

# Metacolonialism: A Metamorphosis in Power Relations and Discourse

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## Abstract

*The present inquiry comprises introductory observations that stand on the brink of the recent sociopolitical horizons of the world and try to understand its complicated power relations and discourses. It introduces the concept of "meta-colonialism" as a critical framework to be elaborated in further studies. As for the here and now, the most significant remarks about the realities—sometimes hyper-realities—run by the world system are shared in hope the topic would find duly critical responses. In addition to contributing to the meta-colonial mindset through enriching the existing thoughts as well as coming up with new ones, it attempts a new critical understanding of the nihilistic reality that some parts of the world are undergoing in light of the underlining relevant discourse. Furthermore, it explores and highlights some of the most recent texts and views that support the meta-colonial hypothesis.*

**Keywords:** meta-colonialism; the media; colonialism; discourse; fiction

## ما وراء الاستعمار: تحول في علاقات القوة والخطاب

### الملخص

يشتمل البحث الحالي على ملاحظات تمهيدية تقف على حافة الأفاق الاجتماعية والسياسية الحديثة للعالم وتحاول فهم علاقات القوة والخطابات المعقدة. ويقدم مفهوم "الاستعمار الفوقي" كإطار نقدي سيتم تفصيله في مزيد من الدراسات. أما بالنسبة إلى هنا والآن، فإن أهم الملاحظات حول الحقائق -التي تكون في بعض الأحيان حقائق مفرطة -التي يديرها النظام العالمي يتم مشاركتها على أمل أن يجد الموضوع ردوداً انتقادية مناسبة. بالإضافة إلى المساهمة في العقلية ما وراء الاستعمارية من خلال إثراء الأفكار الموجودة وكذلك الخروج بأفكار جديدة، فإنها تحاول فهم نقدي جديد للواقع العدمي الذي تمر به بعض أجزاء العالم في ضوء الخطاب الذي يؤكد. علاوة على ذلك، فهو يستكشف ويبسط الضوء على بعض أحدث النصوص ووجهات النظر التي تدعم الفرضية ما وراء الاستعمارية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الاستعمار الفوقي- وسائل الاعلام-الاستعمار-الحوار-خيالي

In Kafka's short story "Metamorphosis," an ordinary clerk leading a normal life wakes up one morning to find out that he has transformed into a monstrous creature with half body of an insect. The protagonist, who used to be unsatisfied with his job, finds himself in an ontological dilemma to which all previous problems and grievances have become but trifles. Kafka's pre-deterministic tone suggests that the protagonist's dilemma has its roots in the uncaring and hostile powers controlling man's existence in a meaningless world. By and large, Heidegger's existential undertone of Kafka's narrative mood reenacts itself at the political level across a meta-colonial world which undergoes a similar metamorphosis leaving it a distorted, disfigured space that can neither resume its prior state nor assume the targeted state perfectly. The recent cultural and political encounters across and beyond the Middle East represent a case in point of a (post-, neo-, and meta-) colonial region that is run by malign powers who want their goals implemented no matter how much destruction and deaths might be ensued. Such powers stand for what can be called "meta-colonialism" the term that can suggest how scheming, elusive, and vicious the new colonial powers and strategies are.

'Meta-colonialism' is a recently-coined term that refers to a spatio-temporal phenomenon where the meta-colonized individual as well as community are quite aware of the colonial intricacies prevalent everywhere around but they are too helpless to get rid of, challenge, or even question. They cannot because the meta-colonial strategies go farther beyond and deeper behind their embittered resistance. In addition, meta-colonialism is further associated with what has been known as self-colonialism or internal colonialism. The self-colonial society is one that submissively internalizes the imperial hegemonic

measures and willingly submits body and soul to its perpetrator. The term applies also to the satellite regimes that never scruple to play an active role in implementing the colonial agendas throughout the targeted peripheries including themselves. Such beneficiaries serve the colonial goals more sufficiently than the colonial powers (Centers) themselves can do. The traditional colonialist and post-colonialist terms are to be redefined since it is not so much the region, ethnicity, culture, or religion that determines who a colonizer/colonized should be as does the mutual interest of the ruling class standing against the common fate of the exploited all over the world. The meta-colonizer/meta-colonized relationship is, thus, not defined in territorial terms as the meta-colonized could be the people—eastern or western—who exist outside the meta-colonizers' narrow circles. Meanwhile, the meta-colonizers belong to variable worlds (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, or 3<sup>rd</sup>), yet they have mutual private interests to protect and sustain.

In his book *Stages of Colonialism in Africa: From Occupation of Land to Occupation of Being*, Hussein A. Bulhan defines meta-colonialism as "a socio-political, economic, cultural, and psychological system that comes after, along with, or among the earlier stages of colonialism." According to him, it refers to the colonial system that "goes beyond in scope or behind in depth what classical colonialism and neocolonialism had achieved" (244). Bulhan revised the classical categorization of the colonizer and colonized which according to him is no longer determined by race, territory, or religion. It "brings about a wide spectrum of beneficiaries and victims" regardless of the local they belong to or the nationality they bear. While some of the formerly colonized elites ignore their victimization and become "today material

beneficiaries of meta-colonialism,” the majority of European common people, “traditional beneficiaries of colonialism . . . are today in some respects victims of meta-colonialism in ways they neither realize nor wish to critically examine” (244). Hence, the process of (meta) colonialism undergoes dynamic changes in victim/perpetrator terms. The meta-colonized, accordingly, could be a citizen of the imperial state in the same way a meta-colonizer could be a citizen of the Third World.

Adopting a similar view, Najeeb A. Jan gives further insight into the meta-colonial phenomenon in his book *The Meta-colonial State*. In his ontological framing, the term “refers to the colonization of life by metaphysics (ontotheology); the colonization/ politicization of life by power. As a cartography of the shadows cast by power over the singularity of life, it maps the darkening of our life-worlds.” Such an ontological understanding of the phenomenon leads Jan to a profound contemplation of its complexity,

The meta-colonial thus marks a spatio-temporal condition that is both prior to the colonial and ongoing (meta as being “in the midst”). In its sense of after, the meta-colonial is thus effective in the present, but not merely as a temporal residue or vanishing mediator. (235-6)

Jan comes up with a meta-colonial association of Heidegger’s concept of “the unhomely (Unheimlich)” by which the postcolonial sense of displacement, the haunted identity, and even the homely home could be revised and redefined.

Bulhan's and Jan's exclusive glimpses on meta-colonialism usher in a new perspective by which the current chaotic episodes in the world's history can be seen and understood as undertaken by the following inquiry. In spite of its intricate structure as a pseudo-phenomenon, meta-

colonialism has been traced hereby through examining the various forms of discourses as outcomes of consciousness. By surveying and analyzing the underlying discursive materials, one can figure out the relationship between meta-colonial thoughts and consciousness and the power relations leading to certain political realities. Presumably, the meta-colonial elements, their interrelations, and the broader integrated framework within which they develop loom large in some recent fictional texts, political speeches, and media discourse. They gain a free play from the alienated space ensued by globalization.

Remarkably, the space we inhabit has become a meta-colony where the dollar determines its worth, the colonial laws benchmark the "civilized" and the technology enslaves your body and soul. While turning the world into a metropolitan site, globalization paves the way for alienating the space from its essence, thus changing the dynamics of domination. In Bulhan's words, "With the rise and growth of globalization, the calculus and dynamics of Eurocentric domination not only shifted but also turned more subtle and therefore more invisible and treacherous" (Metacolony n. p.). For instance, the visible soldiers and weapons gave way to invisible cultural and economic hegemony which in turn develops into more manipulating and tricky means. As far as the state of political unrest is concerned, meta-colonialism emerges in the form of emissaries of compassion and aid dispensers whose job is to relieve the victims of violence and conflicts. Ironically, the same conflicts are sketched by strategists at the neighboring office since both teams do their complementary parts for the same global organization. They assume a patronizing position over the incompetent meta-colonized: they draw the sketches of the conflict and then draft the peace agreement; sell the

weapons that feed the wars and simultaneously allot relief aids; cause the most hideous massacres and claim the humanitarian concerns and interference. Such a Western sociopolitical duality serves an external agenda and meanwhile keeps up the national political image among the meta-colonized fellow citizens to win election. This is a culmination of imperial material exploitation, political domination, and cultural hegemony which maintain and upgrade their structures through effective media.

The new type of global empire was contemplated by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in their book *Empire* (2000). The book describes the new Empire as a shapeless body which grows along global circuits of production and markets and feeds on the weakening of nation-states, particularly their ability to control economic and cultural exchanges. The traditional imperial boundaries vanished and gave way to "a system of channels and barriers that alternately facilitated and obscured the flow of production and circulation" (Hardt & Negri xii). Accordingly, the global empire constitutes indefinite concepts of identities, hierarchies, or even uncontrolled flow of products and ideas. Emphasizing the persistence and evolution of colonialism, they underline that the imperial idea "has survived and matures throughout the history of the United States constitution and has emerged now on a global scale in its fully realized form" (Hardt & Negri xiv). This view is also adopted by David Harvey who declares, "From the late nineteenth century onwards, the U.S. gradually learned to mask the explicitness of territorial gains and occupations under the mask of a spaceless universalization of its own values." (Harvey 47). It is this meta-colonial 'mask' that provides the camouflage necessary to manipulate the minds and senses so as to minimize the colonial costs.

This is carried out through the discourse adopted by the media, on the one hand, and the fictional industry appealing to the contemporary mentality.

One can examine the huge body of discourse made on the 9/11 attacks to recognize the crisis of the mind amid a maze of discrepancies, rhetoric, and theories. Representing a watershed in the current history, the event has been over-tackled from variable perspectives by fictional and non-fictional discourses. A recent survey notes to about 231 novels from around the world that can be classified as "9/11 novels" available in print by June 2011. About 162 novels of this 9/11 corpus were written by U.S. writers. (Däwes 6). Yet, while novels can be calculated, the political speeches, TV shows, cinema products, media coverage, etc. are countless. Due to its emergence as the predominant course of action, the term "Nine-Elevenism" has been used to denote the mode of discourse "supported by governmental institutions, the mainstream media, and especially by those who have re-visited and re-created the event through fiction, that is, novelists, film directors, scriptwriters, cartoonists, etc." (Juanjo 1).

According to Juanjo, Nine-Elevenism assumes different types of discourses. First, "*demonizing and generalizing discourses*," in which the label "evil" is attached to Muslims, Arabs, and whoever looks like them. They become objects of suspicion and retaliation. The second type comprises "*victimizing and heroizing discourses*," in which the white male officers appeared in individual stories of heroism. Such mode, however, "turned into dangerous, blindly patriotic discourses resurrecting the old imperialistic rhetoric of the « manifest destiny »". The third type designates "« *hystoerical* » *contextualizations* of the event, which, obsessed with memorializing the 9/11

date, reformulate contemporary history in Dickensian terms like « everything has changed, nothing has changed » while neglecting to specify « for whom » it has changed, and more importantly « for whom it has not ». "(Juanjo 1-12)

Although some writers try to create their own depictions of the tragedy avoiding the U.S. official narrative, their imaginative impression could not free itself from the version formatted by the mainstream media and monopolizing the sources of information to what happened. Many novels can be cited as examples of such a fictional response shaped by the media: Iain Banks's *Dead Air* (2002), Frederic Beigbeder's *Windows on the World* (2004), Lynne Sharon Schwartz's *The Writing on the Wall* (2005), Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), Martin Amis's *The Last Day of Muhammad Atta* (2006), H. M. Naqvi's *Home Boy* (2009), and Amy Waldman's *The Submission* (2011). The above fictional versions of nine-elevenism are the products of a world imagined by artists whose imagination is channeled, to a greater or lesser degree, by the impression the media has created. According to Derrida, 9/11 encompasses the elements of the act itself and the impression (simply left or dramatically made), "The event is made up of the 'thing' itself (that which happens or comes) and the impression (itself at once 'spontaneous' and 'controlled') that is given, left, or made by the so-called 'thing'" (Borradori 89).

Whereas some novels, like Mohsin Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2008) and Jess Walter's *The Zero*, assumes a counter-discourse position to the meta-colonial machine by offering a different narrative contextualization of the event, others act consciously or unconsciously as agents of the meta-colonial scheme. The latter category of novels tends to

glorify the Self by vilifying and demonizing the Other. Associating the binary opposites of death/life with Islam/West respectively is central to John Updike's novel *Terrorist* (2006). The themes of loss, trauma, and left-behind atrocities are dwelt upon by many novels which elaborate the victim's status leaving that of the perpetrator for the reader to judge. To cite a few in this vein, Joyce Maynard's *The Usual Rules* (2003), Bridget Marks's *September: a Novel* (2004), S. J. Rozan's *Absent Friends* (2004), Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), and Mike Binder's film *Reign Over Me* (2007). Some fictional works, however, never scruple to be the visible carriers of the meta-colonialist propaganda. They either overload the fictional context with historical bias like Don DeLillo's 9/11 novel *Falling Man* (2007) or view the 9/11 attacks by superficial lens such as Claire Messud's novel *The Emperor's Children* (2006).

Nevertheless, the trickiest 9/11 discourse by political leaders, media agitators, and novelists struggled to detach the event from its historical and political context. Such a deliberate acontextualization is meant to distract the attention from the possible political faults leading to the tragedy as well as the upcoming strategical actions and policies by the meta-colonial authorities. Michel Foucault had once warned against the dangers of what he called *le discours historico-politique*: a type of discourse that employs historical arguments to support pre-determined political goals (Juanjo 30). Hence, working under the umbrella of an exceptional situation and historical exceptionalism served as a vehicle to justify the internal security measures and foreign policies. The selective contextualization of the event to other historical events turned a blind eye to the U.S. military actions in the Middle East while opening a wide eye on such tragedies as the



attack to Pearl Harbor, the Vietnam War and even the Holocaust.

Given the media's selective history, the fictionalized facts overshadow the border between fact and fiction. Raymond Federman has rightly commented that history could become a sort of fiction in the presence of manipulating mass media whose job is to "falsify or justify historical facts," leading to the disappearance of "the unequivocal relation between the real and the imaginary". "Consequently," confirms Federman "history must be doubted, reviewed, reexamined, especially recent events as presented, or rather as RE-presented to us by the mass-media and by fiction" (25). This poses the question as to what extent our thoughts and emotions are penetrated and misinformed.

Broadly speaking, meta-colonization designates colonizing the minds (in the Center or Peripheries) through the imbedded empire of the media and manufacture of consent. The metaphor 'colonization of the mind' highlights a process by which the colonized mind's operation and contents are manipulated with long-lasting effects while the colonizer/colonized might be aware or unaware of their role and can participate in the process voluntarily or involuntarily. Therefore, colonizing the mind may take place through the transmission of mental contents by means other than the traditional colonial structure including: cultural practices, religious dictates, language expressions, fashion trends, political rhetoric, the media, education, etc.

Yet, colonizing of the minds is a one-way process rather than an interactive one. The superiority of the colonizer is undisputable due to the history of subjection and manipulation as well as the material and intellectual resources available to use against the colonized. Without the superior/inferior relationship, the idea of mind

colonization would not be efficient. The process is more complicated than filling, vacating or refilling a mind with ideas. It goes beyond the mere accepting/denying options for the colonized who might be aware of what is going on, yet cannot evade or even get rid of its elusive schemes. The intertwined economic, religious, social, and sometimes moral dogmas result in an utter lack of options. For example, millions of Americans who were aware of the government's hidden goals behind the war in Iraq and Afghanistan found it inevitable to keep silent, consent to, and even participate in the government's measures. The people's intellectual response, having being standardized due to the constant exposure to the same media means, is indeed more affected by the superficial standardization of the social media.

Nowadays, the process of colonizing the mind becomes easier the more we get involved in technology. The virtual space where people spend most of their time is a meta-colony par excellence. The terms agreement of the variable social media and platforms is the latest form of bondage by which we sell our most precious and private selves to masters in return for facilitated communication and entertainment. In this, every human being becomes a meta-colonized subject across the domains of the capitalist business lords. For instance, Metaverse has been recently launched as a virtual space of hyperreality where billions of people interact with each other from their physical places all over the world. While such a huge number of digitalized people might get facilitated channels to work, communicate, and entertain, they willingly submit their minds, manners, and privacy to a digital master to control. The Metaverse' augmented reality represents an access point from which the meta-colonizers can ensure that they can easily and effectively reach the

minds across the farthest borders initiating what Michael Kwet calls "digital colonialism" the term that can be partially synonymous to meta-colonialism.

By and large, the dynamicity of meta-colonialism distances it farther the closer we approach. However, it has been already pried open at this stage in hope its salient features and mechanism would be in future inquiries. Embarking from the complicated transformation in the colonial and imperial strategies, the above observations delve cautiously into a new realm of critical studies to understand the intricate situation that determines the (meta)colonizer/(meta)colonized relationship. Undoubtedly, the colonial existence in many spots of the globe has never ceased for a moment. It rather assumes many shapes especially in the post 9/11 watershed that neither colonialism nor post-colonialism theories can define or designate. The mainstream media empire which promotes submerging borders for capitalist emperors while maintaining and hardening the same borders for common people certainly points out at the multifaceted, deep-engaged meta-colonialism. This meta-colonial hand super-controls, to a greater or lesser degree, the flow of discourse as well as its type and content. It fictionalizes history and historicizes fiction to the point that the hyper-real becomes more authentic than the real and the universe is slowly displaced by the metaverse. How long, then, shall we wait till a metamorphosis is complete and the apocalyptic global government (WICKED as prophesied by Dashner in his novel *The Scorch Trials*) would decide who should live and who should die?

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