

**THE COLONIZER/COLONIZED DICHOTOMY:**  
*Is That All There Is?*

**Presented To:** Isabel Dyck  
**From:** Marilou Carrillo  
**Course:** WMST 500 Spring Symposium  
**Date:** 16 April 2003

## **THE COLONIZER/COLONIZED DICHOTOMY: *Is That All There Is?***

### ***Introduction***

That colonization has had devastating effects on women is indisputable. The very structures and implementation of colonization enterprises, and its present-day counterpart of globalization, are anti-women, as policies and practices of colonization invade the very notion of womanhood and of personhood, community and nationhood. The colonizer/colonized paradigm, however, keep women's epistemological environment "unstable." We appear trapped in the "colonizers'" very own epistemology. On the other hand, post-modernism's direction away from dichotomy and towards constant re-configuration of the politics of identity and difference also renders our knowledges equally vulnerable, particularly when it comes to discerning unified, universal actions for change. It is important that feminist critique challenge feminist stances manifested in the continuum of excessive post-modernism and diminished materialism. There *are* essentialist blueprints and meta-narratives of colonization based on the lives of peoples in the Majority World from pre-contact to present times. Finding other schemas of understanding women's experiences shaped by the impact of global empires, through our past historical and current political narratives, is the endeavour required of feminists. Women of the Majority World and women of colour from the North or West are asserting this endeavour.

Because of women's de-humanizing experiences under global colonizers' gazes and fists, feminist critique of women's lives and contexts needs to be grounded in the analysis of colonization and globalization. Anti-colonialist and post-colonialist discourses cannot afford to have feminist critique as an "add-on and stir" to merely inform them, but that feminist praxis – integrated theory and practice – forms an essential part of these dominant discourses. The exclusion of feminist issues from colonization discourses, or of the analysis of colonization from feminist discourse, limits the known, often unacknowledged, realities women live today. These realities are not only as colonized members of society and citizens of nations, but as de-colonized agents who have the memory in their bodies, the flesh and blood lines of their foremothers and communities, of non-colonized societies where humans live fully and in genuine freedom and democracy. Indigenous women and other women from the Majority World, and women

of colour from the West/North, contribute to this remembering. More urgently, the exclusion of these assertions of remembering limits transformative views of the future – that “women” assumes *all* women of the world who yearn, struggle for, and know how to live a just and equal collective life.

### ***A Theoretical Schema***

The colonizer/colonized is an example of the power of dichotomy as epistemological frame. It is rarely questioned and elaborately justified in colonizing environments. Patricia Hill Collins’ intersectional analysis work traces bell hooks’ idea that “feminism does not engage us in the either/or dualistic thinking that is the central ideological component of all systems of domination in Western society.” Hill Collins describes the characteristics of this social construction of oppositional difference as: (a) the categorization of people and ideas based on their difference from one another, (b) non-complimentary difference that do not enhance each other, and (c) intrinsically unstable. They are unstable because the relationship, by not representing difference and equality, is resolved by subordinating one of the pair to the other. “Dichotomous oppositional differences invariably imply relationships of superiority and inferiority, hierarchical relationships that mesh with political economies of domination and subordination.” In this dualistic thinking she notes the implications of culture versus nature as the relationship that justified slavery and colonialism. Non-European peoples are seen as closer to “nature,” more backward in their cultures, and therefore inferior. In opposition to this, Europeans control nature, understand with reason (versus emotion), have a higher culture, are more civilized, and therefore superior. At present, we inherit this dichotomous social construction and with globalization, the colonizer/colonized has become the globalizer/globalized. The hierarchical, dual relationship remains intact.

To step out of this trap, feminist thinking swung to post-modernist, post-structuralist feminism. Michelle Barrett summarized this “paradigm shift” that questioned the emphasis on social structures (including capitalism), analyzed culture’s symbolization and representation, and instead, emphasized subjectivity, plurality, agency, language, and difference. While objecting to dualisms (rationalism versus Cartesian subject) she points to the “tension between the highly particularistic and relativistic view of

knowledge adopted in post-structuralism and the epistemological claims necessarily made in substantive instances...clearest in the domain of history.” In particular, she discusses these tensions in the critique of theoretical universalism as well as materialism. It was valuable for feminists to recognize the differences in women and the inadequacy if not the falsehood of a universalized voice. Yet universalistic claims are strongly detected in critiques of Marxism and psychoanalysis. In the end, from a materialist perspective, Barrett is not willing to accept, post-structuralism’s abandonment of binary structures and traditional areas of study.

A post-colonial perspective locates itself somewhere between this materialist/post-structuralist binary in feminist critique. Anne McClintock has an intriguing analysis of the relationship of psychoanalysis and material history in the “colonial contest” of industrial imperialism, and that this relationship is itself a product of abjection. She applies Kristeva’s abjection theory as “situated psychoanalysis” to informed, lived materialist history. The theory of the process of abjection argues that the self becomes a social being by expunging, expelling, rejecting elements that society deems impure. The problem is, these elements are never completely expelled and thus come to “haunt the edges of the subject’s identity with the threat of disruption or even dissolution.” McClintock acknowledges the critical notion that we are constructed by that which we reject and try to extricate and we cannot ever really escape from them being a part of ourselves; “the abject haunts the subject at its inner constitutive boundary; that which is repudiated forms the self’s internal limit.”

When applied to modern industrial imperialism (colonization and globalization), McClintock takes the perspective of industrial imperialism (and capitalism) which rejects abject peoples and groups it cannot do without. She names: ghettos, brothels, slaves, prostitutes, the colonized, domestic workers, the insane, unemployed, etc. The abject elements return “to haunt modernity as its constitutive, inner repudiation: the rejected from which one does not part.”

However, the theory can be also applied when the perspective of “the colonized” rather than “the colonizer” is taken. If abjection indeed shapes identity, then “the colonized,”

in rejecting the “colonizer,” are immersed in major paradoxes and contradictions – to reject the colonizer is to reject aspects of oneself. In order to not settle for this, McClintock offers the idea that dimensions of abjection --objects, states, zones, agents, groups, psychic processes, political processes – are interdependent but distinct, interrelated if not contradictory, not universal, and form part of “an immensely intricate process of social and psychic formation.” For those colonized, it is a challenge and a necessity to acknowledge that colonization is in, and constitute part of, our psychic bodies, at the same time that it is situated in the materialist reality of our physical bodies. Taking this materialist reality into account is as equally critical as acknowledging abjection and the psychic process. Colonized bodies draw from this colonized, abject memory to understand the self and communities in colonization, but must also claim the historical, materialist memory of de-colonization struggles, resistance, and victories. More importantly, we sustain the spaces of non-colonization for a social, psychic, historical future of a non-colonized, liberated selfhood and nationhood.

Both Freudian psychoanalysis and Marxist economics (and recalling Barrett’s critique of their universalist claims) repudiate the particular elements that interfere with their theories but which pertain to and structure the other. For example, psychoanalysis rejects class, race, cultural difference, etc., elements essential to Marxism, while Marxism rejects the unconscious, sexual desire, identity, etc. that are critical to psychoanalytic theory. Not falling into their binary opposition here, McClintock’s notion of a situated psychoanalysis informs history, recognizing that it emerged in historical relation to imperialism. She calls for both a decolonizing of psychoanalysis and a psychoanalyzing of colonialism. She ventures to conclude that “there should be no material history without psychoanalysis and no psychoanalysis without a material history.”

Post-modernism’s emphasis on particularities and subjectivities in women’s experiences, narratives, historical and social contexts, and identities, is of intense value. Yet, in this discussion of colonization and globalization, the colonizer and colonized, the indigenous versus industrial ethics and belief systems, substantive, universalist meta-narratives and structures emerge. The tension needs critical examination as it has serious implications for Majority World women’s and national liberation movements. The danger to anti-

colonialist discourse is not to unconsciously fall into the adaptation of deep-seated ruler/ruled, victimizer/victim, colonizer/colonized binaries. However, post-modernist “dispersal and particularity” may not only limit the understanding of colonial historical patterns and synthesis, but may fragment and segment the essential understanding of self and community as well as unified action against colonizing injustices.

Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen and Maria Mies critique post-modernism in light of globalization. They assert that avoiding essentialism and universalist narratives fragment and deny the historical and materialist realities of women’s experiences. When only differences are seen in societies, individual differences, if not antagonisms, are further reinforced. Such fragmentation may actually prevent solidarity movements, and depoliticize people for not engaging powerful global systems that dominate societies in uniform ways. One of the most negative results that can come out of postmodernism is that, on the basis of its own social construction, struggles for women’s liberation – or for the liberation of any other oppressed group or class – become virtually impossible. There is no commonality, no common cause, no common ethics, no common vision. In order to be politically active, however, a somewhat larger perspective than one’s own experience is necessary.

### ***Imperialism and Colonization***

And it is our experience that industrial society is not content to leave other people’s riches alone. Wealth attracts colonialism: the more a native people has, the more colonizers are apt to covet that wealth and take it away – whether it is gold or, as in our case, pine stands and Red River farmland....For us, our wealth was the source of our poverty: industrial society could not leave us be.

Winona LaDuke  
White Earth Reservation, Anishinabeg Band  
Mississippi

The context of globalization, and its impact on women worldwide, rest in the histories of colonization among the majority of the world’s countries and populations (thus, the term *Majority World* is used here to include not only geographic nations but also indigenous

peoples within them). The link between globalization and colonization is obvious and unchanged for those who have lived hundreds of years of colonization. Perhaps for First World feminists, globalization is a new phenomenon. For Majority World peoples, there are shared narratives of how generations were colonized for the first time, in global dimensions, by seafaring Europeans from the late 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Their people were sold into transcontinental slavery or enslaved in their own lands, exploited and made indentured servants transnationally up to the present. The narratives of colonialism in particular countries abound. What is interesting about these are the meta-narratives arising from these experiences. Whether colonized by Britain, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Holland, Belgium, or France in their imperialist enterprises of pre-industrialized eras, colonial history's blueprint is recognized in just about every country suffering the hardships of globalization today. This is not a mere coincidence. The systems of social and economic control changed hands throughout these 500 years, but the relations among the ruling elite and various sectors of these societies remain structurally, and therefore essentially, unchanged.

Indigenous nations and aboriginal communities shouldered the onslaught of this European enterprise and worldview. They are witness to the avarice and resolve of imperialist powers and their expression of colonizing other peoples and nations with impunity. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, a Maori, relates imperialism and colonialism. She notes that European imperialism is understood and treated in four ways: economic expansion, subjugation of others, the spirit that characterizes Europe's global activities (that of a complex Enlightenment ideology of cultural, intellectual, and technical expressions), and a discursive field of knowledge. Colonialism is one expression of imperialism that allows it to expand its world view by dominating colonies. As a system of economic expansion and control, imperialism sought new wealth and possessions, and secured markets and capital investments. Winona La Duke, a Chippewa Anishinabeg, describes U.S. imperialism's colonization of the Chippewas in the U.S. and the Ojibways of Canada. Together they are the Anishinabeg people who lived in the Great Lakes region. As a colonial blueprint, the story is familiar. The federal government passed laws (General Allotment Act of 1887) and treaties that divided the reservation into 80-acre parcels of land for each individual Indian. The "surplus" was then given to white

people to homestead; in the case of the Anishinabeg, the pinelands were given to the state of Minnesota and later sold to timber companies.

Looking at imperialism from what Tuhiwai Smith calls the “spirit” or idea of imperialist realization, the individualist approach, of ownership, land use, and fragmentation of resources, was paramount to the “spirit” of this law. What aboriginal person whose communal knowledge of an interdependent ecosystem would survive on 80 acres of individual land over which man [sic] has dominion? Like La Duke, Patricia Monture-Angus, a Mohawk, looks at the imperialist-colonialist “spirit” through Canada’s education and legal systems. She states strongly that the “entire system of property law in this country is built on a great lie – that colonial myth” that Columbus discovered America and claimed it for the Europeans. She superimposes aboriginal values that contradict those of colonialism, and hence, her inability to accept the very premise of present-day Canadian law, education, and other social systems.

Looking at imperialism from a “discursive field of knowledge,” post-colonialist feminist discourse has made valiant attempts at deconstructing these colonization themes. Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s seminal article, “Under Western Eyes,” examines the global aspects of women’s oppression. She critiques on the one hand the universalist method of describing women’s oppression without the necessary context-specific differentiated analysis. Similarly, she, on the other hand, points to the lack of the specification of local cultural, ideological, and historical contexts in concepts and explanations for women’s oppression. She challenges Western feminism in relation to the universalist construction of Third World women by the over-categorization and then generalization of superordinate systems of representation of gender and culture. The result is the loss of the histories, agencies, and material, complex realities of women of the Third World.

Yet, from the perspective of a Majority World experience, the context of colonization of the past is understood as continuing in the present in many populations and nations. While the particularities and contextual analyses are critical for our understanding of how globalization operates in women’s lives today, the meta-narrative of colonialism and imperialism, the universality of the effects on colonized people, and the essentialism of

the knowledge of the structures of colonialism are the other side of the coin of Mohanty's post-colonial feminist critique. They are equally valid starting points in feminist analysis. Essentialist/non-essentialist, intersubjectivities, and multiplicities are not either/or undertakings in feminist criticism. In re-visiting her 1986 article, Mohanty wishes to affirm "the connections between local and universal."

Aboriginal writers and scholars assert their colonized experience, which had equally devastating parallel effects as colonized women from the Third World. In the Philippines, indigenous women from the Cordillera and Mindanao regions speak the indigenous worldview with common themes as the aboriginal people of Canada. They are, however, also women from the Third World suffering the consequences of neo-colonialism. They claim that the Spanish conquest did not devastate their mountain communities nearly as severely as the Filipinos in the lowlands. They are, however, being strangled by transnational mining companies in today's inescapable neo-liberal economic war to exploit the labor and grab the land of indigenous people. In place of what used to be colonial treaties made with indigenous peoples, there are now international economic agreements between First World global financial entities and impoverished, corrupted local Third World governments. The borders between indigenous and non-indigenous women in the Philippines, and in Canada for that matter, exploited by neo-liberal economic policies are erased. The borders between Third World and First World indigenous and non-indigenous women are also invisible to global economic elites. Majority World peoples who struggle against old and new imperialism comprise most of our world while global economic elites continue to rule as minority elites have done since the 15<sup>th</sup> century. If aboriginal versus non-aboriginal women suffer under the same imperialist systems, the politics of difference or identity between them cannot obscure their shared struggle against colonialism, and even more important, not impede the assertion of their belief systems and the ethics of being human itself.

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