

## Postcolonialism and the Native American Experience: A Theoretical Perspective

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### Abstract

Taking the common understanding of “postcolonial as independence” to task, the present paper challenges some of the fundamental assumptions circulating in the field at a theoretical level, and pleads for a radical overhauling of the postcolonial project to accommodate the indigenous peoples’ cultural resistance in the postcolonial framework. While doing so, it destabilises the very idea of a postcolonial settler literature, thereby placing it in the colonial discourse. By using native American culture as a prototype of postcolonial experience, the paper argues for the restoration of indigenous cultural practices, and then turns them into a critique of Western civilisational complexes. The attempt then is made to locate the agenda of postcolonialism in the narratives of resistance where decolonisation of mind and history is realised.

### Keywords

Postcolonialism, native American, Indian, settler, resistance, decolonisation

This essay attempts to examine the native American experience through postcolonial theoretical insights, and argues that the native culture and literary traditions resisted and continue to resist the White American colonial assumptions. I use the terms “native” and “Indian” interchangeably in the course of the paper to refer to the indigenous tribes of North America, who populated the vast continent before the so called discovery of America by Columbus. While using the term native/Indian as a collective category, I do not intend to have a stereotype because these tribes are culturally diverse and heterogeneous. Though “Indian” as a term is linked to the Columbian misunderstanding and is a product of White imagination, I use it to foreground the idea of postcolonial resistance and two-space where the imagined other ruptures the centre. The use of pronouns like he/him, while referring to a native in the present essay, is done for convenience and does not reflect a sexist attitude, nor does it mean that male natives are more representative of their cultures than females.

The first and most fundamental issue while dealing with postcolonialism is the question of spatio-temporality that gives meaning to “post” in the term

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postcolonialism. In common understanding, the prefix “post” refers to both geographical locations that have been supposedly cleared of colonial presence, and the aftermath of the colonial period which has apparently replaced colonial structures and power. The immediate question now is whether we could really be so sure of such concrete locations and specific periods whose materiality and life-experiences may be called postcolonial. Here Ella Shohat’s suspicion seems justified when she argues that postcolonial blurs the “assignment of perspectives” (Shohat 324). If postcolonialism is about geography, whose perspective and location does it indicate (?): the ex-colonised (India for example), the ex-coloniser (say Britain), the ex-colonial settler (White America) or the still-colonised (the Fourth World)? Since the history of colonialism is shared by both the coloniser and the colonised, though unequally, the term “postcolonial” can technically be applied to formerly colonising societies, though this mindless use of the term “not only neutralises significant geopolitical differences between France and Algeria” (Shohat 324), but also robs postcolonial of its meaning.

Similarly, the problem of temporality in postcolonialism cannot be taken for granted because, as Shohat says, it “leads to a collapsing of diverse chronologies” (Shohat 325). Various nation-states, with heterogeneous histories, got independence in different periods of history starting from the eighteenth century, though there are peoples and places who/which are yet to achieve it. To Shohat’s question, when exactly did the postcolonial begin (?), Arif Dirlik answers, “when Third World intellectuals ha[d] arrived in First World academe” (“The Postcolonial Aura” 329). This kind of reasoning – despite Dirlik’s deliberate misreading of Shohat’s question – trivialises the seriousness of the issue by not only taking postcolonial experience away from the colony, but also by dispossessing the natives of their ability to be postcolonial subjects. Shohat argues that ignoring diverse chronologies and equating independence of settler colonies like America and Canada with that of nation-states like India and Nigeria would collapse the difference between complicity and resistance, and complicate the location and period of postcolonialism.

If geography provides the material location for postcolonial struggle to take place over issues of land possession and dispossession, resource extraction and impoverishment, forced occupation and displacement, then native people of settler societies are already uprooted and thrown into reservations and have virtually no land to fight for. If temporality, or a break from the colonial past, vests in postcolonial subjects the power of self rule and equips them with a conceptual independence from colonial gaze, thereby enabling them to see themselves differently from earlier reflected images, native Americans are not free from their colonial masters and perhaps, unfortunately, never will be. How do we then justify the postcolonial nature of native American experience when they are nowhere close to a postcolonial condition, neither spatially nor temporally?

Categorising something or somebody as “postcolonial” depending on their spatial and temporal independence, to my mind, is highly simplistic. The “post” in postcolonial instead of clarifying, obfuscates the characteristic features of postcolonial experience. Here Ania Loomba’s argument helps to clarify the issue, that the prefix “post” implies “aftermath” in two ways: “temporal, as in coming after, and ideological, as in supplanting” (Loomba 12). Loomba sees complexity in the second

meaning and finds it contestable, saying “if the inequities of the colonial rule have not been erased, it is perhaps premature to proclaim the demise of colonialism” (Loomba 12). This renders the claims of many postcolonial nation-states suspect, given Loomba’s observation that postcolonialism without the ideological supplanting of colonial knowledge is meaningless. However, Loomba seems to take the point of “temporality” for granted and seems to believe in an automatic postcolonial status after the formal independence of colonies. Jasper Goss does not seem to agree with this automatic temporal postcoloniality and questions the approach: “the implication that one is beyond colonialism after the achievement of independence would be laughable” (Goss 245). Both the supposed markers of postcolonialism – temporality and ideology – in reality replicate colonial ways of governance in dealing with their own population and ending up with a system that has been aptly called “derivative discourse.” Decolonisation of geography and periodicity does not necessarily lead to the decolonisation of knowledge and mind, and thus makes postcolonialism merely formal and not substantive. It is rather unfortunate that even the formal features of postcolonialism, which is the decolonisation of space and time, has not been relevant to the native experience.

The fact of the matter is that postcolonialism as a signifier of geography and period autonomous of colonial presence, delegitimizes the claims of many cultures and societies to be postcolonial just because their resistance against colonial powers has not been successful. As a term signifying inequality and marginality, postcolonialism thus gives undue importance to successful resisters over unsuccessful ones. Equating postcolonialism with formal decolonisation often gives legitimacy to one-time colonisers, as in America and Australia, as the real postcolonial subjects. Jasper Goss puts it succinctly saying, “the colonists have become postcolonial simply because their strategy of dispossession has finally succeeded” (Goss 247). Moreover, postcolonialism in the sense of decolonisation overemphasises the role of the political to the exclusion of epistemic or conceptual colonialism, though it is common knowledge that decolonisation was nothing but an administrative restructuring which was taken over by the native elites, and that decolonising knowledge is as important as political restructuring. Postcolonialism, understood as formal independence, is not only conceptually naive, but also a travesty of the postcolonial project.

Using “post” in the term postcolonial synonymously with “after” may apparently seem sound with nation-states becoming independent after the Second World War, but it becomes problematic while addressing the experience of the Fourth World, whose native populations are living as a tiny minority in their own homeland. Where do we then locate postcolonialism? My understanding is that postcolonialism is not a marker of colonial pastness, but a condition that emerges with the beginning of colonial encounter and occupation. Thus the postcolonial moment starts with the first colonial contact, and not necessarily its demise. It signifies the task of disengagement from colonial knowledge and a subjectivity of oppositionality to colonial discourses and practices. By focusing on resistance as the essence of postcolonialism, rather than independence, we can remove formal independence as the reference point of postcolonialism, and as the beginning and end of postcolonial practice. Thus we locate postcolonialism in the agency of the resistant subject, and not in a temporality over

which the native subject has no control. In the process, we delink postcolonialism from independence for the simple reason that many Fourth World societies are not yet decolonised, and because we need to give priority to postcolonial subjects rather than postcolonial territories. This is in spite of the fact that it is often very difficult to separate people from places in the narratives of resistance.

If the natives cannot be postcolonial subjects in the sense that they cannot now hope to regain their land, they can certainly contest and subvert civilisational residues that were imposed on them. Here decolonisation takes the garb of psychological and conceptual warfare intent upon decolonising not only the natives' sense of history but also their minds. It is here that the postcolonial project becomes a critique of Western epistemological and civilisational complexes masquerading as history, or what Robert Young calls "White mythologies" (2005), and in retheorising an alternative history rooted in the natives' understanding of their being in the world. Deconstructing the ideological and civilisational contents of Western history and revalidating indigenous knowledge systems thus become the agenda in the larger postcolonial project.

This project also involves a broadening of the scope of postcolonialism. The first step in that direction, as already argued, is to delink postcolonialism from formal political decolonisation. In this light, postcolonialism is not just a temporal marker of the aftermath of colonial experience, but a position of resistance to colonial discursive practices. The second step in that direction, which is excluding the one-time colonial masters in settler colonies like America, Canada, and Australia from the postcolonial umbrella, thus becomes not only theoretically necessary but also morally imperative. Thus postcolonial becomes more about people and their subjectivities, and less about place, unless the stolen land by the settler masters is returned to its original people. The very prefix "post" is enough to indicate that postcolonial is anything but colonial and that its project is to interrogate the colonial past. Instead of being passive objects of history as in colonial discourse, natives must not appear as others of European civilisation as in colonial discourses, but as the latter's interlocutors. In these situations, postcolonialism converts native American history into a critique of Eurocentrism and its civilisational agenda. We should not forget that White settlers have always been agents of colonial rule, and their formal independence from Europe in no way aligns them with the interests of natives.

The position of Ashcroft et al. in *The Empire Writes Back* is very difficult to sustain for their refusal to see the difference between natives and settlers when they conceive of postcolonial as "all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonisation to the present day" (Ashcroft et al. 2). Though Ashcroft improves upon his argument in *Post-colonial Transformation* by dealing exclusively with the native response to colonialism, he does little to authenticate the native voice as the only genuine postcolonial voice. Offering a blanket and simplistic definition of "postcolonial," Ashcroft et al. argue that "the literatures of the African countries, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Caribbean countries, India, Malaysia, Malta, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, South Pacific Island countries, and Sri Lanka are all post-colonial literatures" (Ashcroft et al. 2). One is left wondering as to what commonalities they see in America and African countries in their response to the metropolitan centre. They add:

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 colonisation and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasising their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre. It is this which makes them distinctively post-colonial. (Ashcroft et al. 2)

It is difficult to trace the ways the US emphasises its differences from the imperial centre when we have reasons to believe that the one-time imperial centre in Europe now plays to the tunes of the US in international relations. In addition, the literature of settler societies is not radically different from the European assumptions of modernity and its literary manifestations.

Native literature, on the other hand, as Paula Allen has argued, is radically different from Western traditions as the fundamental assumptions about life and reality it represents are entirely different from the dominant Western paradigms. For example, the purpose of native literature is not mainly one of self expression, and the tribes hardly celebrate the individual's ability to be emotionally capable because it is assumed that everybody is capable of the same. True literature in the native sense is that literature which has the capacity to "bring the isolated private self into harmony and balance with this reality" (Allen 113). Contrast this to a Western work where the author oftentimes tries his best to prove his emotional and intellectual originality or superiority by presenting characters who are super-sensitive or hyper-emotional. Broadly speaking, Western literature is individualistic and is intended to separate the individual from others, whereas native literature is aimed at integrating the individual with the people. The function of storytelling is to accentuate connection rather than difference, to provide a continuum of the past into the present, and present into future.

Calling both settlers and natives as products of colonisation not only robs colonialism of its meaning, but also makes the latter appear benevolent. If settlers share the same history as the natives, it does not in any way dilute their role as plunderers nor make them innocent. Shared history should not blur the separation of colonising agents and their victims. Leela Gandhi questions Ashcroft and his co-authors for their inability to see this difference and "their refusal to address adequately the ideological wedge between histories of subjectivity and subjection" (Gandhi 170). It is precisely for this reason that the formula of Ashcroft and others in coalescing settlers with natives through the use of "post" is misleading and needs to be challenged and replaced with a new understanding of the term which recognises the difference between the two vis-à-vis their response to the imperial centre. These authors make us believe that both settlers and whites had the same response to Europe, that they broke away from the centre in the same way and that their interests are the same. Deliberate or otherwise, they subsume the native difference under the settler sameness whose best interest then is to be articulated through the settlers' voice. By making settlers postcolonial, they also ignore, and so delegitimize natives' claim to postcoloniality. One fails to understand in what way settlers and natives can inhabit the same space of civilisational periphery. For natives, "centre" referred to White

people, and not a geography called Europe. It meant power which was possessed by white settlers, and not an abstruse idea called Europe which none of them had seen.

If resistance is the defining characteristic of postcolonial condition, nationalist literatures in invaded colonies, and indigenous literatures in settler colonies alone can be called postcolonial. Native cultures and writing not only unsettle Euro-American literary and cultural assumptions, but also disturb the foundations of Euro-American history and civilisation by providing alternative ways and restoring denied knowledges. In this way, native postcolonialism marks a complete break from different forms of knowledge sanctioned by colonialism and Western domination, and exists as a contesting field of knowledge. As Shaobo Xie says, “the postcolonial does not signify the demise or pastness of coloniality; rather, it points to a colonial past that remains to be interrogated and critiqued” (15). In this context, we should locate the origin of postcolonialism in the historical resistance to occupation.

But what has made settler societies postcolonial? In the case of the USA, it is the control of American academia over knowledge and theory (the equivalent of political control during colonialism) which has made the latter, carriers of ideology. Though Third World scholars have developed and enriched this field, it is their location in First World academy that gives the United States an automatic conceptual safety valve, which means that not only colonialism but also its critique can only come from the metropolitan centre. This is how the USA, by accommodating and appropriating these critiques, appears to be broad and progressive. Confining postcolonialism to native intellectuals’ space in the First World gives postcolonialism a colour of artificiality and distance which looks at those hybrids as the real postcolonial subjects and denounces the very idea of authenticity as invention. It is the control of knowledge which makes the First World native scholars see victimhood in settler societies and internalise the postcolonial status of the USA and other settler states. As the colonial status came with the subjugation and erasure of natives, its supposedly postcolonial status comes with the repression of natives at an epistemic level. The postcolonial intellectual thus has a demanding task at hand; to exclude settlers from postcolonialism, and represent native voice as the authentic postcolonial voice.

There are some who believe that postcolonialism overemphasises the impact of colonialism on societies which otherwise show little influence of colonial ways and patterns. There are also many African countries which were colonised for a short period. The criticism is that in places where colonialism was short lived, it is not viable to speak about colonialism in defining the history and people of these societies, as if colonialism has changed their society for good and that they cannot recover from it. But Robert Young argues that postcolonialism “commemorates not the colonial but the triumph over it” (Young, *Postcolonialism* 60). Postcolonialism celebrates resistance to colonialism, however short the latter may have been, and looks at this resistance as a historical achievement, not as a forgotten chapter in history. That is why postcolonialism should be seen as a counter-dominant and counter-hegemonic enterprise intended to subvert imperial forces in the realm of politics, and a critique of Eurocentric/settler forms of knowledge in the realm of culture. Those who believe that postcolonialism should not overemphasise the colonial effect – which should not be



given a fresh lease of life – underestimate the capacity of imperialism in knowledge formation.

Postcolonial does not signify the demise or pastness of coloniality, but points to a colonial presence that is to be interrogated, and replaced by indigenous knowledges. Those who think that indigenous knowledge as such does not exist in any realm of pure past, devalue the resilience of culture and the power of agency in natives. There is no doubt that culture evolves and accommodates new ideas, but the essence remains the same. Sun dance may have undergone several changes, but the very idea of the dance form as an integrating practice remains the same. Native ceremonies and ways of life are no longer the same, but it does not mean that they have been denuded of their essence by Western knowledge. Evolution of culture does not accommodate its negation. Recovery and revival thus are not the correct terms – which we frequently confront in cultural criticism and which imply a break or loss – which is intended to locate nativism in some primordial past. Native practices have always been there in spite of variations and alterations. They do not see or believe in the difference between present and past in the realm of culture because they refer to the same web of life where present is just a continuation of the past.

If colonial knowledge devaluated everything native American, the postcolonial critique should aim at restoring those devalued knowledges as the essence of native identity. For this, a radical change is imperative to understand history and its way of legitimising certain values as self evident truths. History, written in the historians' ideological space, creates not only an illusion of reality but also a masternarrative of itself. In the history of colonialism, "history" as a narrative of legitimisation has always been associated with Western civilisation. Thus the evolution of mankind is believed to have stopped at Western culture, which is seen as the highest stage of physiological and cultural evolution. To give unambiguous power to this history, natives had to be made "others" of colonisers and to appear as the polar opposite of everything supposedly rational, developed, and civilised. Robert Young exposes "the way in which knowledge – and therefore theory, or history – is constituted through the comprehension and the incorporation of the other" (Young, *White Mythologies* 44).

It is the invention of the other and its subsequent incorporation into the history of civilisation that makes this imperial history a masternarrative of legitimacy. English-speaking Europeans were the stars of this history, and native Americans were just background characters to justify White supremacy at best, or villains at worst because they were seen as the negation of everything that European history stood for. This history was not merely a history of conquest, but also a tale relating the nonexistence of natives waiting to be discovered by Columbus. We are made to believe in the benign act of Columbus' discovery of primitive "Indians." This history justified itself as the victory of civilisation over barbarism, of human progress over stasis, but no account is made of the trail of dispossession, disease, and conquest. For an objective analyst, the discovery of America by Columbus is a cruel joke, because the so called discovery implies that the natives were lost somewhere or simply did not exist before they were "discovered."

One such example of this racially-motivated history can be discovered in the critically acclaimed *Literary History of the United States*, in which its editors justify their racial bias as fact:

The literary history of this nation began when the first settler from abroad of sensitive mind paused in his adventure long enough to feel that he was under a different sky, breathing new air, and that a New World was all before him with only his strength and Providence for guides. (Spiller et. al. xvii)

For Spiller, this constituted the embryo of American literature. By tracing American literature to the arrival of settlers, Spiller was repeating conventional knowledge while excluding natives as Americans. In fact, he uses “native literature” to denote White settler literature. A popular belief in the White mind about native literature is its orality. What is ignored is the fact that natives had written literary texts. Some texts of Meso-American Indian cultures exist even today, but most were burnt by Catholic Missionaries. The surviving texts are ignored by Spiller to justify the myth of White America as the real America.

A postcolonial approach contests this exclusion, and if in the process it replicates the same dualistic pattern of colonialism, there is nothing unacademic about it. The counter history of native postcolonialism would be to exclude settler literature from the postcolonial rubric, if not from the rubric of American literature. Though etymologically “history” means to investigate, Bill Ashcroft argues in *Post-colonial Transformation* that imperial history “stands less for investigation than for perpetuation” (Ashcroft 82). Colonisers had to prove that history is a narrative of human progress, the movement from primitivism to civilisation, and in this narrative Whiteness had to appear as the ultimate state of evolution and progress.

Quite predictably, Western history was not only incomprehensible to the natives, but also culturally alien. Native life never required history as a justification for meaningful existence in the European sense. The past was not really a thing of the past, or different from the present and future, as in the linear history of imperialism, but embedded in the present. Natives could move freely between these concepts of time and could speak to characters from the past and the future. The whole native cosmology depends on this sense of time, the beginning and end being the same, the source and object being the same, everything beginning and ending with All-Spirit, Spider Woman, Maheo – call it anything you will. Beginning and end are not two opposite points as in the linear narrative of history where birth will inevitably lead to death, but different manifestations of the same reality that had neither a beginning, nor an end.

A postcolonial perspective would thus conceive history “not as a single overarching narrative, but in terms of networks of discrete, multitudinous histories that are uncontainable within any single Western schema” (Young, *White Mythologies* 3), and articulate other forms of knowledge and alternative histories. The postcolonial mission then is two-fold: first, to write an alternative history from the natives’ perspective of what constitutes native history and second, reject White history as a masternarrative of objectivity. Many native historians fail in this endeavour. Arnold



Krupat, for example, argues that we can accept native versions of American history so long as they do not rise to the level of real history. Here we see Krupat making a case for the inclusion of alternative versions, but failing to question the Western history; rather he justifies its normativity. What Krupat argues is that native American history should not pit itself in an oppositional relationship with Western history. It means that native historical accounts or stories can be discussed as long as they help us to understand native worldviews, but they should not be taken seriously. It also implies that we can engage with those accounts so long as they are confined only to realms other than facts. In contrast to Krupat, we have Traveller Bird publishing *Tell Them They Lie* (1971) with documentary proof, reconstructing the history of his ancestor and refuting the official claim. He proves that, contrary to the official American version, the man called Sequoyah never existed. Rather he was a man called George Guess or Sogwali who belonged to the Seven Clan Scribe Society. Bird is thus successful in not only providing his version of the story and proving the official account wrong, but also in proving that native accounts may be factual, and official versions ideological and wrong. The title *Tell Them They Lie* is very suggestive of postcolonial resistance and an attempt at articulating native resistance.

Since the native always existed outside representation, postcolonial history should aim not just at re-insertion as Krupat argues, but radical re-orientation and revision, even if it turns Western history on its head. Instead of being apologetic about native epistemological difference, the native postcolonial subject should attempt to explode the official version of history by radically incorporating his own consciousness in it. Ashcroft calls this strategy “interpolation” – “the capacity to interpose, to intervene, to interject a wide range of counter-discursive tactics into the dominant discourse” (Ashcroft 47). It is a surprise that while calling interpolation a counter-discourse, Ashcroft refuses it the status of a separate oppositional discourse. Here Ashcroft falls short of an anti-imperial agenda and like Krupat warns us against an anti-imperial intention, thus failing in distinguishing “interpellation” from “interpolation” as he so loftily claims to do. His argument that natives can never speak outside representation makes the postcolonial project vulnerable and possible only within the space of White allowance. Both Krupat and Ashcroft imply that it is the Whites’ accommodating space from where natives can speak.

But interpolation as a strategy, in spite of what Ashcroft thinks it to be, has the capacity to destabilise the dominant discourse. By re-writing history, the postcolonial critic overhauls the official history and reworks it for his own ends. The archetypal character here is Caliban who used the master’s tool (Prospero’s language) for his own ends and dismantled the master’s edifice. Operating from within the discourse does not stop it from being oppositional. In fact the very validity of counter-history depends on the discrediting and replacing of official history which implies a relationship of resistance. If we say that natives were more civilised than Whites, it is not only different from the White version that they civilised the natives, but also oppositional. Replacement and opposition are complementary.

Ashcroft’s method of writing indigenous history through allegory, which he borrows from Stephen Slemon, goes beyond the mode of oppositionality and instead pleads for a more “emancipatory” view of the historical. It is quite clear that Ashcroft

sees the postcolonial project as merely literary, which can offer an imaginative re-reading of native history and thus transform history itself. Before Ashcroft, Slemon too had argued for a transformation of colonialist appropriation “through the production of a literary, and specifically anti-imperialist, figurative opposition or textual *counter-discourse*” (“Monuments of Empire” 11). In another essay, Slemon argued for postcolonial allegories that are “concerned with neither redeeming nor annihilating history, but with displacing it as a concept and opening up the past to imaginative revision” (“Post-Colonial Allegory” 165). By confining postcolonial to the realm of literary and figurative, Ashcroft and Slemon are guilty of not only limiting the scope of postcolonial, but also of conceding ground for an automatic Western historical superiority and corroborating the colonisation of history. This weakening of the postcolonial agenda makes us believe that decolonisation is not possible beyond the textual. Jasper Goss reveals his discomfort at this thought when he says, “postcolonial critics, it seems, have guaranteed themselves the position of arm chair decolonisers, with the primacy of a textual role being the most prominent in anti-colonial struggles” (248).

Writing counter history, which natives write from the margin, is not merely transformative as advocated by Ashcroft and Slemon, but subversive as has been done by Traveller Bird. In the former, Western history retains its role as “the history” and as the repository of facts and truths, which can accommodate and gradually appropriate native stories. There is thus an implicit perpetuation of Western historiography as “real,” and dismissal of native accounts as oral. It also signifies that native intellectuals cannot participate equally with their White counterparts in historical debates, and unlike Traveller Bird cannot say “you lie.” The choice for critics like Arnold Krupat is simple: to defend White ideas to avoid being scolded, “either get real or shut up.” This approach to write counter-history is not writing back to the centre, but is a deliberate corroboration of the centre and a deliberate cornering of the periphery.

Decolonisation involves the decolonisation of mind. The colonisers were not content to leave the colony after decolonisation, but remained to create neo-Europes out of these colonies. It was a subtle mode of colonialism which aimed at transforming the soul of the native and to making him acknowledge the intrinsic superiority of Western knowledge. Hence colonialism was often called *mission civilatrice*, and was intended to civilise the savages of colonies. Forming a superior community along the lines of Western values in the new found land thus meant demonising the existing patterns of historical knowledge in colonies, and to convert the meaning of the West, in Ahish Nandy’s words, “from a geographical and temporal entity to a psychological category” (qtd. in Gandhi 16). Many independent nation-states are thus politically postcolonial but epistemically colonised, though it is another story for people of the Fourth World who are spatially colonised in the literal sense but resist, and thus render futile, the civilisational mode of colonialism.

Colonialism was thus a subject-constituting project as it was an exercise in plunder. To achieve this target, colonisers had to interrupt the continuity of native tradition. The desire for creating a homogeneous group of people for the purpose of civilisation was prompted by the colonisers’ desire for unity and sameness. The aim

was to dehumanise the native by making him internalise the intrinsic inferiority of the native culture. It is for this reason that decolonisation should aim at making the native subject stop playing roles scripted by their one-time colonisers, and make them visible as subjects. It should be a kind of history which “moves Indian actors to the front of their historical stage, as opposed to subordinating them to be simple background actors reacting to White expansion” (Berkhofer 36). Natives should stop being natives as known to Europeans and emerge as natives in themselves; stop living through the gaze of Whites, and live on their own terms. Bringing natives to the centre stage of counter history and developing a native American perspective becomes all the more important in a postcolonial framework because these very people were written out of history for being “people without history.”

There is no doubt that dislocating natives from their culture was aimed through a loss of memory which would make them forget who they are and where they came from. According to Paula Allen, this loss of memory – which means discontinuity from the past – was integral to the process of colonial oppression. She argues that “the roots of oppression are to be found in the loss of tradition and memory because that loss is always accompanied by a loss of a positive sense of self” (Allen 210). Western education ensured a radical break between nativism and civilisation and served to reject the sense of continuity which natives normally have with their past. The colonisers knew the importance of memory in native tradition and it was absolutely imperative for colonial discourse to disturb that memory. Allen shows how the question “Who is your mother?” is very important in the Laguna Pueblo tradition. Naming the mother is not merely naming the biological mother, but becoming inscribed within the tribal web of life. Not being able to recognise one’s mother is the failure to recognise one’s significance and one’s relationship with the land. Forgetting is like being lost and abandoned.

Decolonising mind and history involves remembering connections and knowing native histories. Remembering the importance of cultural origin and one’s continuity with that tradition can take natives beyond colonial paradigms. Silko shows, in her landmark work *Ceremony*, the importance of memory in native tradition and how it forms the fabric of tribal sense of continuity:

    Their evil is mighty  
    but it can’t stand up to our stories  
    So they try to destroy the stories  
    let the stories be confused and forgotten.  
    They would like that  
    They would be happy  
    Because we would be defenseless then. (Silko 2)

If rejection of native tradition was a prerequisite of civilisation, native worldview, which postcolonialism advocates, values the maintenance of such traditions. Natives value continuity in which memory plays a defining role in the formation of a tribal identity. In native American culture, disease occurs when an individual forgets his past, and recovery requires remembering that past. Native American tradition as a web

of life has never been subject to forgetting and requiring recovery. Recovery takes place only at an individual level, that too after a bout of illness, as in the novel *Ceremony*, which recounts a complex process of the painful putting together of a dismembered past.

Of late, there has been uncharitable criticism of recovery as a crude mode of postcolonial resistance. It is argued that recovery is always indistinguishable from invention, and that in recovering we tend to ignore the constructedness of the past. To this position, Dirlík retorts:

If the past is constructed, it is constructed at all times, and ties to the past require an ongoing dialogue between present and past constructions, except in linear conceptions of history where the past, once past, is irrelevant except as abstract moral or political lesson. (Dirlík, "The Past as Legacy and Project" 24).

Here is the fundamental difference between the Western sense of time and the "Indian" understanding of the same. Time, in the native worldview, is never linear and one cannot leave one's past behind nor be civilised by relinquishing everything native American. Rather, time is circular and repeats itself in the present, not in an aesthetic way as in Western literature, but in a very real sense. What cultural critics do not understand is that if the past is constructed, so is the present. What we call the present is not autonomous from the past and may be carrying the latter's sediments. If past is constructed as is present, the very difference between present and past vanishes as in natives' circular concept of time.

There are some, including natives themselves, who argue in favour of forgetting the past and finding a common ground. But culture as a common ground, though it appears to be innocuous, carries within it seeds of appropriation. Ultimately, it is the dominant worldview which subsumes the alternative worldview and makes alterity a mere facet of sameness. This approach may be seen in Robert Warrior's essay "The Native American Scholar," in which he, referring to the Spokane poet Gloria Bird, warns against "the parade of ethnicity" (Warrior 47) and declares that he is "interested less in a celebration of our intellectual past than... a more just future for native people" (Warrior 51), thus implying that one cannot think of a future unless one extricates oneself from the past. Dismissing postcolonialism as intellectual gymnastics, he sees in it a kind of new imperial domination. It is not difficult to see Warrior's problem with postcolonialism given that the postcolonial approach demands a radical disposition to the past which threatens the status quo.

It is in these situations that the struggle over history is among the colonised themselves; between those who would conveniently forget and those who would painfully remember. It is remembering, as Silko so poetically evokes, which is the essence of native identity. Those who deny natives their past, thinking that it would encourage a kind of violent revival upsetting the present peace, fail to distinguish one revival from the other. When revival in a typical politico-religious or clash-of-civilisation sense leads to bloodshed and violence, the native cultural essentialism is a

“desperate concern for survival; not in a ‘metaphorical’ sense but in a very material sense” (Dirlik, “The Past as Legacy and Project” 11). Silko writes in *Ceremony*:

I will tell you something about stories,  
They aren't just entertainment.  
Don't be fooled.  
They are all we have, you see,  
all we have to fight off  
illness and death. (Silko 2)

One, as in Silko above, is a struggle for survival and the other, in a *jihadi* sense, intends to create a mono-cultural world. This failure to distinguish one from the other, according to Dirlik, is “morally irresponsible and politically obscene” (“The Past as Legacy and Project” 10). This, however, does not mean that native people are wedded to a kind of ahistorical cultural essentialism in the way it is theorised in culture studies, but are committed to maintaining a historical trajectory which has withstood the vagaries of time.

There have been attempts, as in Spivak, to question the very idea of a counter history or subaltern voice capable of challenging the dominant paradigms. The question raised by Spivak (though in a different context) in her famous essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” unsettles the uniformity of subaltern consciousness because they are unredeemably heterogeneous. But this can be equally applied to the voice of any people. No identity group can ever speak in one voice, not even those appearing to be uniform. So the problem we have to address, more than the subaltern’s capacity to speak, is our own capacity to listen. In fact, Spivak’s rhetorical question leads to more questions than it answers. If subalterns can speak, it implies that colonialism was not violent enough; if the subaltern cannot speak then there is no hope, and all representations will lead only to misrepresentation. Instead of indulging in questions of this kind, we should rather concentrate on the nature of speech made by the researcher. One kind of speech, as in colonial discourse, speaks instead of the natives’ voice, which is nothing but a kind of silencing act. There is another kind of voice which speaks for natives when they are silenced by others. Spivak’s question collapses the difference between these two kinds of speaking and ignores the agentic attribute of the speaker to populate language with his own intentions. Any speech, which is interventionist in nature, intended to make the native a subject, can be called the postcolonial native voice. It is anything which liberates the native from his mode of inhabiting the perception of colonisers.

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