

Plagiarism Declaration and Assignment Cover Sheet

ESSAY COVER SHEET

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Probing Post-: Intersections and Constructions of the Pre- and Postcolonial

“Language constructs our reality, and the specific way in which it does so has consequences.”

Aram Ziai (2013)

Branched and innumerable are the ways in which colonial discourses lens our critical analyses of human history, yet flawed and constantly evolving are these cracked, warped lenses with which we strive to understand our world. Historical misconceptions, semantic disrupts and misused frames (to name a few) make poor toolsets for the navigation of a harder still to navigate critical landscape. The goal of this project is to take a careful and guided look into one such inadequate tool, whose popularity in so many genres of critical discourse tinges it with a danger few other discursive tools can claim. Rarely are ideas as hotly contested, and as widely disseminated and used as those generated in the critical discourse around Postcoloniality. Lively and wrought with uncertainty, this concept and its myriad of associated and derivative terms and areas of study has at once built and destroyed narratives, aided and hindered progressive thought, and been used as a tool for the construction and disintegration of ahistory. I would focus here on the post- in postcoloniality, and all that it suggests and distils into. Post- in the post-colonial, post-in the post-apartheid, post- as denoting temporal or theoretical recentness, post- as a tool for the conception of a concrete pre-colonial and colonial period. This paper is a critical review of the ideas of some of the louder voices in the discourse around post- and postcolonialism, and a guided attempt at dissecting the semantics of these terms and the effects of their wider use and effects in not only critical academic spaces but in popular media – such as on the show *Shaka Zulu*, and on Google search results – and the personal spheres of my own Xhosa culture and family. Guiding this research will be a highlighted focus on the aforementioned “post-” and its use as a tool for the shattering and categorical structuring of history, and the effects that this has had on our understanding of history and the ways in which it interacts with the material and metaphysical worlds.

The Post-colonial Postcolonial Disrupt

Academic discourse on the subject and relevance of ‘postcoloniality’ is far reaching and labyrinthine with its vast directory of authors, thinkers, texts and frames, though we will tackle and reference many of the larger voices in this veritable ‘stew’ of academy let us begin our argument with a simple, digestible Google search. Surely, my reader concedes that Google’s worldwide monopoly on instantly accessible information in this age of smartphones, globalization and almost ubiquitous internet connection is a fair (if simple) gauge of the public consciousness and our generalizations about certain histories. A search for “Colonial Period” bares at the top of the results a blurb from a Wikipedia article about colonialism. Highlighted is the following phrase “starting in the 15th century and extending to the mid-1900s”. Next, I input the phrase “Postcolonial”, and the first result is a blurb from a Britannica article that reads as follows:

Postcolonialism, the historical period or state of affairs representing the aftermath of Western colonialism; the term can also be used to describe the concurrent project to reclaim and rethink the history and agency of people subordinated under various forms of imperialism.

(Brittanica)

Google's top results have provided us here both a concrete periodization of the colonial period, and a brief definition of the term postcolonial. Of-course there are many scholars who have vehemently disagreed with these first results (of whom I count myself among) and surely I might find some of them if I had only scrolled into the second page of results, but my point here is not to evidence what is correct or what is incorrect, but to show the popularity of these ideas about coloniality and postcolonialism. It is not the presence of multiple definitions of 'colonial period' and 'postcoloniality' that interests me, it is the suggestion that these results make about the ubiquity of Google as an instant source of knowledge that is both fuelled and in turn fuels common knowledge and public information archives.

There is a difficulty in trying to find the first use of the term postcoloniality because of its double meaning: Post-colonial (which is often, but not always hyphenated) is used to denote the state of being post-independence from colonial powers (an ex-colony) but Postcolonial is used to refer to anything from a theoretical state of being free from colonial influence, a body of literary works beginning with Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), or a critical field that seeks to discuss, undo or rewrite the colonial histories and archives in order to reconcile them into a hybridised, contemporary world and academia. Therefore, an assumption must be made: postcolonialism, must have its origin from the term post-colonial (or have emerged after it)¹. Because the term was initially used to denote a temporal state, and not a theoretical one, somewhere between the early 1940s and the 1980s where both terms made regular appearance in academic circles (Overbey, 2012), a disrupt must have happened to split the word into two. Now, post-disrupt, all of academia rages in trying to agree to a single meaning for a term so popularised none seem able to get rid of it.

I believe that the use of this term "postcolonial", is either justified by the assumption of colonialism having an end period, or in fact the assumption is itself justified by the widespread use of the term. Whichever may be the case, critical discourse cannot seem to shake this term that is wrought with un-surety and double-ness (double-meaning, double-origin, double-justification). For all its apparent ubiquity, Postcolonial theory seems to be haunted by a serious case of conceptual catch-22. However for the sake of writing convention, let it be noted now that for the rest of this paper "post-colonial" will be used to denote the temporal while "postcolonial" will denote the critical aspect of this double-term.

The Construction of Pre-, Post- and Colonial

First and most root of the many troubles laden on the concept of the postcolonial is its insistence on the linearity of not only colonial history, but the histories of entire peoples and cultures outside of the accepted 'colonial' period. In the same way that 'postcolonial' is split into a temporal and theoretical denotations, the designation of a pre-, a colonial, and a post-presumes a linear transition between these not only in the temporal, but also in a theoretical sense. There is fault in the separation and linearization of these imagined periods, but to explore these we must first understand the ways in which the pre-, colonial and post- are imagined through media and discourse, and how this vision is united and universalised across most of the 'modern' world.

¹ because countries have been gaining their official "independence" from colonial power since as early as 1945 (even if we assume the term post-colony itself would not have existed, the state of being "post-colony" would).

The encounter between the blacks of the United States, the Caribbean, and Africa was not only an encounter with another's other, but also, in many cases, an encounter with *others of my kind* – a castrated humanity, a life that must at all costs be pulled out of the dungeon and that needed to be healed. In this encounter Africa was a transformative force, almost mythico-poetic – a force that referred constantly to a “time before” (that of subjection)

(Mbembe, 26: 2017)

In the western imagination, the precolonial can be understood as an other to the colonial. Just like the Occident was once imagined (and so constructed through representations and metaphysics) by western society as an opposite other to the Orient, all that is known to be definitive of the ‘postcolonial’ becomes opposite to the ‘precolonial’. The use of these terms draws a line of opposition between the post- (the present and all that defines it) and the pre- (the past and all that defines it) through adjacent terminologies. The ‘post-colonial’ is only further obscured by the “modern” or the “contemporary”, both terms that overlap in meaning with the temporal designation of a time after ‘colonialism’ – because even though they do not reference the ‘colonial period’ directly, they are made to designate a period closer to the edge of recent history by the apparent centrality of colonialism as a device for measuring and placing any historical event, such that any new discussion about history has to or is assumed to reference the colonial in some way.

Echoing “post-modernity”, “postcoloniality” marks a contemporary state, situation, condition, or epoch. The prefix “post,” then aligns “post-modernism,” “post-Marxism,” “post-feminism,” “post-deconstructionism” – all sharing the notion of a movement beyond.

(Shohat, 1992: 101)

Because the ‘post-colonial’ overlaps with the ‘modern’ and ‘contemporary’, all that is associated with each term respectively overlaps as well: the state of independence from direct colonial rule blends into the state of being far removed from the past in ideas, technology and style, and that blends into the state of being detached from what is understood to be traditional. Through this association of the ‘post-colonial’ with all that is definitive of modernity and contemporaneity, the ‘pre-colonial’ acquires a binarily opposed set of associations: it becomes all that the modern is imagined not to be. While the modern is advanced technologically, the ‘pre-colonial’ becomes defined by a lack of these advancements, it becomes whatever one might imagine the farthest from modern to be. For every postcolonial/modern device for prosperity, there is a pre-colonial scarcity; for every postcolonial freedom, a precolonial restriction; and interestingly for every postcolonial restriction, a precolonial freedom. We now have a clearer understanding of a temporal pre-colonial, before the designated ‘colonial period’ beginning in the 15th century, and a theoretical pre-colonial which is the lack or binary opposition of all that is associated to the postcolonial be it good or bad, material or metaphysical.



The categories of modern and not-modern, pre-colonial and post-colonial are as much temporal positions as they are spatial, this is something I won't dive too deep into as Edward Said (1978), Stuart Hall (1995), and Samin Amir (1988) explore this idea in excellent depth in their respective practices. What I would rather explore, is the less commonly discussed construction of this idea through the use of the splitting of history into pre-, colonial and post- as a device to class geographical regions into respective historical time 'periods'. As so gleaned from the frequent presence of the word "West" wherever "colonial" is also mentioned, the Western world is largely agreed to be the main agent of colonial action in the world, though this is a fairly banal statement as colonialism is a complex and varied process nuanced in each context by regional histories, conflicts and peoples, geographies and states of being, it is to some extent true as the bulk of colonised countries of the 'new world' were colonies of western nations. Now then, since the west was the harbinger of 'colonial period' – which we might call a transitionary period between the "rustic" pre-colonial, and the "advanced" post-colonial – a logical assumption is made about western nations: that what is now known as 'post-coloniality', and therefore modernity (advancement), began there and spread from the Euro-centre into the rest of the world through colonialism and (often forced) adoption into the "objectively" advanced traditions of the west. In keeping with this assumption, the west, in the minds of both the colonised and the coloniser, is the bastion of advancement, it is attributed a certain futurity that the rest of the world – being victims, or 'receivers' of horrors of colonialism/gift of 'advancement' – cannot. In this process of attribution, Africa, the Islamic world, the 'Far' East, South America and Australia, are instead characterised by aspects of pre-coloniality (a lack of advancement) that can never be shaken while the idea of coloniality and advancement are linked, and certainly not while

these ideas are given an imaginary physical birthplace in Europe – against which all former colonies are compared and must lag behind. A new association is built in this, one between coloniality, post-coloniality and its birthplace. The colonial period is imagined now as a period during which a colony is transformed, and the post-colony, is the state of being in the image of its ‘maker’, in the image of Europe. This understanding of the regionality of these designations provides us a new understanding of the colonial period as one not just of transition between the pre-colonial and the post-colonial, but also as the period during which the pre-colony assumes the qualities of its “master”, Europe, in order to be remade in its image as a colony/post-colony.

Shattered History and the Attributive quality

As history is shattered into these three categories, so too are the associations tied to each period categorized into the non-modern, the transitional, and the modern. These are only one layer of associations tied to each designated period. There are layers still upon layers of theory tied to what is seen conventionally as the precolonial, the colonial and the postcolonial.

Another layer of theoretical separation of the pre-, the post- and the colonial in the eyes of the modern being is that which attributes to each designated period a certain descriptive quality. In much the same way as the pre-colonial is attributed a non-modern aura, it is also attributed a broader “precolonial” quality – so named for simplicity and brevity as the term here is a stand in for all else that is attributed to the pre-colonial. If anything, the ‘non-modernity’ of the precolonial itself forms a critical part of the ‘pre-colonial quality’. The modern imagination attributes to each period its own descriptive quality that is popularly ascribed to all that falls into/under that specific period.

Take for example the following exchange between some friends and I about the nature of decoloniality: I asked Kaydon how well he thinks people were decolonialising during the colonial period, “Not well” he replied, and I asked Megan the same question to which she also replied “Not well [...] considering what the period was all about [...], colonialism”. So trends the conversation around the colonial period, that it is defined by being colonial, which is to say that the ‘colonial’ becomes not only a term referring to the period but also a descriptor of it. Evidenced here is the popular belief that decolonial action is somehow less possible/effective during the colonial period due to the attribution of a ‘colonial quality’ to all that occurs or is produced during. There is much to be said of course about oppressive representational regimes during those times, and the relative freedom to criticize major institutions in the modern day. However, the restrictions of the “colonial period” do not mean that the decolonial efforts of such figures as Steve Biko and Martin Luther King were any less decolonial because they occurred during a time that is given to a certain ‘colonial attribute’. The popularity of this idea – which I’ve termed the “Attributive Quality” – that events of the colonial era are all colonial in nature (or somehow tainted by colonialism) and that those of the pre-colonial period have a ‘pre-colonial quality’ about them is another effect of the shattering of history into these three overly simplified categories.

Back to the question about decoloniality, however popular my friends’ opinions are, I don’t believe that they are unmet by opposition even in their own critical muscles. As I spoke more with Kaydon about decolonialism during the colonial period, he came to the suggestion that perhaps decolonialising is still quite a difficult thing to do, that a split between the private and public acts of decolonising complicated the question of whether it was done well during

colonialism or that it is even better actioned today. Megan too, came to ask eventually what exactly constituted a decolonial act and if such an act really even exists. Evidenced in these double-takes is an unsteady belief. The Attributive Quality dictates that the colonial has to be characterised by some ‘colonial quality’, while critical thought actively and simultaneously challenges this rule. While the default presumption about decoloniality during colonialism is linked to the Attributive Quality, my friends have shown here that this link can be deconstructed by further critical engagement with the idea. It is a popular belief, but not an absolute one. Take as proof thereof, another friend Olivia, who when asked the same question initially answers: “Quite well”, citing the very act of resistance to colonial action as form a of decoloniality. She shows here an initial understanding of decolonialism that is not tied to or grossly tainted by the colonial quality. She had broken the link between “colonial period” and a ‘colonial quality’ without need for further discussion of the matter.

Ours is a time where a sizeable chunk of critical theory is based on historical events, movements, works and discourses, for all of these to exist on a historical timeline that is split into pre-colonial, the colonial and the post-colonial leaves them all subject to the defining power of the Attributive Quality. The Attributive Quality, by tossing into the proverbial soup a colonial or pre-colonial quality to conversation surrounding things like for example decoloniality, ethics or feminism puts a hard bar on the ways in which we might understand and interact with these theories. This is not to say that the colonial and pre-colonial should not be considered in relation to critical theories, only that the Attributive Quality should not be allowed to let “colonialism” or “pre-colony” or “post-colony” become necessary descriptors of events that happen within these periods. As mentioned in the beginning of this paper, language is powerful, and the only limit to its power is the ways in which we choose to use it. Colonial, pre-colony and post-colonial have entire menageries of associations tied to them respectfully, decolonialism (to stay with the earlier example) cannot be allowed to be divided arbitrarily by constructed histories into ‘colonial decolonialism’ and ‘post-colonial decolonialism’, rather decolonialism should be allowed to act within each of its nuanced temporal and spatial locations without the hindrance of having to conform to a Eurocentric, universalised conception of the colonial or the pre-colonial or the post-colonial. The truth of history is that it is much too complex to fit neatly onto a linear timeline, rather we must visualise it as a monumental mind map where everything links somehow back to everything else.

Pre-, Post-, Colonial and the Attributive Quality in South Africa

We have discussed earlier how the prefix post- allows for the post-colonial to overlap with “modernity” and “contemporaneity” with which it shares an overlapping temporal location that is also closest to the edge of recent history. This linking of ‘posts’ that are not necessarily related happens often in many forms and with many other “genres” of post- along hundreds of regional and cultural borders (Shohat, 1992:101). South Africa makes for a fascinating case study for the shattering of history into pres and posts, and the Attributive Quality because of its many different designated “colonialisms” and its history which is saturated with instances of the intention to divide and categorize for the furtherment of imperial power.

Erna and Willem Oliver (2017) make the case for South Africa having been subjected in known history to four major “colonialisms”:

- An unofficial colonialism some 2000 years ago, defined by the invasion of the Southern Khoisan by the Nguni peoples originally from East Africa.
- A first official colonialization by the Dutch beginning in what is now Cape Town.
- A second official colonization by the British when Dutch settlers had settled and made large claims in the South.
- A final, internal colonization in the independent South Africa through legislation, segregation and capitalist extortion. Known better today as Apartheid.

As per my argument so far, colonialism presupposes pre-colonialism and post-colonialism. The same applies for each of the Olivers' designations. For all four colonialisms there is a pre- and a corresponding post-, allowing for the construction by involved parties of an image not unlike for example the generalised vision of the African precolonial in the western imagination. Once again – even as periods overlap and affected peoples interact, assimilate and borders between person, place, and culture blur – each respective category subjects to the Attributive Quality, which tends to linger not too long behind once a history is so rigidly categorized, and its categoric language so fully entrenched into historical discourse.

Regarding Language and the Afrikaner – a South African Afrikaans speaking people descended from the Dutch that first planted their flag in the Cape of Good Hope in the Fifteenth Century –, there exists a 'Pre-Dutch' South Africa where roaming Nomadic Khoisan and Nguni settlers had conflicts and diplomacies of their own. In many ways this period aligns with the general conception of a Pre-Colonial period. As one imagines this Pre-Dutch period: there are no guns, there are no western (historical) cities and there are no white people. At the start of the 1650s begins the designated Post-Dutch Period², whose entirety coincides with the general conception of a Colonial Period – because now, wars are fought with Guns brought by white men from their western port cities and forts, a period begins where South Africa is transformed into the image of its then conqueror: the Netherlands. During Dutch occupation of the Cape, wars on the other side of the world encourage Imperial growth in the British Empire, who like the Dutch saw the value of the Cape a place ripe for colony. Ensuing wars between the somewhat settling (once invading) Dutch, the invading British, and the (once settled, invaded and now invaded again) Indigenous peoples of South Africa established British Rule of former Dutch colonies in the 1800s. So began the British Period (imagined as ending in 1961 when Britain rescinded control and South Africa became an independent state – a post-British state) and a new narrative of invaders being invaded. The Boer (later, Afrikaners) that descended from those Dutch settlers fought many wars with the invading British and many remained sour against anything associated to them well into the days of Modern South Africa. Indeed, it is not uncommon to hear of Afrikaans people today raised by grandparents who refuse to speak English because it was the language of their oppressors in those old days (Kilpatrick, 2014). Conversely, Afrikaans itself has a storied history in South Africa as the language of the oppression of the “non-white”. The oppression of non-whites by Afrikaans speaking whites

² Post-Dutch Period instead of Dutch Period because these two periods blend too much into each other for there to be even an imagined end to 'Dutch Rule' in South Africa. Unlike the imagined end of colonialism that coincides with the retreat of colonial forces/ relinquishment of colonial rule by a country's declaration of independence, the Dutch of South Africa never did “retreat” and the rest of South Africa never did officially declare “independence” from *them*. Instead, they integrated fully into South Africa over the centuries, making imagining a start and end of Dutch Rule tricky.

during Apartheid solidified it in black public consciousness specifically as a “white language”. Often, strictly Afrikaans speaking peoples and communities are generalised as racist and separatist. Still, it is not unheard of for Afrikaans Nationalism to be adjacent to separatism and conspicuously Apartheid-like values³. Without going too deep into the complexity of Afrikaans and its use as both a language of liberation and oppression, we should understand from this comparison that the Attributive quality has allowed for that which is associated with the “British Period” to have a British descriptive quality, therefore English remains a symbol for British occupation and the displacement and death of hundreds of Boers, therefore the modern disdain of the language by some Afrikaners. Similarly, all that is associated with the post-Dutch period⁴, namely Afrikaans, becomes a symbol for the oppression of blacks, and therefore the language maintains its oppressive legacy and earns a sceptic eye from non-natively speaking residents of contemporary South Africa.

To Indigenous South Africans and the Xhosa – to whom I can more personally speak – the Dutch, British, Post-British, and Apartheid periods (however defined by their own descriptive qualities) all blend into one hyper-relevant and general colonial period marred by subjugation after subsequent subjugation. Of largest relevance to the indigenous imagination are the generalized colonial period, the pre-colonial period and the post-colonial. This is because these, of all the listed designated periods in South Africa’s history these most inform how the affected peoples (non-whites, blacks namely) see their socioeconomic standing in past and present societies. To the black South African imagination, the pre-colonial (pre-Dutch) represents an era of cultural purity and freedom from what is perceived as external influence; the colonial (post-Dutch) period saw the introduction and intervention of western powers in what was previously a largely Southern African politics; and the post-colonial (post-apartheid) period is seen as having freed the subjugated black from western rule. Of course none of this is of any objective truth as it is so often conveyed in popular media and postcolonial discourse.

The popular historical fiction TV show *Shaka Zulu* (Faure, 1986) begins its first episode with an epilogue scene, a conversation between the son of a late King Shaka and the then Queen of the United Kingdoms in Great Britain. In this conversation Shaka’s son, the Queen and her advisors discuss the fallen might of the Zulu Kingdom, whose once proud and myriad soldiers challenged British colonial presence and ruled a thriving empire reaching farther over Southern Africa than any westerner thought possible by even *organised* groups of “savage Africans”. Shaka’s son – wearing a suit and fluent in the language of his oppressors (significant because for the majority of the show most Nguni and westerners require translators to speak) – pleads for the queen to allow his people to govern themselves, she refuses, commanding her advisors to have the region split into British overseen territories. This series was immensely popular in its airing, garnering over 350 million viewers in the US and being slated for a high budget remake in 2023 (Vuuren, 2023). Though this series was in fact told from a Eurocentric perspective and given to falsities and constructions to serve the mainly European audiences for which it was made, the indigenous popularity of not only the show, but of the retelling of Shaka Zulu’s story is noteworthy. This first scene of the 1986

³ A particular case study is the small town of Orania that grew in popularity for being staunchly Afrikaans and anti-black (Fihlani, 2014)

⁴ -and Apartheid Period (because even though these imagined start dates are centuries apart it is the same group of people who enforce rule over indigenous South Africans, Dutch and their descendant Afrikaners).

show, I believe creates an accurate summary of the Black South African perspective of colonialism: that the pre-colonial era was one of glory and prosperity according to African traditions, and that the colonial (and to some degree the post-colonial) represent defeat. We have spoken earlier of how in the construction of pre- and post-, every post-colonial restriction, has a pre-colonial freedom, for many Indigenous South Africans the latter is freedom from the cultural assimilation and disintegration that coloniality and postcoloniality represent. The defeat of Shaka's kingdom and their subjugation by the British, mirrors the defeat of not only Nguni, but Indigenous South African tradition⁵, it mirrors the death of something "pure" within the South African, a thing whose loss allowed for the South African to toil contentedly (an exaggerate for the lack of a resistance during Apartheid that was as effective as Shaka's is imagined to have been) for decades in the mines of their conquerors. To the African psyche the last breath of Shaka's kingdom was the last breath of the "true Nguni" or the "true San"⁶, all that has since followed is seen as a mottled, tainted version of what once was.

Cinema's involvement in the work of nation-building throughout the 20th century is to be understood not only as historicizing and as myth-making but as part of larger discourses that defined citizenship and inscribed national identities through visual language, iconographic representation and narrative.

(Palesa Shongwe in Vuuren, 2023)

The subject of a sense of defeat in South African colonial history is a layered one worthy of its own paper but consider for now the Attributive Quality and how it defines all that falls under each period by its most prominent features/events. For many indigenous South Africans, the pre-colonial quality is one of cultural purity and true unfettered traditions; the colonial period's quality, while it represents a transition in the western imagination, represents a different kind of change in the indigenous one, it's quality is loss, sunder from the root of tradition. This is most evident in my own Xhosa culture where religious and spiritual practice borrow heavily from both western and indigenous practice. In performing certain rituals there are nuances between families, villages and tribes that are/were shaped mostly by preference for remaining either truer to what little is known of ancient (mostly inaccessible) traditions or adapting to modern (often Christian) practices. In these practices there is a constant exchange between the idea of loss and transformation. From what I have personally observed in different spaces, one either frames their cultural practice as taking what one can from "what was" and borrowing to fill in the gaps from "what is", or as allowing "what was" to transform into something new by the introduction of newer traditions. This exchange (in both forms) is present in the works of many Xhosa and indigenous artists of the apartheid & post-apartheid periods, including my own.

⁵ The defeat of the Zulu Kingdom in this most popular tale, is used as a catch all reference for the defeat of all South African Kingdoms for two reasons: it is easily the most popular tale of British colonial resistance, and the general obsolescence of South African oral storytelling methods by western knowledge systems makes most other tales inaccessible to modern archives, let alone popular.

⁶ As there are few popular adaptations of the histories of other indigenous ethnicities, most indigenous imaginations look upon *Shaka Zulu* to visualise a pre-colonial South Africa.





Inheritance and the Colonial Veil

We have discussed the precolonial, colonial and post-colonial as they exist in both the indigenous imagination, and the western imagination. We should question now, how it is that I, a black South African in 2023 have access to not only my own cultures imaginings of these periods, but a western imagining as well. How is it that I am afforded access to the imaginations of a people so far removed from myself in both time and space? It is because I am a subaltern being, I have inherited the mind (present and historical) of my peoples' colonisers. Such is the nature of all persons whose metaphysical realities are tied inextricably with those of their colonisers. This is because these constructions, these symptoms of a Eurocentric universal metaphysics, are our inheritance as subaltern beings. It is as Marx once said:

Human beings make their own history, but they do not make it arbitrarily in conditions chosen by themselves, but in conditions always already inherited from the past.

(Ahmed, 154: 2007)

Sarah Ahmed expands on Marx's words in A "Phenomenology of Whiteness"(154: 2007) by suggesting that this inheritance can be thought of in terms of "orientations", I would argue in the same vein that these inheritances can be thought of very simply in terms of literal histories, philosophies and myths (constructions). Human existence under and following colonial rule is subjected through this process to a form of mimicry that manifests in more than just the physical and behavioural as suggested by such works as Santu Mofokeng's *The Black Photo Album/Look at Me* (2013) – where black subjects are observed mimicking 'whiteness' by dressing as white people do and adopting their established aesthetics in their own photographic traditions. There are yet deeper layers of mimicry that exist in former

colonies than those explored in this book and photographic series. Ahmed (154: 2007) leads an expert discussion on the subject of whiteness from which I might borrow some concepts to make my argument. Ahmed posits that whiteness has a tendency to centralise itself, it penetrates former colonies deep down into the layers of the metaphysical and becomes the institution itself, overtaking whatever institutions were there before European ships landed on those shores. The white institution, by virtue of existing in place where whiteness is already a minority population, depends on the repetitive, “autopoietic” insistence of whiteness as necessary and central to the operation of the world. So whole and thorough does this practice need to be, that bodies in that sphere are required (be they white or not) to inhabit a form of whiteness in order to move through the institution with any agency. Whiteness becomes currency, one’s closeness to whiteness becomes a measure of one’s power or potential thereof within the institution. In the mimicry or inhabitation of whiteness, one also *inherits* the myths of whiteness. Such myths as Samir Amin explores in stunning detail in *Eurocentrism* (90: 1988) include the popular myth of a general and suspiciously vague line of European ancestry from Ancient Greece to Rome to Christian Europe and then Capitalist Europe. Myths like these are essential to the construction of whiteness both internally and outside of its (former) geographical bounds because it naturalises the ‘eternity’ of whiteness, it forms a pedestal on which whiteness (or the west) can claim a long, and unified climb to philosophical, technological and spiritual superiority.



Eurocentrism is not, properly speaking, a social theory, integrating various elements into a global and coherent vision of society and history. It is rather a prejudice that distorts social theories. It draws from its storehouse of components retaining one of rejecting another according to the ideological needs of the moment.

(Amin, 90: 1988)

It is essential to the mechanism of Eurocentrism, that Europe remain the centre of the universalised world, for as far back as a “civilised” or “uncivilised” world is conceivable. In embodying whiteness, one must to some extent, inherit the eurocentrism that comes built in, and in inheriting this, one inherits the myth of an eternal, white, universal history. This history is constructed as the only history that matters, because ultimately it is seen as the one whose major events shape the world according to Eurocentric thought. By comparison, everyone else in the world must have been twiddling sticks and grunting at the sun while Europeans built steam engines, and invented capitalism (another myth, also necessary to assign responsibility for every major institution of the modern world to Europe). Everyone else is therefore, less relevant, side characters to Europe’s protagonistic rise to world domination. This is why shows like *Shaka Zulu* are seen as having any relevance by both colonised and coloniser audiences, because they are a chapter in Europe’s own story.

The non-white subject, in needing to embody whiteness, in consequently inheriting white myths, casts a veil of irrelevance/invisibility/in-access over any of their own history and cultural traditions that do not intersect with those of the west. This blinding effect is something I have termed the ‘Colonial Veil’, it allows for colonised peoples to adopt western perceptions of their own pre-colonial histories instead of forming their own perceptions based off of their (as in the case of Xhosa oral histories) inaccessible or diminished archives. This veil strengthens Europe’s claim to centrality and further necessitates the split of history into three so that the Eurocentric myth of pre-colonial savagery, colonial transition and post-colonial civility can thrive.

The Postcolonial Myth of Stability

We have discussed how the language of colonial discourse has a labyrinthine set of effects and consequences for the ways in which we conceive of history, but what about the present/future? Do the ways in which we have understood history as categorized affect our perceptions of what is to come? Might there be some conceivable exodus from this way of knowing?

Jacques Derrida’s *Spectres of Marx* saw the first coinage of the term “Hauntology” (1993:10). It was used here to denote the presence and gravity of Marxist theory in a time with no obvious Marxist states or systems to be the source thereof. To put it very simply, these ideas had come completely from the past, they lingered on from times and institutions since passed, they were autonomous, ‘ghostly’. I reference this original use of the term so that my reader might understand my strange problem with Ayo A. Coly’s later adaptation of the term into postcolonial theory in *Postcolonial Hauntologies* (2019). Coly uses Derrida’s term to denote a newer form of haunting, she substitutes Derrida’s spectres of Marxism with her own (or rather the modern zeitgeist’s) spectres of colonialism.

This obligatory inheritance allows the colonial to spectralize itself in the postcolonial and then live on as haunting presence in the postcolonial. In that regard the postcolonial is what Derrida calls a “hauntology”

(Coly, 2019: 13)

One can probably already tell from Coly's insistent use of "post-" why I cannot fully accept the concept of postcolonial hauntology. It is in the insistence of there even being a post-colonial to speak of that this concept fails. Coly's theorizations here are deceptively complex and have their merit in some regards but are flawed at best and harmful at worst in some other regards:

Hauntology, as a chronic inability to break away from a colonial scene or to think of oneself outside of the colonial, becomes here a mechanism that repeatedly chains subjectivities back to the colonial scene.

(Coly, 2019: 14)

Let us first not misunderstand Coly as proposing that the postcolonial is haunted by the colonial (though this can be one reading of her work and it would not be wholly incorrect to read it as such), rather I believe she is proposing that the post-colonial is itself a hauntology of the colonial, a failure to separate oneself from the colonial scene. I do not disagree with Coly, but her idea occupies a confusing in-between where it is both true and not true. I agree that the postcolonial is a tool for the constant reification of the colonial and that this is a necessary way to understand post-colonial theory within the established nomenclature and discourses of academia as it stands today, but I cannot fully agree with the idea that there is a colonial period that is far removed from ourselves to refer back to in the first place (so far removed that we must make conscious efforts in academia and otherwise to distance ourselves from it)⁷, in fact I might argue that the very suggestion (even in this roundabout way) is itself a tool for the continued establishment of a permanent state of colonialism.

Achille Mbembe's *On The Postcolony* (in Lanfranchi, 2019: 194) excellently summarises the stages of the creation of a "Postcolony", first is founding violence, second is legitimisation, third and most relevant to us is maintenance. The maintenance of a Postcolony is the stage during which a Postcolony is established a permanent – as I have understood it, permanently referencing in the colonial, constantly trapped within the throes of an internalised colonialism that is pretending to not be colonialism. Much of the contemporary (formerly colonised, and in some cases not) world is in this last stage of colonialism, and ironically the language of postcolonialism is furthering it by suggesting that at some point colonialism just ended and we are now solidly in the era of reparations and prevention.

The colonial is not dead, since it lives on in its 'after-effects'. But its politics can certainly no longer be mapped completely back into, nor declared to be 'the same' in the post-colonial moment as it was during the period of British mandate.

(Hall, 1995)

Necessary to the maintenance of Mbembe's post-colony is the belief that we are beyond colonialism, surely as illustrated by Hall above, we are still being affected by the events of the colonial period, but never have we been in a time where these effects are nulled. This is the myth created by such terminologies as post- and postcolonial hauntology, the myth that we are now in an era of stability, where our issues are for the most part new and not just the

⁷ As discussed in the first section, there has never been an official end to colonialism apart from the slow and periodic gaining of "independence" by former colonies whose economies and governments remained in many ways forever tied to their former colonisers anyway. One such tie being through what Kwame Nkrumah refers to as Neo-colonialism in *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965).

continued drones of a colonial machine that was built to be both invisible and permanent. I do not aim to delegitimize these terms, because the complex truth of it is that they are as necessary in use as it is to understand their unnecessary. They are made useful by the language of the times and will and have so far been very useful tools. I usually agree unyieldingly with Audre Lorde's famous words but in this case, in light of the complex interwoven threads of history, language and academia, I must submit that it does seem the master's tools can destroy the master's house. This I admit with a salty tongue for still I see the master house yet stands.

Conclusion

Post- is a laden term, in whatever way it is used, it carries with it traces of its many meanings and ubiquitous associations. Though there is much that its use in postcolonial discourse does to the popular and academic consciousnesses, we have explored enough here to know certainly that there must be a better way to conceive of history. One that is less fractured and simplistic, less attributive and purposed to the maintenance of postcolonial veils, myths, confusions and constructions. I have asked whether it is possible to see outside of the vocabulary of postcolonialism into a less apocryphal system of critical thought, but this is not the point of this essay, nor do I think it is possible for anyone to know that this is possible. All that we can do is continue to review and review again and again review until history and knowledge, truth and metaphysics unfolds itself to us.

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