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Feminism, Postcolonial Thought, and Economics

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Simply put, culture is alive and always on the run, always changeful. Our task is to look at the two strategies: culture as a battle cry against one culture’s claim to Reason as such, by insider as well as outsider; and culture as a nice name for the exoticism of the outsiders.

Gayatri Spivak, A Critique of Postcolonial Reason

Western women and people in the postcolonial world are both marginalized within economic discourse. ¹ Their marginalization has been historically sanctioned by particular apprehensions of rationality and humanity that form a hallmark of the European modernist worldview. Modernism is based on a social vision that includes a liberal-democratic nation-state, an industrial capitalist economy, and a series of other specific institutions of public life and “civil society,” requiring a particular mode of interaction between individuals, between individual and state, and between individual and society. This conception is generally offered as

¹. Postcolonial has a twofold meaning. First, it stands for the postwar experience of societies colonized by Europeans in the past few centuries—currently, Third World, “less developed,” or South. In this usage postcolonial mainly marks a historical period. Second, the term postcolonial refers to a body of thought that analyzes Euro-American or Western cultural hegemony that began with colonialism and continues in the current economic and political ascendancy of industrialized countries. In this latter sense, postcolonial refers to a certain critical approach. We use the term postcolonialism to refer to discourse and ideas, and postcoloniality to emphasize the social condition of being postcolonial.
a normative ideal, with societies ranked on the basis of their closeness to or
distance from it. 2

In economics, such modernism has been most intensely expressed in the
notion of “development,” whether in neoclassical, Marxism, or other heterodox
approaches, including feminist scholarship. As Drucilla Barker (2000) notes,
despite the strides made in the field of Gender-and-Development since the
publication of Esther Boerup’s Woman’s Role in Economic Development in 1970
and despite feminist critiques of modernism in economics, much development
feminism remains intrinsically modernist. Postcolonial thought scrutinizes
the way in which the modernist worldview is applied to non-Western, or “less
developed,” social forms and subjectivity(s). 3 The purpose of this chapter is
to provide an introductory overview of postcolonial critique, highlight its rele-
vance for economics, and lay the groundwork for a postcolonial approach to
feminist economics. While feminist critiques of the masculinized Cartesian
self in Beyond Economic Man (Nelson 1993; Strassmann 1993) and this
volume (especially England, chap. 1; Benita, chap. 5) have addressed modernism in
mainstream economics, postcolonial critique goes further, uncovering mod-
ernist limits in both heterodox and mainstream analyses.

The next section surveys the concerns and contributions of postcolonial-
ism. We then examine the relationship between postcolonial and Western fem-
nisms, identifying both common projects and departures. After that, we discuss
the major themes of the emerging area of postcolonial feminist economics and
end with a short conclusion.

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2. As applied to non-Western societies, modernism includes a host of assumptions about: (1)
the nature of history, progress, culture, and cognition, with the West upholding the “modern” end and
the non-West the “nonmodern” end of this spectrum; (2) what happens when members of one society
are forced to reorganize the institutions of economy, polity, and culture to conform to the modernist
imagination; and (3) the reasons for persistent failure to attain the hoped-for results despite ongoing
efforts to put modernist social institutions and norms in place.

3. The terms Western/non-Western, European/non-European, and First World/Third World are prob-
lematic and suffer from multiple inaccuracies. We use them as conventionally adopted categories in
analysis and policy formulation, bearing in mind the complex ways in which these categories shape
analyses and policies and organize international relations. Western and European interchangeably refer
to industrialized societies in Western Europe and those settled by Europeans in North America and
the Pacific. Our discussion does not include Eastern Europe, because it does not share this history of
colonialism with the postcolonial world.

The term subjectivity in social science derives from the root subject in the sense of “being subjected
to.” It refers to a human being as historically and culturally constituted. Here, the human is interpreted
as an incomplete (not fully coherent) site of cultural and historical processes, rather than a “rational,”
fully meaning source of knowledge, as in the Cartesian/Kantian tradition. For a brief discussion of
subjectivity, see Taylor and Winquist 2001.

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Postcolonial Thought and the Critique of Modernism

Postcolonial critique is a broad field that takes up a variety of themes—the phi-
losophy of history, culture and identity-formation, and the social and economic
reorganization of non-Western life during and after colonialism. However, in
general, postcolonial scholarship is marked by concern with

1. Cross-cultural hegemony and domination in all its forms (cultural, economic
or political), and the consequent phenomenon of subalternity;

2. European historicism as it is applied to “other” cultures.

In the discussion below, we outline these themes and provide an introduction
to key scholarship in which they have been developed.

Postcolonial writers borrow the terms hegemony and subalternity from An-
tonio Gramsci (1975). Hegemony refers to the ability of a particular social class
e.g., capitalists, men) to make everyone consider this group’s interests the uni-
versal concern and thus creates acceptance of a particular way of organizing
society. Subaltern, on the other hand, refers to a subordinate person—Gramsci
used the term subaltern classes to refer to those of lower rank (primarily peas-
ant) dominated by the political and intellectual authority of the state in Fascist
Italy. In Western thought, analyses of how cultural hegemony works to
produce subjects and explorations of how to undo hegemony when one is a
product of a hegemonic order have been most strongly developed in the work
of poststructuralists such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, Louis Althusser,
and Jacques Derrida. 4 Postcolonial critics examine how Western hegemony
and non-Western subalternity has been created in and through knowledge
construction since the colonial encounter. Like their Western poststructuralist
counterparts, they examine how subjects and identities are formed, negotiated,
and reshaped and seek strategies to undo hegemony. These issues have been
most importantly articulated through the pioneering work of the literary critics
Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha. 5

4. Postcolonialism shares several analytical projects with postmodernism. However, postcolonial
critique engages with European modernity through its subaltern history. For discussions of the con-
vergences and departures between postcolonial and postmodernist visions, see Appiah 1992; Bhabha
1994; Zein-Elabdin 2001; and the mini-symposium on postmodernism and postcolonialism between
McCluskey (2000); Spivak (2000); and Charusheela (2000a).

5. Primarily Said’s Orientalism (1978), Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988), and Bhabha’s
“The Other Question” (1983) and “Signs Taken for Wonders” (1985). Their work has come to be
known as postcolonial theory, a narrower field than postcolonial thought, and has defined the central
The appearance of postcolonial thought in the Western academy is commonly associated with Said’s Orientalism (1978). Said argued that cultural hegemony was a central element of colonial relations and a continuing aspect of how the West maintains its hegemonic power vis-à-vis the non-West. While critiques of European ethnocentrism predate Said, his book inaugurated the analysis of how European thought constructed an imagined non-Western (Oriental) Other, who was central to the creation of Europe’s own modernist self-imagining. He identified orientalism in three related ways: an academic field with its own protocols; a style of thought that sets up a dualism between East and West based on perceived ontological and epistemological differences between the two; and an institution of domination that authorizes a certain treatment of the Orient based on its representation as inferior and backward. Accordingly, orientalism is not about the Orient per se. Rather, it is about a relationship of power maintained and upheld by a discourse of what is wrong with others (and consequently, what is right with oneself).

Following Said, postcolonial critique grew with the work of Spivak and Bhabha. All three authors critique essentialist conceptions of “human nature” and push for alternate, nonessentialist approaches to cultural identity(ies). Essentialism—a defining aspect of modernism—refers to the belief in pregiven, underlying attributes that define what it means to be a member of a particular group (e.g., male or female, Western or non-Western). Postcolonial critiques do not deny the social existence of such categories, but they see no innate aspect that defines any group’s experience. Rather, the categories are relational—the nature and meaning of each is socially fabricated, and known and experienced mainly through social relationships of power that define them. In developing the analytical implications of Said’s insights, Spivak and Bhabha paid special attention to subaltern identity-formation, with Spivak highlighting the role of implicit meanings in the structure of language and Bhabha examining the simultaneous displacement and reconstitution of cultural meanings. In effect, the two have produced an outline of the postcolonial condition, namely, the problem of seeking alternatives to a discourse of which one is a tangible product. They have also proposed strategies for formulating alternatives.

Spivak (1988) used the term subalternity to refer to subordinate, oppressed groups that include not only peasants, but also tribal and poor “informal sector” workers in South Asia, who, she argued, have been silenced by the epistemic violence of colonialism. To describe the consequences of such violence, she used the case of the British abolition of sati (widow burning) to show how the sexed (female) subject is constructed under colonial rule, making the Third World woman yet another subaltern. With the debate about sati taking the form of a contest between a British story of “white men saving brown women from brown men” and an Indian nativist argument that “the women wanted to die,” there remained no discursive space from which the sexed subaltern subject could speak (1988, 297). Spivak’s solution is to resituate the debate about sati in its historical context to figure out how and why it unfolded as it did—a deconstructive strategy that seeks to undo the discourse around sati. But Spivak also knew that her solution is not available to the Other or subaltern women, who lack the position of authority possessed by the postcolonial intellectual woman schooled in the ways of the hegemonic order.

Realizing that getting heard requires authority, Spivak articulates postcoloniality around the role of the cultural critic. The postcolonial critic must (re)claim cultural authority by “reversing, displacing, and seizing the apparatus of value coding,” that is, the hegemony that assigns certain value to different positions (1990, 228). This can be accomplished through the catastrophic use of historically European concepts such as democracy and citizenship. In literary criticism, catachresis refers to the “misuse” of terms, either occurring mistakenly or performed deliberately for rhetorical effect. In Spivak’s work, catastrophic “misuse” indicates the intentional reappropriation of conventionally Western concepts into non-Western meanings and contexts. She suggests catachresis as a vehicle for postcolonial cultural struggle since one cannot simply escape or reject modernism—not only has one been marked and shaped by its structure through the colonial encounter, but one cannot not want its promises of liberation, nor should one seek to disavow them. At the same time, the

6. As with any field, locating a point of origin is somewhat arbitrary. Several authors (e.g., Gandhi 1998) trace arguments of a postcolonial nature back to Frantz Fanon 1967a. Moore-Gilbert 1997 argues that elements of postcolonial critique can be found in earlier African-American influences such as the Harlem Renaissance.

7. A discourse is an overall language—not merely the stated words, but the implicit meanings, the shared, taken-for-granted, and unstated assumptions that we use when we deploy a language. It is thus a cultural product, and we become part of a culture by learning the discourse and engaging in its various discursive practices.

8. This means that violence (in a social, moral sense) operates at the level of how we organize knowledge, how we force a reorganization of institutions as a result of this knowledge, and how we fail to comprehend the protests of those having to undergo this reorganization. Spivak (1988, 281) draws this term from Foucault, who used it to describe the overhaul of the episteme (structure of comprehending self and society) in redefinitions of sanity at the end of the eighteenth century in Europe (Foucault 1973, 1980).
terms of modernist emancipation have too many hegemonic connotations—thus one needs to force new meanings onto them. Within feminist economics, attaching new meanings to the concepts of labor and work or thinking about endowments in new ways form part of a similar effort. A postcolonial approach would similarly push feminist economists to look anew at the meanings of development, progress, empowerment, and so on.

The complexity of postcoloniality as a contemporary condition emerges powerfully in the work of Homi Bhabha, who draws on psychoanalysis (e.g., Fanon 1967a) to generate a complex, ambivalent image of colonial domination. In “The Other Question” (1983), he argues that the colonial attitude toward the “native” reflected both a longing for her exoticism and a disavowal of his primitive/savage qualities, rendering the stereotypical native a site of both desire and derision. This also reveals that colonial attitudes—expressed by such diverse individuals as the colonial administrator, missionary, or wife—were themselves gendered; the despised savage was masculine, the desired exoticism is feminine. At the same time, in “Signs Taken for Wonders” (1983), Bhabha shows that colonial authority was never complete; it was constantly challenged and undermined by local interpretations and questions. Thus, he reads colonialism not as a singular tale of Western triumph but as a process of mutual transformation for both colonizer and colonized in the constant struggle over constituting and reconstituting hegemony.

Bhabha (1994) describes postcoloniality as a constant movement, in-betweenness, and ambivalence between here and there; a condition of migration, diaspora, displacement of tribal and aboriginal communities, exile, and refugee liminality. It is a state of cultural hybridity, namely, the advanced mixing and remaking of European and other cultures that has resulted from colonialism. Hybridity undermines any appeal to notions of “authentic” identity; it also suggests that cultural relativism and multiculturalism are inadequate frameworks for capturing postcoloniality, because they both conceive of self-contained, “homogeneous national, or ethnic, cultures” (5). Similarly, postcolonial thinkers reject interpretations of the binary constructs First World/Third World and North/South as pregiven, independent, or fixed identities and boundaries (also see Hall 1990: Chakrabarty 1992).

The work of these pioneering authors cannot be adequately understood apart from the problem of historicism, which is a predominant current in European modernism. Historicism is the interpretation of history as a process that unfolds according to certain immutable laws. This notion—which typically presents a set of historical rules all leading to the universal replication of the European experience—is constitutes a hegemonic discourse within which the non-West is produced as subaltern, forever immature, nonmodern, and less developed. The Subaltern Studies Collective writers (see Guha et al. 1982–1997) have been most critical of historicism. Chakrabarty (1992) criticizes the Enlightenment narrative of history as a set of stages culminating in modern (European) development, showing how it conflates capitalism with historical progress and development with the re-creation of European institutions. His critical examination of the Marxist tradition is especially relevant for the fields of economic history and development because it shows how Marx’s notion of historical materialism made capitalist modernity both the definer of progress and a necessary precondition for further progress under socialism. This conviction underlay Marx’s tolerance of British colonialism in India as a necessary evil for modernizing precapitalist structures (Zein-Elabdin 2001).

In the postwar era, historicism surfaced through the many stages-of-growth accounts that provided the anchor for development economics. The Colombian anthropologist Arturo Escobar (1995) renders the most comprehensive analysis of modernism in this field. He ethnographically traces the emergence and expansion of the postwar project of international development from the first World Bank mission to his own country in 1949 to the subsequent mushrooming of its literature. He adapts Said’s notion of orientalism to describe the parallel contemporary phenomenon of developmentism as a discursive field, a framework of knowledge with a set of certain dynamics and conventions that “results in concrete practices of thinking and acting through which the Third World is produced” (11) as the less developed Other. The result is the collective subjectivity of underdevelopment or backwardness that authorizes Western development policy prescriptions.

9. *Diaspora* and *exile* hold different cultural and psychological connotations. The first refers to longer-term group experiences and identity formulations, while the second denotes a more immediate, individual subjection. Postcolonials may experience one or both. Liminality, a term derived from being at the limen, i.e., a typically psychological threshold, is used frequently in contemporary anthropology to describe the state of people living in-between situations, cultures, and societies.

10. By *cultural relativism* we mean the anthropological tradition in which a culture’s practices cannot be judged from the “outside,” because outsiders have no access to its meanings and logics. Multiculturalism is an adaptation of the idea of pregiven cultural identities in order to promote “tolerance” of different ethnic groups (black, Latino, etc.). See Charusheela 2001b for a critical discussion of the ethnocentrism-relativism dilemma in economics.

11. Of course, all cultures are hybrid to varying degrees. The deployment of hybridity in postcolonial analysis underestimates the modernist imagination about “other cultures.” The rejection of essentialist approaches to the categories North/South or First/Third does not indicate that there is no problem of First World–Third World relations to be examined. Rather, postcolonial scholars examine the relationship between each pair of terms that creates these categories, and expose how treating them as essentialist identities upholds and re-creates that relationship.
By linking the continued operation of modernism's hegemony over the non-West directly to the discourses of historicism and developmentalism within economics, postcolonial thought challenges us to rethink our approaches to the non-West. Its critiques push us to look for theories that undo the modernist imagination of not only the individualist subject of neoclassical economics (as many feminist scholars have undertaken to undo), but also our imagination of the history and future of economic and social change.  

Postcolonialism and Feminism

Before we review postcolonial contributions to feminist economics, some discussion of the relationship between postcolonial thought and feminism is in order. The two share many concerns: many postcolonial scholars emphasize the role of gender in shaping subalternity, and many feminists engage questions of race and culture in their own analysis (see Saunders and Darby, chap. 4 in this volume; Beneria, chap. 5 in this volume). Beyond that, postcolonial thought shares methodological concerns with postmodernist and poststructuralist strands of feminist thought. Both pay attention to how cultural hegemony is generated and maintained, and both seek to challenge the construction of center-margin relations within modernist thought. Feminism's effort to undo androcentrism parallels postcolonialism's effort to undo orientalism and developmentalism. Nonetheless, certain issues require a distinctly postcolonial feminist intervention.

There are some inherited tensions between the feminist and the postcolonial projects. Leela Gandhi (1998) points out two sources of tension. The first is the historical complicity of many Western women in the project of imperial domination. Many served in the colonies in different capacities, and feminist and postcolonial efforts to resurrect elided historical figures approach this role very differently. Gandhi (1998) examines two pieces of feminist literature that illustrate this problem. The first is Jenny Sharpe's book Allegories of Empire (1993), which critically brings to life the problematic figure of the female imperialist. This figure is far more revealing in Pat Barr's The Memsahibs (1976), which seeks to find validation for the lives of European wives, mothers, and daughters in the colonies. Barr's defensive remembrance of this colonial constituency is summarized in her statement: "For the most part, the women openly and stastically accepted their share of the white people's burden and lightened the weight of it with their quiet humor, their grace and often their youth" (Barr 1976, 1; emphasis added). Indeed, as Spivak (1985) demonstrates, Western feminist activism itself rose at the age of formal empire, and therefore the feminist imagination of what it means to be a liberated woman was generated partly in contrast to orientalized representations of Other women. The rights and desires of one group of women, while wrested in the name of women in general, rests on the back of subalternity for other women.

The second source of tension between feminist and postcolonial concerns is an extension of the first: contemporary feminism has exhibited much of the cultural bias of colonial Europe. This is perhaps most clear in the use of the category Third World woman, a "singular, monolithic subject," with an essential identity (Gandhi 1998, 83). As Gandhi states, "the representation of the average third world woman as 'ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domesticated, family-oriented, victimized;' facilitates and privileges the self-representation of Western women 'as educated, modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to make their own decisions' " (86). The composite Third World presumes notions of both a definitive non-Western experience and of Western feminism.

The issue of development is central in the relationship between Western and postcolonial feminisms. In deconstructing the category Third World woman, Chandra Mohanty (1984) highlighted the problem of representation of the Other in Western feminism. Feminist scholarship has usually taken the notion of development for Third World women for granted, as evidenced by the massive industry of women-and-development, now reformulated as gender-and-development (GAD)—with its extensive projects, literature, experts, and training programs. Spivak (1999) discusses the limits of modernism in the reformulated discourses of GAD and demonstrates that, in practice, the GAD agenda presents incorporation into capitalist markets, the safety nets of the welfare state, literacy, and skill-based empowerment as the key solution for women's oppression in the non-West. The institutional frameworks of market

12. In addition to its disciplinary expansion, postcolonial thought has followed a distinctly regional pattern in its historical evolution—from historiography in South Asia (e.g., Guha et al. 1982–1997) to philosophy in Africa (Mudimbe 1988; Appiah 1992), cultural studies in the Caribbean/Black diaspora (Hall 1990; Gilroy 1993), and postdevelopment in Latin America (Esteva 1991; Escobar 1995). The different loci of these strands of postcolonial thought reflect specific disciplinary projects for historical and epistemological reasons and are, therefore, complementary in nature.


14. One example of Western feminist complicity is reflected in the difficulty Huda Sha'arawi, the Egyptian feminist (1879–1924), had in getting Western feminist allies in the International Woman Suffrage Alliance to address the role of imperialism in shaping women's lack of rights within their discussions of rights for women (Bidran 1995). American-born Lady Brunyate refused to respond to Sha'arawi's letter critiquing British policy in Egypt despite having played the role of long-time friend and supporter to the Egyptian feminist (Sha'arawi 1986).
and state on which GAD projects rest their hope for non-Western women's emancipation are the same institutions identified with Western women's own emergence from subordination. However well-meaning the project, it lacks serious consideration of the transnational and local institutional contexts that shape state formation, market operation, and cultural transformation in the non-West (also see Ong 1988).

Despite these differences, common ground can be found in feminist and postcolonial struggles against domination and hegemony. Gandhi offers a clue to this potential when she suggests that the colonial encounter may be read as a "struggle between competing masculinities" (1998, 98). She argues that the nation, on either side of empire, often authenticated itself through its women—for instance, Mother India serving as a nationalist trope. Another example is the use of the veil as part of the Algerian anticolonial strategy (Fanon 1967b). Indeed, Said (1978) had pointed out that orientalism was a male-dominated practice, with orientals ranked on a parallel threshold with European women, delinquents, the poor, and the insane. These affinities suggest that the political projects of Western and postcolonial feminisms share interests in rejecting masculinized, nationalist structures.

Thus, although the relationship between postcolonialism and feminism faces some difficulties, there are also historical and theoretical grounds for solidarity. Western women and formerly colonized people are both marginalized Others of European modernity and share contemporary marginalization within economics. Both share an interest in undoing the hegemonic discourses of mainstream economics even as they approach key aspects of these discourses from different angles.

**Postcolonial Feminist Economics**

From our standpoint, the most significant contribution of feminist economics over the past decade has been the interrogation of economics as a hegemonic discourse (Nelson 1992, 1993; Strassmann 1993; Williams 1993; Grapard 1995; Seiz 1995; Barker 2000). However, the continuing modernism in Western approaches to non-Western women—highlighted in postcolonial feminists' critical discussions—indicates the need for a specifically postcolonial approach in feminist economics. In this section, we review the small but growing body of postcolonial scholarship in this area.

Feminist postcolonial scholarship in economics takes two forms: first, it interrogates the orientalism and developmentalism of economic discourse, and second, it contributes to the creation of alternate frameworks. In both forms, the nature of postcoloniality does not permit an easy, clean break with past discourses. Nor, given hybridity, can we fall back on multiculturalist politics or simple relativism. Instead, postcolonial insights operate critically to generate renegotiated standards for assessing approaches to analyses of and for non-Western women. Additionally, postcolonial scholarship follows a transdisciplinary method. Instead of drawing on material from different disciplines that maintain their philosophical core and methodological tools (the current interdisciplinary approach), a transdisciplinary method reveals the common preanalytical premises of different disciplines, for example, economics and philosophy; and forces them to lose their perceived autonomy (Zein-Elabdin forthcoming). The following literatures focus partly on critique and partly on alternatives.

A number of scholars have examined the role of colonialist mindsets in classical political economy. The easy transposition of Malthusian orthodoxies of the classical period into the postwar development project of population control provides one obvious indication of the continuities between colonial cultural frameworks and the "new" frameworks of modernist economics. Dimand (forthcoming) excavates the treatment of slaves, women, and colonized Others in early political economy. His work parallels critical feminist discussions of androcentrism in early economic thought. Grapard (forthcoming) shows how one can uncover unstated assumptions in classical thought and link them to the broader cultural discourses of orientalism. She locates approaches to trade in classical political economy within the broader context of hierarchical discourses about world regions, as displayed via the use of six allegorical statues in female form representing the six regions of the globe at the 1878 Paris Exhibition.

Others have deconstructed the contemporary development paradigm to reveal the continuity between orientalist discourses in the colonial period and development discourses of the postwar era. Charusheela (1997) provides a detailed discussion of the role of orientalism and Cartesianism in defining development economics from its inception through the 1990s. Zein-Elabdin (1998) traces the notion of development through its grounding in Western Enlightenment philosophy and ideas of universal history that underlie both mainstream and Marxian visions of progress, thereby revealing their convergence in representations of non-Western societies. Both visions fail to recognize that for 15. Transdisciplinarity is mandated by the need for catastrophe since the reappraisal of many concepts requires an inquiry into the philosophy of knowledge and being. For example, the term development can be reappraised only after an inquiry into the philosophy of history and ethics, rationality requires an examination of the philosophy of humanism ontology. Democracy calls for a serious interrogation of its relationship to the nation-state in political philosophy.
nonindustrial cultures, development is not merely a matter of limited macroeconomic policy but a much larger, ontological question.

Suzanne Bergeron (1998) draws on postdevelopment literature (e.g., Escobar 1995) to examine the production of the development discourse, especially the subjectivities produced by the rhetoric of backwardness and primitivism. She argues that “economic development theory is an important aspect of a broader development problematic that authorizes particular visions and practices and forecloses others, participates in the establishment of expertise and silences alternative perspectives” (2). She focuses particularly on the idea of the nation, pointing out the extent to which the nation-state “has framed our concepts of the economy” (4) and showing that the idea of a national economy and how it operates implicitly assumes other modern European notions, such as citizenship and sovereignty. Bergeron (2001) develops this critique further, examining debates over financial stabilization and structural adjustment. She reveals the extent to which nonindustrialized “nations” are framed in gendered, racialized, and colonized terms.

Postcolonial perspectives have also highlighted the limitations of developmentism beyond the mainstream. Charusheela (2000b) shows that modernism is embedded in the otherwise critical and insightful capabilities approach. Drawing on the philosophical underpinnings of the approach as laid out by the philosopher Martha Nussbaum (e.g., Nussbaum and Glover 1995), Charusheela examines the role envisaged for literacy within this framework, showing that it depends on taking a modernist institutionalization of society as the norm for development. As a result, the framework ends up promoting approaches that worsen hegemony and fail to provide appropriate solutions to the problem of gender subordination in the non-West.

This critique can be further developed to examine the limits of the usual GAD agenda (Charusheela 2001a). GAD policies are based on microlevel, bargaining models that depend on certain assumptions about the role of the market and the state in empowering women, even as both market and state are being transformed in ways that prevent them from fulfilling this role at the macrolevel under globalization processes. In contrast, discussions of poverty, race, class, and burdens of work found within the feminization-of-poverty literatures in the West provide better structural solutions because they use Marxistinstitutionalist approaches. Nonetheless, modernism also besets much Marxist feminist thought (Charusheela 2000b). Although feminists have challenged Marxism’s androcentrism, many continue to hold on to its modernism by implicitly drawing on Classical assumptions about the nature of the transition to capitalism, the logic of capital accumulation, and the relationship between capitalist development and women’s emancipation, which limits their analyses of non-Western contexts.

Some postcolonial literature has identified the presence of overt orientalism in contemporary economic scholarship. Jennifer Olmsted (forthcoming-b) highlights this tendency in the treatment of Islam and Muslim societies through an analysis of feminist economic texts. Olmsted discusses Grossbard-Schechtman and Neuman’s (1998) use of econometric tests to examine the impact of marriage-related practices within Christianity, Islam, and Judaism on women’s labor supply in Israel. Grossbard-Schechtman and Neuman list a variety of marriage-related practices, including divorce, fertility, and domestic violence, that could affect women’s labor market entry. However, Olmsted notes that they do not follow with a careful examination of these practices in the three communities. Instead, their model partitions the data into religious categories, notes the presence of differences in labor market outcomes for Muslim women, and concludes that since the differences are statistically significant, they have shown how differences in marriage-related religious practices affect women’s labor supply outcomes. They conclude that two models of marriage operate in Israel—one reflecting a “Christian West” culture and the other reflecting a “Moslem [sic] East” culture. 16

As Olmsted notes, this is a methodological problem that demonstrates how orientalist assumptions can influence data organization and testing. In deciding that all differences are attributable to inherent religious beliefs, Grossbard-Schechtman and Neuman have, in effect, preanalyzed culture and have made no effort to work out the differential role of religious vis-à-vis other factors in shaping practices. Their analysis rests on assuming a stark dualism between Judeo-Christianity/West culture, on the one hand, and Islam/East, on the other, which overlooks the ways in which the three religions are closely tied historically. Moreover, by assuming that the categories Muslim, Christian, and Jewish capture primarily religious-attitudinal differences, they do not consider other specific elements, such as how levels of secularization link to socioeconomic conditions and the extent to which the three religions themselves have been

16. Olmsted (forthcoming-b) discusses another example of orientalism that surfaces in Bergmann’s (1995) critique of Beckers’ theory of the family (in which he concludes that polygamy is more beneficial to women than monogamy). Olmsted shows how Bergmann makes a number of sweeping, largely unsubstantiated generalizations about the status of women in Muslim societies, including claims that “in societies that allow polygamy” (more precisely, polygyny), “women tend to have abysmal status,” in summary, “they are virtual prisoners; men totally monopolize all the power, freedom, fun and games” (Bergmann 1995, 145). It is worth noting that Feminist Economics has published a contrasting perspective to Bergmann’s view (Hale 1995). An article critically discussing Grossbard-Schechtman and Neuman’s article is to follow (Olmsted forthcoming-a).
hybridized by successive historical processes and power relations, including Ottoman and British colonial rule and Israeli occupation. Olmsted's work exposes the tendency to slip into pre-given, essential categories in comparative economic analysis of cultures.

We end with three examples of scholarship that use postcolonial strategies to offer alternatives to conventional economic approaches. The first shows the usefulness of the concept of hybridity for considering conceptions of identity, the second provides an example of catastrophic strategies for redoing economic analysis, and the third shows how a culturally situated, non-essentialist interpretation of gender breaks the binarism of the development discourse.

Karen Graubart (2000) has challenged received economic histories of the gender division of labor in Latin America. She suggests that "the colonial economy of Peru was constructed in contestation: the relations of production and consumption that developed were the result of innumerable conflicts between and among indigenous and European actors, and not the simple triumph of one system over another" (537). Her analysis links the construction of gender roles in the formation of a gender division of labor to the emerging political economy of the period. Graubart (forthcoming) builds on this insight, using the concept of hybridity (nestizaje) to show how the now-naturalized conceptualizations of pre-Hispanic Incan culture and of the racial and cultural identity-categories Spaniard and Indian were the product of social negotiation to reconstitute and consolidate the emerging social and economic structure of early colonial Peru.

Colin Danby offers an example of catastrophic strategies, where he critically reappropriates Post Keynesian economic theory into new contexts. Danby (2002a) utilizes Post Keynesian theory to show that the gift-exchange dichotomy, often used to explain differences between nonmodern/nonmarket and modern/market production, is flawed since the concepts of both exchange and gift rest on the same underlying Walrasian vision of market exchange. He notes that many feminists have also relied on this dichotomy when distinguishing between household and market spheres. But he also argues (Danby 2000) that although the Post Keynesian notions of time and uncertainty should in principle be as applicable to alternate institutional arrangements as they are to bank-firm relations in advanced industrial states, the modernist commitments of contemporary Post Keynesian theorists have prevented them from making this move. This argument provides the basis for a reappropriation of Post Keynesian theory in which its insights about uncertainty and financial fragility can also be applied to households. By adapting the Post Keynesian cash-flow approach to firms to cultural contexts in which "nonmodern" institutions such as kinship and familial relations play a large role in structuring material life, Danby (2002b) illuminates the intersecting roles of kinship and credit/money management in household interactions, offering another dimension to our approach to households (also see Charsheela and Danby 2001).

Finally, Zein-Elabdin (1996) has addressed the nature of gender in the context of the environment-development discourse. She critiques the essentialist construction of women in the two competing positions in this debate, neoclassical economics and cultural ecofeminism. From this critique, building on the institutionalist tradition of Thorstein Veblen and Karl Polanyi, she provides an interpretation of gender as an institution that sets the parameters of women's and men's operation within the (culturally embedded) economy. She rejects the notion of a theoretical articulation of a relationship between gender, development, and the environment and instead sees a multiplicity of contextual points of interaction where women and gender relations can be examined and understood only within historically and culturally specific contexts. In this conception, there is no presumption that development is the underlying logic of all economic processes, in other words, that all institutions and processes in the "less developed" economy must result in the orientalist vision of development. She further suggests (2000) an economic approach that theorizes postcolonial economies as contemporary cultural productions and not a mere prelude to "modernity."[17]

**Conclusion**

Postcolonial thought explores the ways in which orientalism, historicism, and developmentalism draw on and maintain Western hegemony over former European colonies. Beyond critique, postcolonial scholars have confronted the difficulty of challenging this hegemonic discourse. Their approaches provide us with concepts and strategies for the task of creating alternatives: the strategies of catastrophic and transdisciplinarity and the concepts of hybridity and non-essentialism identity. The above discussion has provided examples of the usefulness of these concepts and strategies in creating a postcolonial approach in feminist economics.

17. For a similar articulation, see the "situated subjects" approach in Charusheela 2001b.

**References**


