

Postcolonial CUL-DE-SAC And The Return Of U.S. Imperial Terror

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A few months before his death, Edward Said, arguably the founding “patriarch” of postcolonial studies, reassessed his critique of “Orientalism” by affirming the value of “humanistic critique to open up the fields of struggle” so as to enable the speaking of “issues of injustice and suffering” within the amply situated contexts of history and socioeconomic reality. He invoked sentiments of generosity and hospitality so that the interpreter’s mind can actively make a place for “a foreign other,” the “active practice of worldly secular rational discourse”. He strongly denounced the current U.S. government policy of celebrating “American or western exceptionalism” and demonstrating contempt for other cultures, all in the service of “terror, pre-emptive war, and unilateral regime change” (2003, xx). In an earlier interview, Said asserted that his main interest was in neocolonialism, not postcolonialism (which, to him, was a “misnomer”), in “the structures of dependency and impoverishment” in the global South due to the operations of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank (1998/99, 82). Overall, a modernist humanism, not postcolonial hybridity, deconstruction, or genealogy of speechless subalterns, was for Said the paradigmatic framework of inquiry for a comparative analysis of cultures and societies in an epoch of decolonization.

After over two decades of intellectual specialization and investment, postcolonial inquiry has now enjoyed sufficient legitimacy and prestige in the Euro-American academy to make it serviceable for reinforcing the Establishment consensus. Decolonization is over. The natives now run the government. Long live the free market

around the planet! Works by Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, and others are institutionally consecrated “touchstones,” to use the Arnoldian rubric, that, though somewhat vitiated as products of a “comprador intelligentsia,” nevertheless serve to authorize a validation of colonialism and its legacies as a useful if ambivalent resource. Informed by theoretical protocols and procedures hostile to nationalist movements, not to speak of anti-imperialist revolutionary struggles and other “metanarratives” inspired by Fanon, Mao, Ho Chi Minh, Che Guevara and others, postcolonial studies today function not as supplements to the critical theories of Derrida, Foucault or Deleuze, but to the official apologetics of the “new world order” called “globalization” ushered with the demise of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, that is to say, the end of history and the eternal triumph of capitalism and its attendant ideology, neoliberal globalism. As Arif Dirlik summed it up, postcolonial discourse has become an academic orthodoxy in its “self-identification with hybridity, in-betweenness, marginality, borderlands”—a fatal move from the “language of revolution infused with the vocabulary of political economy to a culturalist language of identity politics” (2000, 5).

What happened to revolution and the decolonizing figure prefigured by Caliban and personified by Rizal, Sandino, Nelson Mandela, and others? In his master-work *Culture and Imperialism*, Said paid homage to the revolutionary militants, Amilcar Cabral, Frantz Fanon, C.L.R. James, and others, as the *locus classicus* of emancipatory “third world” discourse who engaged the recovery of lost integrity in the context of regaining the territorial habitat of memory—places instead of spaces— and popular sovereignty. But today, nationalism and national liberation struggles are anathema to postcolonialists. And with the neoconservative counter-revolution after the defeat of U.S. aggression in Indochina, a “cultural turn” effectively replaced the revolutionary process in history with an endless process of “abrogation and appropriation” of colonial texts and practices in quest of an identity that is ultimately and forever decentered, shifting, borderless, fluid, aleatory, ambivalent, and so on. What encapsulates all these qualities is the term “transnational,”