

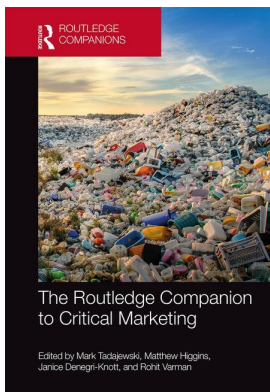
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### **Postcolonialism, subalternity, and critical marketing**

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# 3

## POSTCOLONIALISM, SUBALTERNITY, AND CRITICAL MARKETING

*Rohit Varman*

### Introduction

A cursory look at the research published in the leading journals in marketing shows that the exalted spaces within the discipline are primarily confined to discussions on American and West European markets or consumers. With less than 10% of the world's population, the attention devoted to these American-West European sites or the Global North is completely disproportionate. For example, in over 150 research papers published in the last year in the three leading journals – *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Marketing Research*, and *Journal of Consumer Research* – less than 3% of the papers covered issues outside the Global North. Such a skewed attention to the Global North in the name of scientific rigor and quality of research reflects how academic privileges within the discipline in the form of Eurocentrism unfold and how they create research priorities, agendas, and dependencies across the globe.

In this chapter, I draw upon postcolonial theory to mount a critique of Eurocentrism and to offer a different imagination of the discipline. I use the term Eurocentrism broadly to include the countries in the Global North with the United States at its center. According to Amin (2009), Eurocentrism is a distortion of the social world and creation of European hegemony that helps it to dominate the world with its ideas. This prejudice translates into a consistent valorization of the Global North and devalorization of the Global South through various disciplinary procedures. Such an emphasis is academically misleading, morally unsound, and contextually ahistorical because it ignores Fanon's (1963, p. 76) observation that

European opulence is literally scandalous, for it has been founded on slavery, it has been nourished with the blood of slaves, and it comes directly from the soil and from the subsoil of that underdeveloped world. The well-being and the progress of Europe have been built up with the sweat and dead bodies of Negroes, Arabs, Indians, and the yellow races.

Postcolonial theory is a framework for better understanding the complex relationship between the Global North and the Global South that continues to inscribe contemporary discourses of identity, race, modernity, and development (Bhabha, 1994; Chatterjee, 1992; Fanon, 1952; Loomba, 2005; Nandy, 1983). As an area of enquiry, postcolonial theory is devoted to

revisiting and interrogating the colonial past to examine relationships of reciprocal antagonism and desire between the colonizer and the colonized (Gandhi, 1998). Postcolonial theory is not a unified framework of analysis, and the broad perspective of postcolonialism is applied in a variety of ways. My intention in this chapter is to summarize some of the key ideas in postcolonial theory and to help critical marketing scholarship to interrogate the relationships of power that are taken for granted.

In attending to Eurocentrism, I do not wish to rehash the emphasis on ethnic differences as is commonly done in the cultural turn of the discipline. Instead, this chapter is an interrogation of deeper power structures that constitute articulations of universal markets and consumer subjectivity in discourse of modernity that is central to marketing as a discipline. My postcolonial analysis of power structures helps to locate vectors of hegemony, control, and resistance from a non-Western perspective. It also attends to the question of subalternity in a manner that challenges the neoliberal modernist discourses of subsistence and base-of-the-pyramid (BOP) markets in the discipline.

### **Eurocentrism and its limitations**

Most writings in marketing start with Eurocentric theories and then apply them to the rest of the world. This problem not only plagues the mainstream marketing theorization but also critical narratives of consumption and markets. In this section, I will briefly engage with some of the developments in consumer culture theory (CCT) that are more culturally informed. I will particularly focus on the postcolonial critique of Michel Foucault because his writings have inspired several critical scholars in CCT and critical marketing.

The problem of Eurocentrism is best exemplified in the early developments of CCT in the discipline. Much of the theorization inspired by postmodernism, uncritically and prematurely celebrated the fragmentation of metanarratives and possibilities of human emancipation (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Thompson, 2000). Such an approach does not take into account how the imposition of capitalist modernity under the aegis of European colonialism produced uneven social outcomes in colonies. Moreover, such an analysis assumes conditions of capitalism of the Global North and ignores economic and cultural conditions in the Global South. These writings fail to acknowledge how non-capitalist and capitalist aspects coexist in postcolonial societies and how they reinforce each other (Loomba, 2013). Moreover, these writings rarely interrogate how cultural logics of the Global North and the Global South are intertwined through colonial histories. Under these conditions, an uncritical adoption of the cultural logic of postmodernity is difficult to comprehend (Varman & Vikas, 2007).

The problem of Eurocentrism persists with poststructuralist CCT. For example, the research inspired by the writings of Michel Foucault often neglects the issues of race, colonialism, violence, and dependency as concrete socio-cultural conditions in the Global North and the Global South (e.g., Thompson & Hirschman, 1995; Thompson & Tambyah, 1999). Although there is much to learn from Foucault about the question of power, several postcolonial theorists have observed that he failed to account for the European colonial project and did not take into consideration how elements of imperialism and race inscribed disciplinary and biopower in Europe (e.g., Chatterjee, 1983; Stoler, 1995). According to Foucault (1977), with disciplinary power, people are controlled and regulated by hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment, and the examination. Biopower is fostering life or managing a population in a way to make it productive and to ensure its welfare, regulation, and control (Foucault, 2008). More specifically, while agreeing with Foucault's idea of colonization of body, Arnold (1997) critiquing his reading of discipline in the penal system, points to how colonial jails in India were distinct from Bentham's

model of a panopticon. A panopticon is a uniquely designed jail in which guards can observe inmates without inmates becoming aware of the gaze. Such an apparatus of disciplining creates far-reaching ability to control the behavior of prisoners and 'reform' them without any explicit use of physical violence. Instead, Arnold (1997) found that Indian jails were sites of resistance and evasion with little control exercised by prison authorities on the local networks of knowledge and power. Unlike in the prison system theorized by Foucault (1977) in which the emphasis was on 'reform', the goal of colonial jails was to primarily confine people.

Prakash (1999) adds to the above critique by observing that while biopower established its full presence in the West in the 18th CE, the non-Western world remained vulnerable to famine and biological risks. While, in the Global North, a more violent form of sovereign power was gradually superseded by biopower, Prakash (1999) offers a different reading of power in colonies that were controlled by Europeans. Colonies were witness to physical violence and deaths as tools of governance. This was not because colonies were not sites for biopolitics to take deep roots, but because that occurred under the shadow of a violent colonial apparatus. And to that extent, bio and sovereign power fed into each other to produce colonial and postcolonial subject positions. This intertwining of bio and sovereign power is so often overlooked in marketing theory and leads to a lopsided understanding of power. For example, Varman and Vijay (forthcoming) show that studies on consumer vulnerability have overlooked how sovereign power is used to violently dispossess vulnerable consumers. This study explains how dehumanization of vulnerable consumers and subsequent denial of their status as subjects contributes to violence. Varman and Vijay (forthcoming) offer insights into how vulnerable consumers are exploited, displaced, and dispossessed without creating popular revulsion.

In another insightful analysis of different modes of power from a postcolonial perspective, Chatterjee (1983) applauds Foucault for offering fresh insights on power but also points to a key limitation. Accordingly, in the Global South disciplinary regimes of power are limited and qualified by the persistence of explicit use of coercion and violence by ruling classes to exercise their domination. Spivak (1988) has suggested that Foucault treats the subaltern as a sovereign subject in control of her consciousness and assumes the intellectual to be a transparent medium through which subaltern conscious can be made present. Foucault renders colonial subjects either invisible or transparent. He does this by ignoring the 'epistemic violence' of imperialism or violence in the construction of knowledge about the colonized and the international division of labor. Such invisibility is a common feature of Western (imperialist) discourse and acts to effect the silencing of the subaltern while hindering the possibility of resistance to oppression.

Such a foundational critique of postmodern/poststructuralist writings of markets has important implications in terms of how and to what we attend in our theoretical engagements. For example, in analyzing the hegemonic brandscape of Starbucks, Thompson and Arsel (2004, p. 640) write, "Through these postmodern forms of community, consumers seek a palliative for the distressing feelings of isolation, inauthenticity, and depersonalization that can be precipitated by the conditions of postmodern consumer culture." While these conditions of resistance merit attention, the emphasis on postmodernity might hide more violent forms of control exercised by global hegemonic brands. This is illustrated in the writing of Varman and Al-Amoudi (2016) who uncover the violence that marks the domination of the Indian market by Coca-Cola and show how the global brand uses different forms of coercion to quell any resistance to it. Accordingly, Coca-Cola gets away with violence by derealizing villagers. Derealization occurs whenever particular identities are excluded from discourse (Butler, 2004). Varman and Al-Amoudi (2016) examine the practices through which the firm derealizes people. First, Coca-Cola derealizes dispossessed farmers by influencing official reports. Second, the firm derealizes workers by keeping them under a continuous threat of the sack. Third, Coca-Cola derealizes

citizens by bypassing local councils. Hence, while subordinate identities are deemed inferior, derealized identities are even more fundamentally excluded because they do not fit recognizable categories through which subjects may vindicate rights, express needs or even claim existence as human beings.

In summary, the above analysis of the limitations of postmodern/poststructuralist theorization surfaces the need for scholarship that explains conditions of the Global South without Eurocentric distortions. Moreover, there is a need to understand the historical legacy of European colonialism and its impact on consumers and markets in the Global South. Postcolonial theory offers such an approach.

### Postcolonial theory

Postcolonial theory, as Gandhi (1998, p. 4) describes it,

can be seen as a theoretical resistance to the mystifying amnesia of the colonial aftermath. It is a disciplinary project devoted to the academic task of revisiting, remembering and, crucially, interrogating the colonial past. The process of returning to the colonial scene discloses a relationship of reciprocal antagonism and desire between the colonizer and the colonized.

It is in the unfolding of this troubled and troubling relationship that we start to discern the ambivalent postcolonial condition. According to Go (2016), postcolonial theory is primarily an anti-imperialist discourse that critiques empire and its persistent legacies. Moreover, it critiques conventional theories in the way they cultivate knowledge about the colonized and offer prescriptions to the Global South (Go, 2016). In many ways, postcolonial theory is antithetical to social theory in its origin. As much as sociology has colonial origins and is deeply embedded within its culture, postcolonial theory emerged amid anti-imperial protest and resistance (Go, 2016). The earlier first wave of postcolonial thought included writers such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Amílcar Cabral, Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, and C.L.R. James. In the later wave, postcolonial theory has been advanced by writers such as Homi Bhabha, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Partha Chatterjee, Edward Said, and Gayatri Spivak, among others.

In suggesting a future roadmap for theory development, Calas and Smircich (1999) have drawn the attention of management scholars to postcolonial theory to attend to formerly colonized people whose voice has been absent from management disciplines. Drawing upon this call, several theorists have deployed postcolonial theory in management and marketing in the last few years. For example, Mir, Mir and Upadhyaya (2003) use postcolonial theory to argue that in contemporary organizations, control systems are derived from discourses of modernity that emerge from processes of colonialism. Prasad and Prasad (2003) unpack some key concepts of postcolonial theory, such as ambivalence, mimicry, and hybridity (discussed below) that were used by the colonized to challenge the colonizer. These ideas help to broaden the understanding of workplace resistance in organizations. In a similar vein, Priyadharshini (2003) offers a postcolonial critique of texts widely used by business and management communities through the ideas of knowing and representation. She argues that the population of the Third World is often problematically represented as wild beasts in these texts originating in the West. Accordingly, such representations create a global hierarchy in which the Third World is always the less human Other. Similarly, Jack and Lorbiecki (2003) deploy postcolonial theory to critically analyze the messages, images, and symbolism contained within cross-cultural training videos. They show that the videos encode the Western fiction of the Other and draw upon

West-centric management theories that relegate non-Western forms of knowing and subjectivity to the margin.

In marketing theory, some researchers have used postcolonial theory in recent years. For example, Patterson and Brown (2007) interpret Irish pubs as postcolonial sites of resistance, which are paradoxical, parodic, provocative, and performative spaces. While Patterson and Brown (2007) have looked at postcolonial theory as a framework that highlights resistance, some other marketing theorists have used it to draw attention to global hierarchies, racism, and subordination. Costa (1998) has followed the latter approach to demonstrate how a discourse of Orientalism inheres in the consumption and marketing of Hawaii. Similarly, Jack (2008) reports a hierarchical system of colonialist binaries in a case of the marketing of soap and in the promotion of Third World tourist destinations. Kjeldgaard and Askegaard (2006) show that deprived consumers in the periphery deploy discourses of plentitude to construct postcolonial nationhood. They show how Greenlandic youth yearn for rock music because it is popular in the First World. Such a dependence on the First World culture repeats itself in many non-Western contexts (Ger & Belk, 1996; Üstüner & Holt, 2010; Varman & Belk, 2012). Moreover, Varman (2016b) suggests that marketplace icons are markers of transnational transactions engendered by commercialization and dominance of the West. Examining the case of curry as a marketplace icon, Varman (2016b) observes that the descriptor ‘curry’ was a British imposition shaped by colonial and commercial interests. The colonial intervention globalized Indian food as a marketplace icon. This shows that for a product from the Global South to become a marketplace icon, colonization and commercialization are necessary pre-conditions for it to gain wider acceptability. Similarly, Askegaard and Eckhardt (2012) show that the popularity of yoga in the West has added to its acceptance in India. Therefore, to achieve popularity, signs originating from the Global South are often dependent on circuits of commercialization and Westernization.

In summary, several postcolonial scholars have highlighted the hegemony of the Global North and the role of colonialism in shaping market discourses. These scholars have further highlighted the role of modernity as a hegemonic discourse in the creation of postcolonial subjectivity. Moreover, scholars have emphasized the issues of hybridity, ambivalence, and subalternity or subordination as important markers of postcoloniality. It is to these aspects of modernity, violence, hybridity, ambivalence, and subalternity that I turn in my analysis of postcoloniality.

### **Modernity and colonial violence**

The idea of modernity with its specific origin in European history after the Renaissance was closely tied to the human ability, individually or collectively, to determine its future. Amin (2009) observes that modernity is a product of capitalism and develops in close association with the worldwide expansion of the latter. Amin further clarifies that although Enlightenment thought offers us a concept of reason that is associated with emancipation, the idea of freedom is defined and limited by what capitalism requires and allows. Therefore, in Enlightenment, a particular vision of emancipation is made into a universal reason that gets removed from its origin and history of emergence. Moreover, such a vision of modernity is closely tied to capitalism as a mode of production. As a result, modernity is closely associated with fundamental laws that govern the expansion of capitalism and is steeped in inequality and asymmetry.

There are two key features of discourse of modernity in a postcolonial society (Guha, 1997). The first is an inward-looking critique of how modernization linked with local practices. The second critique is outward looking, challenging the universality of European experience. These are contradictory moments that make modernity deeply ambivalent – simultaneously a colonizing trope as well as a site of resistance. Prakash (1999), who observes that British colonizers in

India presented the project of science as a civilizing mission, captures the inherent ambivalence of modernity. Accordingly, science was considered as a form of rationality that had to displace all other forms of reasoning and traditional understanding. This was, however, a project fraught with several contradictions because these societies had deeply entrenched cultural practices and institutions that colonizers could never understand. Describing the project of scientific modernity in the Indian context, Prakash (1999) observes a rift in the project. On the one hand, the colonial masters desired to teach the 'natives' that Western science was universal and it should be adopted by the colonized. On the other hand, for the British, Indians were primitive and backward with no ability to appreciate and develop a scientific ethos on their own. As a result, scientific modernity was a 'civilizing mission' that could only be achieved through colonialism.

Such a narrative is similar to articulatory practices in marketing in which the Global South is a laggard that is in need of Western modernity. This approach is evident in the observations made by Westfall and Boyd Jr. (1960) about marketing systems in India. Based on their rather superficial analysis, they suggest that marketing is underdeveloped in the country and in need of modernization. In this discourse of modernization, the adoption of marketing practices prevalent in the West is a sign of modernity. In these articulations, marketing becomes a civilizing mission that the Global South should adopt. It ignores the lengthy history of markets and marketing in the country. As Sreekumar and Varman (2016) show, Indian markets had a number of institutions that point to a fairly high degree of sophistication even in medieval times. Moreover, marketing evolved in India over a long period impelled by its specific historical circumstances and institutional make-up. They point out that Indian bazaars were institutionally distinct from markets in the Global North and they were labeled as unorganized because of their different forms of organization (Ray, 2011). However, much of this history is rarely interrogated in marketing discipline, and attempts are made to fit markets and marketing in the Global South in the pre-existing grids that have been developed in the West. And practices and institutional apparatuses that cannot be explained through these Western grids become unrecognizable and unintelligible. These unrecognizable and unintelligible marketing apparatuses and practices are often labeled as primitive or traditional and in need of modernization, which can be achieved by following the West (Varman & Sreekumar, 2015).

Postcolonial authors have criticized such an approach to modernity as racist and violent. As Fanon (1952, p. 191) insightfully suggests, "in the school programs, they desperately try to make a white man out of the black man. In the end, they give up and tell him: you have undeniably a dependency complex regarding the white man." Under colonialism, the colonized are made subservient in a way to support colonialist values, and native cultural values are deemed as lacking or as uncivilized (McLeod, 2013). As a result, Fanon (1963) observes, a colonized identity is defined in negative terms by the colonizer and is denied the position of a subject. Such an identity is abbreviated, violated, inferior, and imprisoned by a way of seeing that is a form of desubjectification. Here, desubjectification means that the colonized are stripped of their heritage and ethos. For Fanon (1963) colonialism was not just an economic project but was also a psychological project of dehumanization and desubjectification. And Fanon (1963, p. 114) famously observed, "the white world, the only honorable one, barred me from all participation. A man was expected to behave like a man. I was expected to behave like a black man."

The above fixation of the colonized as traditional and primitive is richly elucidated by Bhabha (1994) in his interpretation of stereotypes. Stereotyping is not merely setting up a false image that is used for discriminatory practices, but instead an important colonial strategy that involves acts of disavowal and fixation which create conditions for colonial fantasy, violence, and civilizing missions or anti-conquests (Pratt, 1992). McLeod (2013) reminds us that under colonialism, the colonized are made subservient through the use of stereotypes that

reflect and support colonist values. A particular value system of the Global North is taught as the best, truest world-view. Said (1978) offers a rich understanding of the role of discourse of Orientalism in the determination of colonized subject positions to allow the Global North to inflict colonial atrocities. Stereotypes helped the colonizers to simplify the task of governance of the people they knew little about and to use violence against them as a form of civilizing mission to make them learn Western ways of life. Such stereotyping involves a reduction of ideas to a simple and manageable form. The function of stereotypes is to perpetuate alterity and otherness (Loomba, 2005). As Judith Butler (Berbek, 2017) reminds us, “If the self is the basis of sympathy, our sympathy will be restricted to those who are like us. The real challenge occurs when that extrapolation of the self is thwarted by alterity.” Therefore, stereotypes helped to create a divide between the colonizers and the colonized, us and them, and modern and primitive. These divides, in turn, were used to inflict violence in the name of modernization and civilization.

Drawing upon Said’s (1978) understanding of stereotypes in representations, Costa (1998) demonstrates how Hawaii is discursively constructed as a primitive site for consumption by Western consumers. In a similar vein, Varman and Costa (2013) illustrate the manner in which American consumers and marketers draw upon discourse of development to give meaning to country-of-origin (COO). COO theory and practice draw upon stereotypes created by discourse of development to produce a sense of modern and primitive. Challenging the use of stereotypes, Varman and Costa (2013) critique the COO framework as a creator of economic difference and hierarchy. Similarly, Bonsu (2009) has shown that the colonial stereotypes of savagery and exotica inform contemporary representations of Africa in North American advertising to reinforce a global hierarchy of races, cultures, and nations.

Systems of devalorization of cultural practices of the colonized have led to long-term traumatic outcomes as they continue to reel under the spell of slavery long after formal structures of colonialism have been removed. Nandy (1983), pointing to such an outcome, laments that colonialism colonizes minds in addition to bodies and it releases forces within colonized societies that alter their cultural priorities. Such a form of colonialism shifts the modern West from a geographical entity to a psychological category. And it leads to forms of mental slavery that are difficult to dislodge even after political freedom is achieved. Nandy further helps to understand how the center-periphery relationship between the Global North and the Global South has been configured by remnants of European colonialism and neo-colonialism. In this relationship, the Global South is located at the periphery – economically, spatially, culturally, and psychologically (Gupta, 1998). As a result, postcolonial subjects yearn for the Global North as a site of development, progress, and modernity. This results in a loss of self and a neurotic existence of trying to be like another person. Drawing upon this line of analysis, Varman and Belk (2012) interpret shopping malls in India as postcolonial sites in which young consumers deploy the West in an attempt to transform their Third World identities. Shopping malls in former colonies represent a postcolonial modernity that offers consumers the illusion of being Western and developed. Moreover, consumption of postcolonial retail arenas is characterized as a masquerade through which young consumers attempt to disguise or temporarily transcend their Third World realities. As Fanon (1952, p. 2), dissecting the psycho-politics of colonialism, contends, “all colonized people – in other words, people in whom inferiority complex has taken root, whose local cultural originality has been committed to the grave – position themselves in relation to the civilizing language: i.e., the metropolitan culture.” In Fanon’s theorization psycho-political means that human psychology is a combination of personal and political dimensions. Therefore, race, identity, and colonial experiences have to be closely understood to comprehend how consumers and marketers behave in postcolonial settings.



It is well understood that imposition of modernity in such a form has not produced a free and liberated space. Instead, it has helped capitalism to take deeper roots and has facilitated exploitation and expropriation of resources by the Global North. Modernization often relies on violence and use of coercion of different forms. The contact between the colonizer and colonized was fraught with violence as is the case with the more recent contact between the Global North and the Global South under the aegis of neoliberal globalization. And Césaire (1972, pp. 11, 21) rhetorically asks, “has colonialism really placed civilizations in contact? . . . I answer no . . . No human contact, but relations of domination and submission.” The imposition of European modernity was often justified as a civilizing mission that was steeped in racism and economic exploitation of colonies (Loomba, 2005).

Drawing upon these arguments, Varman and Belk (2009) show how an anti-consumption movement against Coca-Cola in India is impelled by fears of neo-colonialism. India was colonized by England for more than a century before it gained independence in 1947. In contemporary India, some nationalists see Western corporations as forces of neo-colonialism and urge consumers to boycott them. Varman and Belk (2009) highlight the role of a nationalist ideology that valorizes local producers over multinationals in resistance to consumption of Coca-Cola. They explain how a nationalist ideology can become a challenge to global brands that particularly manifests itself in postcolonial encounters and is an important addition to the contradictions in present-day consumer culture.

Modernization is a project marked by violence and displacement that relies on methods that are anti-modern. This is evident in marketization and privatization as they have been imposed across the Global South in the name of structural adjustment programs in the last quarter of the twentieth century. The World Bank and International Monetary Fund impose structural adjustment programs in which they enforce privatization of public assets and reduction in state support to the under-privileged on nations that seek their financial support. Sassen (2014, p. 90) reports that “the restructuring programs were about more than debt service; they aimed at shaping a political economy and a repositioning of these countries as sites of extraction.” She identifies continuity across colonialism and neoliberalism in the violent dispossession and displacement of the Global South. It is a historical continuity of the capitalist dialectic of incorporation and expulsion that characterized colonial relations. In this dialectic, colonies continue to be incorporated into the colonizers’ project of capitalist expansion, and the colonized people are expelled from their lands for extraction and expropriation of their resources. Capitalism is a mode of production that often requires violence to generate profits and the socio-cultural system that capitalism generates is manipulative and violent. Banerjee (2008) labels this form of capitalism as necrocapitalism.

In necrocapitalism, businesses make profits by creating death worlds, with Varman and Vijay (2018) providing us with an illustration of necrocapitalism in their analysis of how vulnerable consumers are dispossessed of their homes to create a shopping mall for elite consumers in South India. In such a context, the poor are violently cast aside by the state and private corporations to generate profits. Therefore, as an outcome of the imposition of modernity and capitalism, postcolonial sites of consumption and exchanges are arenas of violent expulsion, dispossession, and expropriation (Varman & Al-Amoudi, 2016).

### **Ambivalence and hybridity**

Despite extensive use of violence in the spread of colonialism, there was popular resistance to it in various societies leading to ambivalent and hybrid outcomes. For example, in the spread of colonial dominance, local elites have played an active role in both siding with the European

project of modernity as compradors, while resisting it as nationalists (Prakash, 1999). Compradors are individuals who work on behalf of foreign capital and help in the transfer of wealth from the Global South to the Global North. Postcolonial theory provides the analytic scheme to understand these positions through which local and global, colonial and national, and modern and traditional are intertwined to produce hybridity. Therefore, postcolonial theory enables a different kind of understanding of practices and discourses in the Global South, one which does not seek to determine whether something is authentic or uncontaminated but which accepts cultural hybridity as a starting point (Gupta, 1998). For example, neither local nor global can be understood as pure cultural containers and can only be comprehended as social registers that emerge in a dynamic interplay with each other (Wilk, 1995).

Postcolonial hybridity is not a mere coming together of different ways of life or production of a cultural mix of ideas. Instead, it is a location created by structural violence and is impelled by different forms of inequities (Gupta, 1998). Hybridity is also a site of resistance in which the colonized do not meekly surrender to different forms of dominance. Instead, we witness combinations of local and global, modern and traditional to produce outcomes that are often different from what the dominant groups visualized. These moments of slippage and destabilization are not always conscious outcomes of tactics of resistance. An illustration of such hybridity is provided by Gupta (1998) in his ethnographic work in a village in North India which shows that postcolonial subjects subvert Western narratives of the self, of progress, and of modernity through unreflexive everyday actions that are not meant to be seen as acts of resistance.

Hybridity often manifests itself as a form of mimicry. Bhabha (1994, p. 128) suggests, "Mimicry is like camouflage, not a harmonization or repression of difference, but a form of resemblance, that differs from or defends presence by displaying it in part, metonymically." Hence, mimicry is a performance that creates a surface impression of similarity and is simultaneously a form of colonial control and resistance to it. Bhabha (1994) further argues that hybridity threatens the authority of colonial command. He points out that the colonized try to copy their 'masters' and participate in the disciplinary regimes, but realize that colonialism often speaks in a tongue that is forked. In other words, Bhabha interprets hybridity as a process of strategic reversal in which knowledge created by authority gets combined with other marginal forms of knowledge and is used by the colonized to challenge colonial power. Hybridity leads to mimicry which enables the postcolonial subject to perform their contempt of the colonizer in the process of emulating it. Under these conditions, resistance is an outcome produced by a dominant discourse itself because it forces people to mimic. For instance, Varman and Belk (2012) show how young consumers interpret shopping malls in India as signifiers of Westernization, progress, and development. They deploy these signifiers to project India onto the global stage and displace the West from its position of preeminence. These young consumers claim that the future belongs to India with its ability to beat the West in the game of economic development and progress. As Gupta (1998, p. 233) observes, "through mimicry and mockery, parody and protest, riots and rebellion, the 'not-quite-indigenous' and 'not-quite-modern' disrupts the complacent march of continuous progress implicit in discourses of growth and development."

Continuing in this train of thought, Bhabha (1994, p. 122) observes that the colonizers' interpretation is refracted by ambivalence in which natives are "almost the same, but not quite." The irony in this discourse plays itself out as a colonial mimicry, in which colonizers are keen to reform and discipline the Other, but also acknowledge that the native subjects can never be like them. As a result, the governed subject is unpredictable and indeterminate. This unpredictability contributes to the creation of a paranoid authority that leads to cycles of violence through which the colonizer tries to overcome the fear of the unknowable subject (Varman & Al-Amoudi, 2016). Therefore, hybridity helps to further comprehend how domination and

resistance become intertwined in postcolonial settings. A large part of this resistance is infra-political or unorganized and generates a sense of paranoia that can lead to greater violence by those in authority.

### Subalternity

To understand postcoloniality in marketing theory, a considerable emphasis has to be placed on structures of subordination or subalternity. Such an imperative, inspired by a group of scholars working in the area of Subaltern Studies (Prakash, 1994), has to go beyond neoliberal discourses of the BOP and subsistence markets to attend to the wider structures of subordination as they prevail in the Global South. The idea of subaltern can be traced to the writings of Antonio Gramsci, who used the term as a form of disguise for the proletariat to overcome the problem of prison censorship. More specifically, Subaltern Studies have their origin in India. It was a project to write history from below to focus on ordinary people instead of focusing on the rulers, as is the case with conventional history. Subaltern Studies were started with the objective of overcoming colonist elitism and bourgeois-nationalist elitism in India.

I see two forms of subalternity that need to be addressed in marketing theory. First, borrowing from Chakrabarty (1997), I see subalternity of epistemology. This form of subalternity is manifest in how marketing scholars writing accounts of markets in the Global South have to always refer to the writings in the Global North. This closely resonates with the observation made by Chakrabarty (1997, p. 264) that,

Third World historians feel a need to refer to works in European history; historians of Europe do not feel any need to reciprocate . . . they produce their work in relative ignorance of non-Western histories, and this does not seem to affect the quality of their work. This is a gesture, however, “we” cannot return. We cannot even afford an equality or symmetry of ignorance at this level without taking the risk of appearing “old fashioned” or “outdated”.

As Varman and Saha (2009) show, knowledge flows in postcoloniality are disciplined by Eurocentrism. They explain marketing knowledge in India as a form of emulation of the mainstream and managerially oriented research in the Global North. Such a Eurocentric discursive approach privileges the Global North through its mystification and denigration of the Global South through distorted representations. These articulations are situated in discourse of self-orientalism that allows the domination of the colonized to be accepted as a disciplining influence. It is, to a large extent, an outcome of dependency created because of the legacy of colonialism in the Global South.

Therefore, subalternity creates unreflexive subjectivities that shape marketing knowledge flows in postcoloniality. As a result, marketing theorization and practices in postcolonial settings witness attempts to emulate the West. For example, Varman and Saha (2009) outline how, in an elite Indian business school, researchers unreflexively adopt the SERVQUAL scale developed in the United States. Despite recent attempts to include voices from the Global South in marketing, the discipline remains overwhelmingly Eurocentric, white, and primarily confined to conversations in the Anglo-Saxon world. As Burton (2009) insightfully points out, white spaces and white people dominate consumer research, and researchers perform whiteness. Most accounts of markets and consumers tend to become variations on master narrative that could be called markets of the West (Chakrabarty, 1997). As a result of the ‘first in the West and then elsewhere’ structure of the discipline, different non-Western societies are expected to produce local versions of the same

Western narrative of modernity, progress, markets, and reason after a time lag (Fabian, 2002). This has consigned non-Western subject positions to an imaginary waiting room of history. It has allowed Western ideas to be used as benchmarks for others as non-Westerners are treated as less modern and in need of a period of preparation and waiting before being considered as full participants in modernity. This results in an overwhelming dominance of the West and any legitimate theorization of markets has to be an extension of pre-existing theories developed by mainly white scholars. Therefore, the Global North becomes a universal referent for any theorization that happens in the Global South. However, this is a status denied to scholars from the Global South because they remain provincial and theorists of particular cultural orders that have little claim to universality outside what has been pre-determined by the West.

The second facet of subalternity that requires attention is the limited space that has been devoted in the discipline to subaltern markets and consumption. Subaltern settings have broadly remained at the margins of marketing scholarship. The problem of silence on subalterns is further exacerbated by the limitations of their representation by privileged academics. Because of their disempowered positions, subalterns do not achieve a dialogical status and are problematically represented through privileged vantage points of academic experts. In examining subalternity in India, Spivak (1988) argues that any attempt to retrieve the voice of subalterns further distorts their speech because they cannot be represented within dominant discourses (McLeod, 2013). Accordingly, scholars must subvert the representational system that rendered subalterns mute in the first place. It is not that subalterns do not speak, but others do not know how to listen and how to have a dialogue. Therefore, the silence of subalterns is a failure of interpretation in the marketing discipline.

Such an engagement is obviously necessary because conditions of subalternity require appropriate theoretical analysis. Varman and Vikas (2007) remind us that the abject poverty and abysmal living conditions of subaltern consumers necessitate a radical rethink about the role of corporations and markets under capitalism. In a capitalist society, a vast majority of the population struggles to survive because capitalist relations of production are exploitative and fetter human agency. Varman and Vikas (2007) report that subaltern groups suffer extreme exploitation with low wages and the absence of any form of social security. These conditions leave little room for freedom in the sphere of consumption. Contra some postmodern thinkers, loss of control in production cannot be compensated for via consumption. Hence, subalternity helps us to understand issues of consumer freedom and choices under conditions of material constraints. It surfaces the linkages between the conditions of production and consumption that are all too often overlooked in marketing theory.

Attention to subalternity can also help understand markets and consumption situated in conditions of social conflicts and contradictions. As Bhadra (1997) observes, submissiveness and defiance simultaneously characterize subaltern behavior. Furthermore, the disempowered positions of subaltern groups imply that many of their discourses and practices are concealed from open scrutiny. Consequently, a deeper understanding of subalterns requires closer attention to their polysemic and hidden transcripts that contain cultural codes of resistance or infra-politics, and multiple subjectivities (Scott, 1990). Such an analysis will require a critical re-reading of the foundational assumptions of the way subalternity in the form of poverty has been examined in the discipline. Stimulated and structured by neoliberal ideology, BOP and subsistence market discourses have put emphases on markets, profits, and entrepreneurialism. A key assumption in BOP discourse is that the multinational firms have ignored the poor, and thus, the poor do not have access to the benefits of markets (Pralhad, 2005). With this assumption in play, they contend that an active engagement of big private corporations with BOP markets would transform such settings with huge latent demand. Such an approach builds on neoliberal discourse

which assumes that market-based engagements create choices for the poor resulting in their economic transformation. Work on subsistence markets (e.g., Viswanathan & Sridharan, 2009; Viswanathan *et al.*, 2011) is another dominant strand of research on the poor within marketing theory. The subsistence marketplace project is positioned as a microlevel initiative complementary to the macro-level BOP approach (Sridharan & Viswanathan, 2008; Viswanathan, Seth, Gau, & Chaturvedi, 2009). Subsistence market research also heralds markets and consumer power within the logic of neoliberal ideology (Viswanathan, Rosa, & Harris, 2005). It seeks to create active, prudential, and entrepreneurial market subjects among the poor. It is often imposed by the Global North in the name of modernity against the old logic of the welfare state in the Global South. Such subsistence marketplace initiatives are extensions of the logic of social entrepreneurship that replaces traditional socioeconomic government interventions to support subaltern groups with market-based initiatives. Therefore, the logic of subsistence is deployed as a form of mystification to mask the creation of market subjectivity in support of private accumulation (Varman, 2016a). Because of this ideological mooring, there is a marginal understanding of the systemic issues that cause poverty. Khare and Varman (2016) contend that the subaltern institutional setting is fraught with Kafkaesque elements such as indecipherable legality that does not allow subalterns to access and assess the technicalities of a state's policies, fosters abusive power relations through which local elites exploit subalterns, and creates alienation that leaves subaltern subjects disenchanted in their social and professional domains. Varman, Skálén, and Belk (2012) also criticize the role of a corporate BOP initiative for exacerbating conditions of poverty and marginalization. To understand subalternity, marketing theorists have to distance themselves from the neoliberal ideological moorings of the discipline (Eckhardt, Dholakia & Varman, 2013) and there is a need to understand how capitalism systemically creates conditions of subalternity for the majority of people on this planet.

### Conclusion

This chapter outlines some of the key developments in postcolonial theory and explains their usefulness for widening the purview of critical marketing. It examines the role of modernity, hybridity, ambivalence, and violence in shaping postcoloniality. It further delves into the question of subalternity to offer it as an alternative imperative for imagining the discipline in a postcolonial society.

In the Global South, a key challenge for critical marketing is to provincialize Europe. We need to decenter the West as a universal referent for the creation and understanding of non-Western subjectivities. This does not mean we abandon systemic understanding and emphasis on global forces such as capitalism. I agree with Chibber (2013) that we need to understand the logic of universals that capitalism creates as we look into the specificities of a context. However, universal aspects of capitalism such as accumulation, extraction of surplus value, alienation, etc. have to be located in conjunction with local conditions to comprehend how they interpenetrate each other. And a universal does not equate with the Global North because it is as provincial as any other location on the globe. There is a need for theoretical development that challenges the universality of Western theories about markets and consumers, and situates them instead in their specific spatial, cultural, and institutional contexts. This requires questioning the canonical status granted to Western scholars, who have little or no awareness of the Global South. Such a shift is going to be difficult because of the entrenched interests of scholars in the Global North and the dependence of scholars in the Global South on the scholarly trends in the West. However, it is a shift that is needed to make the discipline more relevant beyond the privileged circuit of a few.

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