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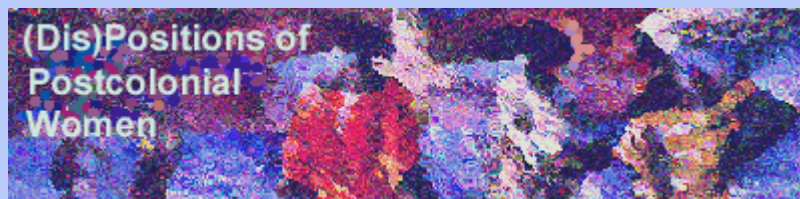
Western Experiences: Education and "Third World Women" in the Fictions of Tsitsi Dangarembga and Meena Alexander

by

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1. Perhaps one of the most ironic elements of postcolonial literary analysis is the fact that readers and critics alike must access and interact with the English language, the imperial tongue of many postcolonial nations, to write about its hegemonizing force on a global level. When combined with the codifying problems of culture and tradition in given pre-independence contexts, it is no wonder that a number of postcolonial feminists have questioned the relationship between the woman and the postcolonial, one subaltern subject with another. In her essay "A Feminist Approach to African Literature," Kristen Holt Petersen asks, "which is the more important, which comes first, the fight for female equality or the fight against Western cultural imperialism?" (252). This question is further problematized when education and language are mixed into the complexity of identities and their constructed hierarchies as channeled and/or policed by colonial discourse, which transforms into the norm and thus generates stereotypes, alliances and biases within the native community.
2. In this sense, women's positionings in the colonial and postcolonial worlds and subsequently produced texts are riddled with the polemics of subaltern identity, and are doubly difficult to break away from. Thomas Macauley's call to create a race of brown-skinned Englishmen in his notorious "Minute on Indian Education," insult though it was to Indian men, appropriated even less agency to the role of Indian women in the discourse of British colonial culture. For even when women in the East are reluctantly allowed a voice in the patriarchal dialogism of the West, notes Chandra Talpade Mohanty, they are marked by the modifier "third world," which carries with it an implicit stigma of "less than" (172). Subsequently, as noted by British scholar Terry Eagleton, "the plight of women in such societies, forced as they are to assume many of its most wretched burdens, has resulted in a peculiarly fruitful alliance between feminism

and postcolonialism" (205). It is no wonder then that many prominent postcolonial theorists are women, and most discussions of the subaltern subject inextricably involve a discussion of the (dis)placement of women in colonial/postcolonial/neocolonial contexts.

3. This is perhaps one of the primary reasons that systems of epistemology and language acquisition must be historicized in the context of the Third World women's experience. Hence, education and the English language are popular reflective themes in fictions in English written by Third World women, partly since this knowledge of English has become a vehicle for narrating personal histories, be they through memoir, poetry, or fiction, to a world whose ears are already pricked up and familiar with the English language. And though some felt and may feel that subscribing to this "bastard tongue," as termed by Salman Rushdie, was, in a sense, a kind of linguistic betrayal of the mother tongue, it was one of the only ways colonized people could rise economically, socially, and politically under colonialism. This case is especially true for women -- the knowledge of English translated into a new tier in paradigms of social stratification that automatically rendered status to the speaker of the colonizer's tongue in the colonized homeland.
4. Certainly Africa and India shared this experience, for in the context of the English language, hegemonic linguistic discourse creates the space for a new kind of feminist culture to be born. In other words, the linguistic domination of English has created a new set of (dis)comforts: proficiency in English and/or British schooling enables colonial men and women to be a rung above their subaltern counterparts in pre-independent colonial nations already problematized with stringent class and sex stratification. "Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world," observes Ngugi Wa Thiong'o in "The Language of African Literature" (16). Language, in other words, gives socio-political agency to the self. Following the hegemonic discourse induced by language shift, native Indians and Africans (to name only two peoples) have given a bourgeois status to English which indigenous, regional languages are not privileged with.
5. When we compare these (dis)positions of the Third World women in relation to Tsisti Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and Meena Alexander's *Manhattan Music* (1997), we experience, as critical readers, a transcendence through history and literary space that reveals an interesting study. What makes these two novels an interesting comparison is not their likeness, but conversely, their difference, which raises polemical questions concerned not only with the binary of Europeans vs. native peoples, but man vs. woman, India vs. Africa, and English vs. native tongue. Though the books are set in differing time periods and geographies of empire (Dangarembga's novel unfolds in colonial Southern Rhodesia [now Zimbabwe] of the late 1960s while Alexander's novel is set in today's Indian diasporic communities of New York City) these two narratives reflect similar life discourses and survival tactics for postcolonial woman under the whip of the imperial tongue. British education, for these characters, is a necessity, not an option. It is one of the most important facets of life, for being able to speak English constitutes the utterance of intelligence -- both within and outside of the colonized country.
6. Though the narratives and fictional structures of both novels differ, the protagonists -- Dangarembga's Tambu and Alexander's Sandhya -- are conscious of Britain, conscious of language, and are aware of its power and potential to let women imagine they are transcending from the teeming pool of subaltern subjects to the elite patriarchy of the Crown. English is like an elitist drug, an antidote for the Third World Blues. As noted by Braj B. Kachru, "The alchemy of English (present and future), then, does not only provide social status, it also gives access to attitudinally and materially desirable domains of power and knowledge" (295). This "alchemy" thus is an elixer for postcolonial women to gain agency and visibility, to gain an ideological voice as questioned by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her seminal essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak," in relation to both native and postcolonial worlds.
7. Kachru's claim that the English language somewhat magically gives people of the Third World a socio-political agency in the global marketplace illustrates not only the power of linguistic hegemony but also its dissemination. Where once upon a time knowledge of English was a cultural commodity, it is now a literary necessity for reading texts, even those written in countries formerly colonized by Britain. Our very

interpretation of Dangarembga and Alexander's novels is facilitated through the "Western filter" of the English language, and these authors utilize the dissemination of the colonial language to expose the pains as well as the privileges of being proficient in the language of one's ruler. But there is ambivalence concerning this practice -- the characters of Tambu and Sandhya live experiences with education and language that are bittersweet, even caustic, and their stories in some ways reflect the personal histories of their authors. Hence, these novels strive to make political moves by using personal history as inspiration, and, as Spivak puts it, "world the world" through marginalized voices and narratives (243-44). Dangarembga and Alexander do this in writing their narratives and criticisms, using their female protagonists as textual mediums through which their own subalterned voices are funneled.



8. In Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, Tambu is a meticulously constructed character who speaks in the first person narrative, which draws readers into a more personalized sense of her oppressed history. The novel opens with Tambu's assertion that she does not mourn her brother's death -- a harsh reflection and illustration of her own eventual conditioning into colonialist capitalism. Kachru's "alchemy of English" is metaphorically presented by Dangarembga in her novel: Tambu tells us that "white wizards" from the south who were "well versed in treachery and black magic" educated her uncle Babamukuru (18-9). In this way, the narrative of *Nervous Conditions* comes full circle as we witness Westernization and its impact on a number of characters, including Tambu, her brother Nhamo, her cousin Nyasha and her uncle Babamukuru. For Tambu, the pursuit of a British education is her only hope of escaping her two biological, subaltern roles - blackness and womanhood. Her internal interactions between her own culture and colonial culture induce within her a cultural schizophrenia characteristic of what Elleke Boehmer describes as "a process of both 'reincarnation' and self-splitting, in which she [Tambu] is forced to inhabit borderlines, at one and the same time losing, and yet retaining loyalty to, the traditions of the Shona home" (228).
9. This cultural schizophrenia, this "nervous condition," is exacerbated throughout the novel's narrative discourse when Tambu interacts with others. There exists a tension between the members of Tambu's family that is parallel to the tension between the Shona and British cultures, most explicitly with her mother. In this sense, Tambu is in some ways allegorical of colonial education while her mother is represented as its antithesis. Though Tambu takes over her dead brother's place (the privilege and responsibility of being educated in the family is usually reserved for the eldest son), her mother experiences a heartfelt backlash when the familial patriarchy decides to send Tambu to a Western school after Nhamo's death. While this is an invaluable opportunity for Tambu, her mother views it as a dangerous, insidious move towards Western assimilation and loss of Shona culture (as exemplified by Nyasha after her stay in England), and she viciously compares herself to her sister-in-law Maiguru:
- 'I am poor and ignorant, that's me, but I have a mouth and it will keep on talking, it won't keep quiet . . . Oh yes, Tambudzai. Do you think I haven't seen the way you follow her [Maiguru] around,' she spat at me fiercely, 'doing all her dirty work for her, anything she says? You think your mother is so stupid she won't see Maiguru has turned you against me with her money and her white ways? You think I am dirt, me, your mother.' (140)
10. There are a number of points to note in the previous passage. Tambu's mother's use of the Shona language when speaking to her daughter and referring to her by her full name in the tirade seems a gesture to conjure some Shona "authenticity." If we consider Tambu's mother's cold sentiment an opposition to Western education, we see how the inclusion/exclusion of women from this institution created a tense stratification among Shona women that multiplied the many kinds of marginalizations experienced by them. This is perhaps why Dangarembga so carefully constructs each of her female characters as literary

foils to one another - Nyasha and Maiguru, who succumb to colonial education like Tambu, are isolated by other Shona women for being educated and rich. Simultaneously, they carry status, as exemplified when Babamakuru invites Maiguru into a patriarchal council meeting concerning a local dispute.

11. Hence, the colonial woman of Southern Rhodesia occupies an ambivalent position in which education is both a liberating yet stifling entity in the context of *Nervous Conditions*. The cultural schizophrenia experienced by Tambu and other women in the novel brings them closer to a desirable economic status necessary to maintain a successful life that will support the family, yet simultaneously further displace them from the Shona culture and formidable connections with other Shona women. For Tambu, Westernization is a necessity, even after she witnesses the mental demise of Nyasha and, early in the novel, is disgusted by the fact that Nhamo has forgotten Shona. This reflects Biman Basu's claim that "literacy as a technology provokes a violent reaction on the site of its implantation" (14). Language thus operates like a sweeping industry upon the landscape, an assimilation machine which re-marks the other in terms of Western society's perceptions and his/her own self-perceptions.
12. This concept of literacy as a transcendental technology manifests itself when, after noting the loss/transformation of Shona culture into the hegemonic colonial agenda, Tambu says she could no longer be sure of Shona cultural practices after attending the British school. She claims, "And I was quite proud of this fact, because the more I saw of worlds beyond the homestead the more I was convinced that the further we left the old ways behind the closer we came to progress" (147). It is interesting that Tambu's concept of progress involves the loss of language rather than an integration of languages, and that she becomes a very product of what she dislikes in Nhamo and Nyasha (it may be presumptive to claim she doesn't realize self-assimilation - Tambu in fact seems to accept and crave it). Hence, we witness throughout the novel the reversal of Tambu's allegorical roles under the powerful influence of colonialism from being an upholder of Shona culture to suppliant of hegemonic Western discourses.
13. Perhaps this is because colonial education "seduces" Tambu with merit that creates a punishment-reward system that enforces and encourages a self-generated, "natural" desire for Western assimilation. We experience a sense of this when Tambu describes her impression of the Young Ladies College of the Sacred Heart:

A prestigious private school that manufactured guaranteed young ladies. At that convent, which was just outside town but on the other side, to the south, you wore pleated terylene skirts to school everyday and on Sundays a tailor-made-two-piece linen suit with gloves, yes, even with gloves! We all wanted to go. That was only natural. But only two places were on offer, two places for all the African Grade Seven girls in the country. (178)
14. What constitutes naturalness as described by Tambu is a function of British imperialism that is not only unnatural, but instituted through an intricate, manipulative web of the four distinct power relations imposed on colonies outlined by Edward Said in *Orientalism* - *power political* (colonial establishment); *power intellectual* (reigning educational discourses); *power cultural* (orthodoxies and canons of taste); and *power moral* (ideas about what "we" do and what "they" cannot do or understand as "we" do) (12). The power political (British government, in this case) administers the power cultural entity of the convent, which inevitably institutes a power moral that exercises partial control via the ideology of god - combined, the power cultural is formed and imposed on African youths like Tambu who are convinced their aspirations must be achieved by assimilating to and eventually revering English ways.
15. Tambu's character is further complicated by her complimentary literary foil, Nyasha, who has suffered from her own (dis)positioning in colonial discourses and subsequent "nervous conditions." Again, allegorical figures swap their symbolisms. Nyasha transforms into the embodiment of anti-colonial English language/education, advising Tambu that her departure to the convent would give her the "opportunity" to "forget who you were, what you were and why you were that. The process, she [Nyasha] said, was called assimilation, and that was intended for the precocious few who might prove a nuisance if left to themselves, whereas the others - well really, who cared about the others?" (179). Where Dangamremba illustrates Nyasha's mental and spiritual breakdown, her case of cultural schizophrenia, we

are left wondering at the end of the novel how Tambu will fare in the grips of the colonial agenda. In these many ways, Dangarembga weaves together a vivid novel of the destruction and rejuvenation of two young women as they interact with family and colonial educational institutions in *Nervous Conditions*, illustrating that there isn't anything so "natural" or even meritable of the devastation wreaked by colonialism in the African continent. Each addition of a Western cultural element in Tambu's life equals a subtraction of a Shona cultural element, and hence her "learning" of English is subversively a necessary "unlearning" of Shona culture and language.



16. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Franz Fanon writes "The colonial world is a world divided into compartments . . . this world cut in two is inhabited by two different species. The originality of the colonial context is that economic reality, inequality and the immense difference of ways of life never come to mask human realities" (32). While we explicitly see this in Dangarembga's *Nervous Condition*, the "colonial world" in a postcolonial context takes on an updated version problematized and complicated by the life-jarring process of American immigration in Meena Alexander's *Manhattan Music*. We are no longer dealing only with the discourse of women's education in the native country, hence postcolonial ideology changes face for both the experiencer of the geographical shift and his/her new homeland. As Rosemary Marangoly George has observed, writers in the immigrant genre always view the present in terms of its distance from the past and future, while never forgetting the experience of "homelessness" (171). As such, Alexander's character Sandhya is vexed by her removal from India, marriage to a Jewish man and subsequent cultural schizophrenia that leads to an attempted suicide.
17. The female experience in relation to the English language is one that leaves the residue of violence upon the characters of *Manhattan Music* as experienced by the author. As an immigrant, Alexander has struggled with the processes of coming to terms with the English language while also trying to retain other languages that were de-emphasized by the Crown. She documents this experience in *The Shock of Arrival: Reflections on Postcolonial Experience*, writing "It was a shock to me, a crisis in my writing life, if not in all the rest of what goes on under that phrase -- my life, as if it were an elixir I possessed and might drink to the full or spit out as I chose -- to realise that the machine of the colonial, technically postcolonial education I had received and, indeed, had fostered, was cutting my words off from the very wellsprings of desire. Suddenly, I felt that even the memory would be impossible if I did not turn my attention to the violence very close at hand, attendant, in fact, upon the procedures of my own writing" (4).
18. The construction of Alexander's female characters can be traced back into the history of the author's own life growing up in Kerala, a southern Indian state, as documented in *Fault Lines: A Memoir*, in which she narrates her childhood encounters with many tongues including Malayalam, English, Hindi and Arabic (41). To demonstrate the intense influence that knowledge of the English language had on her, Alexander metaphorically speaks of her learning of English to the erasing of a blackboard - a mental *tabula rasa* (clean slate) -- in which hegemony via language and culture is inscribed in her psyche. She writes, "Sometimes I think I have to write myself into being. Write in order not to be erased" (93). Ironically, this process of writing oneself into being is achieved through the medium of English as the threat of erasure is perhaps a function of the author writing in her native language. Alexander tells us:

I could never figure out those scrawls on the blackboard, the names and dates I had to learn, all taken out of the old first-form textbooks. The books had faded, tobacco-colored covers. Imported from Britain, they were stored in the corner of the school library. I had nothing but mistrust for the facts and dates contained in those bound volumes - information about Bodicea, Julius Caesar, the history of the Britons and Celts, the Crusades, even Suleiman the Magnificent. It never struck me, how curious it was that in an independent Sudan, Sith Samia,

fresh out of Teacher's Training College in Omdurman, would have to plod through these old British colonial textbooks. What I had as protection was a stubborn skepticism. (93)

19. The above passage exemplifies a number of biographical facets of Alexander's life that illustrate the impact of a British education on a young woman: 1) the "scrawls on the blackboard" imply an inscription of language and culture upon the colored tabula rasa; 2) the books are "imported from Britain," and include only a list of Western writers - this illustrates not only literary hegemony, an "importation" of education, but a racist educational discourse as well; and 3) like Tambu's school that "manufactured guaranteed young ladies," the same kind of assimilation is encouraged and instituted for teachers. Alexander sums up the devastation impacted upon her by the colonial linguistic agenda in two simple yet powerful sentences: "Sometimes I think of the English language as a pale skin that has covered up my flesh, the broken parts of my world. In order to free my face, in order to appear, I have had to use my teeth and nails, I have had to tear that fine skin, to speak out my discrepant otherness" (73).
20. We are challenged with an interesting question when we move beyond the colonial homestead of Kerala into the postcolonial, immigrant nation where Alexander's fiction unfolds: how does this "neo"postcolonial deal with geographical difference in relation to native experience? Unlike Dangarembga, Alexander creates a feminist space where characters are given a voice in the havens of fiction and new nationality, yet there are problems in the promised land as well. As noted by George, displacement literatures are actually an integral part of postcolonial literature: "For the immigrant genre, like the social phenomenon from which it takes its name, is born of a history of global colonialism and is therefore an undeniable part of postcolonialism and of decolonizing discourses"(278).
21. If we examine Alexander's assignment of allegory to the two female protagonists in *Manhattan Music*, we may assume that Sandhya is the representative female postcolonial immigrant straddled between two homelands. Draupadi, her friend, contrasts by being constructed as an intense, street-smart woman born in the United States who wonders what kind of female power it takes Sandhya to wrap the six yards of sari around herself (Alexander 50). Here, as suggested in Deepa Mehta's critically acclaimed film *Fire*, the sari is an allegorical body wrap that confines the Indian woman to traditional cultural and gender roles. Sandhya and Draupadi, like Tambu and Nyasha, are literary foils to one another, and are allegorical in similar ways. Draupadi, not a first-generation immigrant, embodies the essence of the second generation ethnic while Sandhya is more symbolic of her former nation, her former homeland. There seems, however, in Draupadi a need to connect to India though she is US-born and has been exposed to Western literature in school. In one part of the novel, Jay, Sandhya's cousin, questions Draupadi's ostensibly nostalgic and self-constructed bond with India. While Alexander writes "India owed her [Draupadi] and she would draw what she wished from that world, rework the language, pack it with lore," Jay asks Draupadi:
- "But is this your past?"
 "I want to make it up," she argued.
 "But why call the *Mahabharata* your heritage?" he quizzed her. "Why not the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* also?"
 And for once she had no answer. The shreds of memory she got from her grandmother didn't add up to the wild glory of the epic. All she had were whispers, shards of songs, torn phrases, and could they add up to a heritage? Still, as a human being, she felt she had a right to anything out there. And what came from India was closer. (52)
22. The above passage illustrates a number of problems in the construction of Draupadi's identity, which is a continuum rather than a static reflection of US life. As noted by the editors in their introduction to *Memory, Narrative & Identity: New Essays in Ethnic American Literatures*, during immigration, "identity instead of being seen as fixed, becomes a dynamic construction that adjusts continually to the changes experienced within and surrounding the self" (Singh et al. 17). Draupadi is Indian in physical attributes but American in cultural upbringing, which induces within her a craving to relate to Indian culture - this yearning, this "cultural cry" for an intimacy with the Indian culture characterizes the cultural schizophrenia experienced by a number of NRIs (Non-resident Indians). We later witness a schism between the postcolonial native of India and the US-born neocolonial -- Jay's questioning of Draupadi's

"authentic" past almost seems to be a criticism of her attempt to connect to a past she did not experience firsthand. And for Draupadi, American nationality doesn't comprise her whole self for it doesn't include her Indian ancestry. This problem of Alexander's character reflects Edward Said's assertion in "Invention, Memory, and Place" that though a national identity always involves itself with narratives of the host country, such identities are "never undisputed or merely a matter of the neutral recital of facts" (177).

23. Ironically, the Greek texts Jay thinks should be part of Draupadi's American heritage are the same texts he, Sandhya and other immigrants would have been studying in India. That Jay thinks he has the insight and/or right to direct Draupadi's connection to the past stems from an assumption that he, as a man from India, has experienced something more authentic or valid - as if the experience of the NRI isn't itself as traumatic as that of immigration. Draupadi tells us, "Columbus struck America and called it *India*. It was India to him till the very end, when mad, bound raving to the bottom of his boat, he was shipped in chains to Spain . . . I stopped, shut my eyes, took in the applause, stepped back, dizzy as if India were all around" (122). Draupadi embodies a narrative discourse in ethnic American literature in which memory is the political gauge to the past and must be reconsidered in the context of history and the act of forgetting, for she experiences an amnesia of a country in which she wasn't even born.
24. Paradoxically, the India imagined by Draupadi where the *Mahabarata* is hailed as a gilded epic is not the India experienced by Sandhya, who cannot even read her mother tongue of Malayalam though she is prolific in English. The narrator tells us, "she [Sandhya] had been brought up within the boundaries of a new India, where regional divisions were not considered overly important. She had fallen back on the Hindi of her school days and the English that people of her class mixed in with whatever they spoke, the polyglot nature of their sentences a sign of breeding" (69). It is ironic in this passage that the common bond between the persons in Sandhya's class are polyglot sentences which are unified by bits and pieces of English - the English language is the linguistic glue that connects together her several "native" tongues. Not only do we understand here the pervasiveness of English as a sign of a hegemonic discourse, but also its ability to serve as a root of these polyglot languages rather than incidents within them. In the context of South Asian languages, English establishes itself as a linguistic root as did Latin among the Romance Languages. This process of "Englishization," claims Braj B. Kachru, has "thus caused a transmutation of languages, equipping them in the process for new societal, scientific and technological demands" (295).
25. Unlike Draupadi, Sandhya also experiences cultural schizophrenia, and her own trials and tribulations send her to the edge of her mind where she closes her eyes and melts into her thoughts while voices in Malayalam, Tamil, Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati and English call out to her (Alexander 226). For Sandhya, this is a side effect of what Deepika Bahri calls the "promise of America . . . the promise of a fresh start in a new world" (51). Because Sandhya is immersed in the immigrant country, her cultural schizophrenia delves to a deeper level than that experienced by Draupadi, who retains a sort of American identity comfort having never directly experienced life in India, only the same exotic and spiritualized perceptions of most white Westerners. Though it is clear that both women are molded by Said's four distinct hegemonic power discourses previously outlined, national context in the narrative creates the ground for the vast differences between the younger, beatnik Draupadi and her older, immigrant counterpart Sandhya.
26. Yet unlike Dangarembga's Tambu, the realization of linguistic hegemony and assimilation to American ideals induces a stronger sense of connection to the ancestral homeland for Alexander's female protagonists. In trying to convey to her readers the isolation of the self and homeland her characters experience, Alexander writes: "She [Sandhya] felt nothing of the guilt so many of her compatriots bore in switching passports, as if they were mortgaging one world for another. She was Indian, she would live and die that way. No one could change her skin, or say to her: your parents are not buried in the churchyard in Tiruvella; your in-laws never lived in Nagercoil. Nor have you ever spoken Malayalam. Surely it is the greatest of illusions that it is your mother tongue. None of that would happen" (132). Hence, in *Manhattan Music*, the female postcolonial subject experiences through the learning of English and Americanization, something similar to the malaise pervasive among NRIs - a spiritual displacement that results in an enforced allegiance to the Indian ancestral homeland. And for both the female immigrant and the NRI

living in New York City, a certain sense of cultural schizophrenia pervades the psyche as a result of geographical and cultural displacement.



27. If we consider Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and Alexander's *Manhattan Music* as novels that illustrate English as a "metalanguage," that is, a transcendental linguistic discourse used by the characters to facilitate their relationship to other languages, we can categorize both novels as meta-narratives of cultural schizophrenia. Terry Eagleton has noted, "Questions of 'meta-narrative' no longer concern just literary works, but the terms in which the post-Enlightenment West has traditionally couched its own imperial project. The decentering and deconstruction of categories and identities assume fresh urgency in a context of racism, ethnic conflict, neo-colonial domination; The 'other' is no longer merely a theoretical concept but groups and peoples written out of history, subjected to slavery, insult, mystification, genocide" (205). The narratives of Tambu and Sandhya are not only consequences of all these aspects of colonial discourse noted by Eagleton, but are also related to one of the most important aspects of American and post-colonial cultures left out by Eagleton - the reign of the patriarchal superstructure and how it merges with other ideologies to shape the status and experiences of (dis)placed Third World women.
28. Hence, "the other" and her experience of cultural schizophrenia delicately waver not only on sex and nationality, but also on the varying ways in which these elements of identity interact with one another and form new political discourses on identity. In the different cases of Tambu and Sandhya, we witness personal alliances toward either western or eastern hegemonic trends that are primarily created and enforced on nationality. The initiatives of writers like Tsitsi Dangarembga and Meena Alexander are important in understanding postcolonial identities as continuously metamorphosing identities depending on the various contexts (e.g. sex, gender, sexuality, nationality, etc.) within which they are combined. For once we understand the fluid dynamics of postcolonial identities, we come a step closer to finding a stable discourse that resists the totalizing agenda of essentialized identity or a dominant body of theory (like postmodernism) that first "others" the Third World economically, and subsequently racially.
29. However, Western education and hegemony cannot be demoted simply as the attempt of the West to taint the ancient cultures of the East with its perversity. While Tambu gravitates toward Western education in the colonial homeland as necessity, Sandhya gravitates toward facets of Indian culture to recover what has almost been erased within her. Defying any neat stack of cultural identities, Draupadi, in this case study of women and colonial education, is an anomalous NRI who has been cultivated in the US tradition but who constantly imagines herself as a more "authentic" product of the Indian culture. Her very consciousness thus becomes a multi-faceted reflection of the postmodern society she lives in, resisting set definitions that try to stabilize her identity by centering it but inversely fling it into the margins by trying to do so.
30. Perhaps the trend of postcolonialism in literary studies is historically just - it may well be high time for the East to colonize the West, at least theoretically. Aren't we, after all, academics who advocate and encourage the global tug-of-war of intellect that creates new polemical discourses? This is currently happening within postcolonial studies as a colonizing force in academia trying to document the experiences of peoples written out of history. For most of us, the stories of women like Tambu, Sandhya and Draupadi are extraordinary since we cannot grasp their full identities in the same ways that their literary foils and other characters do, nor can we easily understand the *différance* that sutures the experience of colonialism. In these many ways, the differences themselves between novels like Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and Meena Alexander's *Manhattan Music* should be appreciated and studied, for the narrative polemics instilled in such fictions about Third World women give agency to the many levels of being and becoming a subaltern subject - even in one's former and/or current "homeland."

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