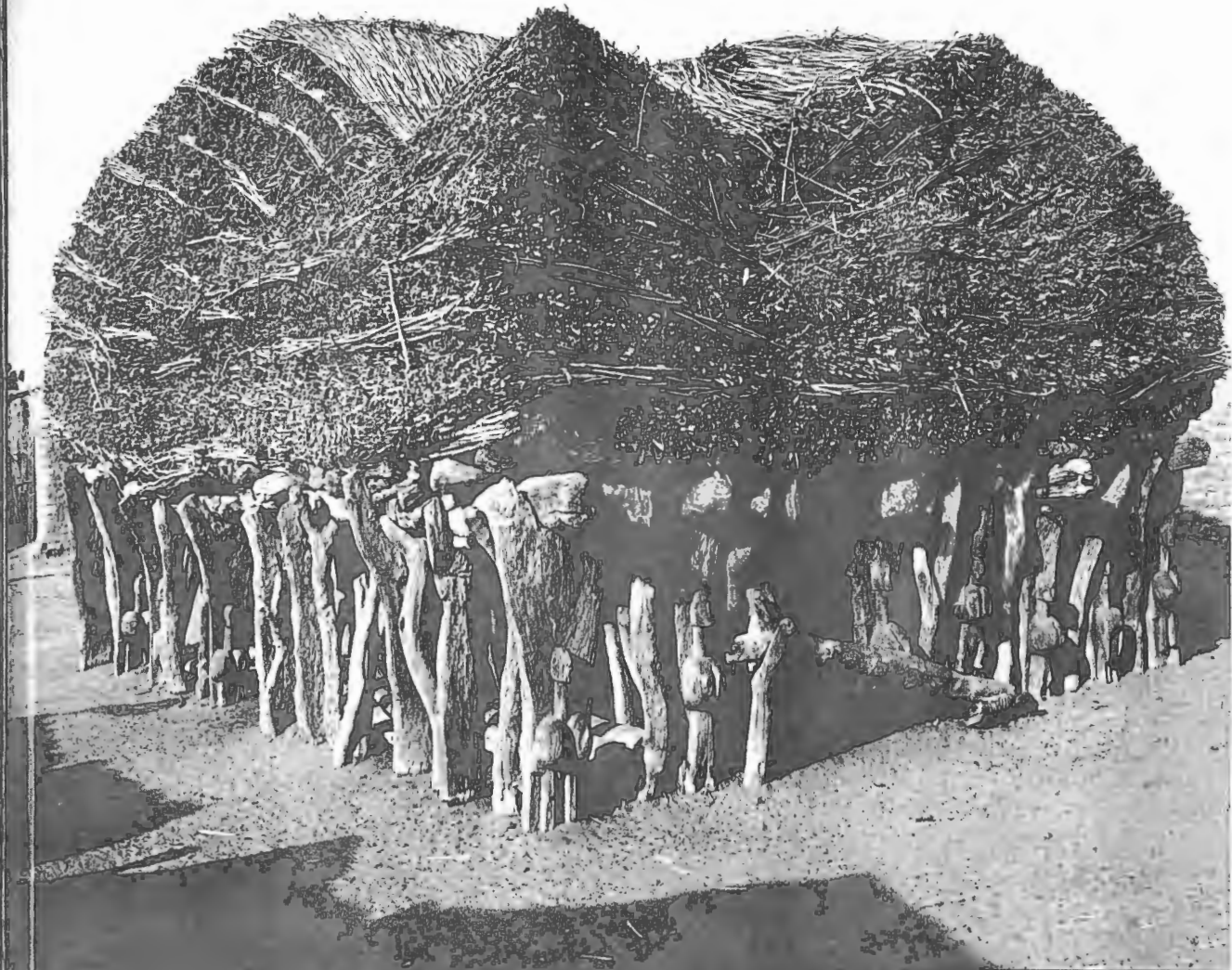


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NORMAN K. DENZIN
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HANDBOOK OF
CRITICAL AND INDIGENOUS
METHODOLOGIES



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READING THE VISUAL, TRACKING THE GLOBAL

Postcolonial Feminist Methodology and the Chameleon Codes of Resistance

Radhika Parameswaran

It is late evening in the bustling global city of Hyderabad, India, in July 2004—a large billboard with a single human figure looms out of the horizon alongside a new highway bridge that adjoins high-rise office buildings, apartments, and shopping complexes. A young Indian woman dressed in low-rise blue jeans and a tight tank top with her thumb inserted suggestively into the waistband of her jeans looks down on commuters from her elevated position on the white space of the billboard. Anchoring her inviting sexual gaze to the titillating promise of the investigative scoop, the local newspaper *Deccan Chronicle's* bold copy on the billboard declares, "We dare to bare. Investigative reporting at its best." Standing tall in the midst of the city's traffic, the visual spectacle of the modern Indian woman, packaged within the commodity aesthetics of erotic White femininity, signals the softening of semiotic boundaries

between the pure nationalist self (modest woman in Indian clothing) and the impure Western other (promiscuous woman in Western clothing) in a globalizing India—these gendered boundaries of insider/outsider structured the discursive landscape of public culture in earlier eras of colonial and postcolonial nation building (Chatterjee, 1989). The *Deccan Chronicle's* deployment of a sexualized image of a young woman to court readers, a promotional strategy that would have been declared crude and sensational merely two decades ago, follows in the wake of recent dramatic changes in the Indian economic and cultural landscape: aggressive economic liberalization, truncation of socialist state policies, spread of capitalist consumer culture, and the rapid penetration of visual media in urban and rural India.

Although consumer culture's alluring canvases in postliberalized India tempt us to believe that

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they represent universal desire for modernity, Derne's (2005) recent work on the distinctions among the middle classes in India reminds us that media representations can gloss over divergent and competing social interests. The billboard's cosmopolitan and rebellious (yet patriarchal) mode of address—slim, sexy young woman in jeans—may not resonate closely with the strata of lower-middle-class Indians, who do not possess the economic or cultural capital to participate in transnational consumerism. Voicing their preferences for simple, domestic, and modest Indian wives, feminine subjects who (unlike the figure on the billboard) have the will to resist the “immoral” lures of modernity, the upwardly mobile young men Derne interviewed in north India rejected the destabilization of traditional gender arrangements that has accompanied affluent Indians' embrace of new, Westernized lifestyle choices and material practices.

Discarding her jeans and tank top for even more skimpy clothing, the sexy young woman of the global consumer cosmos in India has already appeared across the border in China, although in her previous incarnation there in the early nineties, her racial marking resembled that of a White woman, and thus her persona radiated a different matrix of significations. Anthropologist Schein (1994) describes the hectic preparations for a wedding that was under way in 1993 in the Miao Mountains of Guizhou, China. Schein's narration of the wedding foregrounds the arrival of special guests from the city, who come bearing a strange gift—an inappropriate visual artifact—that she methodically unwraps to focus attention on the complex ways in which signifiers of the West intervene in the cultural production of class, ethnic, and gender difference in China's reform period:

Then, the piece-de-resistance—the gift borne on shoulder poles. It is an ostentatious yard-long framed wall hanging behind glass, a photographic decoration slated for the walls of the nuptial chamber. The picture, in a bizarre juxtaposition with the bride, even upstaging her, is of a blonde model in a hot-pink G-string bikini supine atop a snazzy racing car. Lovingly, the hanging is given center placement among the other gifts—heaps of quilts and

household goods—on display in the nuptial chamber for guests to review. Upon completion of her ethnic adornment, the bride poses with the thing. (p. 141)

Observing the wild circulation of such mediated signs in a China that was courting global capitalism, Schein (1994) writes that the slippery surface of the White female body “virtually prickles with polysemy” (p. 142). Any facile reading of the White woman as evidence of China's submission to consumer modernity, she points out, is incomplete because the White woman's body has been written over by a palimpsest of densely intertextual meanings that also reference freedom, individualism, democracy, and progress. For example, in contrast to her sultry and cosmopolitan sexiness in the modern wedding gift in Ghizou, the White woman, in her wholesome embodiment as the “Goddess of Democracy” (referential to the Statue of Liberty) during the 1989 Tiananmen Square demonstrations in China, symbolized young Chinese citizens' organized opposition to the totalitarian state (pp. 144–145). Suspended within the semiotic spaces of global and local culture, both the picture of the nude blond model and the Goddess of Democracy inhabited a China that was beginning to experience a frenzied fever of modernization whose most visible symptom was an “almost obsessive consumption” of the Occident ranging from “dishwashers to divorce” and “such disparate elements as the Bible and Picasso” (Schein, 2000, p. 22).

How do we read and make sense of the shifting social valences of an immensely agile visual culture that moves swiftly across and within national boundaries? Acknowledging the crucial role of modern visual media in shaping “culture” in those parts of the world that were historically aligned with tropes of primitivism, exoticism, and tradition, anthropologists, who had hitherto avoided mass media as a “taboo topic that was too redolent of Western modernity,” have had to confront the fact that “media were penetrating societies once seen as beyond their reach” (Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, & Larkin, 2002, p. 3). The images and ideologies of a rapidly spreading visual culture that has accompanied the arrival of globalization in Asia, Africa, and

Latin America in the past two decades are thoroughly entangled with emerging discourses of cosmopolitanism, nationalism, and hybrid global-local cultural formations. As the two examples of visual artifacts in Asia (billboard in India and photographic poster art in China) indicate, the mobile meanings of media texts are inseparable from their local and global economic, political, and historical contexts. This chapter models the contours of a postcolonial feminist methodology to unpack the fertile, historic symbolism of visual images, particularly the still photograph, in order to advance our skills in decoding the representational politics of resistance and hegemony in the contemporary moment of globalization.

Postcolonial feminism originated in the humanities, primarily in literary theory and criticism; however, its more recent migrations to cultural studies and the social sciences have expanded the field's scope of inquiry to include global and national consumer and popular culture, newspaper and advertising texts, Internet communities, media audiences, and global marketing and corporate practices (Fernandes, 2000; Grewal, 1999; Mallapragada, 2005; Mankekar, 1999; Munshi, 1998; Oza, 2001; Parameswaran, 2002; Shome & Hegde, 2002; Zacharias, 2003). Postcolonial feminism's methodology, although hard to pin down in its varied interdisciplinary formations, has a foundational mission to historicize the normative—taken-for-granted and axiomatic—assumptions we make about our contemporary conditions of modernity and postmodernity. Building on Black feminists' intersectional and multiplicative model of oppression (race and class matter as much as gender) that sought to challenge White feminism's singular focus on patriarchy, postcolonial feminists have argued that the geometries of global and national power slide between and among the vectors of gender *and* sexuality, nation, religion, class, caste, and ethnicity. Finally, in stretching its intellectual muscles to critique the flexible and mobile flows of global media and capital, postcolonial feminism's antiessentialist methodology grapples with the complexities of gender in relation to the ever changing "chameleon world" of institutional power: "We need to articulate the

relationship of gender to scattered hegemonies such as global economic structures, patriarchal nationalisms, 'authentic' forms of tradition, local structures of domination, and legal-judicial oppression on multiple levels . . . we need new analyses of how gender works in the dynamic of globalization and the counter-measures of new nationalisms and ethnic and racial fundamentalisms" (Grewal & Kaplan, 1994, pp. 17, 19). Thus, postcolonial feminism's methodology refuses the comfort of erecting the familiar binary opposition of powerful global (West)/marginal local (non-West) to instead contest the uneven ways in which transnational collaborations among nation-states, religious fundamentalisms, and global and domestic capital police the formations of gender in diverse locations. Calling for historical, creative, and intertextual analyses of globalization's visual significations of gender, race, nation, and class, this chapter will demonstrate that postcolonial feminist interpretations of visual culture can unravel the multiple and intersecting strands of power and resistance that surround cultural representations.

Despite the exponential geographic expansion of visual media in recent years, an analysis of the visual that focuses merely on its contemporary global manifestations would only perpetuate a neocolonial and technologically determinist understanding of global modernity. How is the supremacy of the visual as a symbolic vehicle of globalization linked to the repressive historical discourses of Western science and colonial conquest and trade? A recent essay assessing the current state of visual communication research makes a strong concluding plea for robust doses of history in order to enrich the interdisciplinary contributions of the field (Barnhurst, Vari, & Rodriguez, 2004). Hence, this chapter begins by tracing the emergence of an imperialist epistemology of vision whose problematic equation of visibility to "reality" and "neutral information" continues to haunt our contemporary practices of seeing and processing codes of race and gender in visual culture. This first section situates the compelling authority of the contemporary visual and its relation to unequal hierarchies of global power

within the historical trajectories of Euro-American colonialism and postcolonial nationalism. Using globalization's recent transplant to India as a case study, the second section takes up the challenge of outlining and modeling a postcolonial feminist methodology that can dissect the anatomies of race, gender, and nation in the visual traffic of global media. This section takes into account historical trajectories and contemporary socioeconomic forces to probe the shifting meanings of a single iconic image, the cover photograph of the August 1999 *National Geographic* magazine—my critical exercise here illustrates the process of an “itinerant” mode of analysis that confronts squarely the flexible travels of our objects of study (Schein, 2000, p. 28). Such a methodological approach to uncovering visual media's oscillation between the nodes of resistance and hegemony locates images along the axes of representation, audience, and political economy and juggles alterations in the signifying potential of images when we insert them into different geographies and multiple representational genealogies of gender, race, and class. As globalization's visual masks of gender traverse the globe, how can postcolonial feminism contribute to the mission of interrupting hegemonic versions of modernity? How can educators use the model of visual literacy outlined in this chapter to mobilize our students to embrace the responsibilities of global citizenship? The final and concluding section of the chapter will address these questions to dwell on the progressive pedagogic potential of an antiessentialist, postcolonial feminist critique of visual culture.

Historical and Foundational Matters: Imperial Legacies and Nationalist Fantasies

“Seeing is Believing.” These were the bald words of a teaching consultant, who was helping me understand that my future success as a college teacher depended on my willingness to build an archive of visual images that would stimulate young, television-savvy students to pay attention to the less appealing oral lecture. The teaching consultant insisted that visual displays of concepts

and data were powerful and indispensable aids to authenticate the spoken words of instructors' traditional lectures. But, is seeing really believing? And, how has history taught us that we must see if we want to believe? How do the immensely mobile and kaleidoscopic representations of the global visual domain train audiences to “see” and “believe” in particular discourses of gender, nation, race, or class?

Vision's of Difference: Science and the Sensation of Race

A *critical* postcolonial feminist inquiry into the global terrain of the visual must acknowledge at the outset that the primacy accorded to the pedagogy of the “seeing eye”—the empirical authority we invest in its capacity to harness truth—emerged out of the bowels of imperial history. As proponents of the reflexive agenda of critical globalization studies have argued, the term *critical* implies a commitment to interrogating the historical specificity of our current material and political conditions and hence a rigorous correction to the hypothesis that globalization is an inevitable and timeless force without a beginning and an end (Mittelman, 2005; Robinson, 2005). The technologies of visual culture that have spread across geographic borders in the wake of globalization's extending economic tentacles are faithful to colonial modernity's realist and empiricist ideology of vision, that is, the notion that audiences everywhere want to “see” in order to “believe.” Tunneling backwards from the ascendancy of the visual in contemporary global culture to historical configurations of the visible and vision, and finally to the practice of “seeing” itself, Wiegman (1995) argues that the epistemology of our modern economies of visibility was inaugurated, legitimized, and refined in the midst of imperial projects that sought to discover and fix racial and gender difference. Wiegman defines the visual as both an economic system and a representational economy that was inextricable from the politics of racial oppression and inequality:

In Western racial discourse, for instance, the production of the African subject as non- or sub-human, as

an object or property, arises not simply through the economic necessities of the slave trade, but according to the epistemologies attending vision and their logics of corporeal signification: making the African "black" reduces the racial meanings attached to flesh to a binary structure of vision, and it is this structure that precedes the disciplinary emergence of the humanities and its methodological pursuits of knowledge and truth. (p. 4)

Wiegman's (1995) elegant genealogy of the evolving symbiotic relations between the development of visual economies and the scientific refinement of racial difference locates the biology of the eye's optical abilities within the history of the visual: "For what the eye sees, and how we understand that seeing in relation to physical embodiment and philosophical and linguistic assumptions, necessitates a broader inquiry into the articulation of race, one that takes the visual moment itself as a historically contingent production" (p. 24).

How is the history of the growing dominance of the visual tethered tightly to the production of knowledge on race and gender? To address this question, I draw extensively below on Wiegman's (1995) pioneering work *American Anatomies*, which takes up the task of examining the changing trajectory of the status of vision, visibility, and the body in the nascent science of race and gender—from natural history to the human sciences or biology—to reveal the reciprocal ties that bound the emergence of visual modernity with disturbing paradigms of race and racism. Compensating for the weakening of religious authority's mystical logic in the late 17th century, natural history embraced the task of producing a comprehensive inventory and classification of nature. Most important, natural history departed from the earlier classical method of locating resemblances among creatures and phenomena to demonstrate harmonious unity between God and nature. Propelled by an increasing faith in empiricism, natural historians began to subject these coincidental resemblances to "proof by comparison," a methodology that relied fundamentally on "the apparent simplicity of a description of the visible," and it is this dependence on

accurate and detailed descriptions of the visible that gave birth to "rationalized vision" (Wiegman, 1995, pp. 26–27).

In the framework of rationalized vision, visibility was detached from its holistic relationship to the other senses because the eye, the superior organ, was reappointed to become the primary means to produce disengaged observation and hence to "see and only to see" without any distraction whatsoever (Foucault, 1973, pp. 136–137, quoted in Wiegman, 1995, p. 25). Rationalized vision put its faith in scientific observation, the peephole model of the singular and isolated eye that "purportedly took its place in visual space suspended from the body, observing but not interpreting" (Wiegman, 1995, p. 26). Gradually, the representational relations underlying the metaphor of the peephole became operational in various instruments that shared the same name, *camera obscura*, instruments whose power of disembodied vision was harnessed to study natural diversity and the racial order of its most important species, man (Crary, 1988, pp. 30–33, quoted in Wiegman, 1995, p. 27). As Wiegman (1995, p. 28) notes, the crucial figures of early natural history—Francois Bernier, Carolus Linnaeus, George Louis Leclerc Buffon, and Johann Friedrich Blumenbach—may not have set out to establish proof of a hierarchical order of White supremacy, yet their reliance on the powers of observation and comparisons of identity and difference reified the visual terrain of the body—especially skin color—as the origin of racial distinction. Optical vision, venerated for its ability to harvest visible forms of knowable "data," thus became the sensory pillar for the articulation of the racial order, that is, first, for the European's claim to a universal, normative position and, second, for the specificity of race being reduced to the "Black" and consequently non-White body.

The intricate entanglement between the histories of race and that of vision and the visible takes a different turn in the 19th century when biology began to replace natural history. Moving beyond the visible surface of the body—skin color—as the primary source of raw material for racial classification, practitioners of the science of "man"

began to open up the body and delve into the interior space of subterranean corporeality, those bodily elements that are invisible, and hence offered up the challenge of discovery and domestication to the requirements of visibility (Wiegman, 1995, p. 31). Penetrating the skin to study the skull and the brain, comparative anatomy's quest to master the calibration of race involved the mapping of relations and connections between the visible and the yet to be rendered visible. Whereas the primacy of the visible—the potential for information inherent in surfaces of humans and material objects—receded, the empirical authority of vision and the seeing eye only deepened further. Drawing from Stepan's (1990) work on the 19th-century project of race science, Wiegman (1995) argues that "calipers, cephalometers, craniometers, and parietal goniometers," prosthetic apparatuses of vision, were inventions that sought to transcend the limitations of the eye (Stepan, 1990, p. 43, quoted in Wiegman, 1995, p. 32). Furthermore, comparative anatomists' studies of brain weights, brain structures, and skull formations heralded the power of scientific vision to gain access to invisible layers of data on race and gender, data that generated new analogies to explain similarities between the African male and the Anglo-American woman: "In short, lower races represented the 'female' type of the human species, and females the 'lower race' of gender" (Stepan, 1990, pp. 39–40, quoted in Wiegman, 1995, p. 33).

In related historical developments of visual power outlined by Foucault and scholars who have analyzed the visual field of racism in the West, the disciplinary practices of control that emerged from cross-cutting regimes of specular (production of spectacle) and panoptic (practices of surveillance that emulate the eye's seeing/judging/penetrating gaze) vision were crucial to the maintenance of the racial order's economic and social hierarchies. The Ku Klux Klan's ceremonial public displays of mutilated bodies that were then reproduced in posters and newspaper photographs may appear to conform

solely to the dynamics of spectacle on the surface, but the Klan's white hoods and capes with perforations for the eyes that concealed individuals also had a panoptic effect (Wiegman, 1995, pp. 39–41). These costumes of torture stood for known yet unknowable and diffuse institutional power, and the whiteness of the robes multiplied the symbolism of white skin as the omniscient source of power. The Klan's racist rituals, according to Wiegman (1995), were only the most extreme enactments of a panoptic regime of control that radiated through more mundane everyday forms of visual popular culture (trade cards, cartoons, and children's books) and practices of segregation in housing, medical care, education, and prisons. Similarly, the convergence in the specular and panoptic regimes of racism and sexism directed at Black women gave birth to the visual aesthetics of a commodified pornographic gaze that today pervades the globe, not merely in the pornography industry per se, but in the intimate address of our wider visual culture of global consumption. In her refutation of the myth that Black women were added to pornographic content as an afterthought, Hill Collins (1995) argues that the treatment of Black women's bodies in conditions of slavery—objectification, sexual violence, demands of passivity, and exploitation for profit—serves as the foundation for the commercial and visual economy of pornography. The pornographic exhibition of Sarah Bartmann, the Hottentot Venus, at fashionable parties in early 19th-century Europe points to the overlapping visual modalities of popular pornographic imagination and science; as an entertaining icon of deviant Black female sexuality, Bartmann provoked amused horror among the European elite, and upon her death, scientists dissected her body to study her genitalia. The microscopic appetite for the intimate, the real, and the bizarre, for the obscene excess of relentlessly "truthful" representations that promise greater gratification than the object being represented, feeds the visual hunger of a range of global media, from food and fashion photography to the slew of reality shows that

serve up graphic surgeries, failed relationships, and dangerous displays of physical endurance.

*Colonialism and Nationalism:
The Envisioning and Revisioning of Power*

Shifting gears from the epistemology of vision to questions of visual technologies and imperial conquest, the pioneering work of postcolonial scholars—inspired by Edward Said (1978)—on colonial discourse has shown that the abundant visual images of the 18th and 19th centuries serviced the expansion of Europe's colonial economies. The invention of colorful technologies of visual media—photography and cinema—that entertain millions of global audiences today “coincided with the giddy heights of the imperial project, with an epoch where Europe held sway over vast tracts of alien territory and hosts of subjugated peoples” (Shohat & Stam, 2002, p. 117). It is beyond the scope of this chapter to map the nuances of different colonial regimes or provide a detailed overview of postcolonial studies, but the insights of a few key critiques of colonialism's visual scaffolding uncover the fluctuating and ambivalent construction of the non-White “native” body as the Other. Contrary to the concept of “stereotype,” which proposes that visual media cage their subjects in isolated and fixed cells of representation, significations of Otherness in colonial discourse blended to produce interwoven motifs of barbarism, eroticism, tradition, and exoticism. Working in tandem with the economic relations of colonization, such motifs of Othering the colonized were deployed unevenly and non-equivalently in scattered cultural and historical sites. Modifying Said's exclusive focus on colonizers' imperial construction of the Orient as the Other, Stoler and Cooper (1997) have argued that students of postcolonial studies must strive to bring the dynamic (not Manichean) relations between and among nation and empire, colonizer and colonized, and metropole and colony into one analytic field. Although my brief discussion below concentrates on visual representations of the *colonized*, it is important to remember that tropes of

the otherness of Africans, Asians, or Native Americans entered into equally complex relations with the hierarchies of gender and class that positioned Euro-American women and working-class citizens on the margins of empire.

Libidinal sign systems of the native Other in the global commerce of colonial culture sustained the burgeoning spheres of industrialization and consumption in the empire—the visual incarnations of gender and race that purvey the riches of global-commodity culture in Asia continue this trajectory of linking consumer desire to corporeal signification. As Lears (1989) notes in his analysis of the aesthetics of display, “the nineteenth century market was a liminal space linking East with West in a profusion of exotic images that surrounded consumer goods in an aura of sensuous mystery and possibility” (p. 77). Orientalism's visual field of high and low culture in Europe—paintings, public exhibitions, mall displays, trade cards, and picture postcards—offered an alternative to the mechanical rhythms of an industrializing society by transforming “consumption into a process charged with fantasy and escape” (Lalvani, 1995, p. 275). The exaggerated performances of belly dancers at international expositions, reproductions of Oriental palaces and harems in department stores, and illustrations of singing, dancing, and reclining women on advertisements displaced the threat of the Other within the fetishized pleasures of consumption (Leach, 1989; Williams, 1982). Alloula's (1986) oft-cited analysis of the touristic gaze in colonial picture postcards of Algerian women under French rule deconstructs colonizers' obsessive preoccupation with the bodies of veiled Muslim women in order to expose the “perfect expression of the violence of the gaze” (p. 131). In different iterations of Othering in the United States where colonialism was predicated on the permanent occupation of the colony, systematic genocide, and the forced importation of slave labor, the visual vocabulary of popular print culture regurgitated the imperial impulses of control and domestication. The fantasy drawings on advertising trade cards for food and medicines, for example, featured Native

Americans sprouting out of corn and other flowering plants—such images not only aligned Native Americans with nature and tradition but also represented them as consumable (and hence extinguishable) products' (Steele, 1996).

Turning the colonies into entertainment for the voyeuristic pleasures of the metropole's masses, cinematic fictions of the lives of "natives" in distant lands created a visceral, spatial sense of imperial conquest, thus consolidating nationalist imaginaries and sentiments of pan-European racial solidarity. Although cinema prolonged the colonizing gaze of photography, the ritualized gathering of audiences meant that celluloid spectacles could be mobilized more efficiently to extend the visualist inclinations of Western scientific discourse into the realm of popular fantasy, and such fantasy in turn was conducive to the forging of collective identities. Shohat and Stam (2002) survey the multiple cinematic tracks of a predatory Euro-American colonial gaze that penetrated foreign lands to gather raw visual material to be reworked in the motherland. These critics argue that colonial cinema achieved the twin goals of proving the existence of Others *and of* exhibiting their indisputable Otherness:

Operating on a continuum with zoology, anthropology, botany, entomology, biology, and medicine, the camera, like the microscope anatomized the other. The new visual apparatuses demonstrated the power of science to display and even decipher otherized cultures. Technological inventions in other words mapped the globe as a disciplinary space of knowledge. Topographies were documented for purposes of economic and military control, often on the literal backs of the natives who carried the cinematographers and their equipment. (p. 122)

Analyzing the scopophilic display of alien native bodies in a vast corpus of films ranging from *Tarzan* to *The Dance of Fatima*, Shohat and Stam (2002) write, "The cinematic exposure of the dark body nourished spectatorial desire, while marking off imaginary boundaries between 'self' and 'other,' thus mapping homologous spheres, both macroscopic (the globe) and microcosmic (the sphere of carnal knowledge)" (p. 124). The

invention of and experimentation with color cinema in the United States coincided with the early fashioning of the art deco aesthetic, an eclectic and extravagant visual palette that "borrowed and combined elements from the mechanical, the avant-garde, the primitive, the exotic, and the Oriental, especially Chinese and Japanese culture" (Wang, 2005, p. 167). The art deco-style coloring of the cinematic canvas spilled into the hyperbolic narrative coloring of racial identity, namely, the spurt in White actors' yellowface performances: "Contrary to conventional racial passing, which hinges on erasing all traces of performance and disguise, screen passing in the form of yellowface or blackface masquerade highlights the white actor or actress behind the racially marked screen persona" (p. 168). Spiraling outward to deliver distant lands, objects, and peoples to audiences in the metropole and the colony, the visual apparatus of early photography and cinema—not merely its equipment or images, but also museums, living rooms, laboratories, world fairs, and theaters—thus generated the semiotic environment where constellations of power between nations, races, and classes were made visible (Berger, 2002; Faris, 2002; Lutz & Collins, 2002; Shohat & Stam, 2002). The enduring purchase of the colonial gaze, distilled through the discursive trope of visual conquest, resurfaces in Peter Jackson's 2005 version of *King Kong*, a cinematic story replete with well-rehearsed historic idioms of gender, color, race, nation, and sexuality: Intrepid White male filmmaker discovers a dark and mysterious island; savage "Black" tribes capture White victims and offer them up for ritual sacrifice; the seductive spell of White femininity captivates and civilizes Black bestiality; and finally, the strategic power of Western warfare extinguishes the aggressive threat of the Other, a defeated creature that clings to the phallic architecture of urban civilization before it crashes toward death.

While the dominant images of visual culture in the 19th century helped cement an imperial sense of belonging among Euro-American citizens, the public visual culture of 20th-century postcolonial nationalism in the former colonies also drew on codes of race, gender, and nation (and caste,

religion, and ethnicity) to forge independent political and cultural identities. Analyzing the ideological complexities of 19th-century debates over modernity and tradition in India, for example, a number of postcolonial critics have focused their scrutiny on the gendered vocabulary of anticolonial resistance (Chatterjee, 1989; Grewal, 1996; Kandiyoti, 1991; Mani, 1991; Mankekar, 1999; Moghadam, 1994). In order to counter British colonizers' charges of "horrific" patriarchal traditions that oppressed passive "native" Indian women (objects of the White man's salvation), elite Indian male social reformers began to fashion a nationalist discourse of superior morality that was based in the glorification of the devoted and chaste Indian wife, mother, and citizen. As Chatterjee (1989) notes, the discursive desexualization of the upper-caste bourgeois Indian (Hindu) woman, a mascot of the nation's uncorrupted purity, was achieved through the displacement of sexual promiscuity onto the White/foreign European woman, a racialized symbol of the ills of colonial modernity.

The discursive inheritances of 19th-century anticolonial ideologies continued to inflect and structure the visual landscape of 20th-century popular culture in postcolonial India. Such iconic films as *Mother India* (1957), whose chief female protagonist defends her virtue and respectability in the midst of personal crises and natural calamities, encapsulated the nation's traditional yet modernizing spirit in the immediate aftermath of independence. Representing the strength and purity of an India that could embrace scientific modernity without sacrificing the authentic moral essence of national identity, the heroine of the film is shown gazing upon the nation's future prosperity, which unfolds through spectacular images of large-scale dams, steel and power plants, and factories (Khilnani, 1997). Nayar (2004) writes that the visual semiotics of *Mother India*'s culturally familiar narrative of women's fidelity, postcolonial modernization, and resilient family values resonated with audiences in other non-Western nations: "Indeed, a film as indigenous and nationalistic as *Mother India* (1957) continues to be embraced by audiences of other

nations and races and languages and histories, as if it were in fact recounting the story of Mother Nigeria, or Mother Egypt, or of Romany Gypsies in Eastern Europe or Swahili speaking girls in Zanzibar" (p. 14). The early nationalist practice of grafting patriotic subjectivity onto the emotive apparatus of visual technology has only gained disturbing momentum in the past two decades as state and commercial institutions in postcolonial nations have rushed to mine cultural nationalism's persuasive rhetoric to usher in new modes of governance (Abu-Lughod, 2005; Kumar, 2004; Rajagopal, 1998; Zacharias, 2003).

■ GLOBAL CULTURE AND ITS VISUAL NOMENCLATURE

Cut to the present, the past two decades, a time capsule of visual modernity's triumphant spread to new locales, and an era that has witnessed an intensified cross-cultural traffic in currencies, consumer commodities, capitalist ideologies, tourists and migrants, and media technologies (Appadurai, 1996). The saturation of contemporary human experience from Asia to North America and multiple locations in between with the optical sensation of visual modernity is both a consequence of and a contributor to the global economic changes that have dominated the world in the past two decades. The economic process of globalization that has entailed rapid reforms to accommodate free trade—the relaxing of state controls and licensing, opening of markets for foreign trade and tourism, and dispersed multinational investment—swept through a number of developing nations during the late eighties and nineties. While Harvey (2000) notes that the business practices of globalization per se are not new because international trade dates back to the 15th century, the increased mobility of capital, as well as the rapid and flexible circulation of goods, services, and images across geographic borders, marks the "complex, overlapping, and disjunctive order" of the global economy (Appadurai, 1996, p. 32).

Appearing frequently in the pages of the *Wall Street Journal* since the mid-nineties, India is a

prime example of an “emerging market,” a developing nation that has been renegotiating actively its marginal position in the global economic order. Responding to International Monetary Fund (IMF) demands in exchange for a bailout, the Indian government launched an economic liberalization package in the late eighties that resulted in a shift in national political culture from socialist modernity—development of infrastructure, reduction of poverty, and a rhetoric of social justice—to capitalist modernity—promotion of the urban middle classes as a workforce for outsourced labor and as a lucrative market for the sale of consumer commodities. The media explosion that has taken place in India in the past 10 years, an explosion that has aided the transformation of a protected economy into a lucrative site for global production and consumption, encompasses older print and cinematic forms, newer vernacular and English-language magazines and newspapers, television and the Internet, and billboards and electronic displays. State, capitalist, and activist forces, which jostle each other for space in India’s emergent public culture of journalism, advertising, and entertainment, harness discourses of gender, ethnic pride, religion, and nationalism to capture the imagination of new global consumers and workers (Appadurai & Breckenridge, 1995; Fernandes, 2000; Grewal, 1999; Mankekar, 1999; Munshi, 1998; Parameswaran, 2004b).

*Animating Globalization’s Textual Archive:
Multisited Meanings, Intertextual Imaginaries*

Guided by an awareness of the contingencies of history and the priorities of our global economic order, how can we develop a framework for reading and contesting the semiotics of race, gender, and nation in *visual texts* that make sense of globalization for dispersed audiences? A good starting point for a postcolonial feminist exploration into the archeology of globalization’s visual texts would involve a more active, ethnographic definition of what we mean by the term *text* itself (a reformulation of *téxt* has become even more urgent in light of the turf wars between textual media critics and audience ethnographers).

Although we use *text* in the routine parlance of media studies to refer to visual artifacts, we need to formulate a methodological approach that does not approximate the term *text* to imply the passivity of an inert object or the transparency of a mimetic surface for the reproduction of reality. Taking their cue from ongoing debates over “textuality” in anthropology and performance studies, media scholars can begin to *problematize* texts as performative practices of “iteration,” mediated utterances that react to and coalesce with a host of other typologies of “iterations” to produce modernity as a structure of feeling.

Anthropologist Schein (2000) marshals the insights of performance theory to resuscitate popular texts as “cultural productions” that circulate within the arteries of social networks rather than mute “cultural objects” that invite the post-mortem gaze of dissection, a dynamic reorientation to texts that “obviates notions of culture as straightforwardly inertial” (p. 17). Schein’s approach brings simultaneously to the foreground social actors, who deploy their expert skills to assemble coherent texts out of fragments of culture, *and* those far-flung collectives of actors, who are called upon to decode the contextual meanings of textual scripts and images. Strine’s (1998) essay in the book *The Future of Performance Studies* challenges the usefulness of the “functional separation and distancing” between everyday social relations and cultural forms of representation: “For even the casual observer it would be difficult to deny that the increasingly sophisticated mass media ‘culture industry’ with its ever-expanding range of influence has a decisive formative impact on virtually all aspects of contemporary social life” (p. 4). Strine draws from the work of social theorist Chaney (1993), who has argued that changing forms of representation are “generative, not merely imitative” of social conventions and structures, to define textual genres of culture as performative practices because these mediated representations display “production characteristics, product characteristics, and reception characteristics” (p. 4). Even as we attempt to inject theoretical life into the textual artifact in

media studies, it is important to remember, as Conquergood (1998) warns us in his analysis of African slaves' improvisational musical performances, that it is difficult to extricate the textual imagination of social relations from histories of exclusion and domination: "Instead of holding texts that properly belonged to them, slaves were themselves objects of 'intextuation,' held in subordinate place by an array of legal statutes, commercial auction posters, bills of sale, broadside advertisements for runaways, and so forth" (p. 28). Posing a series of questions that probe the "consequences of thinking about performance and textuality as fluid, exchangeable, and assimilable terms," Conquergood advocates for a complementary and conversational performance-text paradigm of cultural critique (p. 25): "Although I very much appreciate contributions made by the world-as-text paradigm, particularly the way it has functioned as a counter-project to positivism, its limits need to be acknowledged and pre-suppositions critiqued. . . . Performance as both an object and method of research will be most useful if it interrogates and decenters, without discarding the text" (pp. 32–33).

At the forefront of forging interdisciplinary approaches to texts in cultural studies, Hartley (1996) pleads for more animated, finely textured, and taxonomic analyses of the images and words of journalism. Texts, as Hartley notes, are the traceable sediments of "dialogue, relationship, meaning and communication between text-makers (publishers, photographers, writers, etc.), the medium in which texts appear (journalism, cinema, cultural studies, pornography, etc.), and a readership (public construed as citizen, audience, voyeur, expert, policymaker, moralist, etc.)" (p. 5). When collated, these diverse texts originating from different sources and varied generic conventions constitute a "gigantic archive of textuality, a huge store of human sense-making" that offers critics the opportunity to explore the dynamic "social production of meaning in the historical circumstances of modernity" (Hartley, 1996, pp. 3–4). Echoing Hartley's sentiments, Hall (1996) urges critics to recognize the intimate relations between texts and their social contexts:

"How things are represented and the machineries and regimes of representation do play a constitutive, not merely a reflexive, after-the-event role" (p. 443). Arising in the midst of myriad personal, social, and economic interactions, media texts should thus be reconceptualized as recoverable material evidence and as performative practices that contain clues to active and diverse sociohistorical practices of representation.

A postcolonial feminist reading and contestation of textual practices, particularly the *mapping* of semiotic registers of resistance and accommodation, requires a combination of methods—forensic, documentary, historical, and metaphorical—that can unravel the *multisited* and densely intertextual ways in which visual images circulate within fields of social relations. Strine's (1998) definition of "mapping" captures the spirit in which I use the term here: "Mapping as a critical trope implies a process of exploration and organization, of charting relationships and marking possibilities not readily observable across dense and diversified terrain" (p. 8). Multisited ethnography, a methodological innovation that responds to "empirical changes in the world"—namely, the disintegration of "culture" as a discrete, bounded, and holistic object of study—tracks the mobile and shape-shifting formations of culture that arise as images, ideas, artifacts, economies, and people move across and within national boundaries (Marcus, 1995). Suited well to analyze the dislocated ways in which global media images are conceived and reproduced in numerous spaces, multisited ethnography moves out of "single sites and conventional research designs" in an open-ended and speculative manner to trace the comparative emergence of meaning as things (images, commodities, works of art, etc.) circulate in different contexts (p. 97). Similarly, the methodology of critical globalization studies, a field that seeks to build bridges between varied constituencies of academics, activists, policy makers, and private industry, is one that is open-ended, dialectical, and sensitive to the "interplay of market dynamics, power relations and social forces that slice across borders" (Mittleman, 2005, p. 21). Commitment to the dialectical logic of critical globalization studies

would call for focusing “not on things themselves but on the interrelations among them”; that is, cultural analyses of the *social life* of objects and human experiences must address “how distinct elements of social reality may be analytically distinct, yet are mutually constitutive of each other as internal elements of a more encompassing process” (Robinson, 2005, p. 17). A postcolonial feminist critique of the visual architecture of globalization can weave together the methodological sensibilities of multisited ethnography and critical globalization to “map” the nuances of hegemony and resistance in visual texts that are embedded in larger systems of representations.

*Continuous Stories, Discontinuous Histories:
Visual Imprints of Resistance and Hegemony*

This section treats the colorful cover photograph of the *National Geographic* magazine’s 1999 millennium issue on global culture, an emblematic visual citation of India’s recent experiments with globalization, as a vivid palimpsest whose multisited and intertextual meanings illustrate the chameleon (fluctuating) codes of resistance and compliance (see Figure 20.1). The polychromatic portraiture of this playful and dramatic cover, a departure from the magazine’s routine repertoire of images of India that speak to knowledge of natural science, ritual, or religion, deploys Indian women’s bodies and subjectivities as blueprints that busy readers can scan quickly to trace a non-Western nation’s passage from tradition to modernity. Invoking the cultural politics of age, class, motherhood, and feminine fitness, a plump older Indian woman (mother, positioned on the left) dressed in an ornate red silk sari and elaborate gold jewelry signifies the inertness of tradition while a thin young Indian woman (daughter, positioned on the right) dressed in a tight black cat suit, unzipped to the middle of her chest, and sharply pointed black boots purveys the vitality of modernity. The two women are shown sitting slightly apart on a raised platform that is flanked by wrought iron frames, and the quiet and colorless background, the lower face of a grayish white marble building, accentuates the contrastive

colors of tradition and modernity. The caption to the reproduced image of the cover inside the magazine’s pages points to the privileged caste and class position of the two Indian women; readers are told that the older woman, Nakshatra Reddy, is a biochemist, and the younger woman, her daughter, Meghana Reddy, is a model and former television host.

This photograph’s most visible colonial/modernist—natural history’s linear, binary, and sharply polarized logic—rendering of the “new and hip” as radically different from the “old and outmoded” is just the most banal of its hegemonic interpretations of globalization, a contrived moment that was preserved for the public gaze when light from the mother-daughter dyad fell onto a photographic surface. The tangible (tactile and optical) narrative of the cover is significant for what it reveals about negotiations among an authoritative institution (*National Geographic*), renowned for its interpretations of the non-Western world; an individual photographer; posed subjects; and an elite transnational readership. But, it is the intangible and ambiguous multiplicity of such iconic visual stimuli, the different meanings that travel through time and space when we get beyond the camera’s documentation of an instant, that will guide us toward the analysis of an image’s affiliations with codes of resistance and hegemony. Berger (2002) explains that the ambiguity of the photograph arises out of the abyss, the rupture of discontinuity, which lies between the moment recorded and the moment of looking: “All photographs are ambiguous. All photographs have been taken out of a stream of continuity. If the event is a public event, this continuity is history; if it is personal, the continuity, which has been broken, is a life story. . . . Discontinuity always produces ambiguity” (p. 50). The meaning of a photograph, Berger asserts, arises out of the amorphous abyss of ambiguity that lies between the recorded past and the interpreted future: “An instant photographed can only acquire meaning insofar as the viewer can read into it a duration extending beyond itself. When we find a photograph meaningful, we are lending it a past and a future” (p. 49).



Figure 20.1

SOURCE: Reprinted with permission of Joe McNally Photography.

What are some of the stories of the past and future that shroud the female figures on the 1999 *Geographic* magazine's cover with meanings of resistance? Drawing from the insights of multi-sited ethnography and critical globalization studies, how does a particular sign system's potential alliance with resistance fluctuate when we travel to alternate geographic sites and consider the dialectics of varied stories of continuity? Walking into an upscale restaurant in Mumbai in 2004, I spotted an enlarged and framed copy of the very same magazine cover occupying a position of prominence on the center of the back wall. This long-awaited pictorial testimony to modern/urban/civilized India from the United States, the excited restaurant manager in Mumbai insisted, "says everything about India's future reputation in America because it shows that we are not seen as the backward country of death and disease, the same as Africa." This manager's worship of the cover image in Mumbai mirrored the enthusiastic notes and e-mail messages I received from the Indian immigrant community in the United States soon after the August 1999 *Geographic* magazine appeared in bookstores.

The subtext of resistance in the story of the picture's enshrined social rebirth in a Mumbai restaurant, 5 years after its publication, becomes legible only when we listen to a rather long tale of the picture's past. When measured against the historical fabric of the West's essentialized popular iconography of a rural "Third World" India, a nation beset with problems of poverty, famines, riots, natural disasters, and primal violence against women, the image of cosmopolitan India, labeled as "Global Culture," gains the undertones of resistance. Media critics have pointed out that the First World tradition of recycling the Third World through the ahistoric lenses of disorder serves to consolidate a collective self of industrialized Western nations as belonging to a higher order of civilization, one that is typified by order and stability (Dahlgren & Chakrapani, 1982; Parameswaran, 1996). Another dominant story of the past that propels the picture's representational momentum toward the semiotics of resistance originates within the Western academy. When we situate the *Geographic's* picture within the large body of academic narratives on the "development" and modernization of Asia, narratives that have fetishized the backwardness of rural

India, it becomes a representation that challenges the conformity of an earlier authoritative discourse. In staking out her intellectual terrain, feminist anthropologist Mankekar (1993) writes about anthropology's fascination with village India: "As an Indian student of anthropology in the United States, I have been startled by how frequently typical anthropological discourse on South Asia, craving authenticity, had obsessively attempted to represent 'village India' as the true India and has stubbornly resisted acknowledging the presence of dynamic cosmopolitan cultural formations in postcolonial India" (p. 58). Our historical consciousness about the limits of Western *popular* and *academic* representations of India thus lends the portrait of urban, upper-class Indians the oppositional possibilities of a progressive postcolonial critique that questions the othering of India in the First World.

On a more cautionary note, however, despite the picture's inclination to inaugurate a new representational space for India, celebrations of America's recognition of cosmopolitan India at the expense of "Third World" India can also feed into the exclusionary impulses of religious and elite Indian nationalism. Sanitizing India of its embarrassing problems of poverty and disease, the majority Hindu fundamentalist tale of loyalty to the nation would position the clean, orderly image of affluent urban Hindu women within the continuity of India's glorious history of Hinduism, a past of wealth and widespread prosperity that unseemly foreign (Muslim and Western) "invaders" had interrupted. Such recent hegemonic discourses of fundamentalist nationalism have attributed problems of disorder and violence to India's poor minorities, particularly Muslims. Another overlapping strand of "secular" nationalism (a silent endorser of religious fundamentalism) that circulates among the urban, educated managerial classes, a socioeconomic bloc that is fast shedding its allegiance to the socialist vocabulary of poverty reduction, looks ahead to India's future as a technocratic consumer utopia. Emulating the confidence of the *Geographic's* youthful, urban mascot of global modernity, the hybrid global-national imagery of the glossy

popular print media of postliberalization India caters to the growing consumer ebullience of the Indian middle and upper classes who "aspire to be members of a globalizing first world elite which crosses national borders" (Scott, 1996, pp. 17-18). Postcolonial feminists have argued that the visual project of configuring global consumption for the elite classes has two goals: to convince the urban middle classes that they, members of a deserving meritocracy, have earned the right to transnational consumerism and to persuade them that they can preserve their authentic national identities even as they pursue lifestyles associated with the West.

Although it appears unrelated to the *Geographic's* gendered visual performance of a bifurcated tradition and modernity, a playful cover photograph of a 1998 issue of an Indian magazine—*Business World*—reads like a fraternal slide in an ongoing storyboard of India's march into the global economy. The picture fuses gender, ethnicity, tradition, and modernity together while deploying masculinity rather than femininity as a semiotic resource. A nerdy, upper-caste South Indian man, an archetype parodied frequently in Bollywood films for his resistance to Western modernity, sports simultaneously the sartorial signifiers of the traditional and the modern. Tradition, the lavishly dressed Hindu mother of the *Geographic* cover, surfaces in the ash markings on the man's forehead, the thread across his torso, and his white dhoti wrapped around his legs, whereas modernity, the daughter in the tight black outfit, manifests here in the man's designer cowboy boots, dark glasses, Pepsi can, and Burberry umbrella. If the aesthetics of the *National Geographic* cover signals India's assimilation into global culture, *Business India* declares that the schizophrenia of its cover's hybrid South Indian man embodies the new "Sexy South," a region of India that, contrary to stereotypes of being populated with "take-it-easy plodders," was turning into a major attraction—a thriving production and consumption hub—for multinational investment (Mukurjea, Shekar, Radhakrishna, Sen, & Dhawan, 1998, p. 19). Together, the playful and intertextual binaries of the two visual artifacts, *National Geographic* and *Business World*, emerging from

capitalist technologies of vision in different cultural sites pay homage to a market nationalism that seeks to minimize the "Gandhian hangover" of guilt associated with wasteful lifestyle consumption (Fernandes, 2000). The disappearance of signs of Third World poverty in such collaborative journalistic representations, as critics of recent media images in India have argued, works to repress knowledge that provokes ideas of social justice and responsibility toward India's poor, a key constituent of the nation's flickering socialist past. P. Sainath (2001), a leading journalist and antipoverty activist, might argue that the *Geographic's* modern woman, signaling the arrival of MTV in India, and *Business World's* trendy global South Indian consumer point to the disturbing class politics of media: "Journalists are more interested in telling the world that India's burgeoning new middle class finally has access to McDonald's burgers and international designer labels . . . topics that generate advertising revenue, not unpleasant stories about starvation deaths and the lack of clean drinking water, even in the heart of large cities" (p. 44).

Significantly, the two figures on the *Geographic* magazine, who communicate the liberating effects of globalization in India, are *women*, raced and gendered subjects, and hence we can now turn to stories of non-Western femininity and postcolonial feminism to excavate other semiotic layers of resistance and hegemony. Postcolonial feminist Mohanty's (1991a) influential work criticizes Western feminism's ethnocentric narratives for deifying the homogeneous and frozen category of "Third World woman," a *passive* subject of racial and ethnic difference whose life in the social sciences is "operationalized" through the "objective" and well-intentioned but lifeless indicators of well-being: sex ratio, nutrition, infant mortality, life expectancy, and death rate (pp. 5–6). Arguing that these measures "by no means exhaust the meaning of women's day-to-day lives," Mohanty urges knowledge producers in the West to foreground discursively non-Western women's agency as active subjects, that is, to represent the subtle and overt ways in which these women resist their subordination to create a

social space for themselves (p. 6). The *National Geographic's* cover responds affirmatively to Mohanty's advice to produce knowledge that destabilizes the "authorizing signature of Western humanist discourse," a project that requires Third World difference (victimology) to project the West as free, democratic, and egalitarian (Mohanty, 1991b, p. 53). Although the cover's modest Indian mother, with hands folded demurely and feet close together, encodes a rather passive subject position, the young daughter Meghana Reddy's bold act of claiming her personal space—her upright physical pose and assertive demeanor—captures visually the intellectual spirit of Mohanty's recommendation to dislodge the Third World woman from her consignment to the "debilitating generality" of the category of oppressed woman (Mohanty, 1991b, p. 71). Meghana's legs are splayed wide apart, her left arm is poised akimbo style, and her left palm grips her hips in a strong masculine gesture. She disdains her mother's soft smile and tender gaze to stare defiantly into the camera.

Furthermore, the young daughter's unsmiling and almost hostile face (whether staged or spontaneous) carries historical traces of anticolonial and gendered resistance to the camera's routinized appetite for obedient, smiling feminine subjects. The "threatening potential" of non-Western women's unsmiling, defiant faces, as Eileraas (2003) asserts in her reading of French army photographer Garanger's identity portraits of Algerian women, can radically unsettle the boundaries between self and other and the asymmetric positions of photographer and subject. The Algerian women in Garanger's identity portraits, who had to be clearly recognizable to colonial authorities, were unveiled forcibly and commanded to confront the camera's eye in full frontal view. Eileraas probes the internal ambivalence of these visual representations of Algerian women: "But exactly where and how do they look, and how do these women's looks gesture towards resistance?"

The women photographed by Garanger most strikingly communicate resistance with their eyes and facial expressions. As one might expect, none of

these women opt to smile for the camera. This is important to note in a cross-cultural encounter in which the smile would typically serve a “mitigating” function to mute the potentially disruptive or confrontational role of the “other’s” return gaze. Instead of smiling to efface or palliate the asymmetrical power relations between colonizer and colonized that might emerge from these photographs, Algerian women confront Garanger’s camera with lips tightly pursed, their mouths conveying resolve and the desire to be recognized on their own terms. (p. 817)

When we move forward in time to plug the *Geographic*’s young Indian woman into the stories of commercial media images that stitch warm, feminine “happiness” into the tapestry of consumer prosperity, her strong, chilly facial expression deviates markedly from that of her young, feminine peers whose smiling faces animate cosmetics, clothing, and cars in multiple national sites that traverse the globe. Kotchemidova’s historical genealogy of American women’s ubiquitous smile in photographic portraits unearths Kodak Corporation’s careful orchestration of the camera as an indispensable instrument of happiness—the act of shooting, the smile of the posed subject, and the perusing of archived images were represented as events that incited happy narratives of family and community (Kotchemidova, 2005). She observes astutely that the gestalt communication of visual technology generated the epidemic of the contagious smile: “I suggest that the model of the smile was readily absorbed in popular photography partly because it was imparted visually . . . the smile just sits in the visuals, taken for granted. It is assumed” (p. 14). In India, photographs of young, smiling women on billboards and covers of news-magazines distill the pleasures of shopping, competing in beauty contests, and dieting; these hypervisible tropes of feminine happiness signal the nation’s openness to the seductions of First World material abundance. On one of the Discovery channel’s television programs, an exuberant Thomas Friedman, populist cheerleader of globalization, accompanies young, smiling Indian women who have adopted American names and accents—night-shift workers in the sweatshops of

multinationals’ callcenters—on “happy” shopping trips in the daytime. Thus, on embedding the *Geographic* magazine’s young woman, a recalcitrant non-Western photographic subject, within feminist stories of the past and global corporate consumerism’s scripts of modernity, we can begin to detect ripples of resistance.

Again, these subterranean shades of resistance in the *Geographic*’s palette on Indian femininity and global culture take on the hues of hegemony if we process the cover through the lens of colonial history outlined in the previous section. The magazine’s representational strategy of using Indian women to illuminate the transformation wrought by the arrival of Western-style consumer culture harkens back to the 19th century, when Indian nationalists and British colonizers deployed Indian women’s bodies, subjectivities, and behaviors (without actually engaging women) to wage debates over tradition and modernity. Colonial discourses harnessed the burdens of “native” womanhood to claim that a benevolently interventionist colonial state could liberate Indian women—victims of a “barbaric” patriarchy—from their oppression. If such historical discourses of salvation (white men saving brown women from brown men) supported the modernizing mission of colonialism, the young Indian woman who gains confidence and assertiveness when she consents to wearing a tight-fitting costume from the West, not the Indian sari or traditional jewelry like her placid mother, recuperates the hegemonic story of Western/capitalist modernity as the harbinger of women’s liberation in South Asia. The thin, empowered model/media personality in the black cat suit is also conjoined to the visual terrain of commodity feminism’s recent excursions in India; the currency of appearance as symbolic capital has accelerated in these contemporary discourses of patriarchal quasi-feminism. Grewal (1999) describes the expanding reach of pop feminism’s brand of empowered Indian femininity that creates a constant demand for women’s thin and sexy bodies encased in the latest fashion:

This Indian pop feminism, denoting a participation in a globalized economy not only as consumers but

also as professionals (models, advertising executives, marketing experts, and small business owners, especially in garment manufacturing) is influencing the career goals of more Indian urban women of the middle and upper classes, just as the role of working-class and poor women as factory workers is also increasing. (pp. 815–816)

Such a newly minted “racy” symbol of Indian pop feminism cajoles the *Wall Street Journal*'s elite transnational reading public to visit modern India (Sesser, 2006). A vivid front-page picture in the newspaper's lifestyle section portrays a glittering street scene in the shopping district of the city of Bangalore in South India. An illuminated billboard of a thin young Indian woman with flowing hair, bikini bra, and tight jeans towers above the scene—the spectacle of the female body symbolizes the seduction of the nation's resistance to local tradition and capitulation to global modernity. The glowing image of the racy woman and the juxtaposed title of the article “A Passage to India's Future” (echoing E. M. Forster's novel *A Passage to India*) chart femininity's entanglement in colonial history, urban development, global consumerism, and the aesthetics of visual production. Returning to the opening passage of this chapter, the sexy young woman on the billboard in Hyderabad, the *Wall Street Journal*'s female icon of a future India, and the *Geographic*'s slim young woman can be located on a continuum of pop feminism's global paradigm of feminine transgression. Such visual embodiments of “hip” Indian women wrapped in the rebellious nomadic codes of Western femininity preclude the possibility that there are alternative and more complex, indigenous models of women's empowerment. Elderly Indian mothers in saris, as the *National Geographic* might suggest, are not always obedient students of patriarchy, and feminists who wear traditional clothing can also be vocal advocates of Indian women's right to sexual pleasure and lifestyle choices; however, these feminists may not endorse cultural practices that conflate Indian women's strength, fearlessness, and independence with jeans and skirts or cleavage, curves, and slim bodies.

■ WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? VISUAL CULTURE AND PEDAGOGIES OF POSTCOLONIAL FEMINISM

My reading of globalization's visual modalities modeled in this chapter began with an overview of the historical particularity of global media technologies whose extended radars of vision have swept through most of the world today. After detailing the companionate role of the visual in expanding globalization's horizons, I undertook the task of reviving the comatose text of media studies as cultural production, a performative practice that marks a nodal point in the ongoing process of representation. My postcolonial feminist—multisited, contextual, and dialectical—analysis of the 1999 *Geographic*'s cover image of globalization in India unpacks the gendered performances of resistance and accommodation that unfold as we travel inward into history and outward into contemporary cultural politics. As postcolonial feminist studies moves from its originary terrain of literary criticism to intervene in the newer arenas of global modernity and its competing social forces, it can uncover the interlocked ways in which gender, race, class, and nation are deployed as semiotic resources to push forward the agendas of scattered constituencies of global and local power. Postcolonial feminism, as Sangari (1991) proposes, must expose the colonial, national, and capitalist structures of power that filter the symbolic imagination of womanhood: “Femaleness is not an essential quality. It is constantly made, and redistributed. One has to be able to see the formation of femaleness in each and every form at a given point . . . see what it is composed of, what its social correlates are, what its ideological potentials are, what its freedoms may be” (p. 57). Postcolonial feminism's mapping of the chameleon codes of resistance and hegemony in relation to visual representations of gender and globalization documents the transnational operations of power that cannot be easily demarcated into divisions of First World/Third World, White/non-White, or Man/Woman. The oscillating pendulum of resistance and accommodation in the *National*

Geographic's gendered canvas of global culture reveals the crucial need to forge political and intellectual agendas that are vigilant of the collusions among global/local market and media imperatives, state policies, elite nationalism, and historical developments, despite the practical urgencies that call upon us to embrace singular visions of change.

As globalization creates First Worlds in the Third World and Third Worlds in the First World, postcolonial feminism, in the words of Shome and Hegde (2002), must remain committed to the task of contesting the diffused configurations of power that service particular versions of modernity: "The issue is not that difference, marginality, disempowerment, etcetra, do not matter; rather, the issue is *how* they matter, *how* they are evoked . . . and *how* they are reconstituted through the differential logics in globalization" (p. 176). When we push the fast-forward button on the spool of time to 2006, we arrive at a moment when India consolidates its position as a global economic powerhouse (along with China) in the United States. The cover photo of *Newsweek's* March 6, 2006, issue bolsters the *Geographic's* 1999 mission to translate India's economic engagement with the West into the familiar metaphoric language of the feminine. Served up as appetizing visual bait, *Newsweek's* sumptuous cover, bathed in the tropical colors of golden yellow and deep red, tempts readers to proceed to the magazine's cover story on President Bush's impending visit to India. Rearticulating elements from the *Geographic's* visual composition of tradition and modernity, the cover features a touristic portrait of the slim and light-skinned actress, Padma Lakshmi, standing below the optimistic title "The New India," with her hands folded in front of her torso as swathes of rich red fabric float in a dream-like fashion above her shoulder. Like the *Geographic's* modern young daughter, Padma Lakshmi's direct stare, erect body, and loose wavy hair signal youth and confidence; however, the red sequined fabric wrapped around her body and her traditional hand gesture (*namaste*) signifying "welcome" invoke the feminized new age India of Hinduism, spirituality, and yoga, and thus link her to the

Orientalized realm of the *Geographic's* traditional mother.

On one hand, the magazine's choice of Padma Lakshmi—a resident of Manhattan and London and daughter of an Indian father and European mother—challenges the limits of the nation as taking up residence within specific geographical and racial boundaries. On the other hand, *Newsweek's* linguistic silence on the cover image, aside from the editor's short reference to Padma Lakshmi as novelist Salman Rushdie's wife, reduces her exotic visual splendor to mute feminine ornamentation (readers learn nothing about Lakshmi's own modeling or acting careers). Moreover, this light-skinned, hybrid female figure's embodiment of global India aligns her with the sorority of women whose postcolonial whiteness in India's media and advertising discourse of the nineties "opened up new spaces of desire and commodification, forming a culturally seductive logic for market liberalization" (Zacharias, 2003, p. 396). Zacharias (2003) argues that these signifiers of feminine shades of whiteness in the postliberalized nation's public sphere formed "intertextual links with existing social hierarchies of caste and community in India, where propertied classes and more privileged communities could aspire for social mobility through consumption" (p. 396). What remains invisible in *Newsweek's* staged visual production of a glamorous and whitened new India—a nation that has developed hundreds of luxurious gated communities in the past decade—is the story of the other old village India that continues to be home to "a third of the world's poor and where some 300 million people live on less than \$1 a day" (Ramesh, 2006). Just a few hundred miles from the upscale residential settlement of Aamby Valley (new India) in the state of Maharashtra, a private settlement that boasts of golf courses, year-round cool temperatures, water parks, hiking trails, five-star restaurants, a hospital, and an airport, is the village of Vidarbha (old India) where an alarming number of poor farmers, unable to compete with growers from the United States and the European Union after the "last vestiges of Indian government support were

withdrawn," have committed suicide, thus adding to the toll of thousands of Indian farmers who have taken their own lives in the past decade (Ramesh, 2006).

The postcolonial feminist methodological approach to analyzing the antiessentialist politics of resistance and hegemony outlined here can also be useful to debate the democratic possibilities of more participatory forms of visual production. In February 2005, British-born and Cambridge-educated photojournalist Dana Briski's documentary *Born Into Brothels*, a poignant visual odyssey of her sojourn among the children of impoverished prostitutes in Calcutta, won the Best Documentary Feature Oscar at a televised ceremony whose costs alone may have helped fund several of the very same children's education. Among other things, Briski gave several children cameras and taught them how to take pictures. The children's snapshots of their families, friends, and surrounding streets have earned them admiring audiences and sympathetic donors and supporters in the West. Such projects highlight the creative and progressive potential of an intertextual visual genre—a filmic narrative about a photographic production—to interrupt and resist the most ostentatious display of wealth and glamour in the West. Yet at the same time, it is important to ground visual productions of activism within the hegemonic fabric of history not to dismiss entirely the worth of such projects, but to push forward the momentum of social action toward realities that we may not have imagined today. Faris's (2002) thoughts about converting the subaltern subject into a producer are useful here: "Within the traditional, limited conceptions of representation, one obvious solution was to put cameras in the hands of the mis-represented subaltern . . . but cross-cultural photography is very problematic, for unless it can manage to enforce a boundary cross-culturally, it normally drags the framing practices of the dominant photographer along" (p. 81). Can films like *Born Into Brothels* produce long-term help for poor children in the non-West? How do the specular and panoptic regimes of the Academy Awards' ceremony where the documentary film won acclaim amid a broader audience fortify the

boundaries of Self/Other in the West? Crossing over to India, the question becomes this: Was the film viewed positively by the Indian political and educated elite, who might be provoked to set aside their amnesia and offer arguably as much assistance to these poor children as Western audiences?

Finally, a postcolonial feminist critique of global modernity's compelling visual artifacts can serve as an effective pedagogical tool to challenge our students to debate the representations and implications of globalization for marginalized constituencies. How do the visual images of globalization immunize us from questioning its democratic promises of consumer utopia for the world? Applebaum and Robinson (2005) chart the future agenda for a critical globalization studies that is centrally concerned with the uneven path of neocolonial capital, an agenda that challenges the proposition that an inevitable liability of progress is the creation of abjection and poverty for some and not for others. One key recommendation in their endeavor to promote dialogue between academic discourse and movements of social justice involves the rigorous interrogation of the fundamental meanings of globalization: "Debate over the meaning of essentially contested concepts such as globalization goes beyond mere semantics. The contending battleground of such concepts is a leading edge of political conflict. Their meanings are closely related to the problems they seek to discuss and what kind of social action people will engage in" (p. xiv). George (2005), a leader in the global justice movement, calls on academics to turn their classrooms into an arena for the transnational educated elite to engage precisely in such debates over globalization and the responsibilities of global citizenship; she thus asks, "What should be the role and the responsibilities of academia and intellectuals in the global justice movement?" Progressive academics, she writes, must resist the temptation "to transmit the received wisdom" and "acquire a vested interest in mainstream interpretations of a given reality" (George, 2005, p. 5). They must "make explicit these [mainstream] presuppositions and visible this ideological framework, particularly for their students" (George, 2005, p. 6).

Encouraging students to think in multidimensional ways about historical contexts and the formation of global audiences, academics can deploy the very visual artifacts that students are immersed in, not merely to authenticate or liven up lectures, but as pedagogical material that can provoke thoughtful interrogation of the power relations among nations, classes, races, and men and women. Studying global visual media in a sense is always already a study of the nexus among powerful forces of multinational corporate capital and elite transnational producers and marketers, although the audiences interpellated by the fantasies of these media may belong to a wide range of socioeconomic strata. Thus, despite some media ethnographers' dismissal of visual-textual studies as removed from "real" audiences, creative and ethnographic analyses of the performative lives of visual images can aid the postcolonial feminist project of contesting the masculinist, colonial, and capitalist edifices of a multitude of representations. Analyzing the visual culture of the powerful and privileged classes in India and the West, classes whose shared habitus may include the *National Geographic*, *Newsweek*, and the *Wall Street Journal*, can reveal the transnational consolidation of specific ideologies of gender, nation, race, and class in multiple contexts (Parameswaran, 2001, 2004a).

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