

Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement. By Caren Kaplan. Durham, N.C., and London: Duke University Press, 1996.

Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives. Edited by Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

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Perhaps no other subject has generated as much debate in the academy over the last decade and a half as the term *postcolonialism*. *Dangerous Liaisons* and *Questions of Travel* both attempt to realign postcolonial studies with feminist and ethnic studies in the U.S. academy. If, as its critics charge, postcolonial studies has institutionalized itself in the United States by traveling away from the third world sites it was supposed to address, it is traveling again in attempting to enunciate a new politics of affiliation. These are, perhaps, less dangerous than productive liaisons.

Dangerous Liaisons is the most recent of a spate of edited collections on postcolonial theory that includes the 1993 volume *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory* and *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, published in 1995.¹ We might productively ask, then, what this collection, as the latest omnibus installment of writing on the subject, does differently from the others.

¹ Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, eds., *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993); Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).

Although one quarter of the twenty-eight essays in *Dangerous Liaisons* are reprinted from the journal *Social Text*, even a cursory look at the tables of contents in the three collections reveals the same names with numbing regularity: Anthony Appiah, Homi Bhabha, Jean Franco, Stuart Hall, bell hooks, Chandra Mohanty, Anne McClintock, Trinh T. Minh-Ha, Edward Said, and Gayatri Spivak; even worse, some essays are reprinted over again. Mohanty's "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," for example, appears in all three collections, and versions of the essays in *Dangerous Liaisons* by Appiah, Trinh, and Gauri Viswanathan also appear (under different titles) in the Ashcroft volume. The editors of *Dangerous Liaisons* only claim that five of the essays are published for the first time in their collection, but on closer inspection, even two of these (by Appiah and Arif Dirlik) are actually revised or retitled versions of essays that have appeared elsewhere, while another is an English language translation of one of Jose Fernandez Retamar's essays. Collections, of course, frequently reprint essays. Indeed, one might argue that this is their major function. Still, it would appear that rather stale, repackaged fare is being marketed here.

To its credit, however, *Dangerous Liaisons* has reprinted full articles, rather than the brief excerpts reproduced in the other two collections. It also collects some of the best writing published in the journal *Social Text*, including Said's important essay from the inaugural issue, "Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Victims," and Ella Shohat's rejoinder, "Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims," published almost a decade later. Viswanathan's "Currying Favor" continues to be a significant piece of scholarship, while Gyan Prakash's "Postcolonial Criticism and Indian Historiography" was one of the first synthetic engagements with (and defense of) subaltern studies from outside the founding group. Madhava Prasad's essay "On the Question of a Theory of (Third) World Literature" also engages the question of subaltern studies, productively refocusing an earlier *Social Text* debate between Fredric Jameson and Aijaz Ahmad on the category of "third world literature" (although one wonders why the original essays by Jameson and Ahmad were not included in the collection as well). In short, *Dangerous Liaisons* successfully showcases some of the more politically engaged postcolonial criticism emerging from the *Social Text* collective in the last eighteen years.

Yet *Dangerous Liaisons* also contains works by scholars of color such as Norma Alarcón, Michael Hanchard, Wahneema Lubiano, Annette Jaimes, and Theresa Halsey that are not typically read under the rubric of postcolonialism. Indeed, the editors assert that the volume deliberately links "previously isolated areas of critical analysis between U.S. multicultural debates

and colonial discourse outside the U.S., between gender/sexuality and the nation, and between ethnic studies and postcolonial studies” (11). Alarcón’s essay “Traddutora, Traditora: A Paradigmatic Figure of Chicana Feminism,” along with Jaimes and Halsey’s “American Indian Women: At the Center of Indigenous Resistance in Contemporary North America,” theorizes race and the critique of nation as a powerful affirmation of subaltern feminist formations. Thus, one of the major contributions this collection makes is its plotting of race along axes of home, nation, and exile.

The collection’s refocusing of questions of race is tagged in Spivak’s essay, “Teaching for the Times,” in which she argues, “I am claiming post-coloniality for the African-American, then, not because I want to interfere with her self-representation but because I want to correct the self-representation of the new immigrant academic as postcolonial, indeed as the source of postcolonial theory” (479). Hanchard seems to concur, writing that “U.S. blacks lie at the vortex of conquest and decimation,” a position that necessitates “the recognition of two histories at once related and distinct: the history of empire and the history of subordinate peoples” (239).

Appiah’s well-known essay “Is the ‘Post’ in ‘Postcolonial’ the ‘Post’ in ‘Postmodern?’” posits postcolonialism as both ally and agonist for the postmodern (438), yet Lubiano’s “Shuckin’ Off the African-American Other” seems at odds with such a recuperative maneuver. For Lubiano, “Objecting to and/or resisting meta- or master narratives — either as part of a project that reconstructs more specific narratives or as practitioners of cultural practices that resemble what is called ‘postmodernist’ — allow us to be seen as postmodernist, although we can call, and have called, what we do by other names” (211).

The potential equivalences and disjunctions between postcolonial and postmodern theory are elegantly foregrounded in Caren Kaplan’s *Questions of Travel*, which argues for “versions of poststructuralism that destabilize colonial discourse as overtly as they deconstruct logocentrism” (24). Kaplan also takes up the “feminist politics of location” that *Dangerous Liaisons* addresses through the work of Hazel Carby, Ann Laura Stoler, Audre Lorde, Judith Butler, and bell hooks.

If the editors of *Dangerous Liaisons* see “home and the loss of home as a recurring motif of modernity” (2), Kaplan explores what some have called the “postcolonial predicament” by methodically working through the vocabularies and terms of diaspora and migrancy, expatriate and exile, and refugee and immigrant. She understands travel and displacement as different cultural registers for the practice of cultural criticism. The book is divided into four chapters: “This Question of Moving,” “Becoming Nomad,”

“Travelling Theorists,” and “Postmodern Geographies.” Kaplan’s useful readings bring feminist analysis to bear on postmodern discussions of temporality and geography, even as she recognizes that a politics of location is itself dependent on discourses of displacement (25). The book’s last chapter also contains a particularly intelligible discussion of how critiques of Euro-American feminism(s) by feminists of color produced a politics of location that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s.

Paying careful attention to the work of Adrienne Rich, Bernice Johnson Reagon, Barbara Smith, Alarcón, Mohanty, Lata Mani, and Ruth Frankenberg, Kaplan establishes what feminist theory might bring to “ungrounded” notions of time and space: “To work more deeply in and against the local might require strategies that acknowledge the specific conditions of space-time compression” (179). Still, in keeping with the insights of poststructuralist analysis, Kaplan sees location as “discontinuous and multiply constituted,” an “axis, rather than a place” (182–83).

Both *Questions of Travel* and *Dangerous Liaisons* address the vicissitudes of temporality for particular feminist and/or antiracist/anticolonial projects. But perhaps the most productive way to read these texts is to understand them as testaments to a postcolonial history of the present, one whose moment is well traveled and, perhaps, already passing. |