

Review of *The Visceral Logics of Decolonization* by Neetu Khanna

Reviewed by

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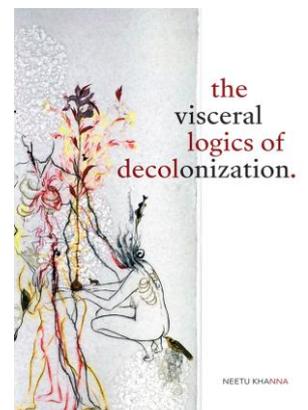
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What if decolonized populations' basic emotions, such as rage, jealousy, or ecstasy, are effusive of bourgeois tastes? Colonialism—Neetu argues—has impacted these populations' capacity for sensing and experiencing life as generic human beings. And what if these far-from healthy affective modalities, set in motion during the anticolonial nationalist struggle, shape the postcolonial stalemate, not only in India but across over the decolonized world, post 1945? Questions such as these inspire Neetu's new book, which if pursued, will encourage scholars to tease the attributive 'postcolonial' as it has metastasized from the colonial situation, framing a propagation, never a rupture as the prefix suggests.

According to Neetu, revolutionary rage and ardor cannot remain flat and progressive terms. The adoption of Marxist realism as a means of literary expression by a group of early twentieth century Indian writers and film makers, the Progressive Writers Association, did not precipitate a vertical reading of history. Because of PWA's coming of age, previous predominant modes of reactions and feelings were systematically viewed as anachronistic. Thus, the pre-colonial affective reservoir was consciously eradicated. But that eradication was a façade, and here lies Neetu's niche: the pre-colonial affective pool survives in the form of the negative; she qualifies as the visceral. It is spotted in the form of a cognitive dissonance, historical contradiction or in the nostalgia for nostalgia when reading the fiction that subscribes to the mood of ant colonial nationalism. Reading the visceral cannot be a luxury, as it indicates alternative pathways whereby postcoloniality can be

efficiently addressed. For, what would be the situation now in a colony such as India or Algeria, if the anti-colonial nationalists did not draw on modes of expression that were already modeled, borrowed or parachuted from the taxonomy of the European class struggle?

Somatically considered, the poetics of rage and disgust have been less of a saga showcasing spontaneous eruptions nor that of soliciting a universal conception of history underlining incendiary imagination. Indeed, the fiction championed by anticolonial nationalists gravitates toward an egalitarian order and more for resuscitating an unfounded past. Indeed, the poetics of rage – the way it is put by Neetu – have been a systematic way of pushing Indians out of their destiny for freedom under the pretext of regaining control of oneself. In romanticizing a classless order and seeking to empower the traditionally powerless, the PWA have been responsible for the postcolonial stalemate.

To enforce its case, the book precipitates insights from three major disciplines, not often considered complimentary: psychoanalysis, phenomenology and postcoloniality. *Visceral Logics of Decolonization* investigates the core principle behind militant nationalism by claiming that, below its surface, its immanent logics had been the nursing of bourgeois values and worldview. The differential expanse between stated aims and ensuing results spells the visceral. Neetu claims that uncritical subscription to realist modes of expression remains responsible for preventing post-colonials from encountering the world for what it is. The visceral leaves post-colonials with unfinished emotional business with empire in the sense of deleterious liberation ideology, imagining liberation as nostalgia, a re-establishment of the precolonial order.

Each of the four chapters traces one aspect of the visceral as experienced somatically; that is, authentically: agitation, irritation, compulsion, evisceration in a major anticolonial Indian novel. Nowhere does the visceral practice boobytrap the liberating rhetoric of the realist-bourgeois novel more than in the fourth one, when the so-called 'revolutionary' fetishizes the age-long courtesan figure, reducing her to a prostitute. Bourgeois morality has then effectively emptied decolonization of whatever liberating content it possessed. The confusion of courtesan art with pornography to the point where the principal character is uncertain of his real feelings in respect to his beloved, as when "...Kabir feels that he should feel jealous because it is the appropriate emotion toward the woman he supposedly loves" (128) testifies to the stifling costs of the visceral. Before the total decomposition of the order preceding the Neolithic Revolution, as elucidated by Friedrich Engels' *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*, the figure of the beloved does not come imbued with the obligation of jealousy or appropriation.

The conclusion reads Fanon's elaboration of the disjuncture between the body and the anticolonial rhetoric of the colonized. Drawing on Fanon's authority enables Neetu to generalize her abstractions drawn from the fiction of the Indian sub-continent, seeking an account of decolonization elsewhere. The bodily dysfunctions explain the paralyzing tensions that the colonized aims less to "become" and more to "substitute" the settler. The distinction is capital: for "the act of becoming" could have ushered in a historical subject and paved the way for an

alternative instantiation of decolonization. Hence, dysfunctions evolve into “...eruptions of civil wars as the diffusion of this revolutionary energy housed in the muscles of the subject, which keeps the subject complicit with the colonial order.” (144). In vain, the settler’s substitution jumps over historical necessity, preferring comforting myths.

Visceral Logics of Decolonization offers a nuanced reading. Perhaps, the extent that realism stifles the revolutionary ardor of eroticism or casts it as simply pornographic is debatable and should not be taken at face value. Indeed, Neetu indirectly asks us to rewrite the nationalist canons for the sake of distinguishing revolutionary from pseudo-revolutionary arts. Neetu assumes that with nationalists’ dwelling on modernism instead of realism, colonial Indians or Algerians could have stood a chance of regaining their freedom beyond the political. The visceral feelings which Fanon refers to, and the reason why the author draws on his authority, start compounding significance from independence onwards, not before. The logics from *Visceral Logics* may look like seeking to exonerate postcolonial literary and cultural elites from responsibility for over half a century of malfunctioning. Given the postmodernist bent to have adolescents in the guise of adults, the majority of readers will not situate the book’s historical examination of what has been running wrong, with the feelings of the decolonized.

Possible slippages aside, the logics of *Visceral Logics* challenge scholars of African and African-American literatures to carry out similar investigations, substantiating the Travel Theory. After struggling through its early chapters, students of postcolonialism will find the book exceptionally rewarding, for Neetu’s contribution will reshape literary scholarship for generations to come, in the way *The Country and the City* (1973) by Raymond Williams or *Orientalism* (1978) by Edward Said have done.

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