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Notes on the “Post-Colonial”

ELLA SHOHAT

The academic opposition to the Gulf War mobilized a number of familiar terms — “imperialism,” “neo-colonialism,” “neo-imperialism” — in a verbal counter-strike against the New World Order. But conspicuously absent from the discussion was the term “post-colonial,” even from speeches made by its otherwise prominent advocates. Given the extraordinary circulation of the term in recent academic conferences, publications and curricular reformulations, this sudden invisibility was somewhat puzzling. Was this absence sheer coincidence? Or is there something about the term “post-colonial” that does not lend itself to a geopolitical critique, or to a critique of the dominant media’s Gulf War macro-narratives? When lines drawn in the sand still haunt Third World geographies, it is urgent to ask how we can chart the meaning of the “post-colonial.” It is from my particular position as an academic Arab-Jew whose cultural topographies are (dis)located in Iraq, Israel/Palestine, and the U.S.A. that I would like to explore some of the theoretical and political ambiguities of the “post-colonial.”

Despite its dizzying multiplicity of positionalities, post-colonial theory has curiously not addressed the politics of location of the very term “post-colonial.” In what follows, I propose to begin an interrogation of the term “post-colonial,” raising questions about its ahistorical and universalizing deployments, and its potentially depoliticizing implications. The rising institutional endorsement of the term “post-colonial” and of post-colonial studies as an emergent discipline (evident in MLA job announcements calling for specialization in “post-colonial literature”) is fraught with ambiguities. My recent experience as a member of the multicultural international studies committee at one of the CUNY branches illustrates some of these ambiguities. In response to our proposal, the generally conservative members of the college curriculum committee strongly resisted any language invoking issues such as “imperialism and third worldist critique,” “neo-colonialism and resisting cultural practices,” and “the geopolitics of cultural exchange.” They were visibly relieved, however, at the sight of the word “post-colonial.” Only the diplomatic gesture of relinquishing the terrorizing terms “imperialism” and “neo-colonialism” in favor of the pastoral “post-colonial” guaranteed approval.

My intention here is not merely to anatomize the term "post-colonial" semantically, but to situate it geographically, historically and institutionally, while raising doubts about its political agency. The question at stake is this. Which perspectives are being advanced in the "post-colonial?" For what purposes? And with what slippages? In this brief discussion, my point is neither to examine the variety of provocative writings produced under the rubric post-colonial theory, nor simply to essentialize the term "post-colonial," but rather to unfold its slippery political significations, which occasionally escape the clearly oppositional intentions of its theoretical practitioners. Here I will argue for a more limited, historically and theoretically specific, usage of the term "post-colonial," one which situates it in a relational context vis-a-vis other (equally problematic) categories.

The "post-colonial" did not emerge to fill an empty space in the language of political-cultural analysis. On the contrary, its wide adaptation during the late eighties was coincident with and dependent on the eclipse of an older paradigm, that of the "Third World." The terminological shift indicates the professional prestige and theoretical aura the issues have acquired, in contrast to the more activist aura once enjoyed by "Third World" within progressive academic circles. Coined in the fifties in France by analogy to the third estate (the commoners, all those who were neither the nobility nor the clergy), the term "Third World" gained international currency in both academic and political contexts, particularly in reference to anti-colonial nationalist movements of the fifties through the seventies as well as to the political-economic analysis of dependency theory and world system theory (André Gunder Frank, Immanuel Wallerstein, Samir Amin).

The last decade has witnessed a terminological crisis around the concept of the "Third World." The three worlds theory is indeed, as many critics have suggested, highly problematic.¹ For one thing, the historical processes of the last three decades offered a number of very complex and politically ambiguous developments. The period of so-called "Third World euphoria" — a brief moment in which it seemed that First World leftists and Third World guerrillas would walk arm in arm toward global revolution — has given way to the collapse of the Soviet Communist model, the crisis of existing socialisms, the frustration of the hoped-for tricontinental revolution (with Ho Chi Minh, Frantz Fanon, and Che Guevara as talismanic figures), the realization that the wretched of the earth are not unanimously revolutionary (nor necessarily allies to one another), and the recognition that international geo-politics and the global economic system have obliged even socialist regimes to make some kind of peace with transnational capitalism. And despite the broad patterns of geo-political hegemony, power relations in the Third World are also dispersed and contradictory. The First World/Third World struggle, fur-

thermore, takes place not only between nations (India/Pakistan, Iraq/Kuwait), but also within nations, with the constantly changing relations between dominant and subaltern groups, settler and indigenous populations, as well as in a situation marked by waves of post-independence immigrations to First World countries (Britain, France, Germany, and the U.S.) and to more prosperous Third World countries (the Gulf states.) The notion of the three worlds, in short, flattens heterogeneities, masks contradictions, and elides differences.

This crisis in "Third World" thinking helps explain the current enthusiasm for the term, "post-colonial," a new designation for critical discourses which thematize issues emerging from colonial relations and their aftermath, covering a long historical span (including the present.) Dropping the suffix "ism" from "post-colonialism," the adjective "post-colonial" is frequently attached to the nouns, "theory," "space," "condition," "intellectual," while it often substitutes for the adjective "Third World" in relation to the noun "intellectual." The qualifier "Third World," by contrast, more frequently accompanies the nouns, "nations," "countries" and "peoples." More recently the "post-colonial" has been transformed into a noun, used both in the singular and the plural ("postcolonials"), designating the subjects of the "postcolonial condition."² The final consecration of the term came with the erasure of the hyphen. Often buttressed by the theoretically connoted substantive "post-coloniality," the "post-colonial" is largely visible in Anglo-American academic (cultural) studies in publications of discursive-cultural analyses inflected by post-structuralism.³

Echoing "post-modernity," "postcoloniality" marks a contemporary state, situation, condition or epoch.⁴ The prefix "post," then, aligns "post-colonialism" with a series of other "posts" — "post-structuralism," "post-modernism," "post-marxism," "post-feminism," "post-deconstructionism" — all sharing the notion of a movement beyond. Yet while these "posts" refer largely to the supercession of outmoded philosophical, aesthetic and political theories, the "post-colonial" implies both going beyond anti-colonial nationalist theory as well as a movement beyond a specific point in history, that of colonialism and Third World nationalist struggles. In that sense the prefix "post" aligns the "post-colonial" with another genre of "posts" — "post-war," "post-cold war," "post-independence," "post-revolution" — all of which underline a passage into a new period and a closure of a certain historical event or age, officially stamped with dates. Although periodizations and the relationship between theories of an era and the practices which constitute that era always form contested terrains, it seems to me that the two genres of the "post" are nonetheless distinct in their referential emphasis, the first on disciplinary advances characteristic of intellectual history, and the latter on the strict chronologies of history *tout court*. This unarticulated tension between the philosophical

and the historical teleologies in the "post-colonial," I would argue, partially underlies some of the conceptual ambiguities of the term.

Since the "post" in the "post-colonial" suggests "after" the demise of colonialism, it is imbued, quite apart from its users' intentions, with an ambiguous spatio-temporality. Spreading from India into Anglo-American academic contexts, the "post-colonial" tends to be associated with Third World countries which gained independence after World War II. However, it also refers to the Third World diasporic circumstances of the last four decades — from forced exile to "voluntary" immigration — within First World metropolises. In some post-colonial texts, such as *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, the authors expand the term "post-colonial" to include all English literary productions by societies affected by colonialism:

...the literatures of African countries, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Caribbean countries, India, Malasia, Malta, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, South Pacific Island countries, and Sri Lanka are all post-colonial literatures. The literature of the USA should also be placed in this category. Perhaps because of its current position of power, and the neo-colonizing role it has played, its postcolonial nature has not been generally recognized. But its relationship with the metropolitan centre as it evolved over the last two centuries has been paradigmatic for post-colonial literature everywhere. What each of these literatures has in common beyond their special and distinctive regional characteristics is that they emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre. It is this which makes them distinctively post-colonial.⁵

This problematic formulation collapses very different national-racial formations — the United States, Australia, and Canada, on the one hand, and Nigeria, Jamaica, and India, on the other — as equally "post-colonial." Positioning Australia and India, for example, in relation to an imperial center, simply because they were both colonies, equates the relations of the colonized white-settlers to the Europeans at the "center" with that of the colonized indigenous populations to the Europeans. It also assumes that white settler countries and emerging Third World nations broke away from the "center" in the same way. Similarly, white Australians and Aboriginal Australians are placed in the same "periphery," as though they were co-habitants vis-a-vis the "center." The critical differences between the Europe's genocidal oppression of Aboriginals in Australia, indigenous peoples of the Americas and Afro-diasporic communities, and Europe's domination of European elites in the colonies are leveled with an easy stroke of the "post." The term "post-colonial," in this sense, masks the white settlers' colonialist-racist policies toward indigenous peoples not only before independence but also after the offi-

cial break from the imperial center, while also de-emphasizing neocolonial global positionings of First World settler-states.

I am not suggesting that this expanded use of the “post-colonial” is typical or paradigmatic.⁶ The phrase “post-colonial society” might equally evoke Third World nation-states after independence. However, the disorienting space of the “post-colonial” generates odd couplings of the “post” and particular geographies, blurring the assignment of perspectives. Does the “post” indicate the perspective and location of the ex-colonized (Algerian), the ex-colonizer (French), the ex-colonial-settler (*Pied Noir*), or the displaced hybrid in First World metropolitans (Algerian in France)? Since the experience of colonialism and imperialism is shared, albeit asymmetrically, by (ex)colonizer and (ex)colonized, it becomes an easy move to apply the “post” also to First World European countries. Since most of the world is now living after the period of colonialism, the “post-colonial” can easily become a universalizing category which neutralizes significant geopolitical differences between France and Algeria, Britain and Iraq, or the U.S. and Brazil since they are all living in a “post-colonial epoch.” This inadvertent effacement of perspectives, I should add, results in a curious ambiguity in scholarly work. While colonial discourse refers to the discourse produced by colonizers in both the colony and the motherland and, at times, to its contemporary discursive manifestations in literature and mass-mediated culture, “post-colonial discourse” does not refer to colonialist discourse after the end of colonialism. Rather, it evokes the contemporary theoretical writings, placed in both the First and Third Worlds generally on the left, and which attempt to transcend the (presumed) binarisms of Third Worldist militancy.

Apart from its dubious spatiality, the “post-colonial” renders a problematic temporality. First, the lack of historical specificity in the “post” leads to a collapsing of diverse chronologies. Colonial-settler states, such as those found in the Americas, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, gained their independence, for the most part, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Most countries in Africa and Asia, in contrast, gained independence in the twentieth century, some in the nineteen thirties (Iraq), others in the nineteen forties (India, Lebanon), and still others in the nineteen sixties (Algeria, Senegal) and the nineteen seventies (Angola, Mozambique), while others have yet to achieve it. When exactly, then, does the “post-colonial” begin? Which region is privileged in such a beginning? What are the relationships between these diverse beginnings? The vague starting point of the “post-colonial” makes certain differentiations difficult. It equates early independence won by settler-colonial states, in which Europeans formed their new nation-states in non-European territories at the expense of indigenous populations, with that of nation-states whose indigenous populations struggled for indepen-

dence against Europe, but won it, for the most part, with the twentieth century collapse of European Empires.

If one formulates the "post" in the "post-colonial" in relation to Third Worldist nationalist struggles of the fifties and sixties, then what time frame would apply for contemporary anti-colonial/anti-racist struggles carried under the banner of national and racial oppression, for Palestinian writers for example, like Sahar Khalifeh and Mahmoud Darwish, who write contemporaneously with "post-colonial" writers? Should one suggest that they are pre-"postcolonial?" The unified temporality of "postcoloniality" risks reproducing the colonial discourse of an allochronic other, living in another time, still lagging behind us, the genuine postcolonials. The globalizing gesture of the "postcolonial condition," or "post-coloniality," downplays multiplicities of location and temporality, as well as the possible discursive and political linkages between "post-colonial" theories and contemporary anti-colonial, or anti-neo-colonial struggles and discourses. In other words, contemporary anti-colonial and anti-neocolonial resistant discourses from central America and the Middle East to Southern Africa and the Phillipines cannot be theoretically dismissed as epigons, as a mere repetition of the all too familiar discourses of the fifties and sixties. Despite their partly shared discourses with Third World nationalism, these contemporary struggles also must be historicized, analyzed in a present-day context, when the "non-aligned" discourse of revolutions is no longer in the air. Such an approach would transcend the implicit suggestion of a temporal "gap" between "post-colonial" and the pre-"postcolonial" discourses, as exemplified in the melange of resistant discourses and struggles in the Intifada.⁷ What has to be negotiated, then, is the relationship of difference and sameness, rupture and continuity.

Since, on one level, the "post" signifies "after," it potentially inhibits forceful articulations of what one might call "neo-coloniality." Formal independence for colonized countries has rarely meant the end of First World hegemony. Egypt's formal independence in 1923 did not prevent European, especially British, domination which provoked the 1952 revolution. Anwar Sadat's opening to the Americans and the Camp David accords in the seventies were perceived by Arab intellectuals as a reversion to pre-Nasser imperialism, as was Egyptian collaboration with the U.S. during the Gulf war.⁸ The purpose of the Carter Doctrine was to partially protect perennial U.S. oil interests (*our* oil) in the Gulf, which, with the help of petro-Islamicist regimes, have sought the control of any force that might pose a threat.⁹ In Latin America, similarly, formal "creole" independence did not prevent Monroe Doctrine-style military interventions, or Anglo-American free-trade hegemony. This process sets the history of Central and South America and the Caribbean apart from the rest of the colonial settler-states; for despite shared historical origins with

North America, including the genocide of the indigenous population, the enslavement of Africans, and a multi-racial/ethnic composition these regions have been subjected to political and economic structural domination, on some levels more severe, paradoxically, than that of recently independent Third World countries such as Libya and even India. Not accidentally, Mexican intellectuals and independent labor unions have excoriated the Gringostroika¹⁰ of the recent Trade Liberalization Treaty. Formal independence did not obviate the need for Cuban or Nicaraguan-style revolutions, or for the Independista movement in Puerto Rico. The term "revolution," once popular in the Third World context, specifically assumed a post-colonial moment, initiated by official independence, but whose content had been a suffocating neo-colonial hegemony.

The term "post-colonial" carries with it the implication that colonialism is now a matter of the past, undermining colonialism's economic, political, and cultural deformative-traces in the present. The "post-colonial" inadvertently glosses over the fact that global hegemony, even in the post-cold war era, persists in forms other than overt colonial rule. As a signifier of a new historical epoch, the term "post-colonial," when compared with neo-colonialism, comes equipped with little evocation of contemporary power relations; it lacks a political content which can account for the eighties and nineties-style U.S. militaristic involvements in Granada, Panama, and Kuwait-Iraq, and for the symbiotic links between U.S. political and economic interests and those of local elites. In certain contexts, furthermore, racial and national oppressions reflect clear colonial patterns, for example the oppression of blacks by Anglo-Dutch Europeans in South Africa and in the Americas, the oppression of Palestinians and Middle Eastern Jews by Euro-Israel. The "post-colonial" leaves no space, finally, for the struggles of aboriginals in Australia and indigenous peoples throughout the Americas, in other words, of Fourth World peoples dominated by both First World multi-national corporations and by Third World nation-states.

The hegemonic structures and conceptual frameworks generated over the last five hundred years cannot be vanquished by waving the magical wand of the "post-colonial." The 1992 unification of Europe, for example, strengthens cooperation among ex-colonizing countries such as Britain, France, Germany and Italy against illegal immigration, practicing stricter border patrol against infiltration by diverse Third World peoples: Algerians, Tunisians, Egyptians, Pakistanis, Sri Lankans, Indians, Turks, Senegalese, Malians, and Nigerians. The colonial master narrative, meanwhile, is being triumphantly re-staged. Millions of dollars are poured into international events planned for the quincentenary of Columbus's so-called voyages of discovery, climaxing in the Grand Regatta, a fleet of tall ships from 40 countries leaving from Spain and arriving in New York Harbor for U.S. Independence Day, the Fourth of July. At the same time,

an anti-colonial narrative is being performed via the view-from-the-shore projects, the Native American commemorations of annihilated communities throughout the U.S. and the American continent, and plans for setting up blockades at the arrival of the replicas of Columbus's caravels, sailing into U.S. ports. What, then, is the meaning of "postcoloniality" when certain structural conflicts persist? Despite different historical contexts, the conflict between the Native American claim to their land as a sacred and communal trust and the Euro-American view of land as alienable property remains structurally the same. How then does one negotiate sameness and difference within the framework of a "post-colonial" whose "post" emphasizes rupture and deemphasizes sameness?

Contemporary cultures are marked by the tension between the official end of direct colonial rule and its presence and regeneration through hegemonizing neo-colonialism within the First World and toward the Third World, often channelled through the nationalist patriarchal elites. The "colonial" in the "post-colonial" tends to be relegated to the past and marked with a closure — an implied temporal border that undermines a potential oppositional thrust. For whatever the philosophical connotations of the "post" as an ambiguous locus of continuities and discontinuities,¹¹ its denotation of "after" — the teleological lure of the "post" — evokes a celebratory clearing of a conceptual space that on one level conflicts with the notion of "neo."

The "neo-colonial," like the "post-colonial" also suggests continuities and discontinuities, but its emphasis is on the new modes and forms of the old colonialist practices, not on a "beyond." Although one can easily imagine the "post-colonial" travelling into Third World countries (more likely via the Anglo-American academy than via India), the "post-colonial" has little currency in African, Middle Eastern and Latin American intellectual circles, except occasionally in the restricted historical sense of the period immediately following the end of colonial rule. Perhaps it is the less intense experience of neo-colonialism, accompanied by the strong sense of relatively unthreatened multitudes of cultures, languages and ethnicities in India, that allowed for the recurrent usage of the prefix "post" over that of the "neo." Now that debt-ridden India, where "post-colonial discourse" has flourished, has had to place itself under the tutelage of the International Monetary Fund, and now that its non-aligned foreign policy is giving way to political and economic cooperation with the U.S., one wonders whether the term "neo-colonial" will become more pervasive than "post-colonial."¹²

The "post-colonial" also forms a critical locus for moving beyond anti-colonial nationalist modernizing narratives that inscribe Europe as an object of critique, toward a discursive analysis and historiography addressing decentered multiplicities of power relations (for example, between colonized women and men, or between colonized peasantry and

the bourgeoisie). The significance of such intellectual projects stands in ironic contrast to the term “post-colonial” itself, which linguistically reproduces, once again, the centrality of the colonial narrative. The “post-colonial” implies a narrative of progression in which colonialism remains the central point of reference, in a march of time neatly arranged from the pre to the “post,” but which leaves ambiguous its relation to new forms of colonialism, i.e. neo-colonialism.

Considering the term “post-colonial” in relation to other terms such as “neo-colonial” and “post-independence” allows for mutual illumination of the concepts. Although “neo-colonial,” like “post-colonial,” implies a passage, it has the advantage of emphasizing a repetition with difference, a regeneration of colonialism through other means. The term “neo-colonialism” usefully designates broad relations of geo-economic hegemony. When examined in relation to “neo-colonialism,” the term “post-colonial” undermines a critique of contemporary colonialist structures of domination, more available through the repetition and revival of the “neo.” The term “post-independence,” meanwhile, invokes an achieved history of resistance, shifting the analytical focus to the emergent nation-state. In this sense, the term “post-independence,” precisely because it implies a nation-state telos, provides expanded analytical space for confronting such explosive issues as religion, ethnicity, patriarchy, gender and sexual orientation, none of which are reducible to epiphenomena of colonialism and neo-colonialism. Whereas “post-colonial” suggests a distance from colonialism, “post-independence” celebrates the nation-state; but by attributing power to the nation-state it also makes Third World regimes accountable.

The operation of simultaneously privileging and distancing the colonial narrative, moving beyond it, structures the “in-between” framework of the “post-colonial.” This in-betweenness becomes evident through a kind of commutation test. While one can posit the duality between colonizer/colonized and even neo-colonizer/neo-colonized, it does not make much sense to speak of post-colonizers and post-colonized. “Colonialism” and “neo-colonialism” imply both oppression and the possibility of resistance. Transcending such dichotomies, the term “post-colonial” posits no clear domination, and calls for no clear opposition. It is this structured ambivalence of the “post-colonial,” of positing a simultaneously close and distant temporal relation to the “colonial,” that is appealing in a post-structuralist academic context. It is also this fleeting quality, however, that makes the “post-colonial” an uneasy term for a geopolitical critique of the centralized distribution of power in the world.

Post-colonial theory has dealt most significantly with cultural contradictions, ambiguities, and ambivalences.¹³ Through a major shift in emphasis, it accounts for the experiences of displacement of Third World peoples in the metropolitan centers, and the cultural syncretisms gener-

ated by the First/Third worlds intersections, issues less adequately addressed by Third World nationalist and world systems discourses, more rooted in the categories of political-economy. The "beyond" of post-colonial theory, in this sense, seems most meaningful when placed in relation to Third World nationalist discourse. The term "post-colonial" would be more precise, therefore, if articulated as "post-First/Third Worlds theory," or "post-anti-colonial critique," as a movement beyond a relatively binaristic, fixed and stable mapping of power relations between "colonizer/colonized" and "center/periphery." Such rearticulations suggest a more nuanced discourse, which allows for movement, mobility and fluidity. Here, the prefix "post" would make sense less as "after" than as following, going beyond and commenting upon a certain intellectual movement — third worldist anti-colonial critique — rather than beyond a certain point in history — colonialism; for here "neo-colonialism" would be a less passive form of addressing the situation of neo-colonized countries, and a politically more active mode of engagement.

Post-colonial theory has formed not only a vibrant space for critical, even resistant scholarship, but also a contested space, particularly since some practitioners of various Ethnic Studies feel somewhat displaced by the rise of post-colonial studies in North American English departments. If the rising institutional endorsement of the term "post-colonial" is on the one hand a success story for the PCs (politically correct), is it not also a partial containment of the POCs (people of color)? Before PO-CO becomes the new academic buzz-word, it is urgent to address such schisms, specifically in the North American context,¹⁴ where one has the impression that the "post-colonial" is privileged precisely because it seems safely distant from "the belly of the beast," the United States. The recognition of these cracks and fissures is crucial if ethnic studies and post-colonial studies scholars are to forge more effective institutional alliances.

Having raised these questions about the term "post-colonial," it remains to address some related concepts, and to explore their spatio-temporal implications. The foregrounding of "hybridity" and "syncretism" in post-colonial studies calls attention to the mutual imbrication of "central" and "peripheral" cultures. "Hybridity" and "syncretism" allow negotiation of the multiplicity of identities and subject positionings which result from displacements, immigrations and exiles without policing the borders of identity along essentialist and ordinary lines. It is largely diasporic Third World intellectuals in the First World, hybrids themselves, not coincidentally, who elaborate a framework which situates the Third World intellectual within a multiplicity of cultural positionalities and perspectives. Nor is it a coincidence, by the same token, that in Latin America "syncretism" and "hybridity" had already been invoked decades ago by diverse Latin American modernisms, which spoke of neologistic culture,

of *créolité*, of *mestizaje*, and of anthropophagy.¹⁵ The culturally syncretic protagonists of the Brazilian modernists of the nineteen twenties, the “heroes without character” coined by Mario de Andrade, might be seen as “postcolonial hybrids” *avant la lettre*. The cannibalist theories of the Brazilian modernists, and their elaborations in the Tropicalist movement of the late nineteen sixties and early nineteen seventies, simply assumed that New Worlders were culturally mixed, a contentious amalgam of indigenous, African, European, Asian, and Arab identities.

At the same time, the problematic spatio-temporality implicit in the term “post-colonial” has repercussions for the conceptualization of the past in post(anti)colonial theory. The rupture implicit in the “post” has been reflected in the relationship between past and present in post-colonial discourse, with particular reference to notions of hybridity. At times, the anti-essentialist emphasis on hybrid identities comes dangerously close to dismissing all searches for communitarian origins as an archaeological excavation of an idealized, irretrievable past. Yet, on another level, while avoiding any nostalgia for a prelapsarian community, or for any unitary and transparent identity predating the fall, we must also ask whether it is possible to forge a collective resistance without inscribing a communal past. Rap music narratives and video representations which construct resistant invocations of Africa and slavery are a case in point. For communities which have undergone brutal ruptures, now in the process of forging a collective identity, no matter how hybrid that identity has been before, during, and after colonialism, the retrieval and reinscription of a fragmented past becomes a crucial contemporary site for forging a resistant collective identity. A notion of the past might thus be negotiated differently; not as a static fetishized phase to be literally reproduced, but as fragmented sets of narrated memories and experiences on the basis of which to mobilize contemporary communities. A celebration of syncretism and hybridity per se, if not articulated in conjunction with questions of hegemony and neo-colonial power relations, runs the risk of appearing to sanctify the *fait accompli* of colonial violence.

The current metropolitan discursive privileging of palimpsestic syncretisms must also be negotiated vis-a-vis Fourth World peoples. It must account, for example, for the paradoxical situation of the indigenous Kayapo in the Amazon forest who, on the one hand, use video-cameras and thus demonstrate their cultural hybridity and their capacity for mimicry, but who, on the other, use mimicry precisely in order to stage the urgency of *preserving* the essential practices and contours of their culture, including their relation to the rainforest and the communal possession of land. The defacto acceptance of hybridity as a product of colonial conquest and post-independence dislocations as well as the recognition of the impossibility of going back to an authentic past do not mean that the politico-cultural movements of various racial-ethnic communities should

stop researching and recycling their pre-colonial languages and cultures.¹⁶ Post-colonial theory's celebration of hybridity risks an anti-essentialist condescension toward those communities obliged by circumstances to assert, for their very survival, a lost and even irretrievable past. In such cases, the assertion of culture prior to conquest forms part of the fight against continuing forms of annihilation. If the logic of the post-structuralist/post-colonial argument were taken literally, then the Zuni in Mexico/U.S. would be censured for their search for the traces of an original culture, and the Jindyworobak in Australia criticized for their turn to Aboriginal language and culture as part of their own regeneration. The question, in other words, is not whether there is such a thing as an originary homogeneous past, and if there is whether it would be possible to return to it, or even whether the past is unjustifiably idealized. Rather, the question is: who is mobilizing what in the articulation of the past, deploying what identities, identifications and representations, and in the name of what political vision and goals?

Negotiating locations, identities, and positionalities in relation to the violence of neo-colonialism is crucial if hybridity is not to become a figure for the consecration of hegemony. As a descriptive catch-all term, "hybridity" *per se* fails to discriminate between the diverse modalities of hybridity, for example, forced assimilation, internalized self-rejection, political cooptation, social conformism, cultural mimicry, and creative transcendence. The reversal of biologically and religiously racist tropes — the hybrid, the syncretic — on the one hand, and the reversal of anti-colonialist purist notions of identity, on the other, should not obscure the problematic agency of "post-colonial hybridity." In contexts such as Latin America, nationhood was officially articulated in hybrid terms, through an integrationist ideology which glossed over institutional and discursive racism. At the same time, hybridity has also been used as part of resistant critique, for example by the modernist and tropicalist movements in Latin America. As in the term "post-colonial," the question of location and perspective has to be addressed, i.e. the differences between hybridities, or more specifically, hybridities of Europeans and their off-shoots around the world, and that of (ex)colonized peoples. And furthermore, the differences among and between Third World diasporas, for example, between African American hybrids speaking English in the First World and those of Afro-Cubans and Afro-Brazilians speaking Spanish and Portuguese in the Third World.

"Hybridity," like the "post-colonial," is susceptible to a blurring of perspectives. "Hybridity" must be examined in a non-universalizing, differential manner, contextualized within present neo-colonial hegemonies. The cultural inquiry generated by the hybridity/syncretism discourse needs re-linking to geopolitical macro-level analysis. It requires articulation with the ubiquity of Anglo-American informational media (CNN,

BBC, AP), as well as with events of the magnitude of the Gulf War, with its massive and traumatic transfers of populations. The collapse of Second World socialism, it should be pointed out, has not altered neo-colonial policies, and on some levels, has generated increased anxiety among such Third World communities as the Palestinians and South African Blacks concerning their struggle for independence without a Second World counter-balance.

The circulation of “post-colonial” as a theoretical frame tends to suggest a supercession of neo-colonialism and the Third World and Fourth World as unfashionable, even irrelevant categories. Yet, with all its problems, the term “Third World” does still retain heuristic value as a convenient label for the imperialized formations, including those within the First World. The term “Third World” is most meaningful in broad political-economic terms, and becomes blurred when one addresses the differently modulated politics in the realm of culture, the overlapping contradictory spaces of inter-mingling identities. The concept of “Third World” is schematically productive if it is placed under erasure, as it were, seen as provisional and ultimately inadequate.

At this point in time, replacing the term “Third World” with the “post-colonial” is a liability. Despite differences and contradictions among and within Third World countries, the term “Third World” contains a common project of (linked) resistances to neo/colonialisms. Within the North American context, more specifically, it has become a term of empowerment for inter-communal coalitions of various peoples of color.¹⁷ Perhaps, it is this sense of a common project around which to mobilize that is missing from post(anti)colonial discussions. If the terms “post-colonial” and “post-independence” stress, in different ways, a rupture in relation to colonialism, and the “neo-colonial” emphasizes continuities, “Third World” usefully evokes structural commonalities of struggles. The invocation of the “Third World” implies a belief that the shared history of neo/colonialism and internal racism form sufficient common ground for alliances among such diverse peoples. If one does not believe or envision such commonalities, then indeed the term “Third World” should be discarded. It is this difference of alliance and mobilization between the concepts “Third World” and the “post-colonial” that suggests a relational usage of the terms. My assertion of the political relevance of such categories as “neo-colonialism,” and even that of the more problematic Third and Fourth World peoples, is not meant to suggest a submission to intellectual inertia, but to point to a need to deploy all the concepts in differential and contingent manners.

In sum, the concept of the “post-colonial” must be interrogated and contextualized historically, geopolitically, and culturally. My argument is not necessarily that one conceptual frame is “wrong” and the other is “right,” but that each frame illuminates only partial aspects of systemic

modes of domination, of overlapping collective identities, and of contemporary global relations. Each addresses specific and even contradictory dynamics between and within different world zones. There is a need for more flexible relations among the various conceptual frameworks — a mobile set of grids, a diverse set of disciplinary as well as cultural-geopolitical lenses — adequate to these complexities. Flexible yet critical usage which can address the politics of location is important not only for pointing out historical and geographical contradictions and differences but also for reaffirming historical and geographical links, structural analogies, and openings for agency and resistance.

Notes

1. See, for example, Aijaz Ahmad, "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory,'" *Social Text* 17 (Fall 1987); Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," *Public Culture* 2.2 (1990); Robert Stam, "Eurocentrism, Afrocentrism, Polycentrism: Theories of Third Cinema," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* vol. 13, nos. 1-3 (Spring, 1991); Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Cartographies of Struggle: Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism" in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* ed. by Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, Lourdes Torres (Indiana University Press, 1991).

2. Does that condition echo the language of existentialism, or is it the echo of post-modernism?

3. The relationships between "post-colonial," "post-coloniality" and "post-colonialism" have yet to be addressed more rigorously.

4. For a reading of the relationships between post-modernism and post-colonialism, see Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?," *Critical Inquiry* 17 (Winter 1991).

5. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 2.

6. For a radical formulation of resistant post-colonial see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Poststructuralism, Marginality, Postcoloniality and Value," in *Literary Theory Today*, Peter Collier and Helga Geyer-Ryan eds. (London: Polity Press, 1990).

7. Read for example, Zachary Lockman and Joel Benin eds., *Intifada: The Palestinian Uprising Against Israeli Occupation* (Boston: South End Press, 1989), specifically Edward W. Said, "Intifada and Independence," pp. 5-22; Edward W. Said, *After the Last Sky* (Boston: Pantheon Books, 1985).

8. This perspective explains the harsh repression of movements in opposition to the U.S.-Egypt alliance during the war. In fact, the Camp David treaty is intimately linked to the Open Door economic policy with its dismantling of the Egyptian public sector. Referred to as the shadow government of Egypt, USAID is partly responsible for the positions Egyptian and most Arab governments took during the Gulf War.

9. The rigid imposition of Islamic law in Saudi Arabia is linked to efforts to mask the regime's anti-regional collaboration with imperial interests.

10. "Gringostroika" is the coinage of Mexican multi-media artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña.

11. For discussions of the "post," see for example, Robert Young, "Poststructuralism: the End of Theory," *Oxford Literary Review* vol. 5, nos. 1-2 (1982); R. Radhakrishnan, "The Postmodern Event and the End of Logocentrism," *Boundary 2*, Vol. 12 #1 (Fall 1983); Geoffrey Bennington, "Postal Politics and the Institution of the Nation," in Homi K. Bhabha ed. *Nation and Narration* (London & New York: Routledge, 1990)

12. As these notes on the "post-colonial" are on their way to print, a relevant article appeared in *The Nation*, Praful Bidwai, "India's Passage to Washington," January, 20, 1992.

13. See for example, Homi K. Bhabha, "The Commitment to Theory," in *Questions of Third Cinema*, ed. by Jim Pines and Paul Willems (London: British Film Institute, 1989); Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

14. The "post-colonial" replacement of the "Third World" is ambiguous, especially when post-structuralist/post-colonial theories are confidently deployed with little understanding

of the historical-material legacy of colonialism, neo-colonialism, racism, and anti-colonial resistance. These slippages have contributed to facile dismissals of Frantz Fanon's formulations as vulgar.

15. On the Brazilian modernists and the concept of anthropophagy, see Robert Stam, *Subversive Pleasures: Bakhtin, Cultural Criticism and Film* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989.)

16. For another critical consideration of hybridity and memory see also Manthia Diawara, "The Nature of Mother in Dreaming Rivers," *Third Text* 13 (Winter 1990/1991).

17. Aijaz Ahmad in his "'Third World Literature' and the Nationalist Ideology" (*Journal of Arts and Ideas* #17-18, June 1989) offers an important critique of the usages of Third World in the U.S. academy. Unfortunately, he ignores the crucial issue of empowerment taking place under the rubric Third World among diverse peoples of color in North American intellectual and academic communities.

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Notes

⁴ **Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?**

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¹¹ **The Post-Modern Event and the End of Logocentrism**

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