

## **Conceptual History and Post-Colonialism: A Concern about Equitable Representation in Schools**

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The concept of post-colonialism has long been used to describe the aftermath of the European colonial state and to explain the unique situations in which independent nations of the post-colonial world have found themselves since gaining political sovereignty (McClintock, 1992). Post-colonialism is a painful topic for which there exists no simplistic explanation to validate the experience of the colonized or to rationalize the behavior of the colonizer. The modern world is firmly in the post-colonial age or the post-post-colonial state (A 'Post-Post-Colonial' Take, 2014), but images of colonialism continue to guide current historical study within U.S. K-12 pedagogy. How is the legacy of imperialism taught by nations that once existed as colonial powers? Do current methods of teaching colonialism create ongoing patterns of cultural exclusion? Through the utilization of conceptual history, a theoretical approach to the field of history that examines how terms and meanings change over the course of time, educators can strive for a more inclusive educational curriculum that incorporates the experiences of all cultures in the story of society, rather than a traditional Euro-centric narrative. By providing an unwavering and unflinching view of post-colonialism from a conceptual history perspective, teachers can provide a meaningful education that does not seek to shield their students from the harshness of an often romanticized colonial era.

### **A Background of Conceptual History**

Conceptual history is a method of studying societies by analyzing how important social and political concepts change over time. Defining a key concept from the perspective of either past, previous, or present meaning "opens a window into the historical society" (Hassing, n.d., para. 4).

Conceptual history is relevant because it guides the reader to accurate understandings of how historical events shape societies. Koselleck explains how the concept of crisis has various implications in different fields, times, and societies, furthering the idea of examining how an idea or term changes connotations. The term crisis derives from the ancient Greek "krino, to cut, to select, to decide, to judge" (Koselleck, 2002, p. 237). From the point of view of war and politics, the term crisis applies to crucial battles, monumental political changes, and social movements. Hippocrates and Galen were some of the first to use this term to define a critical point in an illness. Aristotle viewed crisis as a precursor to important political decisions. In Judeo-Christian theology, crisis implies to the Last Judgment. The concept of crisis evolved over the years similarly of that of revolution or democracy and became a fundamental philosophical concept that can characterize events and processes in various fields.

Ontology of realism can be applied to conceptual history: reality exists regardless of "whether human beings are conscious of it" (Crotty, 1998, p. 10). According to conceptual history, meanings can change overtime; therefore, change is inevitable. Epistemology of conceptual history is similar to constructionists': truth is revealed from humans' experience with the world and is, therefore, co-constructed (Crotty, 1998). Conceptual history can be applied to any discipline as a way to look at an event or a concept from different perspectives; therefore, qualitative or mixed-method research is considered as methodology. Since multiple perspectives would be taken to consideration by a conceptual historian-researcher, axiology can be defined as a continuous search for authentic knowledge from every possible perspective. Through synthesizing and applying

existing concepts, researcher actively searches for and creates new knowledge.

### **Post-Colonialism**

Official decolonization has spanned more than three hundred years, starting in the eighteenth century in North and South America, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa and ending in the 1970 in Angola and Mozambique (Loomba, 2015). Cultural traditions transmitted and disseminated to colonies resulted in hybrid cultures, manifestations of which can be found in religion, film, music, literature, and arts around the globe. Many examples of these manifestations are in music, one of the cultural traditions that remain at least to a certain degree unique for each society. For thousands of years, before colonization and the modern technology and sound recording inventions, the world's musics were isolated. With colonization, world musics began integrating. For instance, African music spread across America; this later resulted in a unique hybrid musical style – jazz (Gridley, 2003). Creolized musical style rake'n'scrape is an example of combination of European and African instruments and concepts. In the second half of the twentieth century, Native American popular music, such as modern powwow love song, and record industry were established. Catholic and Protestant religions imposed on the Caribbean by the colonizers clashed with South American traditional beliefs resulted in a wide range of hybrid religious practices. (Nettle, 2004). Blending of Indian and Western cultural values are in the roots of Bollywood, the Indian movie industry.

The term post-colonialism was first used in the 1960s and later became an official field of study of the legacy of the era of colonialism, the aftermath of colonialism, and globalization of decolonized societies. Some of the influential post-colonialists are Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Mahatma Gandhi, Frantz Fanon, Amilcar Cabral, and Aime Cesaire. From the 1980s, post-colonialism was reflected in writings that shifted

how dominant and colonized societies were viewed by letting the reader experience how “differently things look when you live in Baghdad or Benin rather than Berlin or Boston, and understanding why” (Young, 2003, p. 2). Post-colonialism “invokes ideas of social justice, emancipation and democracy in order to oppose oppressive structures of racism, discrimination and exploitation” (Nayar, 2010, p.4). Post-colonialism demands “equality and well-being for all human beings on earth” (Young, 2003, p. 7). The dominating themes in post-colonial studies are instability of the domination of the colonizer over the colonized, the disdain of the colonizer's habits, and the current economic and gender inequalities (Bolaffi, 2003). Indigeneity, land, social justice, and freedom became some of the central themes of post-colonial literature (Mullaney, 2010). Post-colonial sculptures and textiles became reflections of literature and captured history of colonization, values and practices of colonized societies (Grunkmeyer & Gohrisch, 2014).

### **Identifying Post-Colonialism from a Conceptual History Perspective**

Too often traditional educational methods in addressing the role of European forays into the Americas provide an overtly Euro-centric instructional model that glorifies the viciousness of their interaction with indigenous and African cultures. The legacy of exploration has been viewed as a victory of ingenuity and technological and cultural superiority rather than an introduction of European subjugation on indigenous and African populations and teaches students a false sense of historical consciousness (O'Brien, 2013). The consequence of addressing the term “colonialism” in this respect is further obfuscated by European interactions into African imperialism.

The terminology affiliated with conceptual history often becomes clouded within ethereal arguments of historical philosophy and the study of evolving patterns of social behavior that have developed over the course of humanity's existence.

Koselleck (2002) shows that a term used in one period of time loses its meaning in succeeding eras inasmuch as that a term originally coined or used to describe a particular person, place, or event in one historical era may have lost any connection to what it was initially intended to describe. Conceptual history is not concerned with studying the origins of a word nor is it concerned necessarily with the learning of how language develops as a linguistic form. Yet, if the essential premise behind conceptual history lies in the analysis of the transformation of a given word or term over the course of time, it is then imperative to examine how that original term has come into the common vernacular before the term has had a chance to morph into its contemporary meaning and subsequent interpretation. As a topic, post-colonialism cannot be explored without examining the impact of European exploration, expansionism, and exploitation during the Age of Discovery and the so-called "Scramble for Africa."

### **Portuguese and Spanish Colonization of the Western Hemisphere**

The period of European colonization in the Western Hemisphere begins in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. At the turn of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Pedro Alvares Cabral was the first European to travel to Brazil and within a few short years the Portuguese royal government had sent over three million enslaved Africans to work in the infamous sugarcane facilities that had come to revolutionize the European diet and feed the metropole's growing infatuation with the sweetener (Wiarda, 2011). Portuguese Jesuit missionaries opposed indigenous slavery (Metcalf, 2014) as they argued that it hindered their attempts at spreading Catholicism (p. 37) and hampered their effectiveness in proselytizing to the native people of the colony. The effectiveness of Jesuit persuasion in appealing to the Portuguese monarch to lift the enforcement of indigenous slavery was almost rendered moot with the massive and nearly complete destruction of the

native population to a litany of fatal European diseases (Wiarda, 2011).

The trajectory of Spanish colonialism in the New World mirrors Portuguese expansionism in Brazil. Yet, the impact of Spanish colonialism follows different developments in the continental colonies in the New World than that of their island counterparts located throughout the Caribbean. Spanish Caribbean colonialism, as in the case of Cuba, replaced indigenous enslavement with forced African migration resulting in a total number of 375,000 African slaves brought to Cuba during the colonial era to fuel the island's burgeoning coffee and sugarcane plantations (Del Aguila, 2011, p. 424). Coffee production within Cuba rose at such an exorbitant rate that by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the island's production of coffee was comparable to the wealth accrued by French planters on Saint-Domingue who were exporting sugarcane (Van Norman, Jr., 2013). Although African enslavement perpetrated by the Spanish government was encouraged and created lucrative opportunities within their Caribbean enclaves, indigenous enslavement was practiced with severe efficiency and lethal effectiveness as indigenous populations were forced to serve as laborers satiating demand for profitable cash crops that were becoming an increasingly ubiquitous component of the lifestyle of the politically and financially upwardly mobile classes of European and creole society (Patch, 1999).

### **British and French Colonialism in the Western Hemisphere**

British and French colonialism in the Caribbean and the Americas follows a similar path of African enslavement and indigenous decimation. While the French and British participated in colonial actions later than their Iberian counterparts, their contributions to the European legacy of brutality in the New World was no less pronounced. As the French made inroads in modern day Canada, and the Mississippi River Valley, the production of sugar within the Caribbean proved to be an

especially lucrative opportunity to encourage agrarian monoculturalism at the expense of enslaved African laborers who bore the brunt of the brutal toil in the hellish island plantations of Saint-Domingue, Martinique, and the Antilles (Miller, 2008). French settlement on the island of Saint-Domingue beginning by mid-17<sup>th</sup> century and by 1767 the island had become the global leader in sugar production with a slave population of over half a million people, up from 14,500 slaves just 50 years prior (Miller, 2008, p. 25). Like their Iberian brethren, the British originally anticipated enslaving the native populations throughout their Caribbean and American holdings. Yet, they found the native inhabitants either engaging in openly rebelling against them or inconveniently dying of disease. To combat the issue of servitude and to supplement their own worker supply of indentured servants, the British government enslaved Africans to fuel an ever growing demand for labor. The British were responsible for forcibly importing almost three and a half million slaves from Africa to their possessions in the New World from 1662 to 1807 (Morgan, 2007, p. 12).

### **Europe and African Imperialism in the 19th Century**

Although Portugal, Spain, France and Britain were not the only European nations that found themselves entrenched within the colonial era of the Western Hemisphere, the rude awakening of independence movements that erupted throughout the late 18th and early 19th centuries forced many of the European colonial powers to reconcile the determination of their former colonies in demanding political sovereignty with the traditional continental monarchies reluctance to relinquish control in the face of unrelenting popular opposition. While Europe hesitantly and painfully bade farewell to many of their continental American colonies by the early half of the 19th century, they turned their collective attention to a new imperialist target that would be sought after with great zeal in the so-called “Scramble for Africa.” Many European

nations envied the French possessions in North Africa and British holdings in South Africa, and by the end of the 19th century, the vast majority of Africa had been systematically divided between the new powers of Europe that emerged in the latter half of the century.

### **African Independence and the Emergence of the Post-Colonial State**

Indigenous African exploitation had been developed and viciously enforced throughout the continent for generations and, like calls for autonomy in the Americas nearly a century and a half before, similar demands for independence would be loudly voiced in the post-World War II era by long marginalized groups with sovereignty granted for most African nations by the early 1960s (Meriwether, 2002). The traditional pedagogical instruction of African imperialism, like that of the Age of Exploration, seeks to glorify the European explorer’s dominion over an untamed environment rather than a powerful opportunity to encounter and address the issues of the colonizer confronting an unknown and unwelcome foreign interloper (Traill, 2007).

Post-colonial theory will in turn reject this very thought process, and ask for the inclusion of multicultural perspective, a term imbued with multicultural representation embraced by some European Enlightenment thinkers but painfully absent from the forthcoming “Scramble for Africa” in the new era of imperialism (Colonialism, 2012). The colonial experience in late 19<sup>th</sup> century and 20<sup>th</sup> century Africa replicates the European perception of cultural superiority in offering a civilizing force to the uninitiated. The act of replacing indigenous customs with European practices was rationalized through scientific advancement of the era and social Darwinism concurrent with highly racialized thought (Boyce, 1911). Europeans were under the belief that they were duty bound by faith, by racial domination, and by technological preeminence to control African territories and that the subjugation of an indigenous population was completely and

entirely warranted under these conditions (Aitken, 2007).

The term colonialism, as applied in this context, has an air of superiority vs. inferiority. From a European monarchical and political historical perspective, it is a legacy of authority, power, and wealth, albeit borne frequently on the backs of forced labor. Post-colonialism addresses the perspective of indigenous and enslaved populations in their relationship to their former mother country subsequently arguing that colonialism is nothing more than a term that denotes oppression, violence, subjugation, and death. A horrific legacy that, in many ways, has laid a foundation of financial and social inequity that continues to haunt less developed nations that continue to attempt to find a path towards political solvency while maintaining some form of reliance on a larger global power (Wiarda & Kline, 2011).

### **Decolonization and the Birth of Post-Colonialism**

Now, in the so-called “post-colonial” world, how are the movements that brought political autonomy to the Americas and Africa viewed within contemporary educational systems? As institutions of learning move towards more inclusive and representative curricular models, are they incorporating the perspectives of all participants in historic events? Independence movements are either viewed as uprisings or wars of liberation and their contributors are known as bloody insurrectionists or freedom fighters. Within the current school climate of American public education, students are often subjected to a sanitized version of historical study. The application of conceptual history to the term colonial and post-colonialism forces the consideration of how the term “colony” and its affiliated terminology to be bluntly addressed from all positions and compels us to reflect on the proposition that the sentiments connected to the reverberation of the death of colonialism is not fully represented in contemporary schools.

### **The Current Pedagogical State of Post-Colonialism**

The term post colonialism does not suggest that colonialism no longer exists. The information that modern generations have absorbed from the teaching methodologies in the classroom, media, and society are deeply rooted with common practices as a result of colonial and imperialist schools of thought. It has been suggested that people in the United States are afraid of radical change and that is why there has been no real revolution or outcry in response to the lack social justice or inequities in educational curricula. It is easier to glance over the atrocities that happen and move on before the extent of racial and economic inequality in the school system is realized. Because this type of injustice is ingrained in the dominant culture’s psyche, in U.S. schools, churches, and disguised as a societal norms after centuries, they do not make headlines. There are daily examples of students being asked to provide answers for their race or cultural group. Being ignored by the teacher can be equally damaging to students who are racially or socially different.

Daily experiences can hurt the student’s spirit but are not blatantly violent enough to be locally or nationally news worthy. Students may walk away from the classroom never to return, particularly in middle and high school, for several reasons. Some because they are old enough to recognize the fact that some of the information they are being taught does not seem accurate or applicable to them, and as a result, the student may not feel as though they fit in to the educational system imposed upon them. Sometimes students are invited to leave if they do not test well and cannot pay attention to the jargon presented. The student struggles with relating the material to their lives and cannot find tangible applications of content that have a sincere and genuine impact on their lives. This is the legacy of cultural exclusion and the pain of social ostracism left by colonialism. While focused on the Americas, the Caribbean, and Africa the experience is much the same in any

colonized society or any place where people are marginalized. Hickling-Hudson (2006) argued that the experiences of the colonizer and the colonized in the post-colonial state are constantly exposed with current curricular standards that emphasize the victories of colonialism rather than the brutality of subjugation.

### **Instructional Strategies and Post-Colonialism**

History is not static, rather, it is an evolutionary process. The world is no longer Euro-centric. Diverse voices deserve to be heard and therefore it must be acknowledged that history is more than a Euro-American impression of the world (Freire 2009). While the United States is still a colonial power, Africa and the Caribbean are based on post-colonial schools of thought. English has been made the primary language, Christianity the dominant religion, and Euro-centric ideals and cultural norms the preferred and accepted social standard. The U.S. school system has been the harbinger of this learned post-colonial way of life. All students, regardless of ethnic background, are expected to learn the Euro-American “way of life,” appreciate it, accept it, live it, and make decisions based on a system upheld by these cultural and even racial values (Freire, 2009). If one’s culture is treated as being not as worthy as that of the country that colonized one’s environment and one’s media, that prints one’s textbooks, designs one’s clothes, prepares one’s food, and organizes one’s schools, then an internal struggle will exist pitting man against a larger oppressive force. The institutions where a student values their peers and instructors judgement of themselves and their work will force them to perceive themselves as an inferior when placed against an impossible typecast of which does not represent the student at all. When students are not thought of as a valuable asset to their class or society then outcomes and productivity are suppressed and the result is self-hate.

Education is deeply affected by globalization. Bacchus (2006) proclaimed that student-centered classrooms would address student

needs to be prepared to enter the global job market. Student-centered classrooms would strengthen their own cultural identities as they to better relate to others from different cultural backgrounds” (p. 275). In the United States, recent newspaper articles raised questions that framed slavery as “a migration of workers” (McAfee, 2015) rather than express the reality of involuntary servitude within classroom use. The revised Advanced Placement United States History curriculum framework, implemented in 2015 by the College Board, has been harshly criticized for its coverage of slavery in the United States prior to the outbreak of the Civil War and for deemphasizing the lasting and painful racial injustices emanating from the era of chattel slavery (Flaherty, 2015).

The responsibility of educators is to promote all human history and, if sincere about inclusion, this mean greater discussions social justice and equity. Confronting issues that keep society divided in order for society to proceed is essential to ensure progress. The subject of colonialism, imperialism, and post-colonialism should be taught to student teachers, teachers, and administrators in order to create new environments that erase ideas of superiority and inferiority. Comparative education can be used as a forum to discuss topics that can be used to address issues addressing how teachers are to incorporate cultural context in lessons with global events, currently developing research, and social issues that students may find relevant to their personal lives. The purpose of education must not be to continue to perpetuate ongoing stories that validate heroic conquistadors or elevate European grandeur and applaud the pillaging of indigenous cultures. History education is an all-inclusive study that may incorporate elements of art, literature, music, poetry, and science and must acknowledge and appreciate the experiences of all participants in the colonial process from the European to the former slave to the indigenous person. Addressing the presence of multicultural studies in the classroom. Bradley (2006) suggests to discuss the cultural and political context, so that students find

common understandings and connections with their fellow students (p. 17).

Conceptual history provides educators with the opportunity to develop lesson plans that provide a multicultural understanding of colonialism and emphasize the appreciation and expression of cultures once subjugated under the crushing weight of imperialism. The term colonialism has changed dramatically from its introduction as a symbol of power for European nations to post-colonialism as a manifestation of frustration with the continued ties to the mother country. By changing the term colonialism, applied within the lens of conceptual a history, students can begin to examine cultural interaction with a more holistic worldview. Without a truly inclusive and representative curriculum there can be no truly inclusive and representative society.

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