Social postmodernism

Beyond identity politics

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK www.cup.cam.ac.uk
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011–4211, USA www.cup.org
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain

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First published 1995
Reprinted 1996, 1999

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data
Social postmodernism: beyond identity politics / edited by Linda Nicholson
and Steven Seidman.
p. cm. – (Cambridge cultural social studies)
ISBN 0 521 47516 3 (hardback) – ISBN 0 521 47571 6 (paperback)
1. Sociology – Methodology. 2. Group identity. 3. Political
sociology. 4. Social movements. 5. Postmodernism – Social aspects.
I. Nicholson, Linda J. II. Seidman, Steven. III. Series.
HM24.S5443 1995
301′.01 – dc20 94-49039 CIP

ISBN 0 521 47516 3 hardback
ISBN 0 521 47571 6 paperback

Transferred to digital printing 2002

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Introduction

Linda Nicholson and Steven Seidman

It is perhaps ironic that the very intellectuals thought to have originated postmodern theory – we mean of course Baudrillard, Foucault, and Derrida (Lyotard being the exception) – have refused this characterization of their work. It is again not entirely without paradox that postmodern theory has found its most welcoming reception and home not in France but in the United States – the nation of pragmatism, empiricism, and a much vaunted liberal consensus. And notwithstanding Rorty's liberal pragmatic version of postmodernism, it is among the American left, among neo- and-post-Marxists, feminists, queers, and Third World and postcolonial intellectuals, that postmodernism has been most enthusiastically embraced. Why have Americans, mostly left academic intellectuals but also some outside America (for example, in Britain and Australia) come to advocate a politics and social theory in a postmodern mode?

We think that this is an important question but it cannot be productively engaged by approaching postmodernism in an ahistorical way. Postmodernism is best spoken about in the plural and its meaning best clarified by understanding those who use it in a particular social and discursive setting. So, we submit two stories, our stories, of "why postmodernism." Of course, we know that these are not the whole story or the only ones – indeed they are not even the only stories we could tell but they are, we hope, stories that are suggestive beyond the tales of two left American academic intellectuals.

Why postmodernism: Steve's story

Before I was a postmodernist, I was a Marxist. Why the change? My "conversion" pivoted on my disillusionment with Marxism which

broadened into a disenchantment with key aspects of the Western Enlightenment tradition.

Marxism was a natural for me. White, middle class, culturally alienated – a 1960s radical. For me, Marxism was entangled in an oedipal and generational rebellion – against a successful but distant father and against an "affluent" society that promised little more than family, consumerism, and career. Marxism allowed me to stake out a rebellious identity in opposition to the liberalism of my parents and an American national identity. It furnished a standpoint from which to criticize my elders – to expose their hypocrisy by exposing America's social inequalities and its illusions of freedom by appealing to the reign of capital and class. Marxism allowed me a ferocious critique of America and liberal intellectuals that could not be so easily refused as my previously held hippie critique. Moreover, Marx's vision of a fully realized self, especially as elaborated by such neo-Marxist gurus as Erich Fromm and Herbert Marcuse, resonated perfectly with the folk beliefs I absorbed from mainstream and countercultural America. So, I became a Marxist of the Frankfurt School persuasion.

As the 1960s passed into the 1970s, and establishing an academic career moved to the center of my life, my enthusiasm for Marxism waned. Undoubtedly, the failed institutionalization of Marxism in the United States worked against sustaining Marxism in a post-crisis social setting. Moreover, as the heroic days of rebellion passed, and as my education included a serious engagement with classical sociology, my assessment of Marxism proved decidedly mixed. I continued to value Marx's historicist and political critique of ideology and his view of science as in the service of social change. However, I was critical of Marx's collapse of the social into class conflict, which hardly spoke to my radical political impulses which pivoted on issues of the subjective and the cultural, e.g., the body, the psyche, sexuality, and the "spiritual."

By the middle of the 1970s, the spirit of revolution had, for me, given way to a more sobering consideration of political prospects. I thought that progressive social change in the United States pivoted on a liberal–left alliance which went beyond the division between Marxism and liberalism. I imagined that in some of the writings of Durkheim and Weber there was to be found a social liberal ideal that had some kinship with a social democratic reading of Marx. I believed that a reconstruction of European social theory could provide intellectual resources for a social democratic political culture. Although I was questioning Marxism and liberalism, I remained firm in my faith in the Enlightenment – for example, in the link between science, truth,

and social progress, in millennial notions of human liberation, in the West as the site of human progress, and in the self as the ultimate ground of knowledge and action.

My belief in the Enlightenment was seriously shaken in the early 1980s. Why? Of course, the succession of Republican administrations dampened my hopes of a liberal–left progressive front. The renewal of Cold War politics under Reagan and the vigor of the new right and neoconservatism further marginalized the left. I, once again, felt like a stranger in America. These developments shaped a context favorable to putting my belief in the Enlightenment into crisis. Personal considerations proved fateful.

As the world left my dreams of change tattered and almost mocked my high-minded European criticalness, my own personal life, despite an academic appointment and higher levels of consumerism, landed me in psychoanalysis. And my analysis brought me face to face with the web of delusions, inner otherness, and just plain psychic craziness that unconsciously drove my life. I initially undertook analysis with the Enlightenment faith that it would replace delusion with reality, opaqueness with scientific insight, unconscious compulsion with deliberate willfulness, and distress with happiness. Wasn't this its promise and indeed the promise of scientific Enlightenment? To be sure, analysis (thankfully) released me from certain inner constraints and did give me an understanding of particular feelings and psychic patterns. Yet, even as my daily life has been less brooding and anguished, my analytical experience contributed to putting my Enlightenment faith into doubt. Analysis revealed a self or "subject" which was de-centered, a psyche populated by multiple, often conflicted identities, selves who were hitherto strange to my conscious life, and a self driven by unconscious desires. Moreover, despite many years of analysis my psyche remained dense and opaque, ruthlessly refusing truth in favor of narratives whose value came to be judged by me – and my analyst – less by their validity than by whether they "worked" or were enabling or hopeful or permitted a provisional psychic coherence. In short, psychoanalysis disposed me to think of subjectivity less in a "modern" language of centered, unified, rational subjects than in a "postmodern" vocabulary of de-centered, multiple selves impelled by unconscious structures. Psychoanalytic understandings looked decidedly less like "science" or "reason" than pragmatic narratives or literary-poetic texts.

My analysis transpired side by side with coming out as gay. I don't of course assume any necessary tie between this event and a postmodern

standpoint. Nevertheless, coming out had for me far-reaching epistemological consequences. While I was already well read in critiques of scientism, my coming out put me in a daily political relation to science and, indeed, pressured me to rethink the politics of knowledge beyond Enlightenment frameworks.

In its servicing of a heterosexist society, science denied me a range of legal and civil rights; it shaped a context which made me a target of ridicule and violence. It did this by constructing homosexuality as a disease and as marking a pathological, deviant, morally damaged personage. I did not conclude that science was an evil social force. I knew that it could be invoked to justify "normalization." I did conclude, though, that science is a powerful social force. This power, moreover, lay not only in its capacity to rationalize the denial of basic civil and social rights and to enforce social marginalization. More importantly, by virtue of its ties to institutional practices (e.g., education, medicine, law, government, mass media, therapeutic regimes), science had the power to inscribe in our bodies and minds a sexual and social regime. This regime made sexual object choice into a master category of sexual and social identity and that purified a heterosexual life while polluting a homosexual one. Science helped to create a regime of sexual and social order which organizes and regulates our bodies, desires, identities, and social behavior. Foucault of course provided the full conceptual articulation of this perspective, but my personal experience allowed me to hear his arguments about power/knowledge and the productive and disciplining aspects of power. It followed that if the regime of sexuality is a disciplinary order, if the assertion – even affirmatively – of gay identity reinforces this regime, the Enlightenment project of announcing and liberating the homosexual is in doubt.

My suspicion toward a Western culture of Enlightenment was further nourished by internal developments within the gay community during the 1980s. This was a time of enormous turmoil and division within the gay movement. The ethnic model of identity that grounded community and politics was under serious scrutiny. An antigay backlash exposed the political costs of an insulated community pursuing a single-interest gay politic. Moreover, voices of difference within the gay movement threatened to unravel the fragile bonds of solidarity that rested upon the assertion of a common gay identity. Hitherto excluded segments of the lesbian and gay community – people of color, sexual rebels, Third World gays, working-class gays, butches, and fems – protested their silencing and marginalization by the gay mainstream. They exposed the repressive politics entailed in asserting a unified gay subject. Rebelling against

the disciplining effects of a politics of identity, a new celebration of multiple, composite identities became the rallying cry of a queer politics of difference. While some saw this as threatening the gains of lesbians and gays, I imagined the new queer politics as potentially recovering the radical impulse of gay liberationism, namely, the ideal of a truly coalitional politic and a politic that goes beyond legitimating homosexual identities to remaking bodies and everyday life. In this regard, I saw the language of postmodernism as resonant with a new queer politics challenging normalization and a routinized politics of respectability.

Why postmodernism: Linda's story

As with Steve, Marxism was for me a means of making sense of many of the political and psychological sentiments which came out of my early years. I was a "red diaper baby" in the sense that my parents gave to me and my brother a strong sense of identification with the underdog and a certain disdain for what they regarded as the shallow and overly consumer-oriented elements of much of American life. My parents' contempt for mainstream American life was also mixed with a not untypical second-generation immigrant desire for their children to succeed, particularly in that arena they viewed with unqualified regard, education. So I became a Marxist academic, using my academic studies both to create a career and refine my understanding of Marxism. In the course of my work in philosophy as an undergraduate and then in the History of Ideas program at Brandeis University, this refinement led to a particular perspective on what was worthwhile in Marx's writings: his critique of capitalism; his vision of a democratic socialist society; and his strong sense of the historicity of all ideas. Against many reigning liberal ideas about "reason" and "objectivity," and in accord with ideas which were beginning to emerge in nascent form in academic and new left culture of the time, Marxism also sensitized me to the power dynamics involved in the production and distribution of knowledges. That sensitivity, and the developing critique of positivism and scientism I was deriving from my studies in the early 1970s, led me to think of the Marxism that saw itself as "a science of society" as not only wrong-headed but as allied with the authoritarianism I identified with the Marxism-Leninism of the Soviet Union and of the Eastern bloc countries. I became, in short, a child of that segment of the new left who thought the words "class" and "Marxism" had political relevance but who also rejected the kind of Marxism associated with the parties of the old left. Not surprisingly, I became attracted to many of the writings of those associated with the

Frankfurt School. In 1973, I found in Jürgen Habermas's *Knowledge and Human Interests* the elegant expression of many of my developing ideas about politics and knowledge. One idea in that book I found particularly compelling was Habermas's way of thinking about the two different Marxes. Habermas drew a distinction between the Marx who provided a powerful historical narrative about the development of capitalism and the Marx who saw himself as providing a philosophical theory about the nature and meaning of human history. I started to think about how this latter Marx, this Marx who thought he could provide a perch upon which to view all of human history, was a Marx who had not taken seriously enough his own ideas about the historicity and power dynamics of the production of ideas.

But in 1973 Marxism was not the only issue on my political and intellectual agenda. Feminism was emerging as a force which both excited me and demanded that I carve some place for it in my intellectual, political, and emotional life. While my Marxist commitments had initially led me to characterize this new movement as a manifestation of "bourgeois" interests, by 1973 such a characterization could no longer fit with the excitement and energy I found from this movement. But, of course, as an academic philosopher I could not just call myself a "feminist." I needed to decide just what kind of feminist I was. I came to describe myself as a "socialist-feminist." In large part this self-description emerged out of my earlier commitment to Marxism. It enabled me to declare myself a feminist while also remaining publicly committed to many of those ideas of Marx's I still found viable: his critique of capitalism, his vision of a future socialist society, and his sense of the historicity of all ideas. But other psychic factors were also at work. As someone who had a deep emotional connection to a father who died when I was just entering adolescence and as one who has always been strongly connected to an older brother, the alternative beckoning theory of radical feminism was never completely attractive. While in the late 1970s I certainly could not use public declarations of allegiances to men to defend any theoretical commitment, I could use the strong sense of historicity I derived from Marx to undermine what I was also seeing as the ahistoricity and lack of attention to differences among women in many radical feminist accounts. Of course at the time I was also being powerfully affected by many of the ideas that were coming out of radical feminism, ideas which were both deepening my commitment to feminism and accentuating my turn away from Marxism. At a certain point, and at least in part because of feminism, I stopped calling myself a Marxist.

It was somewhere in the 1980s, probably through work on my book

Gender and History, that I began to put together theoretically my criticisms of Marxism and of radical feminism. I began to think that what was wrong with both could be expressed in the same terms. Moreover, this common language could also be used to account for each not being able to include what was important in the other. It was Marxism's tendency to see itself as providing a grand theory of history and social organization constituted around such categories as "production" and "labor" which precluded it from adequately theorizing the situation of women. Simultaneously, it was radical feminism's tendency to develop grand theories about "patriarchy" and women which precluded it from seeing differences among women which were, amongst other things, differences of class.

It was around this time that the word "postmodernism" was beginning to enter my intellectual world. It attracted me because it seemed to provide a label by which to name this common problem I saw in Marxism, feminism, and liberal understandings of reason and knowledge: the tendency in elements of all to forget that what they were calling "reason" or "history" or "women" came out of a particular context and were implicated in relations of power. It made sense that liberalism, Marxism, and feminism might suffer from such a common problem. All had emerged within a certain period in Europe and North America where this part of the world had exercised a great amount of power over other parts of the world. As this power was coming into question, so might also the ways of theorizing knowledge which had attended it. The term "postmodern" seemed to provide a name for this break.

Why social postmodernism

We do not think that these two stories exclude other accounts of postmodernism. In particular, we value macrosocial perspectives which, for example, feature the importance of changes in systems of production, technology, and information systems, or perspectives which underscore the importance of deterritorialization or globalization. Yet we are convinced that shifts in left public cultures, in particular, the rise and development of the new social movements and their encounter with Marxist and liberal Enlightenment traditions are one crucial matrix for understanding the formation of postmodern theories in America and perhaps elsewhere. Moreover, we believe that at least certain strains of postmodern thinking are a key resource for rethinking a democratic social theory and politics. While it is understandable that some might

be suspicious of perspectives that announce the de-centering of the subject, the end of metanarratives (including Marxism), the interlocking of knowledge and power, and the substitution of a politics of difference for a millennial liberationist politic, we believe that the postmodern turn offers a potentially useful vantage point from which to rethink theory and politics in at least some Western nations.

And yet, we have come to see that while the term "postmodernism" had its benefits, it also had its problems. Some of the problems seemed to us to emerge from those places where postmodernism overlapped with poststructuralism. Such overlaps occurred particularly in relation to thinking about language. For example, as Jean François Lyotard talked about the power dynamics in the play of discourse, so also did Jacques Derrida talk about linguistic and social meaning in relation to the regime of power of "logocentrism." But the concern with undoing reigning beliefs about logocentrism or troubling textual authority on the part of many poststructuralists meant that poststructuralism in particular, but postmodernism also, became significantly associated with a critical mode of analyzing texts. At times, the social was collapsed into the textual, and critique often meant "deconstructing" texts or exposing the instability of those foundational categories and binaries which structured texts and which were said to be carriers of ideological meanings. As important as deconstruction was to politicizing language and knowledge, this "textualizing" turn of the postmodern meant that many of the issues that have been pivotal to social theorists were neglected. In short, the whole field of institutions, social classes, political organizations, political economic processes, and social movements appeared to remain in the hands of Marxists or other theorists whose perspectives were often untouched by postmodern concerns. For Steve Seidman, with his background in social theory, and for Linda Nicholson, with her background in political philosophy, this separation of the "postmodern" and the "social" seemed to mark a wrong turn.

This slippage between postmodern critical analysis and "social" theory seemed to us further accentuated by the nature of postmodernism's critical engagement with the new social movements. For us, and for many others who were also sympathetic to postmodern ideas, the ways that these movements maintained the legacy of modernism was to naturalize or essentialize categories of identity. Thus, Nicholson, as well as other feminists, critiqued those tendencies in feminism which naturalized or essentialized the concept of "woman." Seidman, as well as other gay and lesbian theorists, challenged ahistorical constructions of "the homosexual." Our project was to demonstrate the constructed,

historically variable, and varied meanings of such categories, that is, to "genealogize" or "deconstruct" these categories. But many such attempts also seemed to us to turn away from "the social." By focusing on what was wrong in the understanding of specific categories of identity, our attention remained fixed on the individual categories themselves. We were paying little attention to the ways in which the genealogies we and others were constructing intertwined with each other. Many of us had abandoned broader, systematic, and integrating perspectives on social processes and dynamics. Postmodern critique narrowed into a critique of representations or knowledges, leaving relatively unattended their social and historical contexts.

But one of the serious causes of the turn from the social appeared to us as the pronounced negative or critical aspect of much postmodern theorizing. It is difficult to focus on the interrelation of social patterns when one is fixed on avoiding totalizing or essentializing analyses. This negative bent of much postmodern intellectual work was quickly perceived by its critics and soon became described as a sign not only of its theoretical weakness but also of its political weakness. Postmodernism, it was claimed, could show only what was wrong: it could provide no positive directions either intellectually or politically. After all, was it not impossible to generate strong political movements while also deconstructing the categories such movements were based upon?

In this volume, we wish to show that it is possible for postmodern thinkers to focus on institutions as well as texts, to think about the interrelations of social patterns without being essentializing or totalizing, and to create constructive as well as deconstructive analyses of the social. The positive possibilities of postmodern theorizing can be matched, we believe, by constructive ideas about political action. Such ideas may seriously challenge and expand our ideas about how political change can take place. But, to transform present understandings of "the political" is not equivalent to abandoning politics altogether. Rather, through the following essays we hope to begin the process of imagining what "postmodern" social analysis can be and of how "postmodern" political action can be understood.

Critiques of identity

This volume begins this task by looking at the critique postmodernism has made of identity politics. As the three essays in the first section show, the critique is a complex one. Those who reject the postmodern turn often equate the postmodern or poststructural term "deconstruction"

with the ordinary-language term "destruction." But the postmodern move to "deconstruct" does not translate into a move to destroy or abandon. Rather, as Linda Nicholson demonstrates in her opening essay "Interpreting Gender," a feminist deconstructive analysis of the concept of "gender" does not mean eliminating it. Rather, it entails a critical examination of its history to see what baggage the term carries from that history and the political effects of that baggage. It means "redeploying" the meaning of the term so that feminists can accomplish their political ends without encountering some of the difficulties past uses of the term have generated.

Nicholson argues that even after the development of the concept of "gender," many feminists continued to hold onto the idea that the male/female distinction is rooted in some fundamental features of biology. "Gender" was introduced to undermine widely held beliefs in the biological basis of many of the traits associated with women and men, beliefs expressed through the concept of "sex." However, insofar as "gender" was understood to supplement rather than supplant "sex," the idea of some biological basis of the male/female distinction remained. The conjunction of "gender" and "sex" was made possible by what Nicholson describes as an implicit "coat-rack" understanding of human identity: where biological givens distinguishing women and men constitute the basic "rack" upon which different societies "throw" different interpretations, the latter constituting "gender." Nicholson argues that this understanding of human identity articulates a particular worldview developed in the early modern period in Western Europe and North America where biology rather than the Bible came to be seen as the "cause" or "basis" of socially given distinctions. While this transformation had many manifestations, including the development of the biologically based concept of "race," in relation to the male/female distinction, it generated an understanding of differences between women and men both as more rigidly binary than had previously been the case and as the direct manifestation of the "facts" of biology. While the feminist introduction of the concept of "gender" represented a move to get beyond this worldview, keeping "sex" as a supplementary term has prevented feminists from wholly doing so. Nicholson depicts this limited transcendence in feminist theory by pointing to what she describes as "biological foundationalism." While the latter is not equivalent to "biological determinism," it shares with the latter the ideas that certain givens of biology exist cross-culturally and are always potential contributors to the social understanding of the male/female distinction.

Nicholson claims that it is this idea that there are certain cross-cultural

givens of biology, albeit always subject to possibly diverse social interpretations, which provided the theoretical grounds for the elaboration of "difference feminism," that is, that feminism which stressed the similarities among women and their differences from men. "Difference feminism," however, has been most at fault in ignoring differences among women. Nicholson argues that adequately to get beyond this erasure of differences requires that we get beyond biological foundationalism as well. Doing so means abandoning the idea of differences as that which supplements certain basic similarities. It means coming to see differences as that which "go all the way down" affecting the very criteria of what it means to be a man or a woman in diverse societies. This does not mean abandoning attention to the body; instead, it means seeing the meaning given to the body and how this meaning is related to the male/female distinction as historically variable. This way of thinking about the "body" supports an understanding of the term "woman" not as reflective of some one determinate meaning, but rather as reflective of a diverse set of meanings related through a complex set of "family resemblances."

While Nicholson's essay focuses on the grounding of "woman" in biology as a contributor to essentialist tendencies within feminism, Chandra Talpade Mohanty's "Feminist Encounters: Locating the Politics of Experience" focuses on essentialism itself and its relation to politics. Even in the absence of "biological foundationalism," "essential" or "unitary" characteristics can be attributed to the category of "woman." For example, it could be argued that while the meaning of "woman" is completely socially constructed, this construction has been similar in central ways throughout a long span of human history. Mohanty's essay elaborates many of the problems inherent in such an essential or unitary understanding of "woman."

Most basically, such an assumption erases social, historical differences among women, differences which are those of power. Using Robin Morgan's essay, "Planetary Feminism: The Politics of the 21st Century" as an example, Mohanty illustrates how this kind of assumption affects such an erasure. It does so by placing women outside history and, as related, by employing a problematic, individualized conception of experience.

Mohanty argues that Morgan, by eliding the difference between history as a written record and history as a course of events, depicts "history" as a male construction. Consequently, women are portrayed as having no part in history and as ahistorically endowed with certain traits, for example, as being "truth tellers." Such a depiction ignores the ways in which women have been differently situated in history and in

the ways such differences have affected both the lives they have lived and the truth and power of the stories they have told.

Allied to this depiction of women as outside history is a conception of women's experience as given and individual. There is in Morgan's essay, according to Mohanty, no sense of experience as socially constructed in accord with different historical contexts.

> The *experience* of struggle is thus defined as both personal and ahistorical. In other words, the political is *limited to* the personal and all conflicts among and within women are flattened. If sisterhood itself is defined on the basis of personal intentions, attitudes, or desires, conflict is also automatically constructed on only the psychological level. Experience is thus written in as simultaneously individual (that is, located in the individual body/psyche of wom*a*n) and general (located in wom*e*n as a preconstituted collective).

Mohanty draws on Bernice Johnson Reagon's "Coalition Politics: Turning the Century" to generate ideas about identity and politics which are different from those of Morgan. Particularly, Mohanty points to Reagon's idea of political struggle as being based on a recognition of difference rather than on imputed commonalities in experience. This idea of political struggle opposes metaphors of "coalition" to metaphors of "home." Whereas the latter suggested criteria of unity separating those on the inside from those on the outside, the former suggest constructed and contingent comings together which can coexist with differences. In short, it represents a notion of political struggle where alliances are made around explicit goals rather than presumed on the basis of imputed commonalities. It represents "sisterhood" as that which needs to be achieved rather than that which can be assumed.

While the first two essays in this volume focus on problems in feminism as a site of identity politics, similar kinds of problems have been found in many post-1960s social struggles, in those of the gay and lesbian movement, and in struggles by African-Americans in the United States and in nationalist and postcolonial struggles around the world. The essay by Gyan Prakash provides a framework for understanding the genesis of such problems. In "Postcolonial Criticism and Indian Historiography," as Prakash makes explicit, oppositional discourses emerge within a complex relationship to the discourses of domination they seek to overthrow.

Focusing on Marxism as an example of this point, Prakash shows how this discourse can be seen as a continuation of the very territorial imperialism it sought to overthrow. By employing a unified concept of "capitalism" and by making this concept foundational to the analysis of

all those societies which have been affected by it, Marxism effectively homogenized the histories of these societies.

> In fact, like many other nineteenth-century European ideas, the staging of the Eurocentric mode-of-production narrative as History should be seen as an analogue of nineteenth-century territorial imperialism. From this point of view, Marx's ideas on changeless India – theorized, for example in his concept of the "Asiatic mode of production" – appear not so much mistaken as the discursive form produced by the universalization of Europe, by its appropriation of the absolute other into a domesticated other.

The point here is not to abandon an analysis of capitalism nor to stop using the concept of "class" but to understand how the dynamics of capitalism and class intersect with other determinations. By doing so, it becomes possible to recognize "the irreducible heterogeneity of metropolitan capital with the colonial subaltern" and consequently to extricate Marxism from the imperialistic elements of its nineteenth-century Western European heritage.

However, a word of caution is in order. As Prakash emphasizes, the idea here is not to idealize heterogeneity per se. It is not to emphasize difference for the sake of difference nor to include a list of determinations, such as those of gender, race, ethnicity, etc., for the sake of some current ideal of what is politically appropriate. Rather, it is to recognize that all categories of analysis – even those used in the service of political opposition – are the affects of specific relations of power. In the case of postcolonial discourse this means recognizing that an emphasis on difference emerges from the ambivalence produced in the very enunciation of colonial discourses. As colonial discourses asserted unchanging identities both to the colonizer and colonized, they also acknowledged differences and potential disruptions to these forms of identity. They thus created the very stress points which their critics can employ against them. Consequently, the lesson here is not some absolute celebration of difference but a sensitivity to the relations of power which make a focus on difference both possible and an effective tool of subversion.

If the above essays begin to show some of the complexities involved in the critique of identity politics, the essays in the second section illustrate the limits of some versions of this critique.

Critiques of the deconstruction of identity

As the above comments make clear, we see the force of at least some critiques of identity politics as both theoretical and political.