

# SOME-WHERE OVER THE RAINBOW : THEORIZING THE ENDLESS DEFERRAL OF IDENTITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

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"elsewhere" space. Apartheid may well be considered as the last logocentric colonial structure (unless, that is, one wishes to include Bosnia under this unpleasant rubric) to finally collapse.<sup>2</sup> Further its collapse may be considered the end of a state apparatus formed as an institutionalization of logocentric thinking (something unusual for Derrida who very rarely talks in terms of practices). Let me then begin this paper by turning to the idea of logocentrism and slowly proceed through it to the theme of national identity and its deployment by various theorists. The purpose of this paper is not to turn to a specific example of a form of national identity and offer an analysis, but rather to outline or sketch some of the current theoretical debates on the subject in broad brushstrokes so that one might begin to notice the similarities and differences, the links and discontinuities, the global and the particular characteristics of both South Africa and those other places and times that have witnessed the births of new nations from their previous (colonial) incarnations.

## ABSTRACT

*"Nowadays, a far graver mistake is made: race is confused with nation and a sovereignty analogous to that of really existing peoples is attributed to ethnographic or, rather linguistic groups." Ernest Renan, 1882<sup>1</sup>*

Although Jacques Derrida is not usually thought of in terms of the problematics of nations and nationalism, the term "endless deferral" cannot help but evoke his philosophical project, and it is to his picture of logocentrism that I initially turn in elaborating South Africa's "preeminent" status as a nation whose identity always seems to reside in some

## The Nation and its Supplement

Derrida starts from the claim that deep in the discourses or texts of the west is the tendency to structure concepts in terms of binary oppositions, one of which is given "preëminent" status to the complete marginalization of the other. Oppositions between man and woman, truth and lies, white and black, the west and the rest, and Derrida's own favorite, speech and writing, appear, he believes, again and again in endless variation throughout these texts. When they appear, the one term becomes the sole essential definition of the concept, with the other reduced to the status of a mere supplement. Thus, for example, in the writings of Freud, despite his profound sympathy for women, he clearly defines the human in terms of the male subject position, that is, in terms of the psychological development of the little boy. Rather than adding something essential to the human, women are defined purely in terms of what they lack -- the penis. Freud's continual downplaying of the importance of pre-oedipal, mother-infant relations in the formation of both male and female children further marginalizes the role of women in the production of the human. This "lack" or inferiority essential to the constitution of women runs through his entire theoretical work. Women are be-

witched by "penis envy" (does a man never envy the breast, the womb, the capacity to be the center of a young child's world?). They fail the arduous task of making it through the oedipal complex and thus remain morally vague. Their very capacity for bearing children is written off as yet another of their behaviors which is malefixated: they wish to bear children so as to present their fathers with oedipal babies.

This discussion of Freud is not irrelevant to the topic at hand, since it illustrates clearly the structure of the supplement. While the one term: the male, is adulated as the sole and essential bearer of identity, the other is considered an inferior term which adds minor additions to the first, without being in any way essential to its identity. It is this structure which Edward Said claims supported Orientalism, and which was, by extension, crucial to colonialist discourses on Africa. With the west clearly in the saddle as the sole model of the human, the civilized and the good, the rest of the world became under colonialist discourse and practice a mere supplement to it. Entire cultures were marked by lack and inferiority. As Christopher Miller points out, Africa was in an especially inferior position, for if the Orient was the "Other" for the European, conforming to the profile of what Europe thought it was not, this left Africa as a third term, an "other's Other." The notion of nullity

or 'lack' is thus a key term for understanding European conceptions of Black Africa which did not exist until the arrival of the European.<sup>3</sup> Whereas the west was piston of modernity and historical life, other cultures lacked the capacity to produce history (Hegel): they were consigned to endlessly repeat the world of their childhoods, their pasts, their fixations, as if the rest of the world were nothing but a mummified museum.<sup>4</sup> Whereas the west was marked by increasing civilization (sublimation), Africa existed in a state of primary process in which its sexuality was uncontrollable and overwhelmed every aspect of its cultural processes.<sup>5</sup> Downgraded to the status of material for the west's use, the colonial subject was a mere article of labor; colonial culture, mere material for the west to rip out of context, place in museums and project onto its assortment of fantasies.

As mere supplements to the west, the Orient and Africa played no essential role in the construction of its identity, which leads us to the topic of a deconstruction. For logocentrism claims that the identity of the major term is complete as it stands: that is, its identity is in no way "deferred" or found to reside elsewhere. For the logocentric mentality, the Lacanian claim that "I am elsewhere" can make no sense. I am I, complete as I am, born of whiteness, maleness and westernness. It is clear enough that

South African apartheid was perhaps the ultimate expression of this claim of a national identity in no way deferred, since its texts asserted that the nation was white, European and ultimately, male. I shall elaborate this fact about South African apartheid soon enough, but first I need to discuss the ideas of deferral and deconstruction in more detail. When Derrida speaks of deferral, he has two related dimensions in mind. First, the meaning of a term is provided not by the term itself but through the endless web of imbrications that term has in a language as a whole. A sign takes on meaning only via its relationships to all other signs (or at least to a great many of them). This is deferral in "space" -- that is, in the "space" of language. Second, he thinks of meaning as deferred in time, in that the meaning of a term when it is employed in a sentence in a given "text" or "context," will become successively clear only after the fact of its use, only through what happens, and through how this utterance of the term becomes part of a further and future wave of sentences, events and receptions. Derrida refers to this process as the "dissemination" of the term or of meaning. A deconstruction consists in showing that the logocentric opposition between two terms (man/woman, west/Africa) is undercut by the very texts or discourses which assert it. Thus the west's claim to stand as the complete bearer of human identity to the marginalization of

Africa is undercut by the profound dependence of the west on African culture for its own cultural identity and imaginings.<sup>6</sup> The deconstruction has lead to a reversal (what appeared as mere supplement turns out to be essential to the identity of the other term), and it has lead to unclarity (we no longer know exactly what the term "west" means, granted the failure of the discourse of colonialism to stabilize its meaning logocentrically.) This skepticism about what the terms in question mean, this uncertainty about their identities, is nothing other than a way of pointing to the processes of "deferral" or dissemination wherein each term is defined through its relation to the other.

## Performing Apartheid

This brings me finally to the topic of apartheid. Apartheid as a social practice was established through a specific "text": the aptly named master plan devised by Hendrik Verwoerd and further developed and refined throughout the course of its forty year history. According to the terms of that plan, the whiteness, "Europeanness" and maleness of the nation was to be assured through the instantiation of a special type of colonialism wherein the colonizer and the colonized dwelt in the same geographic space but not the same national one.<sup>7</sup> What South African apartheid succeeded in doing was to reinvent the structure of colo-

nial logocentrism within the space of the nation, under its attempts to institute or "perform" this logocentrism. Persons of color were denied South African citizenship and relocated permanently to outlying geographical areas -- the "tribal homelands," -- or temporarily, to locations/townships on the edge of the city. The signs of the logocentric nation thus took a geographic shape, with the white culture at its center and with persons of color in the Bantustans, the townships and the "independent" homelands. The result is what Derrida calls the "violence of the law," for the law here enacted what it claimed to assert, namely the attempt at producing a nation of white logocentric subjects in relationship to a host of "supplements" (the people of color). The attempt to produce an essentialist national identity through the law (as opposed to through the guns of Serbia, the atrocities of the concentration camp or the eradication of native populations) depends on the truth of the claim that its texts in effect do nothing other than enact: namely that the nation is white, that the white is European, that the European is the sole bearer of the human. It is these claims, enacted through the "master plan" that so evidently stood in need of deconstruction, since 1) the Afrikaans culture at the center of apartheid was in fact a hybridized African culture, that is, in J. M. Coetzee's words, a culture "no longer European, not yet African," 2) the tribalism of

Afrikaans culture (expressed through its Germanic Volkisch character) was in fact as tribal as the African cultures it despises on those very grounds, 3) the claim of the South African nation to exist as a white European nation in Africa was undercut by *the very act of its institutionalization of apartheid* in the name of Europe, since this type of colonization never happened in Europe, could not happen in Europe, and could only happen in a place that is not Europe. (What is the relationship between that place and Europe other than one of wish fulfillment?). Moreover, white South Africa depended on its disenfranchised populations for its very productivity, identity, character, culture, language, etc; just as the west depended and continues to depend on Africa for its gold, its diamonds, its artistic forms, its academic disciplines and theories.<sup>8</sup>

The question now is: What is performed when the discourses of apartheid (its master plan, its central text) have collapsed? At present the South African pedagogic narrative is one of a multi-lingual, multi-faith, multi-cultural society contained in a single South Africa with a single set of government institutions -- a "rainbow nation." No longer a major term, separated and safe in its white ghetto of meaning, South African identity is now recognized to be completely pluralized -- and dispersed out into Soweto, Alexandria, Kwa-Zulu-Natal, etc.<sup>9</sup> It can only take on meaning in

relation to all these other identities so long denied an existence under the apartheid regime -- in other words, the context of its dissemination has changed. This is the crux of the problem because while the ideology of the contemporary progressive state is clearly one that celebrates diversity within unity, cross-pollination and hybridity, to search for a unifying identity based on a set of shared rules (call them traditions) and practices (call them customs) may, Derrida believes, predispose one yet again to a profound marginalization of those whose styles of life and complex identities differ from the terms of the mythically imposed (logocentric) "we"<sup>10</sup>. Further, as Homi Bhabha has noted in his "double-time" of the nation, it is all a question of performance, of how the state and the people will enact these complex recognitions of similarity and difference through economic, social, and cultural practices and through the gestures of everyday life. Bhabha's concept derives directly from Derrida's already present concept of the law as enacting what it claims to represent, and whose emphasis on the processual nature of nationhood clearly has application for South Africa as a nation coming into being. Benedict Anderson has been criticized for exaggerating the speed with which this occurred (Stephen Kemper) and for concentrating only on origins and not on maintenance ( Daniel Dayan) Once imagined, Anderson seems to sug-

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gest, the nation is there to stay. Bhabha's focus on process is a way of overcoming these problems. When Renan asks: By what sign should we know the nation, Bhabha's answer would be, not by a sign, but by the ambivalent character of signs which results in their continuous production. Because the nation is not a static imagined community, it requires continuous re-imagining and re-narrativization. Bhabha concentrates on the temporal dimensions of the nation in order to escape from the logocentricity that has dogged most discussions of nationalism and the nation. This re-defines the conceptual object by connecting the synchronic dimension (all elements in play belong to one and same moment - the apartheid view) to the diachronic (elements are brought into play from different times and moments) and thus producing what he terms, the "double time" of the nation. The important point here is that the connection between the two dimensions is unstable, slippage results, revealing the nation to be both an ambivalent institutional power and narrative strategy and, above all, a contested terrain.

The two temporalities correspond to Bhabha's idea that the nation is produced from two different enunciative positions: the pedagogic (synchronic) and the performative (diachronic). Through an authoritative pedagogy, the nation is produced as a continu-

ous object (the imagined community) that emerges from a historical point of origin and continues to exist in a linear fashion through the connection of events and stable signs, one of which is the national citizen as object of national pedagogy. On the other hand the nation also exists at the level of the everyday and the local, that is, in the present moment in all its various bits and pieces. These have to repetitively gathered together and yoked to the idea of a national culture by the subjects of the nation through a performative practice that "redeems" the pedagogic narrative or, can be used against it by revealing its Janus-faced character present in all of its lived experience and its locality. There is always a movement between these two positions, an "in-between" space of hybridity which allows for the possibility of counter-narratives that disturb the unified idea of the nation. Yet the concept of hybridity becomes increasingly unclear in a post-modern world filled with mediated images and possibilities. When does hybridity slide into chaos? What are the boundaries that separate hybridity from sheer obliteration by global forces? When does one turn from a subversive counter-narrative force into a postmodern pastiche playing identity politics so as to get your piece of the national pie? Fundamentalism is alive and well all over the world and surely that cultural closure is part of a reaction to the threat of engulfment by the other and the

resultant loss of oneself. If one is not prepared to write oneself out of modernity, the question becomes one of finding a balance between retreating to the fortress of tradition or raising the white flag and surrendering to the outside, that which is not familiar, or settled, or home. How should the question of South Africa's complex national identity or rather identities be thought through in what Achille Mbembe has called the "chaotic plurality of the post colony."<sup>11</sup> Within this chaotic space, all signs are polysemic which is why, according to Mbembe, the powers are constantly in the process of reshaping themselves. So too is the post colonial subject, who, in the face of everchanging rules, arenas, and modes of operation appears as fluid, mobile, bargaining, ambivalent, and improvisational. Further, Mbembe's idea of a power which expands beyond routine bureaucratization to include the obscene, the vulgar and the grotesque, that is, those informal modes of power which cannot be captured through standard descriptive categories (resistance/ passivity, state/civil, ruled/ruler) has resonance with the continuing presence of internal, often regional, regimes of power in South Africa that challenge the national government's legitimacy. Who can watch the parade of Zulu impis and chiefs in full battle regalia down the main street of Johannesburg in the middle of the work week, see the gleeful participation of the crowds

(are they all Inkatha supporters or Zulus and are those two the same?), the presence of the multi-cultural, dressed for success SABC reporters, the Betacam's ceaselessly panning the urban landscape, without being reminded of Mbembe's idea that the banality of power, as displayed in this kind of spectacular excess, binds the rulers and the ruled in a web of social relations characterized as much by constraint as by conviviality and conivance. Of course Mbembe's analysis is specific to the particular conditions of postcoloniality in Togo and the Cameroons. It is not clearly applicable to contemporary South Africa which is trying to introduce a democratic modern state as opposed to an all-embracing regime of power. Yet his picture of a polysemic realm in which signs are under contestation and constantly changing, including the sign of the subject, evokes the "chaos" that has resulted from the collapse of the master plan and the difficulties of integrating into one space all that which has been deliberately separated. It also points to a particular difficulty resulting from our historical moment -- the birth of a nation against or within the global cultural economy. These globalized forces profoundly affect the shape of the new nation, yet produce no national texts in the strict sense of the word.<sup>12</sup> Within them, people are exposed to different subjectivities and desires unmoored from a specific cultural or geographical location. Af-

ter years of cultural boycott and isolation, South Africa is now part of that living room in which, to borrow a phrase from David Morley, the local meets the global.<sup>13</sup> Just as its rejection by the rest of the world involved expulsion from economic, political and cultural global institutions, so its re-legitimation as a nation takes the form of incorporation back into these economies. Further, globalization has its own geography of power. Not every nation is equal on the global board and everything depends on where one is placed in this power matrix -- incoming, outgoing, on the periphery, the centre, receiving or sending. The key or difficulty lies in how one invites the re-incorporation and placement in the global while at the same time attempting to develop a unique and particular South African cultural production and identity.

The flux and flow of human identity, its fluidity and avatar-like quality elicit immediately thoughts of that most powerful generator of mutable signage: the media. Here bargaining, change, improvisation, and mimicry translate unproblematically into the fare of television (they are the fare of tv) with its production of new social types that seek to challenge the old racist categories of South Africa, and create a space for other representations. I am talking here of blond female announcers speaking Zulu, of beautiful black female announcers speaking in the accent of Johannes-

burg's northern suburbs, of two announcers in conversation with each other, one speaking Afrikaans, one Xhosa and both acting as if it is right and natural to talk to each other in different languages during a conversation, of black and white spectators at a Rugby Match engaging in male homosociality over an ice cold Castle lager. I am talking of the self promotional montages under the label Simunye: We Are One -- which flawlessly blend local and global programming, the faces of the tv celebrities, unknown South "types," the famed geographical sites of South Africa - Table Mountain, the Waterfront, the vineyards of Paarl into television flow. Or consider People of the South, a show hosted by the son of a famous ANC in exile leader which, combines the aesthetics of Las Vegas, Oprah Winfrey and a rock video and a guest list which includes Walter Sisulu, F.W. de Klerk, and Evita Bezuidenhout in satin and sequins on the same night. "If we'd known you were all so nice, we wouldn't have kept you in prison so long," quips Evita coyly, tapping Sisulu's knees to the merriment of the studio audience. All these images and signs unite together within the peculiar logic of a medium that, as Patricia Mellencamp has noted, appears to offer greater choice and pluralism but really provides greater standardization in the name of choice.<sup>14</sup> Hence South Africans now, like the rest of the world, have the



choice of watching CNN, Loving, The Bold and the Beautiful, Elsa Klensch's World of Style.

## Learning from "Others"

With India as its exemplar, Partha Chatterjee's model of the process burgeoning post-colonial nation states go through in their achievement of nation-ness, seems to address South Africa's unique position in many ways. Briefly let me go through the three basic positions he outlines so that the connections become clear. The three positions follow each other in succession, each compensating for the inadequacies of the former, yet in turn, exhibiting their own set of limitations. First is the moment of departure. Here, the discourse of the nation attempts to blend an absorption of Western principles of progress with an indigenous "traditional" and/or spiritual life. The contradictions inherent in this blending lead to the adoption of the second stage, that of "manoeuvreur," characterized by a rejection of the West and a swing towards the indigenous, the traditional, the pre-or anti-modern. Here the retrieval of the lost identity is conceived of as existing in opposition to the West. Gandhi's pre-independence rejection of the idea of the modern state characterized by rational technology, market economics, and ideas of progress, and his embrace of a pre-modern state based on Hindu social and spiritual values,

is an example of this stage. However, this position is inadequate to the needs of the contemporary society which requires the institution of a state apparatus and all that that entails in terms of economic, social and cultural change. This realization heralds the final stage – that of arrival. Here the tension revolves around attempts to accommodate the conceptions of industrial, social, and educational modernization taken over from the West with the needs, beliefs, desires, and cultural intensities of the indigenous people. It is a tension, or a set of tensions, that still requires resolution in most post-colonial nations and clearly it is one that will occupy a major position in South African national imaginings.

The question of whether all post-colonial nations follow these stages and in this pattern is unanswerable. It would appear to me, judging from my perspective as a white, South African-born woman who has returned 'home' after seventeen years in the United States, that all three are present in various groups' imaginings of the new South Africa. Chatterjee's model is, after all, hypothetical. What is true is that the history of vacillations described by Chatterjee as obtaining in the story of Indian postcolonialism are an excellent example of the dialectic of sameness and otherness at work in the postcolonialism's attempts to reclaim its past and make it its own. What Chatterjee's model demon-

strates is the inadequacy of any single nationalist/ ideological stance (pedagogy in Bhabha's terms) as being sufficient to account for the complex and disunified fragments which compose the nation. All post-colonial histories are histories that take place as searches to establish identity in societies split between the old and the new, and all post colonial histories take place within and against the power and the terms of the west.<sup>15</sup>

## The "Other" Nation

Battles over national imaginings have a direct bearing on gender relations and roles, on the way women are defined and re-defined, and on the way gender interests are placed within the parameters of nationalist movements. Women have been constructed at different times and in various ways as guardians of traditional culture, victim of the society's backwardness, or symbols of national modernity and progress.<sup>16</sup> The important point here is that nationalist discourse, no matter how diverse, regulates gender as part of articulating cultural identity and particularity, hence the process of integrating women into the modern nation state as enfranchised citizens, is different from that of men. As soon as one introduces the topic of gender into the national question, the issues<sup>17</sup> surrounding the role of the state in women's liberation, the defi-

nition of the public and the private sphere in regard to women's place in the nation, the relationship between post-colonial nationalism and modernization, and the subsumation of (to paraphrase Radakrishnan) one politics (the "women's question") by another politics (the national question) are thrown into sharp, oppositional, contrast.<sup>18</sup>

I will begin with a brief summary of the way different theorists have viewed the role of the state in women's social reforms.<sup>19</sup> Broadly speaking, two contradictory views of the state emerge: The first views the state as a secular agent concerned with broad social reform among which is the enfranchisement of women.<sup>20</sup> The argument is that in its secularizing push, the specific traditions founded in community and religion are homogenized and diminished, thus transforming patriarchal institutions and providing a possible alternative for a progressive gender politics.<sup>21</sup> In contrast, in the second view, the state emerges as a patriarchal construction expressive of men's interests.<sup>22</sup> In terms of women, its interventions are purely instrumental. For example, in times of war, women are mobilized to fulfil special duties and then, once the crisis is past, relegated back to the private sphere or to subordinate roles within the public one. It is interesting to think of this view in relation to recent South African history. In the struggle for liberation,

women, organized by the ANC Women's section, and by trade union associations (COSATU) played major roles in the increasing militancy of workers evidenced by the growing number of industrial shopfloor actions, work stoppages, go-slows, and working to rule demonstrations. Organized women were central to the successful launch of the United Democratic Front in August 1985 and participated vigorously in their campaigns, constituting the backbone of community resistance at the local level.<sup>23</sup> The issues they tackled were those affecting black communities everywhere: housing, food, schools, high rent, crime, and juvenile delinquency. This history of resistance is now being brought forward by women activists to bolster their bid for greater representation and power in the present Government.

The question of whether they will meet with success and whether women's issues will occupy a central place in the reform agenda is still unanswered in the present moment of national reconstruction, and, if other people's histories are any guide to one's own, is uncertain. Much depends on the way gender interests are placed within the parameters of nationalist movements, on the way the politics of nationalism become an all-embracing horizon containing all the other politics within the forming nation, on the way the nation becomes the organizing framework con-

doning gender reform. With regard to Indian nationalism, for example, Kandiyotti notes, the result has been a censoring or muting of feminist concerns in view of the "greater" importance of interest of national and cultural interests. Radhakrishnan has a fascinating discussion revolving around the way ideas of the universal and the particular are used to bolster the power of nationalist discourse.<sup>24</sup> Posed as a universal ideology as opposed to, for instance, a relativist one (one among many and consequently, how is one to adjudicate which of these is more important than the other?) nationalism becomes a macro-politics, able to speak for and on behalf of all, while gender issues, the "women's question," or women's issues, remain just that, a particular set of concerns appealing to a particular constituency, but not a politics per se. Even when it ascends to that title, it stays at the level of a micro-politics, which has the effect of "bracketing out" the category of gender instead of integrating it into every aspect of reality as is argued by feminist theorists. However, to return to the original discussion of the two views of the state, despite their differences, both recognize that the process of integrating women into the modern nation state as enfranchized citizens, is different from that of men.<sup>25</sup>

To explain this difference, the concept of the social world as divided

into a public and private sphere has been utilized by many theorists, with the idea that in the formation of the modern civil state, traditional notions of public and private are carried through into its institutions. The result: instead of a traditional patriarchy one has a civil patriarchy. Hence the concepts of citizen and civil society take the masculine form.<sup>26</sup> The words citizen, and civil society belong to the masculine world. The terms "private" and "public" become more complicated depending on how the concept of patriarchy is theorized. One can have a "private patriarchy" based on the exclusion of women from arenas of social life other than the home, and a "public" one, where women are not excluded from the public sphere of employment and the state, but subordinated within it. In the process of modernization, it is argued, there has been a shift from private to public patriarchy. One of the problems with this approach is its failure to acknowledge the extent to which the state structures the so-called private domain thus rendering these divisions opaque and unclear. In his analysis of Bengali women's reforms at the end of the nineteenth century, Partha Chatterjee, for example, notes how the division of the social world into public and private by anti-colonial national movements was a self-conscious strategy aimed at solving the dilemmas brought on by modernization and the imitation of the west. Since I deal with this point later in

some detail I will not elaborate further now. The important point to emphasize here is that the concept of what is public and private is unstable and changeable, since its meaning depends on certain stages in the process of nation-building. In view of this instability, Kandiyotti is correct in her reluctance to use these dichotomies to explain women and the diversity of their national experiences particularly when one considers the "Janus-faced" character of nationalist discourse – that is, the way it presents itself as a project that is both transformative of "traditional" cultural values in favor of new "modern" identities and affiliations, and at the same time, deeply affirmative of those values as containing the essence of the nation and part of its 'historical' continuity. Bhabha talks of the nation's "double time" and its two enunciative positions, thus revealing nationalist discourse to be a field of highly unstable and ambivalent meanings, constantly under contestation by various groups struggling to establish a national and cultural hegemony.

These ideological battles have a direct bearing on gender relations and roles, on the way women are defined and re-defined. Women have been constructed at different times and in various ways as guardians of traditional culture, victims of the society's backwardness, or symbols of national modernity and progress. Kandiyotti notes how the "language of national-

ism singles women out as the symbolic repository of group identity." In her opinion, women can never emerge as fully fledged citizens of a modern nation-state as long as they are identified as "boundary markers of their communities, " or "privileged bearers of corporate identities."<sup>27</sup> The important point here is that nationalist discourse, no matter how diverse, regulates gender as part of articulating cultural identity and particularity.

For Partha Chatterjee, the question that demands interpretation in terms of the "women's question," is the relationship between nationalism and modernization. This is particularly pressing in the case of postcolonial nationalism where attempts at modernization take place both within and against the institutional forms that have been left in place by the colonial power. The dialectic between what is authentic to the new state and what is imitation of the former colonial power is an unending and unresolved one, and has direct consequences for the liberation of women. How? In order to answer this question I need to backtrack a little and provide a brief summary of Chatterjee's rather complicated thesis in his book Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World. Chatterjee argues that anticolonial nationalism is in place in the colonial society long before the actual engagement with the colonial power begins in the following form: The social world is divided into two realms:

the spiritual and the material. The material domain is that of the "outside:" of technology, economics, science and the state. It is where the superiority of the colonial force is evident, cannot be denied, and hence requires acknowledgement and imitation. However, it is the "inside" realm of the spiritual that contains the essential aspects of cultural identity, which remains inviolate from colonial superiority. The more one westernizes, that is, imitates the institutions of the west, the greater the need to preserve the "distinctiveness of one's spiritual culture." As long as Indian nationalists were careful to retain this division, they could make compromises within the material realm of politics and science and technology without comprising their own, and the nation's, true identity. For Chatterjee, this is a fundamental feature of all anticolonial nationalism in both Africa and Asia.

Using this feature of anticolonial nationalism as a central analytic concept, Chatterjee attempts to analyze why the reforms for women in Bengal, which had been vigorously pursued in the preceding decades, slowed down at the end of the nineteenth century just as the politics of nationalism rose. The received view is that nationalism stalled the progress of social reform occurring under modernization because of its tendency to defend the traditional as containing the essence of national culture. But mod-

ernization, for Chatterjee is neither linear nor does it happen in one huge totality against which nationalist politics reacts. Instead, he argues, the reformers or modernizers select what they want from these imported ideas as if filtering them through an "an ideological sieve" (Chatterjee's phrase). In the case of Bengal one of the ideas they retained (that is, that escaped modernization) was the material/spiritual division of the social world. He concludes that the relative unimportance of the "women's question" at this time can be explained in terms of this retention. Women issues were not censored out of the reform agenda by conservative nationalist politics but instead relegated to a private realm outside of the political which coincided with the spiritual realm constituted by the discovery of cultural "tradition," and the true self. In terms of social reforms for women, the material/spiritual dichotomy corresponded to the terms: home and world, or to use another set of terms, sacred and profane. As Chatterjee puts it, the home had to "remain unaffected by the profane activities of the world -- where one encountered the colonial presence and was subjugated to the modern arts and technology of the west. One needed this subjugation in order to overthrow one's subjugated position which is what made the home all the more sacred a place."<sup>28</sup>

Chatterjee's point that women became tropes for national identity but only by being taken out of the world and placed in the home, is one that many theorists of postcolonial nationalism have noted. Kandiyotti remarks on how the marking out of a private realm as containing the authentic seeds of cultural identity, and the identification of women with that realm, has provided the postcolonial nation with an easy rhetoric for articulating difference (to the former colonial power) and diversity. For Kandiyotti, it is predicated on and continues to maintain oppressive patriarchal traditions. What Chatterjee adds to this analysis is an extra layer namely, that these divisions existed as responses to the colonial context and then were used to deal with the "women's question." In this sense, the stalling of women's reform was not merely a continuation of the oppressive traditional patriarchy, but part of a nationalist political answer to the unresolved dialectic of modernization and national identity.

## **Gendering the Postcolonial: Yours, mine and ours**

Let me now turn to Anne McClintock who uses gender to problematize the very term "postcolonial."<sup>29</sup> McClintock launches her discussion of gender relations out of a general dis-ease she feels with the way post-colonial theory has, in its institutionalization

as both theory and discipline, come to organize the world around the binary term "colonial/post colonial." This term suggests a unified and universal condition of postcoloniality that homogenizes experience and history through the ellision of difference. Ironically instead of denoting the very multiplicity repressed by colonial discourse, the term ends up replicating the idea of a single explanatory category, of a shared past, of a single common experience, of a linear march of time as one progresses from the colonial to the post colonial. Different forms of colonizations, she points out, engender different forms of decolonizations.<sup>30</sup> Thus the world is not uniformly postcolonial (how could it be, since it was not uniformly colonial) nor is it exactly clear that the postcolonial is an established uniform fact in the world. The instability of such a position is highlighted when one introduces gender into the post-colonial mix. No post-colonial state, she categorically announces, has granted men and women equal access to the rights and resources of the new nation. Hence, men and women do not live postcoloniality in the same way. In order to emerge from this panoptic vision of a world ordered around such generic abstractions as "the postcolonial," "the subject," "the global," and "the patriarchal," one needs to be specific at every level, to acknowledge the political and material facts at work in each case, to develop theories of gender

relations that are nuanced to the particular situations at hand.

McClintock's call for a multiplicity of theories, histories, and positions to address the experiences of postcolonial men and women, although issued in a very different rhetoric, leads me to Spivak's deconstruction of the "postcolonial subject" as a category whose subjectivity can be known, talked about and objectively (that is outside of ideology) contracted. Within feminist discourse, failure to acknowledge the construction of subjectivity leads to the belief in a universal notion of women (a sisterhood) bound together by common experience (as in McClintock's post-colonial) which allows, in the case of South Africa for example, a white female academic to unproblematically represent or "speak for" the "other," that is, a black subaltern woman or, to the idea, that even if the white woman cannot know the black subaltern, the subaltern can "know" and "speak for" herself. All of these misconceptions hinge on the conflation between "being" and "knowing."

Briefly, Spivak's point is that there are two senses in which representation can be understood: first, representation as in "speaking for" (Johnnie Cochran, the lawyer for O. J. Simpson is an example that springs to mind), and second, representation as it occurs in art or cinema or philosophy, as that which presents the world.

The first sense is indicated by the German word *vertretung* (speaking in the name of), the second by *darstellung* (presentation). Spivak seeks to maintain the division between these two senses --to prevent them collapsing into each other. For with that division in place one cannot claim "to speak for" someone's experiences in an objective/analytical sense-- that is, in the way Margaret Mead "spoke for" the Trobriand Islanders -- without the admission that in that act of intellectual*vertretung*, one is also engaging in the act of *darstellung*, that is of constituting or presenting the subject through one's intellectual discourse. Moreover, and this is the subtle point, in this process one conceals the extent to which the subject of the self-knowing, self-representing subaltern has in fact been constructed by the intellectual. The upshot is the "effacement" of the subaltern or in the case of the female subaltern the "double effacement." The efforts to hear the historical voices of subaltern women are hopelessly marred by the very discourse we use in their construction. This point clearly has great application for my own work since I am in that position of the mediating white South African intellectual engaged in the process of "speaking for" another, and constructing the other's voice.

Is there a way out of this impasse? Like McClintock, Spivak argues for a move away from abstract generic

categories like "the subaltern" toward the precise historical and economic forces that have determined colonial histories and constituted the subaltern subject. However, material analyses based on an undeconstructed notion of the subject will fall back into idealist utopian conceptions, while a deconstructed analysis that is not concerned with the materialist and historical underpinnings is nothing more than a textual exercise, a "poetic revolution" inadequate to the real problems facing women in South Africa today.<sup>31</sup>

## Notes

1. A lecture delivered at the Sorbonne, 11 March, 1882. "Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?", *Oeuvres Completes* (Paris, 1947-61), in *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge Press, 1990), p. 8.
2. There is some concern to be voiced over any unproblematic embrace of the term "post-apartheid" due to the ongoing presence of neo-colonial practices in the world, and specifically in South Africa, the continuing heritage of many apartheid structures. However let us accept that there is a new dispensation in the land which has wrought profound changes allowing one to talk of a "post" period.
3. Christopher Miller. *Blank Darkness*. Chicago UP, 1985.
4. I am indebted to Daniel Herwitz for these ideas which find greater de-



velopment in his work on the expression of modernism/s in Indian contemporary art.

5. Sander Gilman's book, *Difference and Pathology*, has a wonderful exploration of the relationship in the Western mind between black-ness as an icon of difference, sexuality, and pathology. The black female is the ultimate icon of other-ness since she connotes sexuality, primitivism and physical difference all at once. Hence she is patho-logical since "pathology is the "central marker for difference." (Ithaca: CornellUP, 1985: p. 23)
6. Marianna Torgovnik has a fascinating deconstruction of early anthropological texts, in particular those of Malinowski. To summarize briefly she argues that the generalized tropes and images used in these texts to describe the primitive (the primitive as child, our untamed selves, our id) end up as tropes of self-description marking the passage of the Euro-American psyche. These societies and peoples act as "allegories of modernization," thus allowing the west to construct coherent narrations about the past and the future. In this sense they provide the west with both an origin and an ending. The upshot of this deconstruction of early anthropological texts is to render it no longer clear where the west ends and the rest of the world begins, a deconstruction evidently undercut by the increasing globalism in modernity wherever it may be found.
7. This thesis of an internal colonialism has been critiqued by the Pan African Congress party (which espouses elements of Maoism with a black na-
- tionalism of the Kwame Nkrumah variety) as one that poses the problem in a way which privileges liberation on the premise of Western liberal and socialist principles.
8. See *Africa and the Disciplines*. eds Robert Bates and V.Y. Mudimbe. Chicago UP: 1993
9. Just to localize the concept:: In the ANC manifesto on culture, Albie Sachs talks of white children toy-toting (a protest dance) or reciting the poetry of Wally Serote, and black children reading Olive Schreiner's *Story of an African Farm* as instances of South African hybridity.
10. In many cases it seems to me that identity is an after the event recognition. Something (exile, specific histories) "calls" you into an identity to which you assent. At a recent conference on identity at University of Natal, Durban which I attended, Stuart Hall put it beautifully when he talked of identity as "the sum of the positions we have assented to."
11. Achille Mbembe. *The Banality of Power and the Aesthetics of Vulgarity in the Postcolony*. *Public Culture*. 4:2 (Spring 1992).
12. Arjun Appadurai talks of this condition in terms of social forms participating in a permanent postnational order. Anthony Giddens of course breaks down the dichotomies of nation/transnational, local/global by theorising the global and the nation as signs of the greater project of modernity with its "inherently globalizing tendencies, with the nation-state as the principal actor within the global.

13. David Morley. "Where the global meets the local: notes from the sitting room." *Screen* 32:1 (Spring, 1991): pp 1-15
14. Patricia Mellencamp, "Prologue," in *Logics of Television*. Indiana UP, 1990.
15. But what of the west itself? Is it as unified a concept as the Chatter-jee's model suggests or can one not find similar searches taking place within western nations themselves conducted by ethnic groups (and gender groups) that regard themselves as having suffered a colonization of sorts and are attempting not to found a new nation, but to redefine the old one.
16. Deniz Kandiyotti. "Identity and Its Discontents: Women and the Nation." *Millenium: Journal of International Studies*. 20:3 (1991).
17. Parker, Andrew, et als. eds. *Nationalisms and Sexualities*. London: Routledge, 1992.
18. I have drawn a great deal of this information from Deniz Kandiyotti's excellent article *Civilization and Its Discontents: Women and the Nation* (*Millenium: Journal of International Studies*. 20:3. 1991), which is the most comprehensive work I have read on this subject, and in many ways, her essay forms the structure of this part of my discussion.
19. Jayawardena. *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*. London: Zed Press, 1988, and M. Mo-lyneux. "Family Reform in Socialist States: The Hidden Agenda." *Feminist Review*, 21. Winter 1985.
20. This is the view of the state put forward in the Zimbabwean film *Neria* (1992) which follows the efforts of the widow, Neria, to recover her late husband's estate which has been usurped by his greedy relatives according to tribal dictates. When she acquires a lawyer and brings her case to court, that is when she acquires the power of civil law and uses it against traditional law, she wins back her property to the great applause of the mostly female onlookers who were in the audience.
21. MacKinnon. "Feminism, Narxism, Method and the State: An Agenda for Theory." *Signs*, 7:3. 1989.
22. V. Burstyn. "Masculine Dominance and the State." *Socialist Register*, 1983.
23. The United Democratic Front was an umbrella organization for anti-apartheid movements both legal and banned. It was dissolved after the election of Mandela.
24. Loc cit. Parker et. al.
25. In her brilliant analysis of I see a Dark Stranger, Antonia Lant shows how gender issues reveal the conflicts between the concepts of nationhood and nationality, and further, how historically specific our understanding of women's roles are. The necessary incorporation of women into the British war effort challenged "familiar habits of representation" that worked to stabilize the nation during peacetime (women in the home) but threatened it under conditions of war.

26. In *Blank Darkness*, Christopher Miller claims that the terms of African anti-colonial nationalism were completely masculine -- taking on manhood as opposed to the loss of manhood under colonialism.

27. Loc cit. P.382

28. Partha Chatterjee. *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993. p. 156. The use of the term "one" here clearly refers to the male subject position.

29. Anne McClintock. "Pitfalls of the Term "Post-Colonialism"" *Social Text*. 31/32. Spring 1992.

30. For example, under apartheid black women's oppression became central to the oppression of black nationalism oppression when the issue of land dispossession, first by the colonial powers and then by the apartheid regime, shifted from taking land for its own sake to siezing land in order to lay claim to black labor power. This is a complicated point that requires some elaboration for which I will rely on the work of Tessa Marcus, a sociologist who works for the ANC. According to Marcus, the dominant capitalist forces restricted Africans to small areas of land so as to create a system of migrant labor which reduced the cost of labor power to capital. The worker, usually a male, was treated as a single labor unit whose social reproduction was to be met by the rural community from which he came. This resulted in a concentration of African women, children, the aged and the unemployed in "tribal homelands." As a result of

these policies, in present day South Africa, the majority of the unemployed are women concentrated in the former bantustans which are the epicenters of economic disaster. Denied the right to work in urban or semi-urban areas under the apartheid Group Areas Act, these women remain dependent on men in the urban areas -- their husbands, fathers, brothers and sons -- as well as on that minority of women who are in waged work for support. Clearly, while both black men and black women were oppressed under apartheid, their oppression took somewhat different forms, has had different outcomes, and hence requires different solutions. However, it is this point that is missing or repressed in the discourses of liberation which assume that the collapse of apartheid signals the end of black women's oppression just as it does that of men.

31. Jill Arnot notes that at the 1991 conference on Women and Gender in Southern Africa held at the University of Natal, there was a wide-spread perception of post-structuralist feminism as abstract, elitist and a-political, with little to contribute to the solution of the practical problems facing South African feminists and women. ("French Feminists in a South African Frame. *The New Historicism*. New York: Routledge, 1989).

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