



Working Papers

## **BORDERLANDS:**

### **A Postcolonial-Feminist Alternative to Neoliberal Self/Other Relations**

L. H. M. Ling  
The New School, New York

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## **A Postcolonial-Feminist Alternative to Neoliberal Self/Other Relations**

L. H. M. Ling

Graduate Program in International Affairs

The New School

[lingl@newschool.edu](mailto:lingl@newschool.edu)

[www.gpia.info](http://www.gpia.info)

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### **ABSTRACT**

The neoliberal 'good life' demands one, unequivocal condition: convert or be disciplined. Conversion requires wholesale integration of the neoliberal Self's policies, practices, and institutions at all sites of public policy-making for the Other, regardless of local histories, cultures, or desires. Discipline comes through economic, political, and sometimes military 'conditionalities' from the Self to the 'non-compliant' Other. That both conversion and discipline mean a kind of annihilation for the Other is, for the neoliberal Self, a necessary risk. This includes the rise of rival camps of hypermasculinity that lead, invariably, to perpetual cycles of competition and conflict. A 'borderlands' approach offers an alternative. Similar to 'traveling' theory from feminists of color, this notion of 'borderlands' also draws from pre-colonial experiences such as the ancient Silk Roads where peoples, societies, languages, religions, and ways of life mixed, merged, and moved. 'Borderlands', in short, exemplifies a multiple worlds ontology to world politics. Three cases illustrate the pitfalls of neoliberal Self/Other relations and why we need to move to the 'borderlands': (1) the Asian financial crisis (1997-1998), (2) US corporate corruption (2001-2002), and (3) the 9/11 Commission Report (2004).

## **BORDERLANDS:**

### **A Postcolonial-Feminist Alternative to Neoliberal Self/Other Relations**

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## **INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>**

‘Welcome to the Coke side of life’.<sup>2</sup> This slogan from one of corporate capitalism’s most famous icons encapsulates neoliberal globalization’s promise as well as its threat. That is, prosperity, equality, and happiness can be attained by all but on one, unequivocal condition: convert to the US-led, neoliberal world-order or be disciplined. Conversion entails wholesale integration of neoliberal policies, practices, and institutions at all sites of public policy-making, regardless of local histories, cultures, or desires. Discipline comes through economic, political, and sometimes military ‘reform’ by the neoliberal ‘Self’ onto recalcitrant ‘Others’.<sup>3</sup> And if both mean a kind of annihilation for the Other, neoliberals reason, so be it. The world, after all, needs to be democratized and liberalized to enjoy an enduring peace.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was delivered as a keynote address to the Gender and Politics Section of the German Political Science Association, Muenster, 25-29 September 2006.

<sup>2</sup> This is the Coca Cola Company’s advertising slogan for 2006 (<http://www.2collectcola.com/page/ACC/slogan>).

<sup>3</sup> The terms ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ refer to a social dichotomy. It posits two, supposedly opposite identities differentiated by colonial constructions of race, gender/sexuality, class, and nationality. The ‘Self’ represents a configuration of whiteness-Christianity-’the West’ and possesses rationality, wealth, and power. The ‘Other’ mires in negation due to its brownness, blackness or yellowness shackled by superstitions or fundamentalisms coming from ‘the Orient’, ‘the New World’, or ‘the heart of darkness’ and exhibits irrationality, poverty, and powerlessness (cf. Said 1979). Updated for contemporary ‘development’, ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ have come to stand in for ‘developed’ and ‘underdeveloped/developing’ economies, respectively, in liberal discourse and ‘center’ and ‘periphery’, respectively, for world systems theory. Given their constructed nature, ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ are treated here as contingent and provisional, although I write them without scare quotes in the rest of the text for simplicity’s sake.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, ‘democratic peace’ theory (cf. Gartzke 2007).

This neoliberal imperium sets up two, interrelated asymmetries: (1) a geospatial-economic ‘West’<sup>5</sup> at the center of world politics and everyone else on the periphery (cf. Bull 1966, Wallerstein 1974, 1980, 1989), and (2) a cultural-institutional one that valorizes hypermasculine whiteness over all other ways of being and relating to others (cf. Hall/Ling forthcoming).<sup>6</sup> Both are underwritten by colonial-capitalist practices of race, gender, sexuality, class, and nationality. Put differently, neoliberal globalization is not simply an abstract system of ‘empire’ as suggested by some (Hardt and Negri 2000). Rather, it stems from and aims to consolidate an imperium of social relations that assigns a minority of the world’s population the privilege of managing and consuming the capitalist world-order and the majority to supplying, laboring, and sacrificing for it.

Not surprisingly, rival camps of hypermasculinity arise in response. Hypermasculine competition becomes a strategy for many Others precisely because they are tired of being peripheralized and, moreover, feminized and/or infantilized by neoliberal globalization. But efforts to re-center themselves often rely on neoliberal methods of property accumulation and Self/Other relations, thereby reproducing similar relations of exploitation, oppression, and infantilization of the Other’s Others: e.g., women, workers, peasants, minorities, and so on. Violence escalates, then, by becoming normalized, damning our world to eternal battles between contending camps of hypermasculinity.

This chapter proposes a postcolonial-feminist alternative: ‘borderlands’. Not only does it disrupt neoliberalism’s fixed binaries along structural lines (conversion vs discipline, center vs periphery, West vs Rest), but it also addresses the neoliberal imperium’s unacknowledged yet explicit designation of Self/Other relations along colonial designations of race, gender, sexuality, class, and nationality. To demonstrate, I refer to three recent events: (1) Asia’s financial crisis (1997-1998), (2) US corporate corruption scandals like Enron (2001-2002), and (3) *The 9/11 Commission Report* (2004),

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<sup>5</sup> I place this geocultural location in scare quotes to signify its constructed and contingent nature. Indeed, so naturalized are these categories that we fail to interrogate how they came to be (cf. Halperin 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Nandy (1988) first coined the term ‘hypermasculinity’ to refer to colonial England’s underlying gender ideology to justify its ‘civilizing mission’ overseas. I draw on this term to indicate a slightly different condition: that is, a reactionary distortion of traditional or ‘hegemonic masculinity’ (Connell 1995) to counter perceived attacks by other, especially ‘foreign’, sources of masculinity. In so doing, hypermasculinity itself becomes a source and means of threatening oneself as well as others.

hereafter *The Report*, on the attacks on the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and the White House on 11 September 2001. I have discussed these cases elsewhere and draw on them here (Ling 2002, 2005; Agathangelou and Ling 2005). Together, these demonstrate the hypermasculine whiteness behind neoliberal globalization.

### **NEOLIBERAL GLOBALIZATION: Hypermasculine Whiteness in Action**

That centers and peripheries divide the international political economy is non-controversial (cf. Little and Smith 2006). Less well-articulated is how these structures of asymmetry relate to colonial designations of race, gender, sexuality, class, and nationality. Given Western colonialism's dominance for the past five centuries, the West naturalizes itself to be the center of world politics, as demonstrated by developmentalism's longstanding maxim that the 'underdeveloped'/'developing' Third World should emulate the 'developed' First World in order to 'catch up' (cf. Fukuyama 1989). Richard Higgott (1998) made the case more explicitly when he cautioned the 'white' states of North America and Western Europe against a 'politics of resentment' from the 'non-white' states of East and Southeast Asia during the Asian financial crisis.

Here, gender plays in high relief. In claiming center status, colonial patriarchy assumes traits such as power, autonomy, and security to be masculine. Contrastingly, colonial patriarchy feminizes those in the periphery as exiled, outsiders-looking-in, invariably wrought with emotion, contingency, and multiplicity (cf. Spurr 1993). Moreover, as Ashis Nandy (1988) has shown, the colonizer's masculinity turns into a *hyper* version to justify the 'civilizing mission' overseas.

A zero-sum logic emerges: the Other must convert to the Christian, white, capitalist Self or be disciplined. From the 16<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, this meant submission to 'gunboat diplomacy' or outright colonization (cf. Rodney 1973). Neoliberal globalization updates this logic: the Other must convert to 'free-market' policies or be disciplined by 'conditionalities' from neoliberal institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or 'regime change' from the US hegemon (cf. Escobar 1996).

Crises in the international political economy expose such hypermasculine whiteness most explicitly.

### *Asia's Financial Crisis (1997-1998)*

At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century, Asia's 'miracle' economies seemed on the verge of collapse. A run on loans resulted with the IMF 'rescuing' Thailand with \$17 billion, Indonesia with almost \$40 billion, and South Korea with \$57 billion (Pollack 1997). A thirty-year dictatorship fell in Indonesia, riots and strikes erupted from Northeast to Southeast Asia. The region seemed mired in chaos economically and politically.

Neoliberal elites in the West crowded. There is only one economic model for the world to follow, intoned then Chairman of the US Federal Reserve, Alan Greenspan, to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in February 1998, and that is 'the Western form of free-market capitalism' (Sanger 1998: 1). The neoliberal, mainstream media denounced the Asian financial crisis for its 'complacency, cronyism, and corruption' (Singh and Weisse 1999: 204) aided by a 'culture of deceit' (Gibney 1998), among other factors. Editorialist Thomas Friedman of the *New York Times* claimed that Asian societies lacked the 'software' (i.e., regulatory agencies, banking controls, transparency, bureaucratic professionalism, civil society) to match the 'hardware' (i.e., relatively free markets, free trade, open capital flows) that advanced industrialization required (quoted in Rao 1998: 1411). Another observer proselytized that Asians needed to strengthen certain [read Western, masculine] values such as 'directness' and 'transparency' to counter their [read Oriental, feminine] tendencies toward 'circumspection' and 'secrecy' (Rao 1998: 1411). *Time Magazine* likened the IMF to the 'expeditionary forces' that America and other Western nations sent to an ailing Asia in the past (Lacayo 1997: 36). Academics who previously had touted Asian institutions as a new model for late-modern capitalism now blamed these same institutions for being the problem (cf. Haggard 1999).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> There were exceptions like Johnson (1998).

### *US Corporate Corruption Scandals (2001-2002)*

Just three years later, neoliberals characterized the corporate corruption scandals in the US as, simply, ‘a few bad apples’ (cf. Cavaluzzo 2004). The American system of corporate governance, far from suffering in reputation and prestige, remained intact as a beacon of capitalist rationality and fairness for all. There were cries of ‘scandal’, ‘misconduct’, ‘crime’, and ‘fraud’ (cf. Deutsche-Pressé Agentur 2002, Toynbee 2002, Iyer 2002, Friedman 2002). But these focused primarily on individuals and their personal failings. Where larger, institutional problems were recognized, these remained limited to specific problem areas: e.g., weaknesses in corporate governance, where practices may be legal but unethical (Surowiecki 2002, *New York Times* 2002, Gettler 2002, Olive 2002, Sanger 2002, Deutsche Presse Agentur, 2002); a ‘managers’ capitalism’ that subordinated workers’ interests to the corporation’s overall well-being (MSNBC Donahue Show, 4 October 2002); interlocking boards and networks that enabled yet camouflaged long-term conflicts of interest (Krantz 2002); and the ‘tyranny’ of shareholder values that distorted corporate production and growth combined with the prevalence of ‘absentee ownership’ that divorced management from labor (Skapinker 2002). Only Walden Bello (2002: 1), a critical economist headquartered in Bangkok and Manila, labeled the corruption scandals a ‘crisis’.

Neoliberals conceded that better legislation was needed but the problem itself was contained, isolated, and idiosyncratic. After all, capitalism is all about dynamic change and destruction, with innovation as its promise and challenge. ‘[J]ust as crisis is in [capitalism’s] nature’, wrote Charles Leadbeater (2002) in the *New Statesman*, ‘so is adaptability...[From] bubbles, booms, busts and collapses [come] innovation, growth, creativity and vitality’. Brian M. Carney (2002) of the *Wall Street Journal* declared: ‘Capitalism [can] fix itself [and so far] it’s doing quite nicely [thank you]’. He further thumped that the corporate scandals separated the ‘chaff’ from the ‘wheat’, allowing us to ‘marvel’ at the ‘strengths’ of the US corporate governance that ‘leav[es] the rest of the economy healthier’, unlike Other industrial wannabes, like Europe and Japan, where ‘governments make every attempt to prop up their corporations – at a heavy economic cost’. Peter T. Leeson (2002) of the *Chicago Sun Times* hymned that corporate America

can redeem itself. The corporate scandals have returned America to its progressive, virtuous, and stoic *true* nature – that is, enlightened self-interest – thereby permitting ‘foreigners’ to learn so that they, too, could progress. Capitalism’s ability to ‘self-correct’, Leeson thrilled, acts as a ‘great uniter’ of different cultures, leading, of course, to world peace.

### ***The 9/11 Commission Report (2004)***

Deference to hypermasculine whiteness intensified after the attacks of 11 September 2001. *The 9/11 Commission Report*, issued in August 2004, serves as an apt example. Mandated to understand the origins of this event and to prevent similar attacks in the future, *The Report* concluded on a seemingly magnanimous note: i.e., the Muslim world needs more and better education about America and Americans. Once ‘they’ know ‘us’ better, the commissioners wrote, then the ‘war on terror’ could be won (*The Report*: 367, 375-378).

The Report presented the Muslim terrorist Other as either ignorant or maniacal, mired in particularistic, local concerns:

1. Muslims are ‘uninformed’ about America and Americans, given their inundation by cartoonish stereotypes. They need to be ‘Americanized’ by teaching them the Anglo-American liberal virtues of ‘[t]olerance, the rule of law, political and economic openness, the extension of greater opportunities to women’ (*The Report*: 362-363);
2. bin Ladin and/or al Qaeda are categorically evil and maniacal. Yet they are, simultaneously, not competent or even effective enough to achieve their diabolical goals due to an incurable irrationality. They were even expelled by several sympathetic governments in the region (*The Report*: 55-63);
3. bin Ladin is a rich, spoiled charlatan. He’s valued more for his money than his leadership or religious devotion (*The Report*: 55); and,
4. Followers of bin Ladin/al Qaeda are similarly misled, mistaken, or misguided, at best, or deranged, at worst. They like to blame the US, the ‘Great Satan’, for all their problems when they should look closer to home. These frustrated,



underemployed young men really need jobs but are frenzied into a mob by greedy, irresponsible governments/leaders (*The Report: 52-54, 63, 362*). It is the story of eccentric and violent ideas sprouting in the fertile ground of political and social turmoil' (*The Report: 48*).

The US neoliberal Self, in contrast, is innocent, peaceful, and global:

1. The US is an innocent bystander to world politics even though it is the world's largest economy and only superpower. Indeed, the US (and other Western powers for that matter) has little to do with the political, economic, and social violence experienced by generations in the Arab/Muslim world (*The Report: 51*). 'To us, Afghanistan seemed very far away. To members of Al Qaeda, America seemed very close. In a sense, they were more globalized than we were' (*The Report: 340*);
2. America reflects the world. '[T]he American homeland is the planet' (*The Report: 362*). Accordingly, the US seeks order and peace by 'engaging other nations in developing a comprehensive coalition strategy against Islamist terrorism...But the most important policies should be discussed and coordinated in a flexible contact group of leading coalition governments' (*The Report: 379*); and, lastly,
3. The implications are clear. The US Self *has done nothing wrong*. Grievances against the US Self have no validity. Whatever complaints Others have qualifies more as the pent-up frustrations of the unemployed, the envious, and the uneducated (*The Report: 340*). They are the 'losers' of globalization whereas, the US neoliberal Self is the all-time winner. But America's good fortune has made Others turn envy into rage, rage into hatred, and hatred into terrorism. The US is the victim of not just a physical attack but also a moral injustice. America's 'openness' and 'generosity' have been repaid with wanton destruction. The Muslim terrorist Other must be out of his [sic] mind, out of control, and/or simply out of it (*The Report: 362*).

The only solution to this problem becomes equally clear: conversion or discipline. Given this high price for ‘the Coke side of life’, rival camps of hypermasculinity invariably arise.

## **REACTIONS:**

### **Rival Hypermasculinities**

Hypermasculine whiteness provokes, in turn, rival camps of hypermasculinity. Whereas the Cold War endured only two main camps of hypermasculinity – a US-led ‘capitalist’ one vs a Soviet/Chinese-led ‘socialist’ one – I argue that we have smaller, more localized, and therefore more profuse versions of such today. These camps of hypermasculinity compete against one another ideologically, militarily, and economically, with some specifically targeting the neoliberal imperium, but each reproducing a similar hierarchy of race, gender, sexuality, and nationality to exploit internal Others: e.g., women, children, peasants, workers, minorities.

Let us review the three cases mentioned above.

#### ***Asian Capitalism: Bloodied, Not Bowed***

‘Never again’ refrains throughout Asia today (Bello 2007). Many regard those who precipitated the crisis – i.e., Western lenders – as ‘terrorists’ (Bradsher 2007). In May 2000, the Association of Southeast Asian States (ASEAN) together with China, South Korea, and Japan formed the ‘Chiang Mai Initiative’ (CMI) as part of the ‘ASEAN Plus 3’ coalition. It would allow member states to swap foreign currency reserves so no central bank could be raided on the scale of 1997-1998.<sup>8</sup> Other measures for regional cooperation included surveillance and monitoring of capital flows along with the personnel training to do so.

These steps build on Malaysia’s defiance of the IMF in 1998 by setting external capital controls to stem the crisis (cf. Nguyen 2003). Contrastingly, South Korea, the

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<sup>8</sup> ASEAN initiated swapping foreign currency reserves in 1977 but it was limited to a small scale, particularly as ASEAN did not have the huge reserves that China, Japan, and South Korea have today.

country that most complied with IMF conditionalities, now suffers from increased poverty (3% of the population in 1996 to 11.6% in 2006), greater social malaise (one of the highest suicide rates among developed countries), continued labor unrest due to massive layoffs, and unprecedented foreign ownership (up to 40%) within Korea's financial and industrial conglomerates or *chaebol* (Bello 2007).

Even as a developmental model, neoliberal globalization is losing ground in the region. Thailand, for example, is opting for a more inward-oriented, Buddhist-based Keynesianism called the 'sufficiency economy' (*setakit pawpieng*) (Tinsulanonda 2001). All turn now to China, the world's 4<sup>th</sup> largest economy with huge credit reserves for the US economy, for political and economic leadership. Another unexpected beneficiary of the crisis have been the family-owned, patriarchally-controlled Chinese firms that network throughout the world but are most concentrated in East and Southeast Asia. These firms, more than others, were able to withstand the worst effects of the crisis by transferring capital to one another, on a fluid and emergency basis, due to their strong, personal ties cemented by clan, marital, or other kinship relations (Peng 2002). Most likely, these business networks will play an even stronger role in the region.

Still, these economies end up exploiting a familiar resource: women. A 1 July 2007 labor law in South Korea, for instance, aims to regulate those workers, mostly women, 'shed' into part-time status by *chaebol* reforms ordered by the IMF (Doucette 2007). Meant to promote part-time workers to full-time status after two years of employment at the same firm, the law has motivated, instead, the firing of women just before they qualify for such status; furthermore, their work can be outsourced to cheaper labor elsewhere (Ahn 2007). Women workers thus find themselves, once again, at the bottom of South Korea's developmental ladder (Han and Ling 1998, Truong 1999, Doucette 2007). For economies less industrialized than South Korea's, sex trafficking and sex tourism remain a compensatory source of profit-making. A \$7- 9.5 billion/year industry, human trafficking alone targets almost 200-225,000 women and children each year, most from Southeast Asia (International Organization for Migration 2000: 88).

### *US Corporations: Resurgently Hegemonic*

The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have redeemed the US corporate hero, allowing it to resurge bigger than ever. Mega-corporations like Halliburton (where Vice President Dick Cheney was CEO) received multi-billion dollar, 'no bid' contracts even before the bombing stopped (CBS News 25 April 2003). Halliburton remains the highest paid contractor for Iraq and Afghanistan, totaling almost \$12 billion.<sup>9</sup> More generally, firms from the US and Western Europe dominate the privatization of military services and operations in the region. Compared to 135,000 US troops in Iraq as of June 2005, private contractors numbered nearly 155,000 in the same fields of operation at the same time (Calaguas 2006: 59).

Campaign contributions from the corporate sector helped. In 2001, even before the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq began, 'ten prominent contracting firms expended over \$32 million on US lobbying efforts and shelled out more than \$12 million in political campaign contributions' (Calaguas 2006: 75). Halliburton led the pack with 95% of its \$700,000 spent on Republicans; DynCorp followed suit with 72% of its \$500,000 to the same (Calaguas 2006: 75). No wonder the Bush Administration lost little time in rehabilitating and revalorizing these corporations.

Businesses underscore such whiteness with hypermasculinity as managerial wisdom. A 2006 study, for instance, finds that 'leadership' is still defined in male terms only. In other words, when women exert 'leadership', they are seen as 'false men' but if they draw on typically feminine traits for management, they are judged 'ineffective' (Catalyst 17 July 2007). The study does not differentiate race in its findings but as Richard L. Zweigenhaft and G. William Domhoff (1998) point out, the rules of corporate America still adhere to those set by upper-class, Christian white males despite the entrance of women, Jews, blacks, Asians, Latinos, and gay men and lesbians in the workforce.

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<sup>9</sup> See, for example, the Center for Public Integrity <http://www.openairwaves.org/wow/bio.aspx?act=pro> (Download: 07.03.08).

### ***Muslim Insurgency/Terrorism: Resistant and Growing***

The US corporate hero, however, cannot escape the consequences of hypermasculinity. Note, for example, the indiscriminate killing of Iraqi civilians by guards employed by Blackwater USA, a private military firm (Glanz and Tavernise 2007). Such actions predictably provoke anger from locals with some taking up arms against the US occupiers. In January 2005, Iraq's director of intelligence services revealed that insurgents numbered as many as 200,000, outnumbering US military troops in the country (Hider 2005). He explained:

People are fed up with no security, no electricity, people feel they have to do something. The army (dissolved by the American occupation authority) was hundreds of thousands. You'd expect some veterans would join with their relatives, each one has sons and brothers.

The Bush Administration's 'surge' of 20,000 in 2007 increased US troops in Iraq to 200,000 (Cordesman 2007). A related 'surge' in Iraqi troops, however, 'has lagged badly in effectiveness, if not in numbers' (Cordesman 2007: 17). As of November 2006, attacks by insurgents and/or terrorists in Iraq have increased to almost 200 strikes per day.<sup>10</sup> As of 4 March 2008, US military casualties in Iraq, both wounded and dead, numbered 29,320 according to official statistics (but estimated at 23,000-100,000 by unofficial sources), an increase of almost 7% since the war began in 2003.<sup>11</sup> The same applies to Afghanistan. 'In the spring of 2006', the *New York Times* reports, 'the Taliban carried out their [sic] largest offensive since 2001', resulting in a quintupling of suicide bombings and doubling of roadside bombings (Rohde and Sanger 2007: 1, 12-13). 'All told', the report continues, '191 American and NATO troops died in 2006, a 20 percent increase over the 2005 toll' (Rohde and Sanger 2007: 13).

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<sup>10</sup> [http://www.swivel.com/data\\_sets/show/1007498](http://www.swivel.com/data_sets/show/1007498) (Download: 07.03.08)

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.antiwar.com/casualties/#count> (Download: 07.03.08) Iraqi casualties, for both government and insurgent personnel, are harder to calculate but the same website estimates it is 1,173,743.

The US Department of Defense claims the insurgents are either self-interested mercenaries or victims of local warlords (Garamone 2007). But a small article in the 5 August 2007 issue of the *New York Times* suggests there might be another motivation at play. It notes that the Army convicted a US soldier of a March 2006 rape and murder of a 14-year-old Iraqi girl, including the murders of her parents and younger sister. After raping the girl, the soldier (one of five conspirators) ‘poured kerosene on her body and set it on fire in an attempt to hide evidence of the crime.’ Given the history of US military atrocities, especially rape, in locales like Okinawa, South Korea, the Philippines, and other parts of East and Southeast Asia during the Cold War (cf. Ling 2002), it is not hard to imagine why both men and women in Iraq and Afghanistan, not to mention the rest of the Arab/Muslim world, would support hypermasculinity as the standard of the day. As Osama bin Ladin declared on 7 October 2001: ‘What the United States tastes today is a very small thing compared to what we have tasted for tens of years’.<sup>12</sup>

Paying for such righteous fervor are women and other feminized subjects. They are enrolled in a gendered division of labor to sustain the ‘revolutionary’ struggle conducted, supposedly, on their behalf (Agathangelou and Ling 2004). Women, in particular, find themselves in the precarious position of either defending the cause with maternal martyrdom or succumbing to the Great Satan due to weakness or selfishness. Note this quote from a 35-year-old conservative Muslim mother speaking defiantly to a US journalist, shortly after the 9/11 attacks:

In the name of God, I will sacrifice my son, and I don’t care if he is my most beloved thing. For all of my six sons, I wanted them to be *mujahedeen*. If they get killed it is nothing. This world is very short. I myself want to be a *mujahid*. What will I do in this world? I could be in heaven, have a weekly meeting with God (quoted in Addario, 2001: 38).

One wonders, after the journalist leaves, what this mother really feels and thinks.

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<sup>12</sup> [http://www.robert-fisk.com/text\\_of\\_usama\\_video\\_7october2001.htm](http://www.robert-fisk.com/text_of_usama_video_7october2001.htm) (Download: 07.03.08)

## **FROM 'BORDERS' TO 'BORDERLANDS': A Multiple Worlds Alternative**

Postcolonial theory seeks to transform such debilitating Self/Other relations. Not limited to one approach, perspective, or method, postcolonial theory nevertheless stems from a common normative commitment: i. e., to recognize and document the ability of the subaltern (whether slave, prostitute, servant, clerk, or lieutenant) to 'remake' the colonizer's hegemony, often under conditions that W.E.B. Dubois (1903) coined a 'double consciousness'. In asking, 'What did the subaltern think and do about colonial oppression, identity, and social relations?' postcolonial theorists return to the Other not just voice and presence but also agency.

Additionally, postcolonial feminists inject a much-needed sensibility to subaltern history: i.e., the role and impact of patriarchy. Note for example, a proto-postcolonial theorist like Edward Said. He masterfully illuminated the intricacies of culture and politics yet did not register any complicity between Self and Other in patriarchy due to his presumption that social structures like imperialism are gender-neutral. He overlooked the possibility that women and other feminized subjects may not regard 'exile', for example, as so different from 'home', especially if they must contend with similar constraints of racism, sexism, and patriarchy in both (Ling 2007).

An Indian clerk, for instance, may be a subaltern Other to the British *sahib* at work. But he becomes a patriarchal Self to his subalternized wife at home. Similarly, the British *sahib*, if Irish or homosexual or minority in any way, would be subalternized by *his* 'superior', say an English aristocrat, in the colonial hierarchy. The status of white women in the colonies exemplified this multi-layered, inter-mixed, and rotational nature between 'colonizer' and 'colonized' (Pratt 1992).

Neither does the hypermasculine white-male Self escape from such complexities and multiplicities. Rey Chow (2003: 342-343) explains:

What I am suggesting is a mode of understanding the native in which the native's existence – that is, an existence before becoming 'native' – precedes the arrival of the colonizer. Contrary to the model of Western hegemony in which the colonizer

is seen as a primary, active ‘gaze’ subjugating the native as passive ‘object’, I want to argue that it is actually the colonizer who feels looked at by the native’s gaze. This gaze, which is neither a threat nor a retaliation, makes the colonizer ‘conscious’ of himself, leading to his need to turn this gaze around and look at himself, henceforth ‘reflected’ in the native-object. It is the self-reflection of the colonizer that produces the colonizer as subject (potent gaze, source of meaning and action) and the native as his image...Hegel’s story of human ‘self-consciousness’ is then not what he supposed it to be – a story about Western Man’s highest achievement – but a story about the disturbing effect of Western Man’s encounter with those others that Hegel considered primitive. Western Man henceforth became ‘self-conscious’, that is, uneasy and uncomfortable, in his ‘own’ environment.

Put differently, the master must recognize what he has become in order to be the ‘master’. As drawn from the gaze of the ‘slave’, this ‘master’ is necessarily brutal, false, all-too-human, acting on whim and fancy and power. And he has nowhere to hide. The hollowness of his proclaimed ideals of Beauty, Truth, Perfection, Rationality, and Science, derived from the supposedly superior legacy of the European Enlightenment, confronts him daily and intimately as the ‘slave’ serves his breakfast, polishes his boots, cradles his children. For this reason, the master-colonizer cannot rest easily or comfortably.

But there’s more. In recognizing the multiple, intersecting relations produced by agency, postcolonial feminists can trace the contrapuntality of power. ‘Contrapuntality’, first developed by Edward Said (1993, 2000), identifies the simultaneous interplay between ‘metropolitan center’ and ‘colonized periphery’, master and slave, the seen and unseen, in the production of colonial/imperialist power relations. This method, Geeta Chowdhry (2007:105) elaborates, helps us to historicize ‘texts, institutions and practices [by] interrogating their sociality and materiality [and] the hierarchies and the power-knowledge nexus embedded in them.’ From this process, we may recuperate a ‘non-coercive and non-dominating knowledge’ (Said quoted in Chowdhry 2007: 105).



Here, we find an opening for emancipatory politics. Relationality challenges hypermasculine whiteness – or any camp of hypermasculinity, for that matter – by producing an alternative method to politics in order to transform it. Towards this end, postcolonial-feminist relationality offers an orientation, a point of departure, by setting the usual analytical categories into dynamic interaction, leading to open-ended, not fixed or known, outcomes (cf. Ling 2007).

Take, for example, an older Muslim woman who has few skills outside the house. Those who emphasize market efficiency and productivity may consider her ‘poor’, ‘helpless’, and ‘irrelevant’. But this same woman could be ‘well-off’ and ‘powerful’ precisely due to her *social* position as the household’s mother and/or mother-in-law. Indeed, it is her role as a linkage between the marketplace and the household that offers possibilities for change *and* resistances to it. Postcolonial feminists recognize these multiple and contending subjectivities as alternative sources of power that envelope and puncture conventional notions of who’s in charge and why. The same applies to contending cultural worlds.

Moraga and Anzaldúa (1983) called it being on the ‘borderlands’. For them, ‘borderlands’ afflicts women of color especially. Not only do they ‘travel’ constantly in-between say, an English-speaking world outside the home and a Spanish-speaking one inside, but they must also ‘translate’ or make sense of all the differences, contestations, and contradictions among these worlds *especially* for patriarchs and other authority figures who feel entitled to have ‘subordinates’ do the hard work for them. As metaphor and lament, Moraga and Anzaldúa titled their volume, ‘This Bridge Called My Back’.

I recognize these burdens. Much intellectual, emotional, and psychic labor has been put into traveling and translating across worlds, none of it easy by any means (cf. Fanon 1965, 1967). But it is also this world-straddling labor, cumulated over the centuries, that gives postcolonials – especially postcolonial women – the *benefits* of being on the borderlands: i.e., a far superior inventory of seeing and acting in the world than what any singular worldview could provide. ‘Tradition’, for example, becomes a repository of resources to draw on rather than a negative history to overcome for ‘modernity’. As we see below, pre-colonial encounters from the Silk Road can show us another model of inter-cultural negotiation. By no means does this suggest that life on

the Silk Road was free of conflicts and contestations. Of course these occurred, as they would anywhere. Rather, what the Silk Road experience offers is another way of dealing with conflicts and contestations that, ironically, exposes the backwardness of contemporary Self/Other relations under neoliberal globalization.

Agathangelou and Ling (forthcoming) coin the term ‘worldism’ to identify the social ontology behind ‘borderlands’. Worldism begins with the premise that multiple worlds define our world politics. These reflect the different ways of thinking, doing, and being passed to us from generations of world-making. Multiple worlds, however, signify more than what postmodernists make of ‘difference’: i.e., contending experiences, histories, perspectives, and/or collective memories (Inayatullah and Blaney 2004). Multiple worlds substantiate the legacies of entwinement and embeddedness among contending experiences, histories, perspectives, and memories, particularly over long periods of time, reinforcing legacies as well as contesting them at the same time. This accounts for complicities between Self and Other along with sources of conflict.

Reconfigured by worldism, ‘borderlands’ offers strategies for dealing with neoliberal ‘conversion/discipline’. Banerjee and Ling (2008) draw on Sino-Indian encounters during the height of Silk Road traffic in the 7<sup>th</sup>-century for inspiration and illustration.

Four main strategies stand out:

1. A Cosmopolitan Outlook. Trade along the Silk Road enhanced a cosmopolitan outlook for masses and elites alike (cf. Weatherford 2004). Peoples, goods, ideas, religions, and lifestyles from Europe, Central Asia, the Middle East, China, Africa, and South Asia mixed openly and constantly. Buddhist pilgrims from India brought knowledge of math, astronomy, calendrical science, and medicine to the 7<sup>th</sup>-century Tang court in China. Similarly, the subcontinent learned of key Chinese technologies like silk and sericulture, paper making and printing, use of the compass, and gunpowder. Such mobility and fluidity made an important political, not just commercial, impact: i.e., tolerance from ruling elites. Buddhist compassion and acceptance of non-organized diversity through ‘non-doing’ (*wu wei*), for instance, helped the Han-dominated bureaucrats in China find a means of including other ethnic and linguistic groups under their rule. Indeed, ‘silk

diplomacy' was used often and effectively to solidify relations between Han Chinese and the Huns in 2 AD (Sen 2004). Equally significant, Buddhism's integration with Confucianism helped to mitigate the authoritarian tendencies of the latter and the other-worldliness of the former to foster a new political activism tempered with compassion. For example, the renowned poet-official, Su Shi (1037-1101), exercised both by convincing local wealthy families to donate funds for orphanages throughout his jurisdiction (Egan 1994);

2. Valorization of Women and Femininity. Though patriarchy prevailed throughout, borderland societies granted significant venues for women's agency precisely because the environment was so mixed and confusing (Devahuti 2002: 69). Women were seen as naturally shamanistic, for instance, given their general sensitivity to cultural mores and needs. Besides performing rituals of nature and other cathartic acts, shamans 'look[ed] after the needs of individuals and families as well as of the tribe as a whole', (Devahuti 2002: 69). Women led in other realms as well, such as establishing a monastery or introducing sericulture to China's 'hinterland' (Devahuti 2002: 93). One could argue that recognizing women's 'special' shamanistic ability entrenches, not reverses, hypermasculinity. But this recognition flouts a fundamental justification of hypermasculinity: that is, it protects women and other feminized subjects even while exploiting them. When major decisions, such as life and death due to war or illness, or when and how to proceed on difficult travel across vast territories, rely on a female shaman's predictions, forecasts, or prayers, hypermasculinity's pretensions must give way to respect and acknowledgement;
3. '*Nizhong you wuo, wuozhong you ni*' ('I in you and you in me'). This rich mix in the borderlands inculcated a sensibility of multi-layeredness, intersectionality, and rotationality. For instance, the ancient kingdom of Khotan, now in Northwestern China, was, during the Silk Road era, 'a most important centre of Buddhist learning and research, frequented for that purpose both by the Chinese and the Indians' (Devahuti 2002: 94). Khotan's past and present both merit consideration contrapuntally, as Said would say, for one could turn into the other at any time. Similarly, Dunhuang, also in today's northwest China, provided a site for 7<sup>th</sup>-

century Indians and Chinese to meet, exchange, and flourish through Buddhism. These sites fostered the Buddhist notion of '*nizhong you wuo, wuozhong you ni*' ('I in you and you in me') where the Self finds its definition through and with the Other, not against it (Tan 2002). This mutually-linked subjectivity accounted for the relative lack of hegemonic control or even struggles for such along the Silk Roads despite their vast distances, high traffic in people and goods, and long durations (cf. Devahuti 2002, Tan 2002); and,

4. Poetics of Life. A poetics of life infused the borderlands, where goods and peoples mixed with religions and the arts. It integrated the *materia* of profit and loss with the *anima* of the spirit and the transcendental. How the Tang Emperor Taizong came to initiate relations with India provides an apt illustration:

The Tang Emperor Taizong ...believed the dream in AD 64 of the Han emperor Ming (AD 57-75) that a golden deity was flying over the palace. He asked the courtiers to explain this dream and obtained the answer that it was a signal from the Buddha of India. The emperor, then, sent out a mission headed by Cai Yin to go to India to invite Buddhism to China (Tan 2002: 132).

Not to be confused with an endorsement of astrologers or dream analysts, this anecdote serves only to convey an alternative heuristic at work. It underscores that a very different kind of relationship prevailed between selves and others then and can, once again. A poetics of life leads us to recognize that certain inherited beliefs, like myths, parables, and other collective memories, affect us as much as, perhaps more so than, 'rational' concerns like profits and loss or security.

## **CONCLUSIONS:**

### **Implications for the Neoliberal Imperium**

A 'borderlands' approach does not counter neoliberal Self/Other relations so much as puncture them. Its cosmopolitan outlook places the logic of

‘conversion/discipline’ in a larger context so that other options for interactions and negotiations could be considered. An analytical framework that grants agency to the Other, whether women or other subalterns, also obsolesces colonial power relations expressed through hypermasculine whiteness or any other entitlement to superiority. Racial divides dissipate when we interrogate their social constructions (e.g., what is ‘whiteness’?) based on structures of power where a small minority relies on the majority for labor, resources, and sustenance (e.g., who’s *really* in charge and why?). The Buddhist notion of ‘I in you and you in me’ teaches, in contrast, that the Self exists in the Other as much as the Other is in the Self, underscoring Edward Said’s call for a contrapuntal method. Seeking to convert or discipline the Other, as in the ‘failed’ Asian economies or recalcitrant Iraqi insurgents, would be tantamount to doing the same to the triumphant, occupying Self. The violence would not be contained ‘out there;’ it would resound ‘in here’ as well,<sup>13</sup> given the mutual complicities that enabled each. We see this happening as Asian capitalists and Muslim insurgents alike vow to avenge themselves on the West. More than ever, we need a poetics of life to help us place ‘the Coke side of life’ in perspective. We can and should enjoy material comforts and pleasures but without being reduced to a slavish, reactionary hypermasculinity, whether founded on whiteness or corporate virtue or any other assigned identities.

Shifting conceptually from ‘borders’ to ‘borderlands’ is not easy. Old ways of thinking remain entrenched despite the fact that peoples and societies have been living, working, and thriving on the borderlands for centuries. But it’s time to match our concepts with our realities.

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<sup>13</sup> Note, for instance, the damage done to US soldiers in Iraq suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD) (Rubin 2008), let alone the generations of Iraqis and Afghans affected by the US occupation of their respective countries.

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