

# POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES AFTER THE INVASION OF IRAQ

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In most mainstream commentary, the Islamist attacks on the World Trade Center towers and the Pentagon on 11 September 2001 are situated in world-historical terms. We are enjoined to believe that the very sub-structure of the world changed as a result of these attacks. Hence the apocalyptic lexicon: 'ground zero', 'year zero' and indeed '9/11' itself - the name of the date identified in this Americanised way having long since become a fetish on the basis of its obsessive and fundamentally decontextualising reiteration. The corollary of this widespread belief that '9/11' marked the end of the world as we used to know it is that the ghastly and colossal (not to say terroristic) violence subsequently visited on Afghanistan and Iraq, and also the wholesale destruction of civil liberties on the 'home' fronts in Europe and the United States, must be construed as responses (in the official versions, measured, defensive and corrective) to these cataclysmic, world changing, attacks.

The lie to this version of events has been given definitively in any number of investigative or analytical counter-commentaries, whether scholarly or journalistic. Let me in passing cite only two of these: David Harvey's study of what he calls *The New Imperialism* makes clear that '9/11' is better understood as the 'Pearl Harbor' of which an increasingly organised and powerful American neo-conservatism had long been dreaming, an event that enabled the neo-conservatives at one and the same time to disable liberal opposition, drive towards hegemony, and 'impose [their] ... agenda on government';<sup>1</sup> and Neil Smith, for his part, insists that 'horrific as the loss of life was when those symbols of the military and economic power of the American empire were levelled', the events of 11 September 2001 'did not change the world'; the events of that day 'were exceptional ... only for sweeping away the global insularity of the vast majority of the population cocooned within the national borders of the world's one remaining superpower. People in most other parts of the world had faced similar if not far larger traumas'.<sup>2</sup> Writing in 2003, Smith added significantly that 'October 7, 2001 may well come to change the world', this latter marking the date on which 'the US government unleashed what it called its "war on terrorism" by bombing an already devastated Afghanistan ... From the halls of official state power around the world, but from nowhere more than Washington D.C., old enemies were converted into terrorists and a hardening of nationally based state power commenced'.

Following Smith's lead, I have entitled this essay *not* 'Postcolonial Studies after "9/11"', but 'Postcolonial Studies after the Invasion of Iraq'. The term 'after' is obviously still intended to open up the question of periodisation;

1. David Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003, pp189-99.

2. Neil Smith, 'After the American Lebensraum: 'Empire,' Empire and Globalization', *Interventions*, 5, 2 (2003): 263.

but the historical schema that I have in mind is very different from that to be found in most of the accounts predicated on '9/11'. Just like the misadventure in the Philippines that inaugurated the 'American century' almost exactly a hundred years ago, the 'splendid little war' of our own time does surely mark a watershed of sorts, and certainly it demands adequate analysis. Harvey speaks, for his part, of a transition from a 'neo-liberal' to a 'neo-conservative' imperialist project - an internal shift with sizeable external implications and effects. We can accept this interpretation if we understand it to be suggesting that in the passage from Bush the Elder to Bush the Younger - from Gulf War I to Gulf War II - the veil has slipped from the face of the juggernaut usually called 'globalisation' (whose champions had been wont to speak of it as the tide, irresistible but beneficial, that would raise all boats) to reveal the unmistakable, and unmistakably brutal, face of US globalism: the power of the American state, now frankly projected and bent on world domination. 'The world is beginning to speak with one voice', George W. Bush was quoted as saying two or three years ago, as he rushed to misinterpret events then unfolding in Lebanon - and he should know, for the voice is his own. Behind him, the roar of the United States military machine - manifestly the real weapons of mass destruction - rises to a crescendo. The cynics among us might then feel justified in suggesting that Nietzsche had been proved right after all: truth *is* just a lie backed up by an army.

But of course 'globalisation' was never the deterritorialised and geopolitically anonymous creature that neo-liberal ideology projected it as being. On the contrary, it was from the outset a political project, a consciously framed strategy designed to restructure social relations world-wide in the interests of capital.<sup>3</sup> A particular response to the crisis of profitability that set in at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, 'globalisation', as Peter Wilkin has written, involved the attempt on the part of the 'dominant social forces in the Northern or core nation-states ... in conjunction with major corporate institutions ... to overturn the limited gains made by working people throughout the world-system in the post-war period'.<sup>4</sup> The historical schema that we need to construct in order to understand developments world-wide since 1945 comprises two distinct eras. First, there is a quarter-century or so of explosive growth, marked by significant gains and the unprecedentedly wide dispersal of social, political, and economic benefits to populations at large. This boom period came to an end as the world system stumbled into economic recession and attendant political crisis at the end of the 1960s; and it has been followed by a period marked by the global assertion and consolidation of US political hegemony and what Samir Amin has called 'the logic of unilateral capital'.<sup>5</sup>

The boom period is marked by the historic achievement of the 'welfare state' and of a measure of social democracy in the 'West', but also by substantial social, political, and economic gains in the 'East' and the 'South'. Concerning the 'South', we need to register as decisively as possible the sheer, irreversible advance represented by the achievement of decolonisation. The articulation

3. The commentary that follows is derived substantially from my chapters, 'Introducing Postcolonial Studies' and 'The Global Dispensation since 1945', in Neil Lazarus (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp1-16 and 19-40.

4. Peter Wilkin, 'New Myths for the South: Globalization and the Conflict between Private Power and Freedom', in Caroline Thomas and Peter Wilkin (eds), *Globalization and the South*, London, Macmillan; New York, St Martin's Press, 1997, pp18-35.

5. Samir Amin, *Capitalism in the Age of Globalization: The Management of Contemporary Society*, New York, Monthly Review Press, 1997, p95.

and elaboration of national consciousness; the mobilisation of popular will or support; the tempering of this will in the fire of the anticolonial campaigns, of struggles for national liberation, when the least response of the colonial powers was intransigence and the arrogant refusal even to contemplate reform, and the more typical response was to call out the police and very often the army to silence dissent and quell resistance - these developments, concerted in their nevertheless uncoordinated appearance across the globe in the immediate post-war period, were (and remain) of decisive significance. 'The world became a larger and happier place', as Basil Davidson writes of the decolonising years<sup>6</sup> - not 'seemed to become a larger and happier place', note, but actively *became* such. What Davidson writes of Africa is generalisable to the postcolonial world at large in this respect:

6. Basil Davidson, *The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State*, New York, Times Books, 1992, p196.

there were many reasons for optimism. The old empires were falling fast and would not be restored. The social freedoms that had provided the real magnet behind nationalism were making themselves increasingly felt; and the grim silence of the colonial years was already shattered by a hubbub of plans and schemes for a more favourable future. People even talked of a 'new Africa,' and yet it did not sound absurd. A whole continent seemed to have come alive again, vividly real, bursting with creative energies, claiming its heritage in the human family, and unfolding ever more varied or surprising aspects of itself.<sup>7</sup>

7. *Ibid.*, pp195-96.

Politically speaking, this new sense of uplift and regeneration proved to be of relatively short duration. In *The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State*, the book from which I have just quoted, Davidson attempts to analyse the processes through which, in the postcolonial era, the gap between People and State has widened rather than (as might have been anticipated, and was certainly hoped for) narrowed. Increasingly, he argues, 'social' imperatives - those concerning the distribution of capital, resources and services - have been subordinated to the 'national' requirements of elite entrenchment - that is, where they have not been cynically jettisoned altogether. Not only has 'the extraction of wealth from ... already impoverished [societies] ... in no way [been] halted by the [ending of colonial rule]'; in addition, the "national conflict," embodied in the rivalries for executive power between contending groups or individuals among the "elites" ... [has] take[n] priority over a "social conflict" concerned with the interests of most of the inhabitants of these new nation-states'.<sup>8</sup> Although his commentary is focused on sub-Saharan Africa, what Davidson says is readily applicable elsewhere in the postcolonial world as well. For in territory after territory, leaders and ruling elites came to identify their own maintenance in power as being of greater importance than the broader 'social' goods of democratisation, opportunity and equality, and they increasingly used the repressive apparatuses and technologies of the state (often inherited from the colonial order) to enforce order and to silence or eliminate opposition.

8. *Ibid.*, p219, 114.

There are some excellent accounts bringing into clear focus the failures of postcolonial leaderships to extend and democratise the momentous social advance represented by decolonisation. Neil Larsen, for instance, has argued generally that in what he calls the 'Bandung era' - the reference is to the historic conference at Bandung in 1955, at which leaders of the decolonising world (among them Nehru of India, Nasser of Egypt and Sukarno of the host country Indonesia, with Tito of Yugoslavia 'as the sole European interloper and Zhou-En-Lai [of China] the somewhat anxiously tolerated guest of honour') had launched the Non-aligned Movement - there was an historic failure to steer the anti-imperialist movement world-wide in the direction of proletarian internationalism on the basis of 'a strategic alliance of metropolitan and third world labour against capital as such'.<sup>9</sup> Despite this, however, it seems to me important to recollect the energy, dynamism and optimism of the decolonising and immediate post-independence era both for the sake of the historical record, and also to enable us to register the *successes* of this period, however slender, partial, provisional, or unsustainable they proved to be in the longer term. The Vietnamese army's defeat of the French at Dien Bien Phu in 1954; the staging of the Bandung Conference itself in 1955; Gamal Abdel Nasser's stand on Suez in 1956; the acquisition of independence in Ghana in 1957 - these were all events which fired the imaginations of millions of people world-wide, placing on to the world stage, perhaps for the first time, the principled and resolute figure of 'Third World' self-determination. Domestically, too, the newly inaugurated postcolonial regimes, at first at least, undertook all manner of ambitious projects intended to improve the livelihood and welfare of their citizenry, from literacy and adult education campaigns to the construction and provision of hospitals, from the building of roads and sewage facilities to irrigation schemes, and from the redistribution of land to the outlawing of feudal rights over the labour of others. Here, women were granted the right to vote, and to own property. There, workers won the right to organise and strike. Still elsewhere, compulsory education of children was introduced. Constitutions were framed; new laws were passed; many tyrannical and bitterly resented colonial laws and edicts were struck down, and many equally bitterly resented pre-colonial customs and practices were officially scrapped or proscribed.

Such social gains bear comparison with those secured in the core capitalist states at the same time under the rubric of the welfare state. What postcolonial state politics entailed in general, as Amin has observed, 'was a bourgeois-nationalist modernization scheme designed to lead to the construction of relatively endocentric and industrialized national economies within an international framework of controlled interdependence on the world scale, as opposed to the Soviet framework of disengagement'.<sup>10</sup> Throughout the Third World in the quarter-century following the Second World War, developmentalism (or modernisation) produced relatively impressive economic results, although these typically failed to augur democratisation, either political or economic. Thus the introduction of 'some aspects of a

9. Neil Larsen, 'Imperialism, Colonialism, Postcolonialism', in Sangeeta Ray and Henry Schwarz (eds), *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2005, pp23-52 (here p33).

10. Amin, op. cit., p147.

11. Jorge Larrain, *Identity and Modernity in Latin America*, Oxford, Polity, 2000, p16.

welfare state in health, social security and housing' in various Latin American states in the post-1945 period was never socially dispersed: as Jorge Larrain has written, 'the benefits ... continued to be highly concentrated and the masses of the people continued to be excluded'.<sup>11</sup>

Sometime between 1968-71, however, the post-war boom was punctured as the world-system stumbled into structural crisis. The key point to note here about this crisis is that it provoked capital into the development and imposition of a raft of new policies, strategically designed to arrest and turn around the falling rates of profit. A savage restructuring of capitalist class relations worldwide was set in train. The practical effects of this restructuring in the West, as we know, have been to privatise social provision, thereby dismantling the welfare state and stripping vast sectors of metropolitan populations of security across wide aspects of their lives; to drive millions of people out of work, forcing them not only into unemployment but into *structural* unemployment; and to enact legislation which has made it increasingly difficult for people to represent themselves collectively, to campaign and fight for their interests and the rights formally accorded them. In the 'Third World', the effects have been analogous. To quote Larrain again:

What was new about this recession and the period that followed it was that the anti-depression policies followed by most governments produced inflation without adequately stimulating the economy, thus provoking high levels of unemployment. Throughout the developing world the recession had damaging effects: it aggravated the chronic deficits of its balance of payments by bringing down the prices of raw materials and raising the prices of oil and other essential imports, thus producing inflation, unemployment and stagnation. This marked the beginning of the huge expansion of the Third World's international debt, which soon became an impossibly heavy burden for its very weak economies, with the result that several countries defaulted on their obligations.<sup>12</sup>

12. *Ibid.*, p133.

Even during the 'boom' years, the sheer size of the debts owed by 'third world' states to foreign lending institutions posed a big problem. But once the global downturn commenced, any chance of their 'catching up' and keeping a clean balance sheet disappeared definitively, and probably forever. As John Saul has written, with respect to Africa:

Fatefully [the] ... debt came due, in the 1980s, just as the premises of the dominant players in the development game were changing. The western Keynesian consensus that had sanctioned the agricultural levies, the industrialization dream, the social services sensibility, and the activist state of the immediate post-independence decades - and lent money to support all this - was replaced by 'neo-liberalism.' For Africa this meant the winding down of any remnant of the developmental state, the new

driving premise was to be a withdrawal of the state from the economy and the removal of all barriers, including exchange controls, protective tariffs and public ownership (and with such moves to be linked as well to massive social service cutbacks), to the operation of global market forces.<sup>13</sup>

13. John S. Saul, *Millennial Africa: Capitalism, Socialism, Democracy*, Trenton and Asmara, Africa World Press, 2001, p23.

The African case is extreme but not unique. In Latin America, the crippling burden of debt repayment led such major economies as Mexico, Argentina, and Brazil to the brink. Growing indebtedness contrived to render Latin American states ever more dependent on foreign capital at the very moment when foreign capitalists, themselves concerned with profitability, became unwilling to extend credit and eager to get the highest possible short-term returns on their loans and investments. 'In the aftermath of the debt crisis' of the early 1980s, as Gwynne and Kay have written,

the international financial institutions were by and large able to dictate economic and social policies to the indebted countries, especially the weaker and smaller economies, through structural adjustment programmes (SAPs). While Brazil and Mexico were able to negotiate better terms with the World Bank and foreign creditors, Bolivia and other countries were unable to do so. Peru, during the government of Alan García, tried to defy the international financial institutions but was severely punished for it and, after a change of government, the country had to accept the harsh reality of the new power of global capital and implement a SAP. Structural Adjustment Programs were used as vehicles for introducing neoliberal policies ... they had particularly negative consequences for the poor of Latin American economies as unemployment soared and wages and social welfare expenditures were drastically reduced.<sup>14</sup>

14. Robert N. Gwynne and Cristóbal Kay, 'Latin America Transformed: Changing Paradigms, Debates and Alternatives', in *Latin America Transformed: Globalization and Modernity*, London, Sydney, Auckland, Arnold, 1999, pp2-30.

Throughout the postcolonial world over the course of the final quarter of the twentieth century, Structural Adjustment Programs were imposed as conditions for the distribution of loans, which the recipient nations were not in any position to refuse. Typically mandating huge cuts in government spending and social provision; the slashing of wages; the opening up of local markets to imported goods and the removal of all restrictions on foreign investment; the privatisation of state enterprises and social services; and deregulation in all sectors to ensure that all developments were driven by the logic of the market rather than by social need or government policy, SAPs became a favoured means of disciplining postcolonial states, domesticating them and rendering them subservient to the needs of the global market. They also became a means of ensuring that postcolonial states retain their peripheral status, neither attempting to delink themselves from the world system nor ever imagining themselves capable of participating in it from any position of parity, let alone power.

The two-phased historical schema that I have been attempting to lay out in what I have said so far provides a necessary preamble to any consideration

of the emergence and shape of the field of postcolonial studies. Despite the fact that what they think and write about in their professional capacities is the relationship between peoples, communities and cultures situated at different and differentially structured points in the modern world system, scholars in postcolonial studies have consistently failed to recognise the unremitting actuality and indeed the intensification of imperialist social relations in the times and spaces of the postcolonial world. The fault is categorical and symptomatic. One can register this in shorthand by noting that in the postcolonial discussion, the term 'capitalism' tends to be conspicuous largely by its absence (that is, where it is not actively disparaged as the linchpin in a Eurocentric 'mode of production' narrative); and the term 'imperialism' tends for the most part to be mobilised in description of a process of cultural and epistemological subjugation, whose material preconditions are referred to only glancingly, if at all.

These emphases in postcolonial studies seem especially noteworthy when we consider that the immediate post-1945 developments unfolded on the stage of a *pax Americana*. It is not only that the East-West conflict, the Cold War, continually buffeted postcolonial states about, obliging them to present themselves in certain lights, to implement certain policies and to shut down or abort others, in order to secure favour or forestall disfavour; it is also that decolonisation - the emergence of new autocratic or would-be autocratic regimes in the postcolonial world - was from the outset viewed by the United States, the post-war hegemon, as an insurgent and potentially dangerous development, to be monitored closely and crushed whenever it seemed too threatening. One might have thought, in these terms, that the concept of 'imperialism' in its full historical and political senses was indispensable to practitioners in postcolonial studies. The fact that it has not been might lead one to conclude that postcolonial studies had 'lost the plot', as it were. Except that the key point here is that, as a field of academic specialisation, postcolonial studies had *always-already* lost the plot. As many commentators have noted, the *emergence* of the field at the end of the 1970s coincided with the routing of liberationist ideologies within the Western (or, increasingly, Western-based) intelligentsia, including its radical elements. The *consolidation* of the field was then arguably, and at least in part, a function of its articulation of an extraordinarily tortuous ideological and intellectual response to this routing. As an initiative in tune with its times, postcolonial studies shared the anti-liberationism then rising generally to hegemony. But as a self-consciously *progressive* or *radical* initiative, it was at the same time opposed to the dominant forms assumed by anti-liberationist discourse (right-wing, Eurocentric, politically 'realist' as these were). What Homi K. Bhabha has called 'the postcolonial prerogative' might then also be understood as an anti- anti-liberationist anti-liberationism.

A good place to start to unpack this claim might be to register that before the late-1970s, there was no field of academic specialisation that went by the name of 'postcolonial studies'. This is not, of course, to say

that there was no work being done before the late-1970s on issues relating to postcolonial cultures and societies. On the contrary, there was a large amount of such work, much of it deeply consequential and of abiding significance. There were political studies of state-formation in the newly decolonised countries of Africa, Asia and the Caribbean; economic and sociological studies of development and under-development (typically centred on Latin America); historical accounts of anti-colonial nationalism and of the various and diverse nationalist leaderships which had fought or campaigned against colonial rule in territory after territory, and which had then themselves come to power when independence had finally been won; literary studies of the new writing that was being produced by writers from these territories; and so on.

The word 'postcolonial' occasionally appeared in this scholarship, but it did not mean then what it has come to mean in 'postcolonial studies'. Thus when Hamza Alavi and John Saul wrote about the state in 'post-colonial' societies in 1972 and 1974, respectively, they were using the term in a strict historically and politically delimited sense, to identify the period immediately following decolonisation, when the various leaderships, parties and governments which had gained access to the colonial state apparatuses at independence undertook to transform these apparatuses, to make them over so that instead of serving as instruments of colonial dictatorship they would serve these new leaders' own social and political interests, whether socialist or bourgeois, progressive or reactionary, popular or authoritarian. 'Post-colonial', in these usages from the early 1970s, was a periodising term, an historical and not an ideological concept.<sup>15</sup> It bespoke no political desire or aspiration, looked forward to no particular social or political order. Erstwhile colonial territories that had been decolonised were 'postcolonial' states. It was as simple as that. Politically charged and ideologically fraught terms were all around, and were fiercely contested - capitalism and socialism; imperialism and anti-imperialism; first-world and third world; self-determination and neo-colonialism; centre and periphery; modernisation, development, dependency, under-development, mal-development, 'dependent development' - but the notion of 'postcoloniality' did not participate, on any side, in these debates. To describe a literary work or a writer as 'postcolonial' was to name a period, a discrete historical moment, not a project or a politics. It was far more usual to see writers and works characterised in terms of their communities of origin, identity or identification. Thus Chinua Achebe was described variously as an Igbo writer, a Nigerian writer, an African writer, a Commonwealth writer, a third-world writer, but seldom if ever as a 'postcolonial' one. To have called Achebe a 'postcolonial' writer would have been, in a sense, merely to set the scene, historically speaking, for the analysis to come.

To begin to appreciate how much things have changed in this respect, consider the following, rather lengthy, passage from Homi Bhabha's essay, 'The Postcolonial and the Postmodern', first published in 1992:

15. Hamza Alavi, 'The State in Post-Colonial Societies', *New Left Review*, 74 (1972): 59-81; John S. Saul, 'The State in Post-Colonial Societies: Tanzania', *The Socialist Register*, Ralph Miliband and John Saville (eds), New York, Monthly Review Press; London, The Merlin Press, 1974, pp349-72. Reprinted in John S. Saul, *The State and Revolution in Eastern Africa*, New York and London, Monthly Review Press, 1979, pp167-99.

Postcolonial criticism bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world order. Postcolonial perspectives emerge from the colonial testimony of Third World countries and the discourses of 'minorities' within the geopolitical divisions of East and West, North and South. They intervene in those ideological discourses of modernity that attempt to give a hegemonic 'normality' to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, races, communities, peoples. They formulate their critical revisions around issues of cultural difference, social authority, and political discrimination in order to reveal the antagonistic and ambivalent moments within the 'rationalizations' of modernity. To bend Jürgen Habermas to our purposes, we could also argue that the postcolonial project, at the most general theoretical level, seeks to explore those social pathologies - 'loss of meaning, conditions of anomie' - that no longer simply 'cluster around class antagonism, [but] break up into widely scattered historical contingencies' ... The postcolonial perspective ... departs from the traditions of the sociology of underdevelopment or 'dependency' theory. As a mode of analysis, it attempts to revise those nationalist or 'nativist' pedagogies that set up the relation of Third World and First World in a binary structure of opposition. The postcolonial perspective resists the attempt at holistic forms of social explanation. It forces a recognition of the more complex cultural and political boundaries that exist on the cusp of these often opposed political spheres.<sup>16</sup>

16. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London and New York, Routledge, 1994, pp171, 173.

We can see straight away that in Bhabha's thinking, 'postcolonial' has ceased to be an historical category. The term does not designate what it sounds like it designates, that is, the moment, or more generally the time, *after* colonialism. There *are* temporal words and phrases in Bhabha's formulation - 'no longer', for instance - but these do not appear to relate in any discernible way to *decolonisation* as an historical event, that is to decolonisation as a 'cut' or break in time, such that one could speak of a colonial 'before' and a postcolonial 'after'. Bhabha writes that 'postcolonial criticism' concerns itself with 'social pathologies' that can 'no longer' be referred to the explanatory factor of class division: 'postcolonial criticism' is thus opposed to (and for Bhabha evidently comes after or supersedes) class analysis. But no explanation is given as to why the term 'colonial' is felt to be implicated in the putative obsolescence of class analysis. Indeed, on the basis of what Bhabha says, 'postcolonial criticism' could as easily be called 'post-Marxist criticism'.

Or even 'post-modern criticism', since Bhabha is at pains to emphasise that the 'post-' in 'postcolonial criticism' is directed against the assumptions of the 'ideological discourses of modernity', which are said to flatten out complexity, to simplify the sheer heterogeneity and unevenness of real conditions, to reduce these to 'a binary structure of opposition'. For Bhabha,

'postcolonial' is a fighting term, a theoretical weapon, which 'intervenes' in existing debates and 'resists' certain political and philosophical constructions. 'Postcolonial criticism', as he understands and champions it, is constitutively anti-Marxist - departing not only from more orthodox Marxist scholarship but even from 'the traditions of the sociology of underdevelopment or "dependency" theory'; it evinces an undifferentiating disavowal of all forms of nationalism and a corresponding exaltation of migrancy, liminality, hybridity, and multiculturalism; it is hostile towards 'holistic forms of social explanation' (towards totality and systematic analysis) and demonstrates an aversion to dialectics; and it refuses an antagonistic or struggle-based model of politics in favour of one that emphasises 'cultural difference', 'ambivalence' and 'the more complex cultural and political boundaries that exist on the cusp' of what 'modern' philosophy had imagined as the determinate categories of social reality.

Between Alavi's and Saul's 'post-colonialism' and Bhabha's, an ideological sea change has occurred. As Larsen puts it, what one now terms 'postcolonial' is a 'euphemism' for what used to be referred to as the 'Third World' - 'euphemism' because the political meaning of the "Third World", which used to 'conjure ... up an entire historical conjuncture and accompanying political culture, in which one naturally went on to utter the ... slogans of "national liberation," etc.' has now been eclipsed. '[W]e who once unself-consciously said "third world" now hesitate, if only for a second, to utter it in the same contexts. This hesitation reflects the decline of the national liberation movements of the "Bandung era" ... leaving us with the question of why and with what effect this decline has occurred ...'<sup>17</sup> Postcolonial studies not only emerged in close chronological proximity to the end of the 'Bandung era', the era of 'third world' insurgency. It has also characteristically offered something approximating a monumentalisation of this moment - a rationalisation of and pragmatic adjustment to, if by no means uncomplicatedly a celebration of, the downturn in the fortunes and influence of insurgent national liberation movements and revolutionary socialist ideologies in the early 1970s. In this context it is also necessary to mention the collapse of historical communism in 1989. For if, after 1975, the prevailing political sentiment in the West turned against nationalist insurgency and revolutionary anti-imperialism, after 1989, it pronounced socialism itself dead and buried.

Postcolonial studies breathes the air of the reassertion of imperial dominance beginning in the 1970s, the global re-imposition and re-consolidation both - economically - of 'the logic of unilateral capital' and - politically - of an actively interventionist 'New World Order', headquartered in Washington, D.C. One of the fundamental preconditions of this re-imposition and re-consolidation (Walden Bello calls it 'rollback'<sup>18</sup>) was the containment and recuperation of the historic challenge from the third world that had been expressed in the struggle for decolonisation in the post-1945 period. In this sense, as Tim Brennan has recently suggested, since it registers and pulses to the political renewal and refurbishment of imperial power in today's

17. Larsen, *op. cit.*, pp24-25.

18. Walden Bello, with Shea Cunningham and Bill Rau, *Dark Victory: The United States and Global Poverty*, London, Pluto Press, in association with Food First, Oakland and the Transnational Institute, Amsterdam, 1999.

19. Timothy Brennan, 'From Development to Globalization: Postcolonial Studies and Globalization Theory', in Lazarus, *Cambridge Companion*, op. cit., pp120-38.

world - a world that, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, has become, unprecedentedly, unipolar - postcolonial studies must be regarded as the cousin of globalisation theory.<sup>19</sup> (Unlike much globalisation theory, however, postcolonial studies typically attempts to respond to and counter this renewal and refurbishment.)

It is in this context that today's extraordinarily disturbing political developments must be situated. The historical significance of these developments has been well conceptualised by Jonathan Schell, as follows:

In the past 200 years, all of the earth's great territorial empires, whether dynastic or colonial, or both, have been destroyed. The list includes the Russian empire of the czars; the Austro-Hungarian Empire of the Habsburgs; the German empire of the Hohenzollerns, the Ottoman Empire, the Napoleonic Empire, the overseas empires of Holland, England, France, Belgium, Italy and Japan, Hitler's "thousand-year Reich" and the Soviet empire. They were brought down by a force that, to the indignation and astonishment of the imperialists, turned out to be irresistible: the resolve of peoples, no matter how few they were or how poor, to govern themselves.

With its takeover of Iraq, the United States is attempting to reverse this universal historical verdict. It is seeking to reinvent the imperial tradition and reintroduce imperial rule - and on a global scale - for the twenty-first century. Some elements, like the danger of weapons of mass destruction, are new. Yet any student of imperialism will be struck by the similarities between the old style of imperialism and the new: the gigantic disparity between the technical and military might of the conquerors and the conquered; the inextricable combination of rapacious commercial interest and geopolitical ambition and design; the distortion and erosion of domestic constitutions by the immense military establishments, overt and covert, required for foreign domination; the use of one colony as a stepping stone to seize others or pressure them into compliance with the imperial agenda; the appeal to jingoism on the home front.<sup>20</sup>

20. Jonathan Schell, 'Letter from Ground Zero', *The Nation*, 5/05/03, p8.

Because postcolonial studies engages, almost by definition, with colonialism and its aftermath, an outside observer might be forgiven for supposing that some of the most incisive analyses of the contemporary crisis would derive from scholars active in the field. The truth, however, is that although some postcolonialists are indeed producing valuable and historically informed analyses, these are for the most part individuals whose relation to the field as a whole is one of internal dissidence. One can certainly hope that the invasion, occupation and, evidently, long-term destabilisation of Iraq will prove to be an event of such *specific* importance to postcolonial studies as to force a broad reconsideration of dominant assumptions and prevailing modes of practice; but the likelihood is that it will not. After all, some of the best-

known scholars in the field have demonstrated a remarkable ability, over a number of years now, to look the facts in the face and not see them. Witness to developments, in their own time, in such places as El Salvador, Nicaragua and Grenada, Colombia and Venezuela, Somalia and Angola, Korea, the Philippines and Indonesia, to say nothing of Cuba and Haiti or Iraq in the wake of the Gulf War of 1991, they have responded by inveighing against ... why, against binaristic modes of conceptualisation, against liberationist ideologies, against nationalism, against Marxist theory and socialist practice! We should therefore not hold our collective breath in expectation that the unfolding events in southwest Asia will lift the scales from their eyes. It is not an accident that Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's book, *Empire*, should have attracted great attention, much of it admiring, in postcolonial studies. Writing in the year 2000 - that is to say, *after* the blood-stained record of the fifty years to that point, and, just as starkly, after the blood-stained record of the *ten* years to that point - Hardt and Negri were able to assert that '[t]he United States does not, and indeed no nation-state can today, form the center of an imperialist project. Imperialism is over. No nation will be world leader in the way modern European nations were'.<sup>21</sup> Hardt and Negri have not rushed to recant after 2001; and I believe that their counterparts in postcolonial studies are unlikely to do so, either. Consider, for instance, the following formulation, by Sangeeta Ray, which appears in a 2005 'Postscript' - entitled 'Popular Perceptions of Postcolonial Studies after 9/11' - to a new edition of her co-edited Blackwell *Companion to Postcolonial Studies*: 'Now more than ever we need to pay attention to the work and role of specular, border intellectuals who have the courage to stand up against the evocation of the horror of alterity by calling attention to intellectually and ethically grounded work on the politics of alterity'.<sup>22</sup> My own view is that postcolonialist writing of this kind, which has always been mystificatory, has today, in the wake of the invasion of Iraq, become no longer *merely* mystificatory, but - in its abstraction and wilful obscurantism - actively political, and actively malign. Part of the necessary corrective is provided by the editors of another recent volume, *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*, who are at least able to call domination by its name:

The shadow the 2003 US invasion of Iraq casts on the twenty-first century makes it more absurd than ever to speak of ours as a postcolonial world. On the other hand, the signs of galloping US imperialism make the agenda of postcolonial studies more necessary than ever. In a context of rapidly proliferating defenses of empire (not simply *de facto* but *de jure*) by policy makers and intellectuals alike, the projects of making visible the long history of empire, of learning from those who have opposed it, and of identifying the contemporary sites of resistance and oppression that have defined postcolonial studies have, arguably, never been more urgent.<sup>23</sup>

This is better, much better, even if the authors then go on - as, in a certain sense, they are more or less *obliged* to do by virtue of their representative

21. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2000, pp. xiii-xiv.

22. Sangeeta Ray, 'Postscript: Popular Perceptions of Postcolonial Studies after 9/11', in Ray and Schwarz, *op. cit.*, pp. 574-83.

23. Ania Loomba, Suvir Kaul, Matti Bunzl, Antoinette Burton, and Jed Esty, 'Beyond What? An Introduction' in *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, pp. 1-38.

24. In the interests of full disclosure, I should state that my own essay, 'The Politics of Postcolonial Modernism', appears in this volume (pp423-38).

capacity as editors of a large, diverse and incorporating volume<sup>24</sup> - to make excuses for the ideological evasions of much of the work within postcolonial studies past and present by suggesting that the complexities of today's world are unique and unprecedented: 'In many ways' they write, 'the new global reality has made the analysis of imperialism, in all its historical variants, more pressing, but also more difficult, than ever before'. 'More difficult, than ever before'? I'd want to suggest, in closing, that we might instead try starting from the premise that if the analysis of imperialism today is indeed a matter of urgent necessity, it isn't especially complicated at all, and oughtn't to be approached as though it were.