



dēcolonize hellás

JULIAN GO

**LIBERALISM AND  
ILLIBERALISM:  
A POSTCOLONIAL  
APPROACH**

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# **LIBERALISM AND ILLIBERALISM: A POSTCOLONIAL APPROACH**

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Despina Lalaki

# GREEKS OF THE CARIBBEAN: AN INTRODUCTION TO JULIAN GO'S WORK ON IMPERIAL LIBERALISM AND THE SOUTHERN STANDPOINT

In 2015, amid multiple socioeconomic crises, the Greek and the Puerto Rican included, German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble reportedly quipped to his American counterpart, Treasury Secretary Jack Lew, that he would gladly trade Greece for Puerto Rico. At the time, comparisons between the two states – more accurately, Puerto Rico is an unincorporated US territory and not a state of the federation – abounded, mainly due to their quasi-colonial dependence on distant powers in Brussels and Washington, respectively. And while Puerto Rico's colonial status has a long, well-documented history, the emergence of Greece as a debt colony and a pariah European state raised questions and brought about a flurry of research. Neoliberalism and liberalism – its political concomitant aligned to the historical emergence of free market capitalism and Western-style representative democracy – received a great deal of attention. Relegated to the status of “Global South,” Greece had to be re-educated in the values of liberal subjecthood – self-control and self-discipline – before re-entering its estranged European family. To that end, the liberal economic and political elites, national and beyond, got hard at work.

The *dēcolonize hellós* collective was established precisely to investigate the new historical trajectory but also to reflect on old connections between Greece and colonial practices and ideas. In our effort to work collectively, think comparatively, and while searching for new methodologies and epistemologies, we have sought out the collaboration of young as



well as established scholars and researchers. At our first international conference in November 2021, we were honored to host Julian Go, distinguished historical sociologist, author of several award-winning books and long-time investigator of empires, liberalism and postcolonial/decolonial thought. In his talk, on which the following chapter is based, Go engaged in a postcolonial critique of liberalism directly emanating from those subjected to America's empire state at the turn of the century. Moving away from questionable geo-ontologies, his critique emerges from the *standpoint* of the colonized within the space of the colonial: a standpoint, as Go explains, that is not an individual location but a social position within hierarchies of power.

Rather than recovering values from a presumably pristine space of “non-Western” indigeneity (Burawoy 2010; Hanafi 2020) – a space external to liberalism’s geographic location of emergence – Go unravels the ways postcolonial thought emerges from the colonial space through a critical engagement with the dominant knowledges imposed on that space. In this chapter we hear from Isabel Gonzalez, a Puerto Rican woman who, in her quest for citizenship, disclosed the limits of liberalism and its boundary-making nature. She stumbled upon ancestry, race and the civilizational boundaries of American liberalism.

Gonzalez’s critique, as briefly presented here, illustrates the “southern” or “subaltern standpoint” that Go explores in his work at large. While analogous to the feminist or the racial standpoint, his approach gives primacy to geopolitical hierarchies and social positionality, the point where the colonial engages with the West, unraveling in the process subjugated knowledges, legacies of marginalization and colonial domination. Go’s conceptualization of the “southern standpoint” should be understood in conjunction with what he describes as “postcolonial relationism,” an approach that acknowledges the interconnectedness and fluidity of social interactions and the mutually constitutive relationships between colonized and colonizers. Both concepts are central in his efforts to interrogate the imperial episteme and bring social theory, a body of thought that embeds the standpoint of empire, and postcolonial thought, an anti-imperial project, in dialogue (Go 2016b). Drawing on the works of thinkers such as Frantz Fanon, Amílcar Cabral, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak, Go calls for a “third wave” of postcolonial thought to emerge from social science and surmount the narrow confines of disciplinary boundaries.

Go has taken up to expand the boundaries of historical sociology with innovative approaches on the study of American imperialism and tutelary colonialism. He favors big comparisons between colonial empires (2011), but also between colonized nations and subjects (2008), and brings meanings, signs and cultural systems to the center of his political analysis. In his comparative study of the elite political cultures in Philippines and Puerto Rico under US colonialism, Go traces complex processes of cultural accommodation and transformation taking as a point of departure the political culture of the colonized – the elites' past experiences, hitherto political and socioeconomic stability, their political ambitions – to evaluate the effectiveness of US colonial tutelage and education in self-government and American-style democracy.

By combining rich historical detail with broader theories of meaning, culture and colonialism, Go has produced a number of groundbreaking studies of the hidden intersections of political power and cultural meaning-making in America's earliest overseas empire. He shies away, however, from liberal exceptionalist conceptions of its benign nature. Both British and American empires built fiscal-military states, deployed formal and informal modes of imperial rule dependent on local conditions, and adapted imperial activities to the changing global fields in which they exercised their power. Go has shown how the policies, practices, forms and historical dynamics of the American empire repeat those of the British, leading up to the present climate of economic decline, murderous interventions in the Middle East and overextended imperial confidence.

To this day the legacies of colonialism are felt around the globe while neocolonial practices perpetuate long-standing relations of inequality and hierarchies of power. The entanglement of Greece with British colonialism in the Eastern Mediterranean and American postwar imperialism in the region calls for a closer examination. Conventional Greek historiography tells the story of the Greek state as one of victimization and manipulation in the hands of the nineteenth-century Great Powers, United States or primordial enemies like Turkey without, however, engaging with the histories of other groups or nations which have similarly suffered the effects of imperialism, capitalist exploitation and outright violence. Victimhood has played a central role in driving xenophobia, racial hatred and other nationalistic attitudes. Instead we call for a radical critique from a Southern standpoint, as identified by Go, among others, not as a point of essentialist identities but of marginality, a particular social position within national





and transnational hierarchies of power. Such an approach will also allow for a systematic analysis and understanding of Greece's position within imperialist circuits of capital, fields of knowledge and cultural production but also networks of collective struggles and emancipatory politics.

It is imperative that we foreground the ambivalent and reciprocal relations between the Greek nation-state and Western colonial and neocolonial genealogies. Liberal capitalist democracy, for instance, lies at the core of the postwar Western civilizational onslaughts and the classical Greek heritage remains central to narratives about civilizational clashes and the end of history (Lalaki 2017). To this day, the “cradle of democracy,” a Cold War construct which carries the imprints of modernization theory and American and European hegemonic hierarchies, conditions our cultural dispositions and political imagination. The social and political significations invested in Hellenism have developed into internalized structures of domination, coherent identities which, combined with these social hierarchies, perpetuate durable inequality. The inability to perceive alternative modes of political and social organization beyond the onslaughts of neoliberalism under the mantle of European integration are intrinsically connected and closely intertwined with identities which are far from immanent or as primordial as they appear. They are, instead, socially and historically grounded on configurations and events that date back to the previous century; they constitute responses to the European Cold War order, fierce anti-communism, transatlantic militarism and the free market economy (Lalaki 2012).

Critical and historical sociological positions that capitalize on meanings, cultural codes and systems, much like what Go puts forward in his studies of empire, liberalism and imperialism, along with examinations of the “Hellenic” that emphasize international and transnational processes as constitutive of its political agency, can illuminate the trajectories of the Greek nation-state and empire – an empire that resides on the outskirts as much as at the heart of the nation. Such an approach could take as a focal point of analysis the groups of experts and scholars, the cultural and political elites who codified the cognitive structures for imagining the “cradle of democracy” and who have recently taken up to discipline and re-educate the nation in the neoliberal properties of Hellenism.

In 2016, in his final overseas trip as president, Barack Obama visited crisis-stricken Greece and against the carefully selected background that featured the Acropolis and the Parthenon, he affirmed the US commit-

ment to transatlantic ties and Nato. The ancients, the Founding Fathers and President Truman featured prominently in a speech that meant to endorse liberalism and capitalist democracy in face of the challenges that austerity economics, the waves of refugees from Middle East and Africa and the ensuing rise of the extreme-right posed.

Yet it is these same so-called crises that have shown the limits and some of the darkest sides of liberalism. A strong sense of insecurity is increasingly difficult to disguise. However, the greater the feelings of insecurity, and the weaker the establishment's proponents become in their decline, as Norbert Elias suggests, "the more they develop the sense that they are fighting for their supremacy with their backs against the wall, the more savage for the most part does their behavior become and the more acute the danger that they will disregard and destroy the civilized standards of conduct on which they pride themselves ... With their backs against the wall, the champions [of civilization] easily become the greatest destroyers of civilization. They tend easily to become barbarians" (1996, 358–59). And this appears to be our task in the new century, once again to avoid barbarism.



Julian Go

# AMERICAN EMPIRE AND THE STANDPOINT OF POSTCOLONIAL THOUGHT

Is there a “postcolonial” critique of liberalism and, if so, *what* and *how* is it? My thoughts on this are formative but if I had to stake a claim, it would be something like this: first, the postcolonial critique of liberalism operates by disclosing the *limits* of liberalism and its *boundary-making* character. The primary feature of liberalism, from this postcolonial view, is not that it is a universalizing enterprise as common assumptions would have it. Rather, its primary feature is that it draws lines that in turn constitute its core. Second, this postcolonial critique emerges from the *standpoint* of the colonized within the space of the colonial; a standpoint that is not an individual location but a social position within hierarchies of power.

To those already versed in the nuances of what I am calling “postcolonial theory,” this statement may appear obvious on its face. But I insist its formal clarification and elaboration is necessary to make explicit what has often been implicit at best. I also insist on its clarification and elaboration as a counterpoint to two other ways in which the “postcolonial” – or “decolonial” – has sometimes been configured. It differs, for example, from approaches that align postcolonial thought with a project of historical excavation to reveal “connected histories” or “connected sociologies” (see, for example, Bhabra 2007, drawing from Subramaniam 2005). Such an approach, while having its virtues, is insufficiently armed in itself for addressing important questions of epistemology and ontology that postcolonial theory’s critique of knowledge summon but which this configuration of postcolonial thought buries under a methodological move of connecting dots across the geo-spatial terrain. The second configuration of the “postcolonial,” seen in certain sectors of sociology and international relations,



equates the imperial episteme with Eurocentrism and therefore collapses a critique of the imperial episteme with the mobilization of knowledge, norms or values found in presumably autonomous non-Western “civilizations” or “cultures.” This approach thus counterposes Islamic, Confucian or Yoruban knowledges (etc.) against Eurocentric ones (see, for example, Acharya and Buzan 2010). An ally of this geo-epistemic configuration of postcolonial thought is one that locates the standpoint of critique in the “South” and individualizes knowledge: to counter Eurocentrism and generate a postcolonial critique, all we need is to locate an individual from the Global South (with the correspondingly correct ethnic or racial identity) whose knowledge automatically facilitates a sufficiently critical arsenal. By these moves, postcolonial thought becomes a game of geo-epistemics resting upon a questionable geo-ontology.<sup>1</sup>

I think of the postcolonial critique differently. More than artfully charting connections across spaces and societies, the postcolonial critique calls witness to the limits that those connections engender, mobilizing the critical voices of those subjected to the analytically flattened connectivities. And rather than digging up values from a presumably pristine space of “non-Western” indigeneity – a space purely external to liberalism’s geographic location of emergence – postcolonial thought emerges *from* the colonial space and *through* a critical engagement with the dominant forms and knowledges that impose themselves upon that space. (Note, too, that this is different from a Marxist critique that operates immanently, contesting the inside from the inside to shatter its logic by highlighting contradiction. The postcolonial critique rather underscores the unstable lines that mark the inside from the outside which constitutes the former.)

## **I Isabel Gonzalez’s challenge**

These admittedly rudimentary thoughts on the postcolonial critique are informed by critical intellectual histories of liberalism and empire and anti-colonial writers such as Frantz Fanon in the French empire (see Mehta

<sup>1</sup> Ibn Khaldun becomes a postcolonial thinker that can be read in ways to challenge Eurocentric hegemony – even that Khaldun’s thought project was itself a project of generating knowledge in the service of imperial dynasties, from the standpoint of royal courts.

1999; Pitts 2005, among others; and, of course, Fanon ([1952] 1967; [1961] 1968). But it is also inspired by the voices of those subjected to America's empire-state at the turn of the twentieth century. Consider a letter to the editors that appeared in the *New York Times* in 1905. Written by a woman named Isabel Gonzalez, it was a curt attack on America's treatment of the island of Puerto Rico. The US had first occupied Puerto Rico in 1898 during the Spanish-American War but then, after purchasing it from Spain at the war's end, declared sovereignty over it. Gonzalez's letter, titled "What Porto Rico [sic] Demands," said in response:

We are not going to ask that liberties and franchises be taken away from or granted to Kentucky or Oklahoma. We are going to ask that our own be given back to us – those that we exercised when Gen. Miles went to Porto Rico... and proclaimed to the wide winds his "liberating" speech, which turned out later to be nothing but bitter mockery and waste-paper.

Gonzalez's letter exposes a betrayal. The "Gen. Miles" she refers to is General Nelson A. Miles, the first US officer to land on the shores of Puerto Rico during the Spanish-American War.

Miles, in order to accrue support for locals for America's arrival, issued a "Proclamation to the People of Porto Rico [sic]" upon landing on the southern shores of the island in 1898, asserting:

We have come to make war upon the people of a country that for several centuries has been oppressed, but, on the contrary, to bring protection, not only to yourselves but to your property, to promote your prosperity, and bestow upon you the immunities and blessings of the liberal institutions of our government.

Gonzalez was holding General Miles to his word. In response to Miles' proclamation, many Puerto Ricans had welcomed the United States with open arms, believing that the occupation meant that Puerto Rico would be fully incorporated into the US system as an equal state in the Union (just as it had for other territories like Oklahoma) and that this implied full and equal citizenship for Puerto Ricans. But the US did not in fact grant Puerto Rico the "blessings of the liberal institutions of our government." It did not make Puerto Rico a state; nor did it make Puerto Rican residents equal citizens (Go 2008, 77–84; Erman 2018; Burnett 2008).

Gonzalez had learned this the hard way, in 1902, after she took a boat



from San Juan to New York City. She had been expecting to enter the country through New York port as a US citizen. Had not the US declared sovereignty over her homeland? Had not Miles promised “the blessings of the liberal institutions of our government” to the Puerto Rican people?

Gonzalez, though, was immediately confronted by a wall: port officials denied her entry as a citizen, detained her as an “alien,” and sent her back to Puerto Rico. Eventually, Gonzalez enlisted a Puerto Rican lawyer (and official Resident Commissioner of Puerto Rico to the US House of Representatives), Federico Degetau, as counsel. Her case ended up in the Supreme Court, as part of a series of cases known as the “Insular Cases” that handled the peculiar status of America’s newly acquired territories like Puerto Rico, the Philippines and Guam (which were also taken from Spain). With the help of Degetau and other lawyers, Gonzalez clamored for equal citizenship. She insisted that America’s constitution followed the flag. Puerto Ricans were full American citizens by virtue of the fact that America had declared sovereignty over the island.

There are countless complexities and nuances to the legal issues entailed in the Insular Cases. The larger issue has to do with how Gonzalez’s campaign for equal citizenship forced the US to confront the question of Puerto Rican’s status. The US had “purchased” Puerto Rico by treaty, declared sovereignty over it, and Congress legislated a civil government to replace military rule. But at the time, it never declared what Puerto Rico actually “was,” nor did it state whether Puerto Ricans (and Filipinos and Chamorros) were citizens. The territories were taken by virtue of the treaty powers of the US president, and once military rule was over, they were subjected to the plenary power of Congress: questions of status and citizenship were left hanging. Gonzalez’s campaign and the other insular cases forced the imperial metropole to answer; to speak and take account.

The answer was not a happy one. Gonzalez failed to win her case for citizenship. The Supreme Court declared that while the US had indeed declared sovereignty over Puerto Rico, the declaration did not mean Puerto Rico was an equal state in the Union. The previous territories acquired by the US which eventually became equal states were “inhabited only by people of the same race, or by scattered bodies of native Indians.” By contrast, the new territories like Puerto Rico and the Philippines represented “differences of race, habits, laws and customs,” as well as “differences of soil, climate and production.” The US could not automatically

confer statehood or citizenship; racial and cultural difference meant that the constitution did not follow the flag.

Regarding Gonzalez's case in particular, the Supreme Court decided that while Gonzalez and the people of Puerto Rico were not "aliens," they were not "citizens" either. They were something else.

Here is where the American empire-state drew new lines. The Insular Cases served to create an entirely new category of American territory: "unincorporated territories." Distinct from the "incorporated territories" the US had previously acquired that later became fully-fledged states, the new category essentially referred to dependent inferior colonies, part of the US but not equal parts of it. They were "foreign in a domestic sense," as the court declared. Meanwhile, Congress, left to decide on citizenship, later created a new category of persons called "US nationals" which meant that the people in unincorporated territories exercised some basic rights but not all. They were second-class citizens (Burnett and Marshall 2001). Hence, as Gonzalez herself lamented in her editorial, America's new colonized peoples were "neither Americans nor foreigners." They were colonial subjects.

Gonzalez's case is an aperture into the limits of liberalism's universalism and its boundary-drawing character. American liberal thought may have conceded that "all men are created equal," but it did not and does not claim that everything or everyone are "men" – or that all men *are* equal in actuality. Liberalism instead insists that, to be bestowed the benefits of liberalism's promise, the rights-bearing citizen must meet strict criteria in order to enjoy status. For one thing, they must be a "person," not a piece of property or thing. This is why slaves were not afforded equal rights: they were seen as property not persons. Second, even if someone is not property, they are not automatically granted the status of the rights-bearing citizen. People must have the "rationality" and "maturity" to be deserving of the rights they will exercise. In early twentieth-century America, Progressive-era liberal reformers like Woodrow Wilson and Elihu Root (US Secretary of War who helped devise colonial policy in 1899) articulated this quite clearly.

Though various speeches and writings, they insisted that having liberty means that one – either an individual or a community – governs itself, but self-government is a "form of character" characterized by "self-control," "self-mastery," "self-possession" and "self-restraint" (in Wilson's words, long before Foucault). Without these characteristics, one is not de-





serving of “self-government” (Go 2008, 39–42). The universal embrace of liberalism stops at your doorsteps.

Through the Insular Cases and Congressional legislation, the American empire-state determined that Puerto Ricans and other peoples of America’s new empire like the Philippines were not deserving of liberal citizenship and the full rights it bestowed because they lacked this rationality and maturity. Due to an unfortunate combination of environment, race and history, they were too bound to their passions and patrons, their subjectivities too enmeshed with their families and tribes, too “ignorant, credulous and child-like” (as Root put it). They were thus incapable of individual or collective self-government. Through an assumption that ontogenetic development was recapitulated at the civilizational and racial scale, Puerto Ricans and Filipinos were literally children; they were indeed human beings but still they were not deserving of full citizenship. The Supreme Court essentially took what Root said of Filipinos to also apply to Puerto Ricans like Gonzalez: “There is a period in childhood during which the obligation of a guardian cannot be performed without the power to control the child’s actions. The people of the Philippine Islands are still in a state of political childhood.”

Liberalism’s universalism particularizes even as it seeks to extend its reach. It is perhaps not accidental that those who were the most ardent proponents of America’s new overseas empire, such as Root and Wilson, were important figures in American Progressivism which sought to expand rights and democratic participation to more and more citizens (albeit through the hand of the state). Extending democracy was concomitant with drawing lines around it.

## **I Constituting liberalism**

Gonzalez’s arrival to New York’s shores from the territorial space of the colonial helps disclose this particularizing character of the ostensibly universalizing liberal project, but it also provides insight into the *constitutive* character of colonial boundaries upon America’s turn-of-the-century liberalism. It is tempting to think of the exclusionary treatment she received as an “exception” to liberalism’s tenets. But this would sublimate the conceptual conditions which make liberalism’s tenets possible. It is better to recognize that the exclusion of Gonzalez from equal citizenship expressed li-

beralism's logic rather than stood outside it. Liberalism *must* draw lines around its subject(s). Liberalism cannot have a liberal rights-bearing agent without some definition of who or what qualifies as a liberal rights-bearing agent, and definitions necessarily exclude.

Liberalism's universalism – which only posits that all humans are *capable* of meeting criteria of citizenship regardless of race, religion, culture, language, sex, or ethnicity – thus depends upon demarcating its own exclusionary boundary, and the question is not whether liberalism excludes; it is only where the lines are drawn, and hence how capacious its qualifications for membership are.<sup>2</sup>

At the turn of the twentieth century, the figure of the colonized, and the territorial space of the colony, provided one of the conditions of possibility for American liberal thought. Note that when liberal thinkers like Wilson at the time enunciated that “self-control” and “self-discipline” were necessary for liberal subjecthood and hence self-government, they did so by reference to colonial spaces and peoples. The encounter with colonial subjects like Gonzalez sparked an explosion of discourse about what “self-government,” “liberty” and “freedom” really mean. Wilson, for instance, theorizes America's own history as a progression from childhood to maturity, whereby Americans learned the “self-discipline” necessary for self-government, but he states that it is America's encounter with Puerto Ricans and Filipinos and the “task” of ruling them that enables him to narrate that history in those terms. The colonial project enables Americans to understand their own capacities that had made them self-governing.

It is our present and immediate task to extend self-government to Porto Rico [sic] and the Philippines, if they be fit to receive it – so soon as they can be made fit. If there is to be preparation, we must know of what kind it should be. Although we have forgot our own preparatory discipline in that kind, these new tasks will undoubtedly teach us that some discipline ... must precede self-government and prepare the way for it; that one kind of self-government is suitable for one sort of community, one stage of development, another for another ... An examination of the affairs of the peoples we have undertaken to govern will confirm us in the understanding of them.

2 While this formulation may sound Derridean, it is also Durkheimian.



Wilson proceeds to claim that America will have to “teach” Puerto Ricans and Filipinos “our own principles of self-help ... order and self-control” requisite of liberty but as they do so, America will better understand itself. “They shall ... teach us, as we shall teach them. We shall teach them order as a condition precedent to liberty, self-control as a condition precedent to self-government; they shall teach us the true assessment of institutions.”

Wilson’s claims do not amount to a critique of liberalism. They are rather an assertion of its underlying tenets, offering a window or trace of how liberal discourse works – viz., not in spite of but through exclusion. Just as the despotic expropriation of value from spaces *outside* the metropole provides the material infrastructure necessary for the practice of liberty *in* the metropole, so does the figure and reality of the colonized – of those who are neither citizen nor foreign – provide the conceptual infrastructure for liberalism’s universalism. In the early twentieth century, that constitutive colonial space was occupied primarily by Gonzalez’s homeland, Puerto Rico, and territories like the Philippines. When the American empire-state declared these territories to be “foreign in a domestic sense,” and when Gonzalez was declared “neither an American nor a foreigner,” the descriptive terms were not unsettled or threatened. They were rather reinforced, and the thirdness of the colonial offered them a new conceptual coherence.

To constitute liberalism, the previous colonial figure was the slave rather than the unincorporated territories. Gonzalez’s boundary-making predecessor was thus the bondsman Dred Scott, whose case in the Supreme Court in 1857 firmly fixed that slaves were property (and so Scott, as property, could not be bestowed with the blessings of liberal subjecthood).<sup>3</sup> Of course, the Fourteenth Amendment overturned that case, thereby granting full citizenship to all those born in the US regardless of race. But this did not so much upend liberalism’s boundary-drawing project as it did reanimate it. Even the Fourteenth Amendment did not overturn the fact that children and women were not granted equal rights, even if they were citizens, and with America’s new empire, liberalism’s exclusionary boundaries were merely redrawn rather than removed. The encounter with Puerto Ricans, Filipinos and Chamorros in the early twenti-

3 Native Americans were also not citizens, but theoretically because they were outside the jurisdiction of the United States, just as an English person or Chilean were.

eth century was thus just another constitutive encounter among many others. As the lawyer Henry Hoyt, arguing before the Supreme Court to reject citizenship status to Gonzalez, put it, in regards to the categories of “American citizen,” “alien” and “national”: “the meanings [of these words] are relative rather than absolute.”

## ■ The postcolonial standpoint

A certain sociology of knowledge is insinuated here. How, or from where, does the postcolonial critique of liberalism as a boundary-making project emerge? What is the *standpoint* of postcolonial critique? Gonzalez’s position as a Puerto Rican subject and her campaign for citizenship offers one answer: the standpoint for postcolonial thought is the standpoint of the *colonial*. But this requires clarification. The standpoint of the colonial does not reduce to individual colonized subjects. Gonzalez, by this formulation, did not “have” a standpoint as an individual. Extending post-positivist feminist theorizing and articulating it with the tenets of scientific perspectivism, a standpoint refers to a position of knowing conditioned by a location in social space; a location within a broader social topography or field.<sup>4</sup> Being in one social location over another carries certain social experiences, discursive exposures, concerns and preoccupations; these in turn form the basis for knowledge. Thus Gonzalez did not “have” a standpoint, she adopted one, and her position as a colonized subject made it easier for her to do so.<sup>5</sup> Put simply, we must not think of the “colonial” space as an individual’s space; it is an empirical site – the realm of the “actual” – as well as a corresponding analytic-conceptual space.

It may help here to first consider how standpoints operate in terms of classical social theory. Take the standpoints occupied by Adam Smith and Karl Marx in their respective theories of capitalism. Smith’s theorization of value in capitalism emerges from the standpoint of the market. The “mar-

4 The location does not unidirectionally determine the standpoint, it generates its conditions of possibility and shapes the parameters of its knowledge. The location entails a certain set of experiences (including exposures to certain discourses and modes of thought, but also social experiences relating to labor, etc.) and hence concerns and interests that in turn form the basis for knowledge production.

5 It follows that one need not be located in a particular social position to access the associated standpoint of it.



ket” here refers to a social space; and seeing economic practices from that vantage of the market provided the basis for Smith’s theorization of value as a matter of nominal price (money) and hence capitalism as a system of exchange marked by fluctuations of prices.

Marx’s alternative came from the standpoint of labor: the “hidden abode of production” whereby Marx could “see, not only how capital produces, but how capital is itself produced” and where “the secret of profit making must be laid bare.” Marx thus shows us that surplus value comes from surplus labor through the extension of the working day or through gains in efficiency – all of which occur in the factory; that is, in the sphere of production. Two different standpoints, two different conceptual spaces and hence theories of the same thing: capitalism.

There are other theories of capitalism too; and these also emerge from particular standpoints. It was the feminist-Marxist movement that highlighted that Marx’s theory, however much an advance over classical bourgeois economy’s fetishization of the market, was nonetheless limited. Its standpoint of production focused upon production by male wage earners in the factory, thereby overlooking another standpoint by which we might mount a theorization of value, price and capitalism: the Victorian household and women’s domestic labor therein (Barrett 1980). And of course it was the profound intervention of Black Radicals to remind us of an entirely different standpoint altogether by which to rethink capitalism: the standpoint of the slave plantation or sites of bonded labor in colonial contexts (Robinson 2000; I discuss this in relation to the tenets of perspectival realism in Go 2016a and 2016b).

The standpoint of the postcolonial critique of liberalism is closest to but does not fully reduce to the standpoint occupied by the feminist-Marxists and the Black Marxist tradition. This is the standpoint of the colonized, located in the space of the colonial (for a different discussion of standpoint that roots the critique of liberalism in the standpoint of property, see Sartori 2014). In terms of US history, this is the space generated by the American empire-state’s hierarchical projects of domination involving either the hierarchical differentiation of space or of people, or both.<sup>6</sup> The colonial is a

<sup>6</sup> We would also want to differentiate between types of colonial spaces, such as settler colonialism as opposed to overseas administrative colonialism, or “internal colonialism,” but that is a matter for a different thought piece.

sociopolitical site of difference that liberal projects seek to organize hierarchically and which, as seen, constitute liberal projects in the first place. It is a location of “second sight” (to summon Du Bois), a standpoint from which liberalism’s limits can be exposed and critiqued. It is the abyssal wellspring of critique.

The postcolonial critique, therefore, is not reducible to the task of analytically tracking connections between two otherwise autonomous spaces or presumably separate histories. The space of the colonial from whence the postcolonial critique emerges it is a site of connection but the standpoint emerges *from* the connection – it does not analyze “connected histories” from a bird’s eye view (that is, the view from nowhere). It comes from a standpoint embedding a set of experiences and concerns that the dominant metropolitan standpoint – or liberal thought itself – strives to cover up, bury or simply ignore. Nor does the postcolonial critique come from a space that exists somehow outside of the “West” or “European” thought – a pristine “non-Western” site through which can be excavated “alternative” or “indigenous” thought. The colonial is not a space outside of Western or European liberalism; it emerges from an *engagement* with it and in turn *constitutes* it. Is it accidental that so many critiques of liberalism have tended to come from the margins, from the bottom of hierarchies (or analytic engagement with those spaces) rather than from the minds and meanings of its founders?



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A POSTCOLONIAL APPROACH**

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This short text uses examples from US liberal imperialism to illuminate the postcolonial critique of liberalism and its standpoint. First, it thinks of the postcolonial critique as one that sees the liberal script as a constitutive boundary-drawing project. Liberalism universalizes not in opposition to but through its particularizing moves. Second, it claims that the postcolonial critique does not emerge from nowhere. It comes from the space of the “colonial”: a sociopolitical site of difference, both material (or “actual”) and conceptual, that liberal projects seek to organize hierarchically and, in so doing, generates the space for critique. To illuminate these points, the text refers to America’s new empire of the early twentieth century that encompassed Puerto Rico and the Philippines and to the colonized subjects’ own anticolonial critique of that empire.

