

A Comparative Analysis of Ireland, the West Indies and Latin America in the Postcolonial Age

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This article examines Irish, West Indian and Latin American postcolonial theory and literature in an attempt to explore the complex issue of global decoloniality. The theories of scholars like Stuart Hall, Edward Said, Franz Fanon, Antonio Benítez-Rojo, Walter Mignolo, Aníbal Quijano, Seamus Deane, Joseph Lennon, Joe Cleary, and David Roediger will be highlighted along with a literary analysis of great poets and writers like W.B. Yeats, James Joyce, Seamus Heaney, Pablo Neruda, José Martí and Aimé Césaire. It is hypothesised that comprehensive knowledge of the similarities and differences among all the former colonies of the world is essential in order to develop effective international strategies with the indication that decoloniality can only be understood contextually within a wider global framework.

Introduction

The point of this comparative study is not to prove that Ireland, the West Indies or Latin America are exactly alike, since no two colonial sites are ever identical. It is rather to demonstrate that postcolonial expression has always been the product of local, national and global processes that are not just random but part of an international structure of domination and to emphasise that it is always worth examining their similarities in order to better understand the decolonial process itself (Cleary 2003). The author rejects the position of neoliberal, development theorists who argue that these types of postcolonial studies are merely emotional, subjective,

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irrational responses that have limited value in real world situations (Grovoqui 2013; Hopkins 1997). To the contrary, it is suggested that intimate knowledge regarding the similarities and differences among all the former colonies is essential in order to develop effective global development strategies in the future. Connor Leckey in *Postcolonialism and Development* contends that global development will simply not evolve without the inclusion of postcolonial theory which provides the number one challenge to traditional eurocentric teleology (Leckey 2014). It is certainly not surprising that Ireland's cultural/historical status as a colony continues to be hotly contested given the political stakes involved. To imply that Ireland is not an anomaly and that it has always been a colony like all the other colonies of the world is in many ways to deny the legitimacy of the British government in Northern Ireland which is certainly 'a very hard pill to swallow' for all involved (Lloyd 1993). This analysis of Irish, West Indian and Latin American postcolonial theory and literature seeks to explore the multifaceted subject of decoloniality in the modern age.

Thinking Through the Postcolonial Turn

The Postcolonial lexicon of Homi Bhabha (1995), Edward Said (1979), Chinua Achebe (1959), Walter Dignolo (1995), Enrique Dussell (1993) and Stuart Hall (1990) were clearly designed to confront historical and political conditions in India, the Middle East, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean rather than in Ireland. Joseph Lennon in *Irish Orientalism* describes exactly how Ireland, both geographically and culturally in Europe, has been historically excluded from postcolonial consideration. Paradoxically, Lennon (2004) later points out that Ireland was clearly England's first colony and that the colonization of Ireland actually provided the context for the first imperial discourse on how and why to conquer and colonize the world. In this same vein, Joe Cleary in *Misplaced Ideas? Colonialism, Location and Dislocation in Irish Studies* argues that Ireland was never an anomaly and maintains that colonialism is not a remote historical phenomenon, but essential to the development of Irish society whose structural composition, ethnic and class relations and land tenure systems have always been of a purely colonial nature (2003).

In retrospect, the literature seems to suggest that the Irish were actually excluded from postcolonial examination merely because of the color of their skin (Carroll 2003).

Since it has now been logarithmically proven that there is no scientific justification at all for using the term ‘race’ to refer to a discrete hierarchy of genetic phenotypes (Gould 1996), the word ‘race’ now becomes just ‘an idea’, ‘a concept’ or in the words of the Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure, nothing more than ‘a floating signifier’ (de Saussure 1998). In *Wages of Whiteness*, David Roediger (1991) presents a clear case for understanding ‘whiteness’ not as a biological reality, but as a socially constructed concept. Roediger demonstrates how a dominant Anglo-Saxon American culture was able to successfully pit race against class in ways that have haunted American society ever since. It was precisely because they could not automatically assume their ‘whiteness’ neither in America nor in the British Empire that the Irish were so anxious to disclaim identification with non-Europeans and to plan their escape into mainstream American society.

Argentinean decolonial theorist Walter Mignolo (1995) first coined the term ‘colonialisation of memory’ to show how Spain simply ignored and denied Aztec pictographic and oral traditions as part of history since they did not conform to their eurocentric codification of knowledge. Mignolo, in fact, considers this denial as the most powerful act of the Spanish conquest of the Americas. As an obvious corollary, radical Irish lawyer William Sampson, while writing in exile in the United States, made this same point almost two centuries earlier when discussing the venerable legal codes of both Scotland and Ireland:

“... (They) had an ancient code which they revered. It was called the law of the judges, or the Brehon Law. What it was, it is difficult to say; for along with other interesting monuments of the nation’s antiquity, it was trodden under the hoof of the satyr that invaded her” (Sampson 1812: 165).

In *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature* Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson and Edward Said (1990) demonstrate how Irish poets and writers historically used literature to reject the concept of Ireland as a constitutional anomaly and to demonstrate how the Irish were actually the first to participate in the decolonisation process itself. Seamus Deane (1995), in *Strange Country: Modernity and Nationhood*

in *Irish Writing Since 1790*, uses Irish writers as diverse as the orator Edmund Burke and author James Joyce to research the long standing Irish tradition of imperial critique. Later, Deane in *Dumbness and Eloquence* presents an even stronger assertion when he suggests that the wrath of a colonised people like the Irish who were denied both a specific history and language, may have just been the force that drove Celtic poets and writers to "an almost vengeful virtuosity in the English language" (Eagleton, Jameson and Said 1990:10).

It is important to note that the objectives of contemporary Irish postcolonial theory and actual Latin American transmodern ideology are really quite similar. Irish scholar Joe Cleary (2003) tells us that any determination of a specific national configuration must be conceived as a product of the global which compels Irish studies in the direction of a conjunctural global analysis with the understanding that the decolonial process itself can only be grasped contextually within a broader global framework. Surprisingly, this is essentially the motto of the Latin American Modernity/ Coloniality/ Decoloniality Project (Castro Gomez 2000; Escobar 2005) whose goals are squarely based on the concept of the Colonial Power Matrix² which views decoloniality as a long-term, never-ending global endeavor.

Myths and Legends: Black Pigs and Little Geniuses

Nowhere is Ireland's place on the Colonial Power Matrix more evident than in the Irish myth of 'The Black Pig', wherein James Joyce weaves new possibilities into the space left empty by the colonial/postcolonial vacuum. The traditions surrounding the valley of the black pig are portrayed in the classic novel *Finnegan's Wake* and offer a perfect metaphor for such dual representations in that the valley literally marks, according to myth, the site of the battle of the end

² Anibal Quijano, in his text *Colonialidad de Poder, Eurocentrismo y América Latina*, directly confronted the theoretical questions concerning the implications of the coloniality of power and in the process introduced his most famous concept called The Colonial Power Matrix. The Colonial Power Matrix is an historical-structural organising principle involving exploitation and domination across multiple dimensions with racism at its core. This concept is considered to be the cornerstone of current Latin American transmodern decolonial theory and essential to the Modernity/Coloniality/Decoloniality Project (Quijano 2000).

of the world. Although Joyce clearly takes the opportunity to satirize the revivalist poets of the era for their elevated and epic compilations of folklore and traditions, Joyce's interpretation of the myth functions at its core as a powerful parody of imperial discourse written in a simple conversational style. His words and phrases mock colonial constructions at every turn and, at the same time, offer an exciting alternative to the mere mystique of 'Being Irish'. In many ways, *Finnegan's Wake* mirrors Martinican Franz Fanon's critique of Caribbean intellectuals tempted not only by imperial forms, but also by the exoticism of their very own culture (Yoon 2014). Stuart Hall (1990; 224), in more academic terms, would simply call creative acts like *Finnegan's Wake* "articulations of identity freed from postcolonial discourse". Joyce's use of comedy tears down one world and his affirmations build another in an attempt to turn away from one's colonial past. The Cuban novelist Antonio Benítez-Rojo (1996) understood this concept as well when he introduced the affirming metaphor of resistance and rebirth at the heart of West Indian carnival. In essence, the carnival represents a temporary suspension of colonial control and a place to expose the masks of those in power and reveal their motives for maintaining dominance at all cost. Just as Joyce satirically deflated an aggressive English hegemony, the theatrical interpretations and comical performances of West Indian carnival personify a cultural synthesis that somehow brings together "that which cannot otherwise be unified" (McKenna 2009: 8). The use of language in *Finnegan's Wake's* does indeed mark a profound narrative shift in which the formerly marginalised relocate to the centre of discourse, weaving themselves into the empty spaces vacated by the colonising powers. This Irish obsession regarding the affirmation of formerly marginalised discourse can be seen clearly again in a poem called *Bog Oak* by modern day, Nobel Prize winning poet Seamus Heaney:

"A carter's trophy split for rafters, a cobwebbed, black, long seasoned rib with the moustached dead, the creel-fillers, or eavesdrop on their hopeless wisdom as a blow-down of smoke struggles over the half-door and mizzling rain blurs the far end of the cart track. The softening ruts lead back to no 'oak groves', no cutters

of mistletoe in the green clearings. Perhaps I just make out Edmund Spenser, dreaming sunlight, encroached upon by geniuses who creep out of every corner of the woodes and glennes towards watercress and carrion”(Heaney 1988: 92).

The physical remnants of Ireland's colonial past clearly recall the people that occupied that time. These include men like Sir Edmund Spenser, who is best known not only for his epic poem *Faerie Queene*, which glorifies England's Tudor Monarchy, but also for an inflammatory pamphlet entitled *A View on the Present State of Ireland* written in 1596, wherein he called for the extermination of a “barbarous and degenerative race” and concluded that all remnants of the Irish culture and language must be destroyed (Calder 1981:36). Heaney's remarkable removal of “Edmund Spenser, dreaming sunlight” to the margins, and the relocation to the centre of “geniuses who creep out of every corner of the woodes and glennes” valorises a brand new discourse and becomes a sharp instrument of identity construction. Unlike the bog oak itself, the narrator is totally detached from the Anglos who once occupied his native land. Instead of being able to share a common historical path, the narrator places himself as an outsider who only wishes to “eavesdrop on their hopeless wisdom” (Kroes 2008). In reality, this Irish/English dichotomy is, in many ways, reminiscent of Fanon's (1967) characterisation of the black man as having two separate personas, one face for his fellow ‘negroes’ and the other for the “white man”. Interestingly, Fanon's fellow Martinican Aimé Césaire (2000:42) had contemplated this same thought many years early, “I see clearly what colonisation has destroyed: the wonderful Indian civilizations - and neither Deterding nor Royal Dutch nor Standard Oil will ever console me for the loss of the Aztecs and the Incas”.

Poems of Imaginary Reunification³

Edward Said, reminiscent of Deane's *Dumbness and Eloquence*, originally hypothesised in *Culture and Imperialism* that the very complexity and insidious nature of power itself might just be the fuel that fires the imagination of artists and visionaries and propels them to seek answers to questions of cultural identity at deep metaphysical and aesthetic levels, rather than being satisfied with the concrete reality of the moments and times they live in (Said 1993). Notable examples of this magnificent impulse can be seen in W.B. Yeats's early, almost mythical poems, the beautiful descriptions by Pablo Neruda of Chilean landscapes, depictions of the Antilles by Aimé Césaire and in José Martí's turn-of-the-century appeals to the timeless simplicity and beauty of children. In *La Edad de Oro* (Martí 2007), the Cuban poet extols the children of America to be the best Americans they can be and shows their importance even more dramatically in his poem, *Sueño Despierto* (Martí 2011: 7):

Sueño Despierto

Yo sueño con los ojos	Day and night
Abiertos, y de día	I always dream with open eyes
Y noche siempre sueño.	And on top of the foaming waves
Y sobre las espumas	Of the wide turbulent sea,
Del ancho mar revuelto	And on the rolling
Y por entre las crespas	Desert sands,
Arenas del desierto	And merrily riding on the gentle neck
Y del león pujante,	Of a mighty lion,
Monarca de mi pecho,	Monarch of my heart,
Montado alegremente	I always see a floating child
Sobre el sumiso cuello,	Who is calling me!
Un niño que me llama	
Flotando siempre veo!	

Yeats (1959:16) would later express this same timeless reverence for children in his classic poem, *The Stolen Child*.

³ Since this same article will be presented in Spanish in July of 2015 at the "XVI Congreso Internacional de Filosofía Latinoamericana" in Bogotá, it was considered important to first introduce each poem in its original language followed by a translation. All poems were translated by the author in collaboration with Professor Estella Agudelo of "La Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana".

The Stolen Child

There we've hid our faery vats, Full of berries And of reddest stolen cherries. Come away, O human child! To the waters and the wild With a faery, hand in hand, For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand.	Allí hemos ocultado nuestras tinajas encantadas, Llenas de bayas Y de las cerezas robadas más rojas. ¡Márchate, oh niño humano! A las aguas y lo silvestre Con una hada, de la mano, Pues hay en el mundo más llanto del que puedes entender.
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Just as Neruda can be thought of as a poet who cared about internal colonialism in Chile as well as the menace of imperialism throughout Latin America, Yeats also came to be viewed as a poet with more than just local Irish significance with both poets having earned heroic importance by somehow uniting all of mankind against what Yeats would come to identify as "the uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor" (Said 1993: 298). In fact, the similarities between the poems of Neruda and Yeats are well worth noting. In *El Pueblo* by Neruda (Neruda 1986: 131) and *The Fisherman* by Yeats (Yeats 1959: 146), the central figure is an unnamed character who in his strength and solitude inspires us all at a universal level:

El Pueblo

Por eso nadie se moleste cuando parece que estoy solo y no estoy solo, no estoy con nadie y hablo para todos: Alguien me está escuchando y no lo saben pero aquellos que canto y que lo saben siguen naciendo y llenarán el mundo.	So let no one trouble themselves when I seem to be alone and am not alone, I am with no one and speak for them all: Some listen to me, without knowing, but those I sing, those who do know go on being born, and will fill up the Earth.
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The Fisherman

It's long since I began To call up to the eyes This wise and simple man. All day I'd look in the face What I had hoped it would be to write for my own race and the reality.	Es mucho desde que empecé Para llamar a los ojos Este hombre sabio y sencillo. Todo el día me miré a la cara Lo que había esperado que sería Para escribir por mi propia raza y la realidad.
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In *Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natal* Aimé Césaire also dramatically portrays the idealised dreams of the post-colonial poets. His plea for pluralistic and collective destiny for humankind is both powerful and moving as shown in this brief excerpt (Césaire 1984: 76):

Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natal

Et aucune race ne possède le monopole de la beauté, de l'intelligence, de la force	And no race has a monopoly, on beauty, on intelligence, on strength.
Et il est place pour tous au rendez-vous de la conquête	And there is room for everyone at the convocation of conquest
Et nous savons maintenant que le soleil tourne	And we know now that the sun turns around our earth lighting that parcel
autour de notre terre éclairant la parcelle que fixe	designated by our will alone and that every star
notre volonté seule et que toute étoile chute de ciel en terre à notre commandement sans limite.	falls from the sky to earth at our omnipotent command.

Poets like José Martí, Aimé Césaire, W.B. Yeats and, Pablo Neruda transcend mere language and stimulate a sense of the universal and eternal which suggests that the global decolonial process itself needs to be analysed contextually utilizing a more sweeping superstructure that goes beyond immediate local and national concerns.

Conclusion

The incredible similarities among all those who have suffered under the dominion of colonial power are undeniable. Dominance, coercion and manipulation by a potent enemy are a legacy shared equally by Irish, West Indian and Latin-American people alike. It is important to understand that all configurations of colonialism are not random but are part of an international structure of dominance and exploitation called the Colonial Power Matrix (Quijano 2000). Classic examples of these fragmented configurations can be seen all over the globe. In the United States, its citizens have every right to be proud of their university system, which is the envy of the world; however, at the same time, they cannot hide the fact that many of its politicians would

like nothing better than to build a giant wall across their entire border with Mexico (The Week 2013). In France, its traditions in the arts and sciences remain unrivalled, but at the same time, their own Jewish citizens are spat upon when entering Muslim neighbourhoods in Paris (Mandel 2014; Khaleda 2015). In Ireland, their writers and poets became eloquent in a language that was not even their own and soon came to dominate the very world of English literature; however, in recent times, the Irish were utterly unable to resist the clutches of the Colonial Power Matrix and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and sacrificed their country entirely to the world of foreign investment which led to the devastating fall of the Irish economy in 2009 (Kirby 2010). In contrast, a country like Colombia can be proud of its economists and politicians who have shown insight and wisdom by not placing their country exclusively in the hands of the global marketplace and, consequently, Colombia's stock market has remained stable. However, for some strange reason that one might attribute to the insidious nature of colonialism itself, Colombians are forced on a daily basis to eat low-quality, black bananas and a second-rate brand of coffee in a country that is a significant producer of both (Quintero Toro 2012). The strengths of each country must, of course, be a source of pride; however, the weaknesses of each should never be a source of embarrassment or humiliation since all have been the result of the colonial process itself. Irish scholar Seamus Deane in *Dumbness and Eloquence* explains that victims often blame themselves and that oppressed people are often "absurd in their own self-estimation" (Deane 2003: 109). To raise awareness concerning the reality of the Colonial Power Matrix and each country's place on this matrix seems like a good way to improve self-esteem for all its members. If the Colonial Power Matrix is in fact a global historical-structural organisational principle, is it not logical to think that resistance to this principle must be carried out both from a national and international perspective? This will require an international substratum of ordinary people implementing both political and apolitical decolonial strategies in their daily lives in a struggle without end.

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