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# Diaspora and Double Consciousness

Samir Dayal

This paper speculates on some theoretical conjunctures between the concepts of diaspora and double consciousness. Contemporary debates about multiculturalism and transnationalism demand a rethinking of diaspora beyond the state-centrist model of allegiance to the host vs. the home country. Diaspora studies affords a critical perspective on the very visible thematic of cultural migrancy and on debates about transnationalism and postcoloniality—debates which find a resonance in the resurgent multicultural debates.<sup>1</sup> James Clifford has noted that “we are seeing the emergence of new maps: borderland culture areas, populated by strong, diasporic ethnicities assimilated to dominant nation states” (110). But the proliferation of border zones of culture may be more complex than this description suggests, and the articulation of the condition of diaspora with such border zones may require something more than the domesticating metaphor of “populating” might suggest. The discourse of multiculturalism has often proved inadequate in accommodating the complexity of race or migrancy, even (or especially?) internal migrancy, and its inadequacy is put in sharper relief when it confronts the hot-button politics of immigration, on the one hand, and the more theoretical issues of diaspora, transnationalism, and neocolonialism, on the other. As Akhil Gupta writes, multiculturalism “feebly” acknowledges the unmooring of cultures from places but simultaneously contains cultural difference within a unitary national narrative. I am interested not only in geographical displacement but also in the possibilities of a transvaluation of *diasporic* sensibility, a metaphorization of deterritorialized critical consciousness in general that is alive to the uses as well as the dangers of metaphorization. A particular danger is that of facile and rootless cosmopolitanism masquerading as transvalued diaspora; but one *use* of a metaphorization of diaspora is the rejection of the “ontopology” Jacques Derrida has recently defined as an “axiomatization” that conflates ontology with topology or biology. I understand the caveat for postcolonial critique prescribed by Gayatri Spivak in reference to this ontopology: one must remember that “to see all activity attaching to the South as ontopologocentric . . . denies access to the news of subaltern struggles against the financialization of the globe” (“Ghostwriting”

71). However, in theorizing double consciousness to accommodate such concerns, I am arguing here, as I have done elsewhere, that it is equally dangerous to sequester the marginalized by representing their struggles merely in terminological and conceptual opposition to the metropolitan critique of ontopology (Dayal "Postcolonial Possibilities"). This sequestration is effectively a submission to prophylactic insulations of so-called "first world discourses" from "third world discourses," or vice versa. The issues of essentialism, contamination, appropriation, and who-speaks-for-whom are only too familiar here. Besides, sequestration cuts both ways: the marginal, and perhaps even the subaltern, cannot forever afford to think only locally if cultural economy is really becoming more and more transnational every day. Nor should subalterns necessarily be bound to their material here-and-now, particularly if transnationalism is in fact what it is cracked up to be.

There is strategic value in cultivating a diasporic double consciousness. First, it affords an interstitial perspective on what it means to be, say, "British" or "American"—a perspective that allows for the emergence of excessive and differential meanings of "belonging," as well as "a parasitic" location (to use Rey Chow's term), where double consciousness is not synthetically—dialectically—"resolved," but rather enables an internal critique while suspending the mundane question of assimilation. Developing this notion, Chow notes that the "continuing *ideological* role" of Orientalism and (neo)colonialism are constantly de-emphasized in Cultural Studies (7; emphasis in original).<sup>2</sup> Double consciousness transfigured as diaspora entails an emancipation from a merely nationalistic or infranational pedagogical. Yet it is not directed or "oriented" just towards the expressivity of the diasporic in the metropole. The obliquities of "belonging," the mediated nature of *both* allegiance to nation and the critique of "nation-ness," are issues about which the "authentic" indigenous critic may also need to be reminded. The imagined homogeneous singularity of national identity frequently courts a sclerotic essentialism in its *volkisch* insistence on the autonomy, purity or superiority of "one's own" culture—a thread that invariably is tied to xenophobia as well as a crisis of self-esteem.

Doubleness as I am conceptualizing it is less a "both/and" and more a "neither just this/nor just that." My attempt here is to conceive doubleness negatively, to explode the positive and equilibristic constructions of diaspora around the desire for belonging ideally to two or more places or cultures. That "doubleness" is often laced with nostalgia, filial piety, and credulity. It is hardly a space within which a salutary rhetoric of suspicion about official narratives of nation, or about race, gender, sexuality, or class can flourish, or within which resistance can be offered to "the contemporary system of nation-states . . . imagined as *an* international community"

(Malkki 41; my emphasis). Nor is it a site where the invention of identity and community can be facilitated beyond the bromides of the multiculturalism debates. Double consciousness need not be conceived in the restricted sense in which W. E. B. Du Bois casts it ("this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (16-17)). Doubleness is more productively conceived as the interstitiality of entering (or leaving) and destabilizing the border zones of cultures, as fracturings of the subject that resist falsely comforting identifications and reifications. Its negative value is that it denies the subject's sovereignty and stresses the performativity of the subject. For *this* doubleness there could hardly be a richer figure than "diaspora."

Paul Gilroy cautions against the "narrowness of vision which is content with the merely national" – a vision that "has been challenged from within [the] black community by thinkers who were prepared to renounce the easy claim of African-American exceptionalism in favor of a global, coalitional politics in which anti-imperialism and anti-racism might be seen to interact if not to fuse" (Gilroy 4, 29). This I would agree with, so long as "coalition" is not construed as involving a simple "putting aside of differences." I argue that a theorization of the diasporic perspective as double consciousness is made particularly fruitful by such an emphasis on a transnational scope for contemporary Cultural Studies. Gilroy's British perspective may be linked to the continental European perspective of critics such as Étienne Balibar, who observes that, although in the European context at least no two countries have identical dynamics of race relations, "we have had and still have reasons to suppose that these different configurations influence one another" (6). This argument emphasizes the need for a transnational rather than merely national understanding of European racism. Many U.S. critics similarly argue for a "polycentric multiculturalism" that "globalizes" multiculturalism (Robert Stam and Ella Shohat 300); others suggest that it is limiting to "posit . . . a humanist individual subject" and point to the need for "traveling" discourse, "produced and disseminated through the cultural divides that mark global inequalities [and] asymmetries of power rather than a global cosmopolitanism" (Kaplan and Grewal 440).

There is a parallel and growing consensus that "[t]he discourse of cultural difference largely remains confined to the problem of minorities in Western constitutional democracy" so as to "block out the global-economic nature of crisis in a neocolonial postcolonial conjuncture" (Cheah 175). The internal and shifting imbalances of power within Western democracies, and among minorities, need to be kept in view, as does the increasing awareness that these powerful economies cannot be closed and organic wholes, with economies insulated from the fortunes – or immune

to the encroachments – of non-Western economic and cultural forces and flows.

Diasporic double consciousness can also stand in – utopically – as a figure for the imaginative completion of what Gilroy identifies as a creative (and by extension theoretical) trajectory sometimes denied to minoritarian constituencies (Gilroy 132–33). Nor is this trajectory likely to be apprehended by someone, even if not subaltern, whose consciousness is contained within a state-centrist or nationalist ideology, or referenced by retroversion to an archaicized rootedness in country or culture. By posing the challenge of an *internal* hybridity, “double consciousness” interrupts the narratives of national purity or autonomy; within the world-system, at any rate, it is impossible now, as Balibar remarks, to “imagine any return to ‘autarky’” (50). By the same token, Balibar conceives that alertness to internal hybridity means recognizing racism in terms of the exclusion of *familiars* in a mixed society. This is a notion he shares with Bhabha’s sense that the uncanny force of cultural difference is most acutely felt “in the strangeness of the familiar . . . ourselves-as-others, others-as-ourselves, that borderline” (Interview 72; qtd. Gupta 19). Double consciousness compels us all to see ourselves and our others in the *same* mirror.

It would be fatuous to suggest that all diasporics are automatically in possession of double consciousness, that they are fully self-reflexive “ambivalent” and cosmopolitan nomads “riding” cultural difference (Massumi 5). Neither the existential accident nor the choice of diaspora confers upon an individual or group that transcendental sophistication of double consciousness. Diaspora in the First World, furthermore, is not always an elective or volunteerist condition. The diasporic sensibility presented in the fiction of Hanif Kureishi or Amitav Ghosh is very different from that in Tayeb Salih’s or in Yambo Ouloguem’s. The cosmopolitan doesn’t share the same cultural location as the refugee or the exile. And complicity is not necessarily complicity with a national *elite* in either host or home country, but may be allegiance to what Jenny Sharpe has called “a global consumerism that thrives on cultural hybridities” (185).

Of course, for some diasporics the condition is not as empowering as it is for other relatively cosmopolitan intellectuals. For white migrants in the west, assimilation is not constituted in the same way as it is for non-white migrants. Class, gender, and other circumstances or accidents may also be important to consider, along with “the logic[s] of production and the dynamics of work relations” (Rouse 360–61). If assimilation does not mean the same thing for all migrants, neither does “diaspora,” as critics such as Anannya Bhattacharjee and Aijaz Ahmad have reminded us (Bhattacharjee 21; Ahmad 16). Even within the South Asian diaspora in the US, intellectuals and cosmopolitans like Meena Alexander and Bharati Mukherjee are differently situated from some other South Asian migrants. Not all

migrants are exilic or nomadic; some are refugees, some merely following the money. To resist the homogenizing tendencies of "diversity talk" one must recognize the constitutive heterogeneity of diasporic positionalities and affiliations, and the shifting (self)-identifications and unpredictable alliances of the diasporic transnational. There are all manner of collusions and complicities, and jockeyings for power, within and *among* all minority groups, and not just diasporics. A diaspora politics requires skepticism about the aspirations, however nuanced, of some migrants to the condition of "model" minorities. As Frederick Buell reminds us, "Model immigrant success stories . . . [are] models precisely because they remind us on every page that the author [of that success story is] an 'other,' while simultaneously celebrating the supposedly complete transformation of that identity" (148).

Instead of marking an achieved pluralized space and time guaranteeing an equal political address within the nation-space, the model immigrant category is sometimes ironically constructed as precisely a divisive and subordinating condition *for* "belonging." The dominant ideology hails (to use an Althusserian image) the model immigrant thus: "you are granted permission to stay here as a model *immigrant*, but you will never be really one of us—so stay on guard and on display as an approved, tokenized prototype, for other potential and future immigrants to model themselves after." And insofar as their cultural alignments are traversed by what DuBois might have called color lines, some nonwhite diasporics or migrants cannot attain more than what Frantz Fanon bitterly termed "honorary citizenship." A theorization of this plurality is precisely what is missing from the Benetton variety of multiculturalism, which wears its facile plurality on its sleeve. The consequence is often that difference is effaced where it seems to be celebrated, and this erasure licenses a subtly coercive marginalization of certain individuals or groups within the facile rhetoric of "multicultural diversity" even as it normalizes others. In Amy Tan's successful *The Joy Luck Club*, the "enigma" of the other, while it seems to be preserved in quaint Chinese customs and family traditions, is in fact appeasingly neutralized as inscrutable and therefore beneath serious examination, or assimilated so that American democratic capitalist ideals—bourgeois individualism, personal material success in the American (yuppie model minority) mode—are if anything further entrenched. All of this combined with the novel's made-for-the-box-office style should give even champions of multiculturalism pause. Tan fails to address seriously the position of minorities and diasporas in the U.S. The concept of diaspora is most useful as a discursive category that sheds some light on the complex issues of cross-cultural or multi-cultural complicity. It is not just the "historical accident" of dispersal that is important, but diaspora as a figure for, in Chow's (admittedly sanguine) words, "an intellectual real-

ity – the reality of being an intellectual" (15).

A self-conscious transvaluation of diaspora foregrounds the specular relationship of West and non-West; it thus brings to the fore issues of identity construction in cultural difference. It also raises under theorized questions such as: What does an other, non-Western modernity look like if it is not just a response to a Western paradigm? Similarly promising is Gilroy's suggestion that the figure of diaspora troubles the periodization of modernity and postmodernity (Gilroy 44). Whether or not it is regarded as a phenomenon coextensive with the histories of decolonization, diaspora is admittedly far from providing an adequate "explanation" or account of recent transformations of nation-states. Upheavals in the Communist bloc and, most recently, the former Yugoslavia; the breakdown and apparent return of the former Soviet Union and its ideology – these are phenomena that may involve diaspora, but are hardly explainable in terms of diaspora studies.

Still, we can learn something from studying diaspora as a figure for double consciousness. The diasporic, always in the waiting rooms of the nation-space, is preserved at least from the illusion of a fixed identity and a prefabricated cultural role. As I am conceptualizing it here, diaspora has not only a literal but a metaphorical sense. The literal sense is usefully developed by Yossi Shain. For him, U.S. diasporas include "all hyphenated or ethnic Americans who attempt to influence American policy toward their homeland . . ." they are "transnational collectivities whose members maintain some real or symbolic affinity (ethnocultural, religious, racial, or national) with their countries of origin . . ." (86). Shain's description is useful for my present purposes because, among other things, it suggests how exploration of the theoretically under examined concept of diaspora can provide a purchase on multiculturalist and "Cultural Studies" debates, as they eddy and swirl around axiologies of cultural value. Such exploration might in the long run translate into the springs of a politics and an ethics, thus to escape the finitude of what Gilroy terms the "fatal junction of the concept of nationality with the concept of culture" (2). What remains important is to reject the model of a "unified" or monocultural national culture, where public and private verities and a consumerist ideology are always already in place, as a normalized and unquestionable model. In the U.S., proponents of such a model presumably wish to avoid the anarchic and threatening possibility of emergent forms of culture taking root in really pluralized and asymmetrical cultural loci and ultimately challenging the foundations of the democratic capitalist cultural economy.

Although generously broad, Shain's definition of diaspora occludes a significant distinction between the positive conception of diaspora, in terms of an elective nomadism or an "affinity with a homeland," and a *negative* conception in which diaspora indicates a specific liminality or incomplete-

ness, or where it reproblematicizes the processes of subject construction and subjection under the nation-state. Diasporas may be said to be constituted negatively if (1) they are structurally excluded from true citizenship, witness the cultural location of Turkish "guest workers" in Germany; or (2) they are "included" within a larger collectivity only to be subsumed and neutralized, as for instance South Asian Americans are "included" within the larger category of Asian America; or (3) they themselves capitulate to an impoverished identity politics so that precisely at the moment when it is acknowledged that the "identity" and composition of diasporic imagined communities are constantly transformed, they are homogenized, reified as collectivities, and thus contained. The "transformation" is misrecognized as occurring homogeneously and uniformly across a unified and determinate body, which does not threaten to be or become multiple, unpredictable, or enigmatic: it merely changes into another manageable minoritarian body. Thus Shain's conception acknowledges transformation but cannot admit an entity that is split by a constitutive difference—*internally* double and less than one—as Homi Bhabha might put it. But diasporics *may* position themselves as resisting assimilation, liminally situated on the borders or fault lines, alive to the play of contradiction and to the unregulated possibilities of such a positioning. Paradoxically, then, the negative dimension of diaspora is productive, in the sense of admitting an analytical sophistication into multiculturalist debate. And it is here that diaspora studies can energize the possibility of a politics and an ethics.

Shain's discussion of diaspora, furthermore, addresses primarily the *literal* or *geographical* conditions of diaspora. But there is another approach where the loss or recuperation of a literal home is not the defining telos of the diasporic sensibility. An alternative is described by William Safran, where diaspora "increasingly" is conceptualized as a "metaphoric designation . . . for several categories of people—expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants, and ethnic and racial minorities tout court . . ." (Safran 83).<sup>3</sup> In this vein, a central contribution of diaspora studies is analogous to the "historiographical operation" theorized by Michel de Certeau (*The Writing of History* 71). The literal translatedness of migrants is itself transformed into a metaphorical translatedness—not only metaphorical dispersal in the sense of widening the scope of "diaspora" by removing the requirement of merely literal displacement, but a richer understanding of translatedness as an emergent and interstitial condition of the internality of difference. In the moment of the iteration of the "same," difference emerges. Diaspora studies thematizes the diasporic as astride at least two cultural identity positions without being tied unproblematically to either; it simultaneously splits the presumption of self-identity of the national or citizen in the host country. The consolidation of the western subject is revealed as being dependent on a specular



othering of a non-western subject, and that subject is also confronted with its own performative self-division. Thus are troubled, too, those assured Eurocentric narratives of modernity or progress, which need, for the perfection of their self-image an antithetical underdeveloped culture.<sup>4</sup> Diasporic double consciousness can also help deflate such Eurocentrism by posing a reminder of the fabrication of the non-western or Oriental other as a negative for the construction of the western subject as the "same," as self-identical, while at the same time refusing to feed the inverted and narcissistic version of Eurocentrism in which all non-western culture is imagined to be fundamentally a response to western culture. By the same token, and given the logic of the intimacy of self and other, to what extent is the culturally dominant self-image of the non-western subject a reaction to the west? How, in a transnational context, does the non-western subject constitute its own modernity as independent from western modernity?

There would seem to be every reason to suppose that the transcultural and the multicultural are not merely alternative but ineluctable modes of understanding the meaning of identity and agency: "if there is a need for an identity of one's own," as Peter Caws puts it, "the best place to look for it may not be a single culture of any kind, minority or otherwise" (376).<sup>5</sup> Such an understanding entails a double vision – a vision of what is taken to be "one's own culture" as well as a vision of cultures that are beyond that boundary. Diasporic double consciousness can not only present a challenge to the "tragic popularity of ideas about the integrity and purity of cultures" by pointing to the hybridity that has always been internal to the cultures of the world; it can also trouble the ossified notions of nationality and ethnicity that are mobilized as warrants for such ideas, so as to make more immediate the promise of access to what Gilroy identifies as the "specific counterculture of modernity produced by black intellectuals" in order to emphasize the "internality of blacks to the West" (5).

Diasporic double consciousness can also throw into sharper relief the specific forms of complicity of diasporic discourse with metropolitan discursive practice. At a more general level this would be a way of defining the role of the diasporic intellectual. Left leaning intellectuals who would identify themselves as simply "American" in performing this internal critique are, in other words, interpellated differently ("organically"?) from those who would identify themselves as diasporic intellectuals, to the extent that "where one is coming from" matters at all. (I would resist any form of nativism). The diasporic intellectual's double consciousness makes possible both an internally critical participation in and complicity with metropolitan western theoretical discourse and a recognition that the only alternative would be – for such an intellectual anyway – a blindness to his or her necessary interpellation within such a discourse. This provides a measure of access to the pedagogy of taste and the transformation

of value – in short to the symbolic economy of representation. The importance of this access cannot be exaggerated: witness the damaging internalization of the hegemony of “white” and “Aryan” as privileged ethnic or racial descriptors, even among people who are neither.

Ethnicity, race, class, gender, and nation need to be theorized in connection with diaspora more explicitly and strongly than they have tended to be. To thematize the difference that difference makes (Stuart Hall's phrase), and to emphasize difference in a transnational context, is to mark the frequent unipolarization *or, alternatively, the often disruptively local enunciation*, of the so-called global cultural economy. Cultural difference is a theoretically useful concept not primarily because it points to the discreteness of one culture from another but because it reminds of the *constitutiveness* of difference. That is to say, among other things, that sovereignty is denied to the subject, and organic self-identity and self-sufficiency are denied to a culture as such.

In its emphasis on transnational culture-scapes and on the asymmetries of oppositional or complementary cultural positionalities, the discourse of diaspora displaces the obsession with (particularly bourgeois) individual identity and the whole apparatus of normativity that sustains it. This entails, inevitably, a recognition of the endless transformation and translation of self. The self's migrancy in negotiation is given a special saliency in the case of the migrant self. And there could hardly be a more apt image for this double consciousness than diaspora. Unmasking the denigrated other whose nearness is disavowed in the anxious repetition of the unitary sameness of the (Euro-American) self, diaspora functions as an exemplary figure for the idea of the fungibility of identity. I am arguing here for a necessary complication of identity politics in three related propositions of cultural “difference.” It is important (a) to acknowledge the race, class, ethnic, gendered, and other differences among diasporics, as well as among the others outside the orbit of the nation-space's cultural dominant; yet it is even more crucial (b) to thematize double consciousness as the diasporic's ambivalent allegiance to, or double hesitation about, belonging to the “ancestral” home, on the one hand, and to the host country, on the other. Finally, it is critical (c) to theorize the constitutive “difference” of diaspora, for the liminality of diaspora stages a “double session” particularly well-captured by the Derridean pun on the hymenal pairing of *entre/antre* – neither in nor quite outside the narratives of nation in which they are interpellated and subordinated. All three propositions of difference are necessary for the understanding of diaspora as I am developing it.

Diasporic double consciousness can help deflate a Eurocentric manipulation of the machinery of representation, as in neo-colonialist signifying regimes. It thus can enable a deconstruction of the presumption of Euro-American cultural completeness and priority, and it can fracture the illu-

sion of cultural purity. While I fully acknowledge the happy mutual "contamination" of cultures that Kwame Anthony Appiah sees as ground for a faith in intercultural harmony (155), it seems more important than ever for diasporic groups to cultivate a double consciousness, by way of declining the blandishments of absorption into larger collectivities, and to insist on a politics of self-representation. It may be that a doubled diasporic post-coloniality entails an irrecusably "catachrestic performance" in which the West is always reinscribed in the moment in which the postcolonial affirms her own "postness"—but this is perhaps less a debilitation than some critics have imagined (see San Juan 8) because this reinscription always throws back an image that is distorted and which can be deliberately deformed and reformed.

It is perhaps more accurate anyway to recognize that in terms of a politics of representation the west and the east are not merely two unrelated economies. Hence the power of diasporic double consciousness to split—to render irrecoverably multiple—the official narratives that together "make up" the nation. An excellent English instance of such a diasporic splitting of the national is effected by Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* and by Kazuo Ishiguro's *Remains of the Day*. In providing several unofficial mini-narratives, the porosity of boundaries at every level begin to remake constantly the national fabric, so that "*E pluribus unum*" can be inverted to emphasize the "many." The figure of diaspora defines the *limit* of "nationness" and its operational rhetorics of assimilation or belonging, of ethnicity, of the other. If history is in some quarters presumed to have come to an end, fulfilled forever in so-called "free" capitalist democracies, then for others (usually inhabitants of third and fourth world spaces) it never began, or at best they are constructed as merely lagging behind in a race toward modernity that has already been run and won. They do not "belong," although they are sometimes benevolently and even "protectively" tolerated in First World narratives. To the extent that their struggle is a crisis of legitimation, diasporic postcolonial discourse reformulates this crisis not only by interrogating the other meanings of modernity and progress for non-First World spaces. This discourse also declines any unproblematic assimilation into a host nation-state as well as relinquishes a primary or exclusive identification with a homeland. Such a theorization of double consciousness, insisting on the *internality* of cultural difference, highlights in a particularly effective way the "malaise of categories and labels" entailing an "intercultural, intersubjective, interdisciplinary" modality that Trinh Minh-ha describes as "not merely double, but a reality that involves the crossing of an indeterminate number of borderlines, one that remains multiple in its hyphenations" (107). Double consciousness embodied in the image of diaspora resists the enchantments of the official understanding of diversity as a "national" issue. It is also a necessary impediment to

the appropriation and expropriation of agency or its containment within a hegemonic status quo.

In splitting official narratives a *signifying irony* is also preserved, one aspect of which is the Caliban capacity, that is, acquiring the discursive strategies of the (neo)colonialist, in order to better curse through them. Irony, however, has another, or a double, edge. If diasporic double consciousness interrupts the Eurocentric or neocolonial manipulation of the machinery of representation, it also ironizes the myths and images which the home country presents to itself. In the case of the South Asian American diaspora, for instance, this would mean ironizing the self-image of Indians – not just predictable Western caricatures. This irony would involve bringing to the fore unpleasant truths in the manner of a V. S. Naipaul, for whom irony sometimes means refusing to flinch from observing the least flattering facets of Indian culture. Even more charitably exercised, self-directed irony might mean taking a less credulous view of the facile reterritorializations of a gloriously mythologized past, rethinking discrimination – and terrorism – based on ethnicity and color (or *varna*) at “home.” It is easy to occupy the place of the righteous and sinned-against subaltern (whether in the Gramscian allegorical sense or the looser sense of “underdog”) in the Western metropole. That is a companion effort to realizing the critical potential of the diaspora perspective to “expose and illuminate the sheer heterogeneity of the diverse social forces always repressed into the margin by the monologism of dominant discourses – discourses of domination” (Mercer 66). The politics of recognition mediated by double consciousness entails self-recognition in a *global mirror*.

The transnational migrant’s double consciousness can continually reinvigorate the regulative ideal of an endlessly open and unpredictable negotiation of civil society and its quickening principle, social justice. Negotiation, however, needs to be understood within a contractualist frame, where anyone within a society is free to reject the structurations and even the unifying *doxa* of that society in favor of negotiating new ones they believe to be more just. It is a necessary ironization of the potential appropriation and expropriation of agency, or its containment within a hegemonic status quo in the host country. I want to emphasize, therefore, the potential of diasporic double consciousness for transforming the public sphere through this process of negotiation.

My stress on negotiation is intended to emphasize a circulating economy of representation in real but also, increasingly, virtual *public spaces* (given the potential of cyberspatial communications to radically reconfigure cultural literacy, modes of cultural production, and access to institutional and theoretical discourse) in which majoritarian discursive practices are hybridized by minority discursive practices and vice versa so that new

objects and emergent *subjectivities* can come into play, but in which the subject is always "less than one and double," in Homi Bhabha's phrase. (I stress public spaces to contest the attempt to limit the expression of cultural diversity to the private sphere.) Diasporic double consciousness can be the name for transcultural critique too: the consciousness of cultural contradictions and incommensurabilities, but also of the possibility of "reading" one culture's space *and time* from the space and time of another, thus destabilizing discursive regularities. The problematizing of any correspondence between identity and place or biology, and the question of irreducible cultural difference, is even more pivotal in the case of post-colonial hybridity. Negotiation thus contains the potential for anarchy in the nation-space, but it points to a more responsive critical and practical approach to cultural difference than does a conceptualization of negotiation as a series of compromises or "conflict resolutions" – whether inscribed in a gestural politics of appeasement or motivated by a desire to defuse racial politics.

The call for the recognition of particular cultural identities, for Charles Taylor, is "one of the forces behind nationalist movements in politics" (Gutmann 25). My own argument is that what matters is not *that* one is acknowledged, but *how* particular performatives of agency, marked by cultural difference, are acknowledged. A politics of recognition, then, needs to be supplemented by a politics of representation, in order to preserve the enigmatic, unpredictably hybrid, and antirepresentational possibilities implied by a performative conceptualization of cultural location in civil society. This complication of identity politics is especially important for postcolonial critique.

It is just such an agenda respectful of hybridity and cultural difference that motivates performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña's call for attention to border experiences, which reveal "transitional identities *in the making* . . . The experience of disjunction . . . of rupture, is a quintessential contemporary experience" (Fusco 149, 154, 156; my emphasis). Alertness to such hybrid processes as negotiated or performative, rather than as natural or permanent, promotes a double vigilance: *both* to the diasporic's implication in the implosive forces which threaten to hypostatize and constrict the subject into an institutionally recognizable identity, *and* to strategies for resisting these (mis)recognitions by allowing for new (even opportunistic) and possibly "deviant" logics and agential possibilities through a radical theorization of negotiation. This is not just a matter of keeping abreast of the nomadic post-identitarian potential suggested by Edward Said's point that "new alignments made across borders, types, nations, and essences are rapidly coming into view" (xxv). Negotiation is also an ethical imperative made the more acute by western triumphalism about the end of history. Diasporic double consciousness can be a reminder of the need

for vigilance as to the hybrid possibilities – the shock – of the new, as antidote to the soporific seductions of double “affiliation” and to the newly resurgent assimilationist rhetoric that narrows the possibilities of post-national solidarity and “belonging” by elective affinity rather than ethnicity or biology.

I provide two brief illustrations of diasporic double consciousness as I am conceiving it. The first is from Mira Nair’s *Mississippi Masala*. In this film, South Asian American identity is deliberately dislocated and dispersed over three continents: the protagonist Meena is a true and self-reflexive “masala” or hybrid. The film dramatizes and demands from the audience a double consciousness, a feature which makes some diasporic South Asians uncomfortable, as well as white or Black American viewers, for it raises issues about that highly unsafe practice of interracial sexuality, about miscegenation. But it also interrogates the constructions at different cultural locations of race, ethnicity, and the politics of representation. Meena’s father is an Indian diasporic who, while living in Uganda, had been jailed for making remarks against Idi Amin; he had indignantly identified himself as a Ugandan first and an Indian in Africa, second. In America, however, Meena’s black lover forces him to recognize that he constructs his cultural location differently here, and that he considers himself and his family ethnically superior to Black African Americans, though only a shade lighter in skin color. This is for him a discomfiting lesson in diasporic double consciousness.

My second example is Coco Fusco’s recent collection of essays, *English Is Broken Here*. She writes about her collaboration with Guillermo Gómez-Peña, in which they presented themselves in a golden cage as two Amerindians undiscovered by Europe for 500 years. As Fusco herself puts it, the spur of that project was the “legacy of performing the identity of an Other for a white audience, sensing the implications for us as performance artists dealing with cultural identity in the present.” Here and elsewhere Fusco thematizes a figuratively diasporic double consciousness as a transnational paradigm of daily life for “many, if not most” of the world’s people. She offers an example of the rich mode of antirepresentational representation and performativity that I have been developing.

While Nair’s diasporic eye lights upon a localized politics of recognition and representation interstitially situated between the South Asian diaspora and the older “diaspora” of African America, Fusco’s more fully theorized interest is in the circulation of a symbolic economy, where recognition and representation are redeemed into a new uneasiness about the confrontation of self and other in a transnational frame. Both Nair and Fusco thematize double consciousness as irony. Again, Fusco explicitly theorizes a counter-ethnographic irony, whereas Nair unguardedly and, one might say, confidently turns this irony upon the diasporics them-

selves, and thus upon herself. Nair's double consciousness is less politicized, less pained; Fusco's sense of hybridity is more acute, as is her desire or nostalgia for subcultural solidarity. I don't claim that these examples exhaustively represent the diverse experience of diasporic double consciousness. But they do offer a starting point for exploring its richest implications for cultural and postcolonial critique.<sup>6</sup>

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### Notes

1. Several observers have talked about this parallel, including Benjamin Lee, who writes that "One can . . . see in the multiculturalism debates a mirroring of the global situation – a tension between a decentering of the United States and the West in general as the world economic order shifts, and a desire to protect its power and privileges" (568).

2. In making this argument she is generally in agreement with critics such as Gayatri Spivak, Ella Shohat, and Anne McClintock. See for instance, Spivak, "Neocolonialism and the Secret Agent of Knowledge," Shohat, "Notes on the 'Post-Colonial,'" and McClintock, "The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term 'Post-Colonialism.'"

3. Safran does say that while the South Asian diaspora does not usually reflect an enforced uprooting from the homeland, it is "a genuine one in several respects: its spread across three continents, its long history, its auxiliary (or middleman) role within host societies, and the varying attitudes of its members – ranging from integrationist to particularist" (88). Above all, South Asian Americans must critically engage the problematic of invisibility and the struggle for recognition and representation in which they are necessarily involved. But his most suggestive idea is that diaspora has a metaphorical effectivity; this is an idea that of course should be considered in the light of the caution that to define diaspora too loosely is to evacuate it of meaning and, worse, to insult those for whom diaspora is something more than a fancied self-designation. See also San Juan 167.

4. As Robert Stam and Ella Shohat present it, Eurocentrism (the reference to "Europe" includes the Americas and Australia) is also characterised by the assertion of an "inherent" tendency to democratic institutions, the "cultural anthropophagy" by which the cultural and material production of non-European countries is appropriated and simultaneously rendered nugatory, the covering over of non-European democratic institutions, and the denial of the West's retrograde or "oppressive" practices such as its colonialist adventures, slavery, and imperialism, by "regarding them as contingent, accidental, exceptional" (297–98). This kind of thinking has been traced through even Hegel and Marx, not to mention colonial literary texts, for instance. Thus India functions, in even Hegel's vision, as a phenomenon which has "remained stationary and fixed" (Hegel 139) and what is more, incapable of History. Writes Hegel,

In the case of such a people . . . that which we call in its double sense, History, is not to be looked for . . . For History requires Understanding – the power of looking at an object in an independent light, and comprehending it in its rational connection with other objects. Those peoples therefore are alone

capable of History, and of prose generally, who have arrived at that period of development . . . at which individuals comprehend their own existence as independent, i.e. possess self-consciousness. (Hegel 161–62)

5. Caws suggests, following Charles Taylor, that all identity transcultural, dialogical, and multicultural:

Given that the mature individual is likely to leave his or her culture of origin behind as limiting to the development of personal identity, what are the most fruitful sources for the construction of that identity, apart from purely interpersonal ones? First, I shall argue, the testing and strengthening of the self against constant features of the natural world – the body, the environment: I call these . . . *transcultural*; second, the enrichment of the self through acquaintance with and cultivation of what is found to be the most rewarding in all the human products and practices with which one comes in contact: I call this *multicultural*. (372)

6. A longer version of this paper is forthcoming.

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