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Introduction: Empires, Colonies, and Postcolonial Interpretation

Empires arose in recorded history as early as the third millennium BCE and have been generally understood as systems of international domination based on power, ideology, and control. They have existed globally, arising from limited tribal conflicts in small geographical regions and occasionally developing into rather large transnational spaces.

Not limited to the past, these tyrannical forms of political and economic rule have continued to the present. Metropolises, the capitals of empires, grow economically and militarily strong and launch efforts to conquer and rule not only their own but also foreign peoples and centers. They increase their suzerainty and influence through military invasion and the internal political administrations of the conquered peoples, which become colonies to support imperial demands that enhance the empire's attainment of power and wealth. In their gaining of supremacy over colonial populations, either kingdoms or tribes, empires rule their colonies not only through superior military might and the threat of its use, but also by the establishment of economic policies favorable to the metropole and the imposition of a culture that colonizes the minds of those who are ruled.

Martial force alone cannot maintain the sovereignty of an empire. Continued control requires the indoctrination of imperial values, beliefs, and concepts issuing from the defining traditions of empires used to socialize not only the metropolitan core, but also the peoples of the defeated. Furthermore, through a system of recompense that rewards loyal, indigenous leaders by giving them a measure of official and social status, the chances of successful colonizations are increased significantly.

I. Sources of Social Power

The sociologist Michael Mann identifies four principal ‘sources’ of social power that intersect in a nation: ideology, military strength, economic resources, and socio-political administration.¹ When applied to the analysis of empire, the deployment and maintenance of these sources provides the means by which hegemony is gained and endures. Once these sources decline significantly and begin to fail, the imperial society that uses them deteriorates and, eventually, crumbles.

Yet even the colonized and their descendants among liberated peoples also possess at least a limited degree of social power in their status of subjection to empires. This colonial power is expressed in the form of resistance, ranging from subversion in speech to deeds of passive and active revolution. However, discourse among the subjugated becomes the most important means by which the subjugated resist the hegemony of imperial nations.

II. The Power of Discourse

Michel Foucault’s views of discourse are essential to understand his concept of the relationship between power and knowledge.² He argues that language is not simply the stringing together of words, but also embodies a creativity that creates and continues to shape the outside world, the value of nature, and human communities, all that embraces that which is intrinsic to self-identity. For Foucault, the concept of a single explanation, or grand narrative, is preposterous. Rather, new ideologies do not result from metanarratives of history and culture, but rather they develop from many disparate, unrelated causes. However, what drives the creation of grand narratives is the ambition of the powerful to maintain their status in the social hierarchy.

Foucault believes that so-called normative knowledge is connected to systems of social control. Sovereign powers in a society, including an empire, decide what is legitimate and true and punish those who differ in their definitions, decisions, and actions.

1. Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*. Also see his ‘The Autonomous Power’.

2. Foucault, *L’archéologie du savoir*. Also see Foucault, *L’ordre du discours*.

In the application of Foucault's understanding of discourse, knowledge, and power to empire and colony, it becomes apparent that imperial dominion is largely founded on the conviction that its knowledge and right to rule are true. By contrast, those who are the objects of conquest are deemed inferior in knowledge. The defeat of imperial rule is in part due to a discourse of resistance that leads to revolution and, if successful, independence.

III. The Discourse of Resistance

In his volume, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, James Scott concentrates on two types of discourse among both rulers and the ruled.³ Scott contrasts *public transcript*, which describes openly the accessible interactions between imperial powers and those they control, and *hidden transcript*, which does not clearly reveal the communication of the empire and the colonized but is known primarily by the symbolic codes inherent in their respective discourse. He notes the symbolic meaning present in the language of both groups of people: the conquering metropole and the resisting colony. Ruling elites convey hegemony publicly through culture, language, state ceremonies, and many types of public transcripts (e.g., proclamations, laws, and rules) made known and implemented through forms of social and political control. Rulers use authority, culture, language, and the display of public ceremonies to enforce the components of their ideology of rule. Rituals of domination and subordination are public and provide symbolic expression of the rule of the metropole, both in formal celebrations and in informal observances, which occur in both the metropolitan core and in the colonies on the margins of culture and influence. Such displays not only maintain the subjugation of the colonized people, but also reinforce the self-understanding and identity of the colonizers as legitimate imposers of subjugation. In resistance to hegemonic rulers, marginalized peoples engage in a criticism of power in the variety of public and private discourse and activities at their disposal.

These two types of discourse propose to substantiate, in the first instance, the metanarrative of the empire and its so-called superior culture, and, to subvert, in the second case, the rulers' ideology of hegemony, particularly when submission and colonization of the mind is being forced upon the ruled. In their public discourse the dominated

3. Scott, *Domination*.

often engage in speech performance that is deceptive in the expression of feigned support for imperial superiority.

In masking their candor, symbolic twists of language and its performance weaken the force of imperial ideology. Confrontations between the powerful and the powerless (the conquered, slaves, workers, women, children, indigents, and feeble) include the latter's feigning of deference and obedience to their masters in public displays, since they are not allowed to engage publicly without punishing consequences. Yet their hidden transcripts express resistance to the conquerors through such things as folktales, songs, plays of the theater of the absurd, jokes of ridicule, and varieties of coded language known only to them. Even rituals serve to present the intent of resistance found in hidden transcripts. This coded language and its performance are central to the misrepresentation and disguising of the thoughts and views of the subordinated toward their masters. Because of threat from the powerful, the dominated seek anonymity behind the language of subversion as well as in actions that permit an innocuous understanding of who they are and what they mean to say. Once the hidden discourse is spoken publicly, the dominated experience the satisfaction of the expression of pent-up hostility, although the public expression may eventually lead to devastating results in their fortunes. The subordinates' views of the powerful come into the open and take the form of both passive and active violence. The objectives of the hidden discourse of the weak include decolonizing the minds of the dominated and the eventual driving out of their imperial powers and the foreign rule they enforce. Thus, the ruled have a measure of power, in particular discourse, in resisting and subverting both the empire and its after-effects in neocolonialism.

Following an introduction to postcolonialism and historiography in Chapter 1, this volume explores the major features of interactions between empires and colonies, along with confrontations, submissions, and fusions. This will be followed in the subsequent chapters by a postcolonial analysis of selected texts from Israel and Judah, beginning in the eighth century BCE, and continuing into the second century CE. In correspondence with the diaspora, some texts originating in Alexandria of Egypt and others from different locations of imperial Greece and Rome will be examined. Important to this study, throughout its various sections, is the role of religion in undergirding and channeling ideologies and actions of rule and resistance.