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The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term “Post-Colonialism”

ANNE McCLINTOCK

His face is turned towards the past.... The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole that which has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.

Walter Benjamin

To enter the Hybrid State exhibit on Broadway, you enter The Passage. Instead of a gallery, you find a dark antechamber, where one white word invites you forward: COLONIALISM. To enter colonial space, you stoop through a low door, only to be closetted in another black space — a curatorial reminder, however fleeting, of Fanon: “The native is a being hemmed in.”¹ But the way out of colonialism, it seems, is forward. A second white word, POSTCOLONIALISM, invites you through a slightly larger door into the next stage of history, after which you emerge, fully erect, into the brightly lit and noisy HYBRID STATE.

I am fascinated less by the exhibit itself, than by the paradox between the idea of history that shapes “The Passage,” and the quite different idea of history that shapes the “Hybrid State” exhibit itself. The exhibit celebrates “parallel history”:

Parallel history points to the reality that there is no longer a mainstream view of American art culture, with several “other,” lesser important cultures surrounding it. Rather there exists a parallel history which is now changing our understanding of our transcultural understanding.²

Yet the exhibit’s commitment to “hybrid history” (multiple time) is contradicted by the linear logic of The Passage (“A Brief Route To Freedom”), which, as it turns out, rehearses one of the most tenacious tropes of colonialism. In colonial discourse, as in The Passage, space is time, and history is shaped around two, necessary movements: the “progress” forward of humanity from slouching deprivation to erect, enlightened reason. The other movement presents the reverse: regression backwards from (white, male) adulthood to a primordial, black “degeneracy” usually

incarnated in women. The Passage rehearses this temporal logic: progress through the ascending doors, from primitive pre-history, bereft of language and light, through the epic stages of colonialism, post-colonialism and enlightened hybridity. Leaving the exhibit, history is traversed backwards. As in colonial discourse, the movement forward in space is backwards in time: from erect, verbal consciousness and hybrid freedom — signified by the (not very free) white rabbit called “Free” which roams the exhibit — down through the historic stages of decreasing stature to the shambling, tongueless zone of the pre-colonial, from speech to silence, light to dark.

The paradox structuring the exhibit intrigues me, as it is a paradox, I suggest, that shapes the term “post-colonialism.” I am doubly interested in the term, since the almost ritualistic ubiquity of “post-” words in current culture (post-colonialism, post-modernism, post-structuralism, post-cold war, post-marxism, post-apartheid, post-Soviet, post-Ford, post-feminism, post-national, post-historic, even post-contemporary) signals, I believe, a widespread, epochal crisis in the idea of linear, historical “progress.”

* * *

In 1855, the year of the first imperial Paris Exposition, Victor Hugo announced : “Progress is the footsteps of God himself.” “Post-colonial studies” has set itself against this imperial idea of linear time — the “grand idea of Progress and Perfectability,” as Baudelaire called it. Yet the *term* “post-colonial,” like the exhibit itself, is haunted by the very figure of linear “development” that it sets out to dismantle. Metaphorically, the term “post-colonialism” marks history as a series of stages along an epochal road from “the pre-colonial,” to “the colonial,” to “the post-colonial” — an unbidden, if disavowed, commitment to linear time and the idea of “development.” If a theoretical tendency to envisage “Third World” literature as progressing from “protest literature,” to “resistance literature,” to “national literature” has been criticized as rehearsing the Enlightenment trope of sequential, “linear” progress, the term “post-colonialism” is questionable for the same reason. Metaphorically poised on the border between old and new, end and beginning, the term heralds the end of a world era, but within the same trope of linear progress that animated that era.

If “post-colonial” *theory* has sought to challenge the grand march of western historicism with its entourage of binaries (self-other, metropolis-colony, center-periphery, etc.), the *term* “post-colonialism” nonetheless re-orientes the globe once more around a single, binary opposition: colonial/ post-colonial. Moreover, theory is thereby shifted from the binary axis of *power* (colonizer/colonized — itself inadequately nuanced, as in the case of women) to the binary axis of *time*, an axis even less productive of political nuance since it does not distinguish between the beneficiaries

of colonialism (the ex-colonizers) and the casualties of colonialism (the ex-colonized). The "post-colonial scene" occurs in an entranced suspension of history, as if the definitive historical events have preceded us, and are not now in the making. If the theory promises a decentering of history in hybridity, syncreticism, multi-dimensional time, and so forth, the *singularity* of the term effects a re-centering of global history around the single rubric of European time. Colonialism returns at the moment of its disappearance.

The word "post," moreover, reduces the cultures of peoples beyond colonialism to *prepositional* time. The term confers on colonialism the prestige of history proper; colonialism is the determining marker of history. Other cultures share only a chronological, prepositional relation to a Euro-centered epoch that is over (post-), or not yet begun (pre-). In other words, the world's multitudinous cultures are marked, not positively by what distinguishes them, but by a subordinate, retrospective relation to linear, European time.

The term also signals a reluctance to surrender the privilege of seeing the world in terms of a singular and ahistorical abstraction. Rifling through the recent flurry of articles and books on "post-colonialism," I am struck by how seldom the term is used to denote *multiplicity*. The following proliferate: "*the* post-colonial condition," *the* post-colonial scene," "*the* post-colonial intellectual," "*the* emerging disciplinary space of post-colonialism," "post-coloniality," "*the* post-colonial situation," "post-colonial space," "*the* practice of postcoloniality," "post-colonial discourse," and that most tedious, generic hold-all: "*the* post-colonial Other."

I am not convinced that one of the most important emerging areas of intellectual and political enquiry is best served by inscribing history as a single issue. Just as the singular category "Woman" has been discredited as a bogus universal for feminism, incapable of distinguishing between the varied histories and imbalances in power among women, so the singular category "post-colonial" may license too readily a panoptic tendency to view the globe within generic abstractions voided of political nuance. The arcing panorama of the horizon becomes thereby so expansive that international imbalances in power remain effectively blurred. Historically voided categories such as "the other," "the signifier," "the signified," "the subject," "the phallus," "the postcolonial," while having academic clout and professional marketability, run the risk of telescoping crucial geo-political distinctions into invisibility.

The authors of the recent book *The Empire Writes Back*, for example, defend the term "post-colonial literature" on three grounds: it "focuses on that relationship which has provided the most important creative and psychological impetus in the writing"; it expresses the "rationale of the grouping in a common past," and it "hints at the vision of a more liberated

and positive future.”³ Yet the inscription of history around a single “continuity of preoccupations” and “a common past,” runs the risk of a fetishistic disavowal of crucial international distinctions that are barely understood and inadequately theorized. Moreover, the authors decided, idiosyncratically to say the least, that the term “post-colonialism” should not be understood as everything that has happened *since* European colonialism, but rather everything that has happened from the very *beginning* of colonialism, which means turning back the clocks and unrolling the maps of “post-colonialism” to 1492, and earlier.⁴ Whereupon, at a stroke, Henry James and Charles Brockden Brown, to name only two on their list, are awakened from their tête-à-tête with time, and ushered into “the post-colonial scene” alongside more regular members like Ngugi Wa Thiongo and Salman Rushdie.

Most problematically, the historical rupture suggested by the preposition “post-” belies both the continuities and discontinuities of power that have shaped the legacies of the formal European and British colonial empires (not to mention the Islamic, Japanese, Chinese, and other imperial powers). Political differences *between* cultures are thereby subordinated to their temporal distance *from* European colonialism. But “post-colonialism” (like postmodernism) is unevenly developed globally. Argentina, formally independent of imperial Spain for over a century and a half, is not “post-colonial” in the same way as Hong Kong (destined to be independent of Britain only in 1997). Nor is Brazil “post-colonial” in the same way as Zimbabwe. Can most of the world’s countries be said, in any meaningful or theoretically rigorous sense, to share a single “common past,” or a single common “condition,” called “the post-colonial condition,” or “post-coloniality”? The histories of African colonization are certainly, in part, the histories of the collisions between European and Arab empires, and the myriad African lineage states and cultures. Can these countries now best be understood as shaped exclusively around the “common” experience of European colonization? Indeed, many contemporary African, Latin American, Caribbean, and Asian cultures, while profoundly effected by colonization, are not necessarily *primarily* preoccupied with their erstwhile contact with Europe.

On the other hand, the term “post-colonialism” is, in many cases, prematurely celebratory. Ireland may, at a pinch, be “post-colonial,” but for the inhabitants of British-occupied Northern Ireland, not to mention the Palestinian inhabitants of the Israeli Occupied Territories and the West Bank, there may be nothing “post” about colonialism at all. Is South Africa “post-colonial”? East Timor? Australia? By what fiat of historical amnesia can the United States of America, in particular, qualify as “post-colonial” — a term which can only be a monumental affront to the Native American peoples currently opposing the confetti triumphalism of 1992. One can also ask whether the emergence of Fortress Europe in 1992 may

not signal the emergence of a new empire, as yet uncertain about the frontiers of its boundaries and global reach.

My misgivings, therefore, are not about the theoretical substance of "post-colonial theory," much of which I greatly admire. Rather, I wish to question the orientation of the emerging discipline and its concomitant theories and curricula changes, around a singular, monolithic term, organized around a binary axis of time rather than power, and which, in its premature celebration of the pastness of colonialism, runs the risk of obscuring the continuities and discontinuities of colonial and imperial power. Nor do I want to banish the term to some chilly, verbal Gulag; there seems no reason why it should not be used judiciously in appropriate circumstances, in the context of other terms, if in a less grandiose and global role.

One might distinguish theoretically between a variety of forms of global domination. *Colonization* involves direct territorial appropriation of another geo-political entity, combined with forthright exploitation of its resources and labor, and systematic interference in the capacity of the appropriated culture (itself not necessarily a homogenous entity) to organize its dispensations of power. *Internal colonization* occurs where the dominant part of a country treats a group or region as it might a foreign colony. *Imperial colonization*, by extension, involves large-scale, territorial domination of the kind that gave late Victorian Britain and the European "lords of humankind" control over 85% of the earth, and the USSR totalitarian rule over Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia in the twentieth century.

Colonization, however, may involve only one country. Currently, China keeps its colonial grip on Tibet's throat, as does Indonesia on East Timor, Israel on the Occupied Territories and the West Bank, and Britain on Northern Ireland. Since 1915, South Africa has kept its colonial boot on Namibia's soil, first by League of Nations mandate, and then later in defiance of a UN General Assembly Resolution and a 1971 World Court Order. Only in 1990, having stripped Namibia of most of its diamond resources, South Africa was content to hand back the economically empty shell to the Namibians. Israel remains in partial occupation of Lebanon and Syria, as does Turkey of Cyprus. None of these countries can, with justice, be called "post-colonial."

Different forms of colonization have, moreover, given rise to different forms of de-colonization. Where *deep settler colonization* prevailed, as in Algeria, Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Vietnam, colonial powers clung on with particular brutality.⁵ Decolonization itself, moreover, has been unevenly won. In Zimbabwe, after a seven-year civil war of such ferocity that at the height of the war 500 people were killed every month and 40 per cent of the country's budget was spent on the military, the Lancaster House Agreement choreographed by Britain in 1979 ensured that one third of

Zimbabwe's arable land (12 million hectares) was to remain in white hands, a minute fraction of the population.⁶ In other words, while Zimbabwe gained formal political independence in 1980 (holding the chair of the 103-nation Non-Aligned Movement from 1986-1989) it has, economically, undergone only *partial decolonization*.

Break-away settler colonies can, moreover, be distinguished by their formal independence from the founding metropolitan country, along with continued control over the appropriated colony (thus displacing colonial control from the metropolis to the colony itself). The United States, South Africa, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, remain, in my view, break-away settler colonies that have not undergone decolonization, nor, with the exception of South Africa, are they likely to in the near future.

Most importantly, orienting theory around the temporal axis colonial/postcolonial makes it easier *not* to see, and therefore harder to theorize, the continuities in international imbalances in *imperial* power. Since the 1940's, the United State's imperialism-without-colonies has taken a number of distinct forms (military, political, economic and cultural), some concealed, some half-concealed. The power of US finance capital and huge multi-nationals to direct the flows of capital, commodities, armaments and media information around the world can have an impact as massive as any colonial regime. It is precisely the greater subtlety, innovation and variety of these forms of imperialism that makes the historical rupture implied by the term "post-colonial" especially unwarranted.

"Post-colonial" Latin America has been invaded by the United States over a hundred times this century alone. Each time, the US has acted to install a dictatorship, prop up a puppet regime, or wreck a democracy. In the 1940's, when the climate for gunboat diplomacy chilled, United States' relations with Latin America were warmed by an economic imperial policy euphemistically dubbed "Good Neighborliness," primarily designed to make Latin America a safer backyard for the US' virile agribusiness. The giant cold-storage ships of the United Fruit Company circled the world, taking bananas from poor agrarian countries dominated by monocultures and the marines to the tables of affluent US housewives.⁷ And while Latin America hand-picked bananas for the United States, the United States hand-picked dictators for Latin America. In Chile, Allende's elected, socialist government was overthrown by a US-sponsored military coup. In Africa, more covert operations such as the CIA assassination of Patrice Lumumba in Zaire, had consequences as far-reaching.

In the cold war climate of the 1980's, the US, still hampered by the Vietnam syndrome, fostered the more covert military policy of "low intensity" conflicts (in El Salvador and the Philippines), spawning death squads and proxy armies (Unita in Angola, and the Contras in Nicaragua)

and training and aiding totalitarian military regimes in anti-democratic, "counter-insurgency" tactics (El Salvador, Honduras, South Africa, Israel, and so forth). In Nicaragua in February 1990 the "vote of fear" of continuing, covert war with the US brought down the Sandinistas.

The recent fits of thuggery by the US in Libya, Grenada and Panama, and most calamitously in Iraq, have every characteristic of a renewed military imperialism, and a renewed determination to revamp military hegemony in a world in which it is rapidly losing economic hegemony. The attacks on Libya, Grenada and Panama (where victory was assured) were practice runs for the new imperialism, testing both the USSR's will to protest, and the US public's willingness to throw off the Vietnam syndrome, permitting thereby a more blatant era of intervening in Third World affairs. At the same time, having helped stoke the first Gulf War, the US had no intention of letting a new boy on the block assert colonial dominance in the region.

For three years before the second Gulf War, the US arms trade had been suffering a slump. After what one military industrialist gloatingly called the Gulf War's "giant commercial-in-the-sky," US arms sales have soared. Nonetheless, if the US had the political muscle to resuscitate a nearly defunct Security Council and strong-arm a consensus through the UN, and the military capacity to make short shrift of 150,000 Iraqi soldiers and an estimated 200,000 civilians in one month, it did not have the economic means to pay for the war. Saddled with its own vast debts, the US has been massively paid off in reimbursements (an estimated \$50 billion) by Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Japan, and Germany, so that it now appears in fact to have profited from the war to the tune of \$4-5 billion. At the same time, most of the estimated \$20 billion necessary to restore Kuwait will go to western, largely US, companies. The war has thus made ever more likely a global security system based on military muscle, not political cooperation, policed by the US's high-tech, mercenary army (and perhaps NATO), moving rapidly around the world, paid for by Germany and Japan, and designed to prevent regional, Third World consensus from emerging. Far from heralding the end of imperial intervention, the second Gulf War simply marks a new kind of interventionism. Not only is the term "post-colonial" inadequate to theorize these dynamics, it actively obscures the continuities and discontinuities of US power around the globe.

While some countries may be "post-colonial" with respect to their erstwhile European masters, they may not be "post-colonial" with respect to their new colonizing neighbours. Both Mozambique and East Timor, for example, became "post-colonial" at much the same time, when the Portuguese empire decamped in the mid-seventies, and both remain cautionary tales against the utopian promise and global sweep of the preposition "post." In East Timor, the beds of the Portuguese were scarcely cold before the Indonesians invaded, in an especially violent colonial occupa-

tion that has lasted nearly two decades. The colonial travail of the East Timoreans has gone largely unprotested by the UN — the familiar plight of countries whose pockets aren't deep, and whose voices don't carry.

In Mozambique, on the other hand, after three centuries of colonial drubbing, the Portuguese were ousted in 1975 by Frelimo, Mozambique's socialist independence movement. But across the border, white Rhodesians, resentful of Mozambique's independence and socialist promise, spawned the Mozambique National Resistance (MNR), a bandit army bent only on sowing ruin. After Zimbabwe itself became politically independent of Britain in 1980, the MNR has continued to be sponsored by South Africa. A decade of the MNR's killing-raids and South Africa's predations has subjected the country to a fatal blood-letting and displaced nearly two million people, in a war so catastrophic that Frelimo has been forced to renounce Marxism and consider shaking hands with the bandits. Now Mozambique is in every sense a country on its knees. What might have been a "post-colonial" showpiece has instead become the killing-fields of Southern Africa.

Yet neither the term "post-colonial" nor "neo-colonial" is truly adequate to account for the MNR. Neo-colonialism is not simply a repeat performance of colonialism, nor is it a slightly more complicated, Hegelian merging of "tradition" and "colonialism" into some new, historic hybrid. In recent years, the MNR has become inextricably shaped around local inter-ethnic rivalries, distinct religious beliefs, and notions of time and causality (especially ancestral intervention) which cannot be reduced to a western schema of linear time. More complex terms and analyses, of alternative times, histories, and causalities, are required to deal with complexities that cannot be served under the single rubric "post-colonialism."

Singular universals such as "the post-colonial intellectual" obscure international disparities in cultural power, electronic technology, and media information. The role of "Africa" in "post-colonial theory" is different from the role of "post-colonial theory" in Africa. In 1987, UNESCO calculated that Africa was spending only 0.3% of the world's \$207 billion allocated to scientific research and development.⁸ In 1975 the entire continent had only 180 daily newspapers, compared with 1900 for the US, out of a world total of 7,970. By 1984, the number of African dailies dropped to 150, then staggered back to 180 in 1987 (the same figure as in 1955). In 1980, the annual production of films in the continent was 70. In contrast, the production of long films in Asia was 2,300 in 1965, and 2,100 in 1987.⁹ The film industry in India remains the largest in the world, while Africa's share of TV receivers, radio transmitters and electronic hardware is miniscule.

The term "post-colonialism" is prematurely celebratory and obfuscatory in more ways than one. The term becomes especially unstable with

respect to women. In a world where women do 2/3 of the world's work, earn 10% of the world's income, and own less than 1% of the world's property, the promise of "post-colonialism" has been a history of hopes postponed. It has generally gone unremarked that the national bourgeoisies and kleptocracies that stepped into the shoes of "post-colonial" "progress," and industrial "modernization" have been overwhelmingly and violently male. No "post-colonial" state anywhere has granted women and men equal access to the rights and resources of the nation state. Not only have the needs of "post-colonial nations" been largely identified with male conflicts, male aspirations and male interests, but the very representation of "national" power rests on prior constructions of gender power. Thus even for Fanon, who at other moments knew better, both "colonizer" and "colonized" are unthinkingly male: "The look that the native turns on the settler is a look of lust . . . to sit at the settlers' table, to sleep in the settler's bed, with his wife, if possible. The colonized man is an envious man."¹⁰ Despite most anti-colonial nationalisms' investment in the rhetoric of popular unity, most have served more properly to institutionalize gender power. Marital laws, in particular have served to ensure that for women citizenship in the nation-state is mediated by the marriage relation, so that a woman's *political* relation to the nation is submerged in, and subordinated to, her *social* relation to a man through marriage.

The global militarization of masculinity, and the feminization of poverty have thus ensured that women and men do not live "post-coloniality" in the same way, or share the same singular "post-colonial condition." In most countries, IMF and World Bank policy favoured cash-cropping and capital surplus in the systematic interests of men, and formed a predictable pattern where men were given the training, the international aid, the machinery, the loans and cash. In Africa, women farmers produce 65%-80% of all agricultural produce, yet do not own the land they work, and are consistently by-passed by aid programs and "development" projects.

The blame for women's continuing plight cannot be laid only at the door of colonialism, or footnoted and forgotten as a passing "neo-colonial" dilemma. The continuing weight of male economic self-interest and the varied undertows of patriarchal Christianity, Confucianism, and Islamic fundamentalism continue to legitimize women's barred access to the corridors of political and economic power, their persistent educational disadvantage, the bad infinity of the domestic double day, unequal childcare, gendered malnutrition, sexual violence, genital mutilation, and domestic battery. The histories of these male policies, while deeply implicated in colonialism, are not reducible to colonialism, and cannot be understood without distinct theories of gender power.

Finally, bogus universals such as "the post-colonial woman," or "the post-colonial other" obscure relations not only between men and women,

but among women. Relations between a French tourist and the Haitian woman who washes her bed linen are not the same as the relations between their husbands. Films like *Out Of Africa*, clothing chains like Banana Republic, and perfumes like "Safari" all peddle neo-colonial nostalgia for an era when European women in brisk white shirts and safari green supposedly found freedom in empire: running coffee plantations, killing lions, and zipping about the colonial skies in airplanes — an entirely misbegotten commercialization of white women's "liberation" that has not made it any easier for women of color to form alliances with white women anywhere, let alone parry criticisms by male nationalists already hostile to feminism.

* * *

How, then, does one account for the curious ubiquity of the preposition "post" in contemporary intellectual life, not only in the universities, but in newspaper columns and on the lips of media moguls? In the case of "post-colonialism," at least, part of the reason is its academic marketability. While admittedly another p-c word, "post-colonialism" is arguably more palatable and less foreign-sounding to sceptical deans than "Third World Studies." It also has a less accusatory ring than "Studies In Neo-colonialism," say, or "Fighting Two Colonialisms." It is more global, and less fuddy-duddy, than "Commonwealth Studies." The term borrows, moreover, on the dazzling marketing success of the term "post-modernism." As the organizing rubric of an emerging field of disciplinary studies and an archive of knowledge, the term "post-colonialism" makes possible the marketing of a whole new generation of panels, articles, books and courses.

The enthusiasm for "post"-words, however, ramifies beyond the corridors of the university. The recurrent, almost ritualistic incantation of the preposition "post" is a symptom, I believe, of a global crisis in ideologies of the future, particularly the ideology of "progress."

The first seismic shift in the idea of "progress" came with the abrupt shift in US Third World policy in the 1980's. Emboldened in the 1950's by its economic "great leap forward" (space, again, is time), the US was empowered to insist globally that other countries could "progress" only if they followed the US road to mass-consumption prosperity. W. W. Rostow's "Non-Communist Manifesto" envisaged the so-called "developing" nations as passing through similar stages of development, out of tradition-bound poverty, through an industrialized modernization overseen by the US, the World Bank and the IMF, to mass-consumer prosperity. Nonetheless, except for the Japanese "miracle" and the Four Tigers (Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong and South Korea), the vast majority of the world's populations have, since the 1940's, come to lag even further behind the consumer standards set by the west.¹¹

Then, between 1979 (the second oil shock) and 1982 (the Mexican default), the world economy began to creak. Increasingly, it became clear that the US was no longer destined to be the only economic power of the future. Hobbled by its phenomenal debts, and increasingly diminished by the twin shadows of Japan and Germany, the US summarily abandoned the doctrine of global "progress" and "development." During the Reagan era, the US instituted instead a bullying debt-servicing policy towards poorer countries, bolstered by aggressive competition with them on the market, and defended by sporadic fits of military gangsterism, as in Grenada and Panama. The cataclysmic war in the Gulf served only to underscore the point.

For many poorer countries, the shift in US policy meant abandoning overnight the *fata morgana* of capitalist "progress," and settling for chronically stricken positions in the global hierarchy. Henceforth, they could aspire only to tighten their belts, service their debts, and maintain some credit. In 1974, Africa's debt-service ratio was a manageable 4.6 %. Thirteen years later it had rocketed to 25%.¹² But the collapse of the US model of "progress" has also meant the collapse, for many regimes, of the legitimacy of their national policies, in the panicky context of world-wide economic crisis, ecological calamity, and spiralling popular desperation. Indeed, perhaps one reason, at least, for the burgeoning, populist appeal of Islamic fundamentalism, is the failure of other models of capitalist or communist "progress." As a senior Libyan aide, Major Abdel-Salam Jalloud has said of the destiny of the FIS in Algeria: "It's impossible to turn back. The FIS has an appointment with history; it will not miss it."¹³

A monotonously simple pattern has emerged. Despite the hauling down of colonial flags in the 1950's, revamped economic imperialism has ensured that America and the former European colonial powers have become richer, while, with a tiny scattering of exceptions, their ex-colonies have become poorer.¹⁴ In Africa before decolonization, World Bank projects were consistently supportive of the colonial economies. Since formal decolonization, contrary to the World Bank's vaunted technical "neutrality" and myth of expertise, projects have aggressively favoured the refinement and streamlining of surplus extraction, cash crop exports, and large scale projects going to the highest bidders, fostering thereby cartels and foreign operators, and ensuring that profits tumble into the coffers of the multi-nationals. During 1986, Africa lost \$19 billion through collapsed export prices alone.¹⁵ In 1988 and 1989, debt service payments from the Third World to the US were \$100 billion.¹⁶ At the same time, as Fanon predicted, Third World kleptocracies, military oligarchies and warlords have scrambled over each other to plunder the system. To protect these interests, the tiny, male elites of "developing" countries have spent almost 2.4 trillion on the military between 1960 and 1987, almost twice the size of the entire Third World debt.¹⁷ Now, after the

1980's "desperate decade" of debt, drought and destabilization, the majority of Third World countries are poorer than they were a decade ago.¹⁸ 28 million Africans face famine, and in countries like Mozambique, Ethiopia, Zaire, and the Sudan the economies have simply collapsed.

The US' "development" myth has had a grievous impact on global ecologies. By 1989, the World Bank had \$225 billion in commitments to poorer countries, on condition that they, in turn, endure the purgatory of "structural adjustment," export their way to "progress," cut government spending on education and social services (with the axe falling most cruelly on women), devalue their currencies, remove trade barriers, and raze their forests to pay their debts.¹⁹ Under the financial spell of the US (and now Japan), and in the name of the fairy-tale of unlimited technological and capital "growth," the World Bank engineered one ecological disaster after another: the Indonesian Transmigrasi programme, the Amazonian Grande Carajas iron-ore and strip-mining project, and Tucurui Dam deforestation project, and so on. The Polonoreste scheme in Brazil carved a paved highway through Amazonia, luring timber, mining and cattle ranching interests into the region with such calamitous impact that in May 1987 even the President of the World Bank, Mr Barber Conable, confessed he found the devastation "sobering."²⁰

The Four "miracle" Tigers have paid for progress with landscapes pitted with poisoned water, toxic soil, denuded mountains and dead coral seas. In "miracle" Taiwan, an estimated 20% of the country's farmland is polluted by industrial waste, and 30% of the rice crops contain unsafe levels of heavy metals, mercury and cadmium.²¹ A World Bank report in 1989 concluded gloomily that "adjustment programs" carry the by-product that "people below the poverty line will probably suffer irreparable damage in health, nutrition and education."²² Now Japan, insatiably hungry for timber and raw resources, is the major foreign aid donor, to the tune of \$10 billion. In short, the World Bank and IMF "road to progress" has proved a short road to what Susan George has called "a fate worse than debt."

To compound matters, the collapse of the US myth of "progress" was swiftly followed by the collapse of the Soviet Union, which dragged down with it an entire master narrative of communist "progress." The zig-zag of Hegelian-Marxist "progress," managed by a bureaucratic, command economy, had been destined to arrive ineluctably at its own utopian destination. The toppling of the Soviet Empire has meant, for many, the loss of a certain privileged relation to history as the epic unfolding of linear, if spasmodic progress, and with it the promise that the bureaucratic, communist economy could one day outstrip the US in providing consumer abundance for all. As a result, there has also been some loss of political certitude in the inevitable role of the male (and, as it turns out, white) industrial working-class as the privileged agent of history. If the

bureaucracy of the Soviet Union fell, it was not under the weight of popular, industrial mobilization, but rather under the double weight of its economic corruption and manic military spending. The irony is not lost that the ascendant economies of Japan and Germany were historically denied the unsupportable burden of the arms race. Thus, despite the fact that men are slaughtering each other around the globe with increased dedication, there has been a certain loss of faith in masculine militarism as the inevitable guarantee of historical "progress." For the first time in history, moreover, the idea of industrial "progress" impelled by technocratic "development" is meeting the limits of the world's natural resources.

Ironically, the last zone on earth to embrace the ideology of capitalist "development" may be the one now controlled by Mr Yeltsin and his allies. The world has watched awestruck as Yeltsin and his fellow-travellers swerved dizzily off the iron road of the centralized, communist, command economy, and lurched bumpily onto the capitalist road of decentralization, powered no longer by the dialectic as the motor and guarantee of "progress," but by tear-away competition and mad marketeering. Never mind that this swerve is likely to unleash a disaster on a scale comparable to the famines that followed the original Bolshevik revolution, nor that the rough beast that slouches out of the chaos may, indeed, not be western capitalism at all, but a particularly grisly form of fascism.

For both communism and capitalism, "progress" was both a journey forward and the beginning of a return; for as in all narratives of "progress," to travel the "road of progress" was to cover, once again, a road already travelled. The metaphor of the "road" or "railway" guaranteed that "progress" was a *fait accompli*. The journey was possible because the road had already been made (by God, the Dialectic, the *Weltgeist*, the Cunning of History, the Law of the Market, Scientific Materialism). As Hegel decreed, "progress" in the realm of history was possible because it has already been accomplished in the realm of "truth." But now, if the owl of Minerva has taken flight, there is widespread uncertainty whether it will return.

The collapse of both capitalist and communist teleologies of "progress" has resulted in a doubled and overdetermined crisis in images of future time. The uncertain global situation has spawned a widespread sense of historic abandonment, of which the apocalyptic, time-stopped prevalence of "post-" words is only one symptom. The storm of "progress" had blown for both communism and capitalism alike. Now the wind is stilled, and the angel with hunched wings broods over the wreckage at its feet. In this calm at "the end of history," the millenium has come too soon, and the air seems thick with omen.

Francis Fukuyama has declared history dead. Capitalism, he claims, has won the grand agon with communism, and is now "post-historic." Third World countries lag behind in the zone of the "historic," where matters are decided by force.²³ Far from the "end of history" and the triumph of US consumer capitalism, however, the new order of the day is most likely to be multi-polar competition between the four currently decisive regions of the world: Japan, the United States, Fortress Europe, and the Middle East. The arms trade will continue, as the military-industrial wizards of Armageddon turn their attention from cold war scenarios to multiple, dispersed wars of attrition, fought by the US mercenary army and other proxies, and paid for by Japan and Germany. Within the US, with the vanishing of international communism as a rationale for militarism, new enemies will be found: the drug war, international "terrorism," Japan, feminists, the PC hordes and "tenured radicals," lesbians and gays, and any number of international "ethnic" targets.

For this reason, there is some urgency in the need for innovative theories of history and popular memory, particularly mass-media memory. Asking what *single* term might adequately replace "post-colonialism," for example, begs the question of rethinking the global situation as a *multiplicity* of powers and histories, which cannot be marshalled obediently under the flag of a single theoretical term, be that feminism, marxism, or post-colonialism. Nor does intervening in history mean lifting, again, the mantle of "progress" or the quill-pen of empiricism. "For the native," as Fanon said, "objectivity is always against him." Rather, a *proliferation* of historically nuanced theories and strategies is called for, which may enable us to engage more effectively in the politics of affiliation, and the currently calamitous dispensations of power. Without a renewed will to intervene in the unacceptable, we face being becalmed in an historically empty space in which our sole direction is found by gazing back, spell-bound, at the epoch behind us, in a perpetual present marked only as "post."

Notes

1. Frantz Fanon, *Wretched Of The Earth*, (Penguin: London, 1963), p. 29.
2. Gallery Brochure, "The Hybrid State Exhibit," Exit Art, 578 Broadway, New York (Nov 2 -Dec 14, 1991).
3. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, (Routledge: London, 1989), p. 24.
4. "We use the term 'post-colonial,' however, to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day." *ibid*, p. 2.
5. During the Algerian war of resistance, over a million Algerians died out of about 9 million.
6. Andrew Meldrum, *The Guardian*, Thursday April 25, 1991, p. 13.
7. Cynthia Euloe, *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley: Univ. of Colorado Press, 1989), Ch.6.
8. Basil Davidson, *op cit*, p. 670.
9. Kinfe Abraham, "The Media Crisis: Africa's Exclusion Zone," *SAPEM*, September, 1990, 47/49.
10. Fanon, *ibid*, p. 30.

11. See Giovanni Arrighi, "World Income Inequalities and the Future Of Socialism," *New Left Review*, September/October, 1991, #189, p. 40.
12. Basil Davidson, p. 669.
13. *The Guardian*, Tuesday, January 14, 1992, p. 9.
14. The international monetary system set up at the Bretton Woods Conference in 1944 excluded Africa (still colonized) and most of what is now called the Third World, and was designed to achieve two explicit objectives: the reconstruction of Europe after World War II, and the expansion and maintenance (especially after decolonization) of international trade in the interests of the colonial powers and America. The President of the World Bank and the deputy managing director are always American, while by tradition the managing director is European. See Cheryl Payer, *The Debt Trap: The International Monetary Fund and the Third World*, (New York, Monthly Review, 1974), and Payer, *The World Bank: A Critical Analysis*, (New York: Monthly Review, 1982).
15. Basil Davidson, p. 669.
16. Robin Broad, John Cavanagh, and Walden Bello, "Sustainable Development in the 1990's," in *Paradigms Lost: The Post Cold War Era*, ed. Chester Hartman and Pedro Vilanova.
17. Broad, Cavanagh, and Bello, p. 100. Calculations are based on figures in Ruth Leger Sivard, *World Military and Social Expenditures 1989*, (Washington DC: World Priorities, 1989), p. 6. A few African socialist states, like Angola and Mozambique, tried to dodge the IMF and WB's blandishments, until national economic mismanagement and South Africa's regional maulings forced them to bend the knee.
18. The World Bank has concluded that "fifteen African countries were worse off in a number of economic categories after structural adjustment programs....A World Bank study found that the debt-ridden developing countries under structural adjustment programmes performed as well as non-recipients less than half the time." Robin Broad, John Cavanagh, and Walden Bello, "Sustainable Development in the 1990's," in *Paradigms Lost: The Post Cold War Era*, ed. Chester Hartman and Pedro Vilanova, p. 96.
19. See Susan George, "Managing The Global House: Redefining Economics," in *Global Warming: The Greenpeace Report* (Oxford and New York, OUP, 1990), ed. Jeremy Leggett.
20. G. Hancock, *The Lords Of Poverty*, (London: MacMillan, 1989), p. 131, n 14, citing Barber Conable's speech to the World Resources Institute, Washington DC, 5 May, 1987.
21. Broad, Cavanagh, and Bello, op.cit. p. 91
22. *Ibid.*, p. 95.
23. Francis Fukuyama, "Forget Iraq — History Is Dead," *Guardian*, 12 August, 1990, p. 3.