

Satoshi MIZUTANI

**HYBRIDITY AND SOLIDARITY:  
CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE POSTNATIONAL  
AND THE POST-SOVEREIGN**

*The perspective of “transimperial history”*

In response to *Ab Imperio*’s kind invitation to participate in a collective contemplation of the “postnational” and the “post-sovereign,” this essay argues that these concepts invoked by the editors, via Arjun Appadurai,<sup>1</sup> can be meaningfully rethought from the perspective of what I call “cross-colonial solidarity,” an analytic category that I have come up with in pursuing historical research within the framework of “transimperial history.”<sup>2</sup> The editorial team has asked me to explore whether transimperial history as an emerging new approach to empire and colonialism has anything to say about the debate in question. This new historical approach, which I have been trying to develop with my colleagues at the Center for Transimperial History, particularly Nadin Heé and Daniel Hedinger,<sup>3</sup> is about the interactions of

---

<sup>1</sup> Arjun Appadurai. *Sovereignty without Territoriality: Notes for a Postnational Geography* // Patricia Yaeger (Ed.). *The Geography of Identity*. Ann Arbor, 1996. Pp. 40–58.

<sup>2</sup> This essay reflects my engagement with transimperial history over the past decade. The full results of this research will be presented in Satoshi Mizutani. *Transimperial Trajectories: Colonialism and Anticolonialism across Empires* – a monograph in progress.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel Hedinger, Nadin Heé, and Satoshi Mizutani. *What Is Transimperial History?* New York: Columbia University Press, forthcoming.



multiple empires and how different historical actors invested themselves in these interactions politically, economically, and culturally. One of several interrelated subtopics is the question of the relationship among different anti-colonialisms. “Cross-colonial solidarity” refers to a specific sense and ideal of *solidarity in resistance* whose moments manifest themselves *across colonies* located in *different empires*. This concept allows transimperial history to critically ask why and how actors resisting colonialism see the experiences of distant strangers with a sense of entanglement as though they are one’s own, and how they imagine the “world” at such moments of entanglement. It helps historians trace and analyze the trajectories of solidaristic feelings and relations that occur among individuals and groups that do not always share any identity-based commonalities, whether racial, linguistic, or religious. I argue that both this kind of solidarity and a world vision based on it can be creatively discussed in ways that address the questions posed by the editors. At some moments, anti-colonial actors vividly imagined the “postnational” and the “post-sovereign” from the perspective of a radical universalism – universalism from below based on the firsthand experience of being colonized.

To highlight several points of discussion that seem particularly relevant, let me compare the ideas of “cross-colonial solidarity” and “hybridity.” In my previous contribution to *Ab Imperio*, I explored some aspects of the celebrated theory of “hybridity” formulated by Homi K. Bhabha.<sup>4</sup> In that essay, “Hybridity and History,” I proposed that Bhabha’s concept of “hybridity” is best understood as a critical intervention in the very idea of time, with “history” understood as first having been invented in Europe and then imposed on non-European worlds through the colonial encounter. The thesis of “hybridity” stipulates that the colonial relation is justified through concepts such as “progress,” “civility,” and “publicness,” offering the colonized inclusion while simultaneously rejecting them as “white, but not quite.” While acknowledging the positive influence of Bhabha’s model, my argument was a critical one. By hybridizing history, Bhabha’s post-historical move ends up failing to capture some aspects of colonialism that shape the experiences of the various actors involved – aspects that would have to be historicized for the sake of a comprehensive demystification. Colonialism as a physical force – rather than as a meta-historical regime of representation – does not always become paralyzed by the otherness of a hybrid way of being: instead,

---

<sup>4</sup> Satoshi Mizutani. *Hybridity and History: A Critical Reflection on Homi K. Bhabha’s Post-Historical Thoughts* // *Ab Imperio*. 2013. No. 4. Pp. 27–48; Homi K. Bhabha. *The Location of Culture*. London, 2004.



it tries to incessantly reproduce the hierarchies and boundaries it creates by taming the contradictory meanings of the otherness in question. In rethinking the postnational and the post-sovereign in terms of cross-colonial solidarity, I basically sustain the argument of my earlier article. Certainly, the trope of otherness is useful for rethinking the postnational and post-sovereign from the standpoint of promoting cultural heterogeneity. However, it also has the effect of overshadowing other crucial factors of anti-colonialism, which require proper historicizing. In this essay, I argue that one such aspect of anti-colonialism is none other than cross-colonial solidarity.

### *Hybridity*

The idea of hybridity can be seen as a theory of the postnational insofar as those who promote it see the “nation” as the main battlefield between the hegemony of historical reason and the incommensurable alterity of the subaltern. Operating within the broader framework of postcolonial theory, one premise of the hybridity argument is that both colonialism and anti-colonialism have largely disappeared while the cultural hegemony of the nation-state remains. If the post-ness of postcolonial theory is taken seriously, something called “coloniality” is still to be examined. With the disappearance of colonial empires, the physical violence, institutionalized discrimination, and economic exploitation which characterized colonialism have largely dispersed and dissipated. The colonial, however, survives in and through the nation-states and the global institutions, which include the former as their constitutive members. The values that were ideologically used to justify colonialism, such as “progress”, “humanity”, “civilization” have now achieved unchallenged hegemony. The elites in the Global South are now busy using them to establish their dominance over their own post-colonial nations, marginalizing the “uncivilized” worlds of the “subaltern” as a hindrance to progress.<sup>5</sup> The task of postcolonial theorists and

---

<sup>5</sup> This view is well articulated in Dipesh Chakrabarty. *Legacies of Bandung: Decolonization and the Politics of Culture* // Saurabh Dube (Ed.). *Enchantments of Modernity*. New Delhi, 2009. Pp. 264–287. In this article, Chakrabarty emphasizes the significance of the critical intellectual interventions of postcolonial theorists from the Global South like Bhabha, who gained positions of authority in Western academe – especially in Britain and the United States. This praise for postcolonial theorists’ success contrasts with Chakrabarty’s criticism of anti-colonial actors in the past, including those who participated in nonaligned solidarity conferences such as the Bandung Conference of 1955. He criticizes them for allegedly internalizing modern Western values uncritically and thereby contributing to the final “Europeanization of the world” (Martin Heidegger’s term). It



theoretically-oriented historians is to read against the grain this narrative of the linear march of progress that is evolving both globally and locally. The recalcitrant and inscrutable ways of “subalterns” – those non-elites who do not internalize time-related values – would produce hybridities that throw historical reason into paralysis.<sup>6</sup> The theory of hybridity’s critical target is the very structure of the nation-state’s temporality. This theory therefore requires a post-historical approach rather than any historical one, including historical materialism, because “accumulation” in this context refers more to knowledge than to capital. Likewise, violence takes the form of “epistemic violence” rather than physical violence, and discrimination becomes not so much about specific pieces of legislation or acts of exclusion as about forms of “absence” in the shadows of the “metaphysics of presence.” The theory of hybridity points toward a postnational space – which Bhabha has famously conceptualized as the “Third Space” – that is not physical, existing in time, but liminal and found in the crevices of history’s linear time frame. The theory of hybridity is also about global sovereignty. Its temporality concerns not just a nation but the world of many nations. In short, it transcends the hybridizing of national history by hybridizing “world history” as a whole.

This approach became influential after the publication in 2000 of the highly cited book *Provincializing Europe*, by Dipesh Chakrabarty, one of the most theoretically oriented South Asian historians close to Homi Bhabha.<sup>7</sup> According to Chakrabarty, “Europe remains the sovereign, theoretical subject of *all histories*, including the ones we call Indian, Chinese, Kenyan and so on” (emphasis added).<sup>8</sup> In this way, post-sovereign also means post-world history. According to Chakrabarty, the paradigm of world history has narrated the pasts of non-European societies through determining their degrees of progress as measured by concepts such as “citizenship,” “public sphere,” “rights,” “democracy,” and “scientific rationality,” whose origins are traced

---

should be noted, however, that another theoretically oriented historian from South Asia, Partha Chatterjee, takes a more nuanced view of anti-colonial solidarity, situating it in a complex historical context of decolonization. Partha Chatterjee. *Nationalism, Internationalism, and Cosmopolitanism* // *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*. 2016. Vol. 36. No. 2. Pp. 320–334.

<sup>6</sup> Gyan Prakash. *Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism* // *The American Historical Review*. 1994. Vol. 99. No. 5. Pp. 1475–1490.

<sup>7</sup> Homi Bhabha. Foreword // Dipesh Chakrabarty. *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies*. Chicago, 2002. Pp. ix–xiv.

<sup>8</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton, 2007. P. 27.



to the European Enlightenment.<sup>9</sup> Contemplating the pasts of these societies in terms of such concepts promotes Eurocentrism, which permanently situates the world outside Europe as “backward” and “lacking” the necessary qualities. The historian’s task is to dethrone Europe from its privileged position as the sole author of world history by showing how its attempts to historicize non-European ways of life end up producing hybridities because of their uncategorizable otherness.

The criticism of world history’s Eurocentrism is paralleled by the criticism of world government projects. For example, following this late subalternist approach, Dianne Otto characterizes the United Nations as embodying Enlightenment values.<sup>10</sup> In Chakrabarty’s terms, the UN belongs to “the dominant institutions” whose “‘major’ narratives” aim at subordinating the subalterns’ “life-worlds.”<sup>11</sup> However, hybrid arrangements can present an alternative to this dominant narrative if “non-European” life-worlds expand, transcending the nation-states’ borders in their own distinctive fashion, and becoming irreducible either to the scale of a nation or that of the modern global institutions.

For example, Catarina Kinnvall and Ted Svensson take an Islamic reform movement, called Tablighi Jama’at, as such a post-sovereign alternative. Drawing on Chakrabarty, they argue that the global institutions representing nations are both secular and statist. They function as a collective sovereign on a global scale and impose Eurocentric norms, enforcing their governmentality over nonsecular social forms. The emerging global public sphere corresponds to worldwide governing bodies with a linear sense of time. By contrast, the globally developing Tablighi Jama’at exemplifies the hybridization of such a totalizing sense of time. Tablighi Jama’at can be seen as a source of hybridity indicating “the limits to notions and enactments of a ‘common world.’”<sup>12</sup> It is in this way that the hybridization of world history transcends the grip of global sovereignty.

The idea of hybridizing world history validates numerous local contexts, which are distinguished by a sense of time incommensurate with that of a

---

<sup>9</sup> Chakrabarty. *Provincializing Europe*. P. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Dianne Otto. *Subalternity and International Law: The Problems of Global Community and the Incommensurability of Difference* // *Social & Legal Studies*. 1996. Vol. 5. No. 3. Pp. 337–364.

<sup>11</sup> Chakrabarty. *Provincializing Europe*. P. 101.

<sup>12</sup> Catarina Kinnvall and Ted Svensson. *Ontological Security and the Limits to a Common World: Subaltern Pasts and the Inner-Worldliness of the Tablighi Jama’at* // *Postcolonial Studies*. 2017. Vol. 20. No. 3. P. 335.



“hyper-real Europe” as the sole standard of historical time. This perspective tells us little, however, about the relations *among and across each of the different forms of alterity*. A mere aggregation of these forms would not constitute some shared body of knowledge mutually recognizable across these sites. This is because unknowability – not mutual understanding – is the very essence of the hybridizing effect. Each mode of temporality acquires its radical specificity in the process of encountering world history as an iteration of colonial discourse in the specific local context.

This confronts transimperial history with a major contradiction: how to explain the fact that resistance unfolds translocally, connecting geographically and culturally distant peoples, who do not share the same sense of time. If each of the colonized peoples possesses a unique temporality, how can these peoples recognize each other’s respective past as having anything in common? And if there is no shared sense of the past, how can they come to share the same goal and find themselves moving forward in time together?

One limitation of the hybridity thesis is that its critique focuses only on the political values upheld by modern liberal nations – particularly Britain, which supposedly epitomizes the time-specific concept of “Europe.” Bhabha’s theory emblemizes postcolonial theory’s Anglocentrism by its overreliance on the case of the British Raj as a source for making generalizations. At least two interconnected conditions specific to nineteenth-century British India are considered important by the founder of the field of subaltern studies, Ranajit Guha. First, British rule projected the liberal political values of the European Enlightenment, so that the British Raj was “an autocracy set up and sustained in the East by the foremost democracy of the Western world.”<sup>13</sup> Second, in India, the colonized elites were exposed to these values through institutions known as “English education.” Combined, these two conditions created what Guha calls “a curious paradox”: “The colonial regime first took upon itself to inculcate the notion of rights and liberties upon its subjects and then deny these in full or in part in the principles and practices of governance.”<sup>14</sup>

It is this characterization of colonialism that has motivated a group of South Asian theorists and historians to problematize ideals such as “liberty,” “democracy,” and “human rights” and their hegemonic hold on the colonized elites. The totalizing discourse of colonialism as historical reason originates in those nations that justify their rule based on liberal credentials,

---

<sup>13</sup> Ranajit Guha. *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India, Convergences*. Cambridge, MA, 1997. P. xii.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* P. 57.



thus contributing to the unicentral theory of colonial domination's spread across the world. This view of colonialism also sustains a binary view of "non-Europe" as a source of hybridity. In anglophone scholarship, for example, "Pan-Asianism" tends to be discussed as a positive phenomenon, so that Indian nationalists with close ties to Japan, such as Rash Behari Bose and Radhabinod Pal, are treated as precursors to postcolonial critics of Eurocentrism. Rash Behari Bose's interpretation of world history based on the idea of Asian cultural unity comes to exemplify an Indian "postcolonial" way of provincializing the League of Nations' essentially Eurocentrist liberal internationalism.<sup>15</sup>

But transimperial history tells a very different story, which is crucial for understanding the cross-colonial kind of solidarity as distinct from the Pan-Asianist solidarity based on a shared sense of regional identity. The transimperial approach defies the unicentral view of colonialism, which erroneously assumes that a critique of Eurocentrism automatically implies a critique of colonialism, and that people such as Rash Behari Bose were principled opponents of colonialism. It is true that Bose vehemently opposed Western colonialism in general and British colonialism in particular. However, he had nothing against a "non-European" Japanese colonialism. Taking a unicentral view of colonialism, Bose justified his support for Japan's imperial expansion by maintaining that it would upset Britain. Urging Korean elites to cooperate with Japanese colonialists, Bose argued that the Japanese, distinctively "non-European" tradition of political integration accommodated Koreans well and protected them from white racism. According to archival Japanese-language sources long held in Japan, Bose cultivated an extremely intimate and mutually inspiring friendship with Japanese Pan-Asianists who advocated Japan's expansion into Britain's Asian colonies and regarded disdainfully the presence of anti-colonial Koreans as a hindrance to that expansion. Bose fully agreed with his Japanese friends' take on colonialism.<sup>16</sup> His vision of "Asia for Asians" was clearly anti-Eurocentric, which makes it appear radical today in the context of the

<sup>15</sup> Joseph McQuade. *The New Asia of Rash Behari Bose: India, Japan, and the Limits of the International, 1912–1945* // *Journal of World History*. 2016. Vol. 27. No. 4. P. 662. On Pal, see Milinda Banerjee. *India's "Subaltern Elites" and the Tokyo Trial* // Kerstin von Lingen (Ed.). *Transcultural Justice at the Tokyo Tribunal*. Leiden, 2018. Pp. 262–283.

<sup>16</sup> Satoshi Mizutani. *Anti-Colonialism and the Contested Politics of Comparison: Rabin-dranath Tagore, Rash Behari Bose and Japanese Colonialism in Korea in the Inter-War Period* // *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*. 2015. Vol. 16. No. 1. DOI: 10.1353/cch.2015.0015. I will discuss these points in greater detail in chapter 5 of *Transimperial Trajectories*.



anglophone theory of hybridity. However, rejecting one form of global sovereignty, Bose still held on to the unicentral view of colonialism. Japan was but one of the multiple centers producing colonial domination rather than a systemic alternative to European colonialism. In this context, adding the analytical lens of hybridity would not help to rewrite world history in a postnational/post-sovereign mode, particularly given that not all colonial regimes subscribed to the ideals of individual liberty and equality.

Transimperial history maintains that in the highly competitive world of imperialism, Britain was one among many centers of colonialism, each highly aware of another. Those colonizing nations that were self-consciously nonliberal, particularly the Axis countries before and during World War II, claimed that their imperial policies were different from and superior to those of Britain, France, and the Netherlands.<sup>17</sup> Japan further underscored its uniqueness by appealing to its “non-Europeanness”: the Pan-Asianists argued that Japanese rule was neither exploitative nor discriminatory or violent because it was not based on white supremacism. Japanese colonialism was in fact just as autocratic and repressive as any other colonialism, and the hollowness of Pan-Asianist claims has long been demonstrated by historians in East Asia specializing in Japanese colonialism. Not written in English, however, their work has been largely ignored by anglophone theorists and theory-oriented historians.<sup>18</sup> Transimperial history insists that colonialism was multicentral, characterized by competing strands of colonial ideology, both liberal and nonliberal, crisscrossing the spaces in-between and across different empires.

The recognition of this multicentral and transimperial condition is central to rethinking anti-colonial imaginations and practices. From the early 1930s, in India under British colonial rule, anti-colonial actors such as Rabindranath Tagore and Mohandas K. Gandhi became worried about the increasing influence of the Japanese empire. Unlike the British counterpart, this empire justified its colonialism through the quasi-religious idea of patriotic self-sacrifice to the emperor as the living “God” and posing as a non-European anti-racist appealing to Asian racial kinship. Unlike modern postcolonial theorists who are singularly preoccupied with critique of Eurocentrism, these anti-colonial actors were keenly aware of the multicentral, interrelated dynamics of colonialisms. While condemning all colonialisms equally, they did not fail to

---

<sup>17</sup> Daniel Hedinger. *The Imperial Nexus: The Second World War and the Axis in Global Perspective* // *Journal of Global History*. 2017. Vol. 12. No. 2. Pp. 184–205.

<sup>18</sup> Satoshi Mizutani. Introduction to special section “Beyond Comparison: Japan and Its Colonial Empire in Transimperial Relations” // *Cross-Currents*. 2019. Vol. 8. No. 2. P. 11.



emphasize solidarity with the victims of all colonial regimes – liberal and illiberal alike. Tagore, for example, cultivated a mutual sense of solidarity with Koreans resisting the increasingly anti-European Japanese colonialism. He was deeply impressed by the call for cross-colonial solidarity by a nameless Korean student he met in Japan in 1929, who told him: “The helpless inherit the earth to-day; suffering will be their bond of union!”<sup>19</sup> And it was as early as 1916 when Tagore discovered that Japan was a colonial power, so that Asia was being colonized not just from outside but also from within. Unlike modern theorists of hybridity, Tagore and his fellow Indian anti-colonial actors did not identify the colonizing–colonized nexus with the opposition Europe–non-Europe and were increasingly concerned about the rising tide of illiberal colonialism. Germany, Italy, and Japan perceived the older liberal imperial powers as obstacles to their own overseas expansion, and the global war between the two imperialist camps caused immeasurable suffering to colonized peoples around the world.

### *Solidarity*

The view of different parts of the world as intimately interlinked is at the core of cross-colonial solidarity.<sup>20</sup> It is precisely this view that makes their claims universalist rather than regionalist and identity-based. Regional grouping is not necessarily incompatible with colonialism, given the latter’s multidirectionality, as discussed in the previous section. As the Indonesian delegate to the Asian Relations Conference – one of the first nonaligned anti-colonial solidarity forums – pointed out, “The concept of an Asian bloc had been condemned when the Japanese mooted one such some years ago. The concept continued to stand condemned.”<sup>21</sup>

These anti-colonial leaders embraced this uncompromisingly universalist worldview not because they internalized European values. Rather, their universalism was based on a shared experience of colonial violence, exploitation, and discrimination coming from multiple centers to every part

<sup>19</sup> Rabindranath Tagore. *Letters from Russia* / trans. Sasadhar Sinha. Calcutta, 1984. P. 12. On these points, see my online essay, *Indians and Koreans in Crosscolonial Solidarity: Part II. Rabindranath Tagore and His Transimperial Encounters* // *Transimperial History Blog*. 2022. November 22. <https://www.transimperialhistory.com/indians-and-koreans-in-crosscolonial-solidarity-part-2/> (all internet resources last accessed March 23, 2023).

<sup>20</sup> Full details of my discussion of cross-colonial solidarity in this section will be found in chapter 7 of *Transimperial Trajectories*.

<sup>21</sup> *Asian Relations: Being Report of the Proceedings and Documentation of the First Asian Relations Conference*, New Delhi, March–April 1947. New Delhi, 1948. P. 86.



of the globe. The problem of colonialism would not be solved by creating “different worlds,” whether geographical or figurative, in isolation from “Europe” and its values. To address the common problem, there had to be just “one world.” As Gandhi said at the same conference, “I would not like to live in this world if it was not to be one world. Certainly I would like to see that dream realised in my lifetime.”<sup>22</sup> Anti-colonial actors like Gandhi knew that each colonized people experienced systemic oppression, so that even after gaining independence from a given empire it was likely to fall under the domination of another empire. The cocreation of a global world was necessary for the collective effort to abolish and prevent colonialism as such. Instead of rejecting universal values like humanity and equality as Eurocentric, those peoples promoted cross-colonial solidarity as their own universalist value. Their solution to universal ideas as a form of hegemony was not to reject these ideas but to impose themselves as their coauthors. This is why it is erroneous to suggest, as postcolonial theorists tend to do, that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was an embodiment of Eurocentrism. The document was jointly authored by “Third World” delegates to the United Nations, including those from India. The participants of nonaligned solidarity conferences, such as the Asian Relations Conference and the Bandung Conference, upheld the universalist notion of human rights as inscribed in the declaration, which was partly written by them.<sup>23</sup>

Universalism was not forced upon them along with Eurocentric concepts of bourgeois-liberal individualism or internationalism. On the contrary, they needed the universalist idea of a single humanity to condemn the numerous forms of colonialism, past and present, as violating universally understood and accepted human rights. For cross-colonial solidarity, it is essential to insist on the reality of just “one world” in which everyone lives. It is this humanistic universalism condemning any forms of oppression that is imposed as a hegemonic discourse on the colonizing nations, forcing them to interiorize the universal value of human rights and reject the arsenal of ideologies used to justify colonial domination.

But cross-colonial solidarity is not simply about curbing colonial powers’ claims to imperialist sovereignty; it expects every nation to voluntarily surrender a part of its sovereignty. Rooted in the experience of collective

---

<sup>22</sup> Asian Relations. P. 177.

<sup>23</sup> Manu Bhagavan. *A New Hope: India, the United Nations and the Making of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* // *Modern Asian Studies*. 2010. Vol. 44. No. 2. Pp. 311–47; Roland Burke. *Decolonization and the Evolution of International Human Rights*. Philadelphia, 2010.



trauma, cross-colonial solidarity is more than a platform for voicing grievances, and it is not an internationalist version of victimhood nationalism. Precisely because of the past common record of enduring suffering, the new single world envisioned collectively from the vantage point of cross-colonial solidarity entails a pledge not to become a source of unfreedom for others. This principle requires a fundamental rethinking of the meaning of “sovereignty.” While national self-determination is a noble and much-coveted goal, one’s independence should not be achieved at the expense of imposing additional restrictions on others.

Most importantly, it is necessary to rethink the concept of “nation” and whether self-determination is synonymous with the exclusive ownership of a nation-state. After all, modern colonial empires were built by nation-states, which made anti-colonial actors aware of the danger that, by building a nation-state of their own, the former colonized could become the source of oppression, both domestically to minority groups and abroad. As Gandhi said, “I would feel extremely sorry if India, having won her independence essentially or rather predominantly through non-violent means, was going to use it for the suppression of other parts of the world.”<sup>24</sup> To avoid this transformation, the politics of cross-colonial solidarity entails a postnational approach to sovereignty – of any country, both former colonial powers and those nations that have only recently achieved independence.

Accepting the universal standards makes it imperative to condemn oppression and discrimination in any society, regardless of its former status as the colonizer or the colonized, and the same applies to imperialism in foreign policy. This is why worldmaking based on cross-colonial solidarity requires that any polity be open to critical scrutiny.<sup>25</sup> Voluntary renouncement of sovereign immunity amounts to limited national sovereignty or, rather, to a post-sovereignty condition. This condition strips any forms of domestic discrimination and oppression of institutional support and it delegitimizes the claims of any majority to embodying the norm in a society. All categories of minorities and the oppressed can appeal to universal standards of human rights. Created from below, such universal norms allow any of those marginalized within a nation to seek solidarity with their counterparts abroad.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Asian Relations. P. 176.

<sup>25</sup> I borrow the term “worldmaking” from Adom Getachew. *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination*. Princeton, 2019.

<sup>26</sup> For an interesting case study of this kind of solidarity, see Purvi Mehta. *Dalit Feminism in Tokyo: Analogy and Affiliation in Transnational Dalit Activism* // *Feminist Review*. 2019. Vol. 121. No. 1. Pp. 24–36.



I am presenting the thoughts and actions of twentieth-century anti-colonial actors not out of nostalgia but because I believe that cross-colonial solidarity remains highly relevant today for our discussions of the postnational and post-sovereign society. I find it unlikely that the colonial regime's violence, exploitation, and discrimination have disappeared since the dissolution of colonial empires. The emergence of post-colonial nations has not always been accompanied by the triumph of liberal values spread by the Europeanized elites of these nations. Nor have the former colonial powers earnestly and persistently disseminated these values abroad. For example, after succeeding the British Empire as the hegemon in Asia, the United States for decades prioritized the safeguarding of American geopolitical interests, supporting right-wing, anticommunist authoritarian regimes. It was not liberal values but the apparatus of repression that the nationalist elites running these regimes had inherited from their foreign predecessors.<sup>27</sup> Those who fought against such regimes in South Korea or Indonesia often did so while calling for solidarity in the name of justice and human rights, just as anti-colonial actors in the past had done. The lingering legacy of colonialism can be seen today in Israeli settler colonialism, which the United States and other Western nations have long supported. The Palestinians have had to fight against physical dispossession and military violence long after colonialism had supposedly ended.

The idea that colonialism is over has been emphatically denied by Edward Said, who has long been misrepresented as the founder and promoter of post-colonial theory. He once said about post-colonial theory in an interview: "I would rather not myself talk about it because I do not think I belong to that. First of all, I don't think colonialism is over, really. I don't know what they are really talking about."<sup>28</sup> In my view, Said exemplifies cross-colonial solidarity, proving its relevance today. Said's sense of solidarity was transnational in a way that was strikingly similar to how anti-colonial solidarity in the past was transimperial. In an interview on September 8, 2000, three years before

---

<sup>27</sup> Jini Kim Watson. *Cold War Reckonings: Authoritarianism and the Genres of Decolonization*. New York, 2021.

<sup>28</sup> Edward Said. In Conversation with Neeladri Bhattacharya, Suvir Kaul, and Ania Loomba // *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*. 1998. Vol. 1. No. 1. P. 92. Robert Young, a postcolonial theorist who once famously called Said, Bhabha, and Gayatri Chakrabarty Spivak the "Holy Trinity" of postcolonial theory, admitted later that Said has been more of an opponent of postcolonial theory, positively disliking being lumped together with the "posties" in the academic establishment in the humanities. Robert J. C. Young. *Opponent of Postcolonial Theory* // Tobias Döring and Mark Stein (Eds.). *Edward Said's Translocations: Essays in Secular Criticism*. New York, 2014. Pp. 23–43.



his death, he recalled that not just his academic work had been important throughout his career. “The real engagement” was consistently with “the different kinds of solidarity you build with people, all over the world.” His visits to decolonized countries like India and South Africa were “all part of building solidarity, where it was important just to keep Palestine in focus, the whole Palestinian cause and all it meant.” At the same time, however, it was not just about Palestine. As he hastened to add, “I don’t mean just Palestinian nationalism, but the whole notion of dispossession.”<sup>29</sup> It was in this context of translocal solidarity that Said took a genuine interest in the struggle of other peoples, geographically and culturally isolated from one another. A particularly important reference point was South Africa, where the African National Congress led by Nelson Mandela ended Apartheid in 1994. Said was moved by Mandela’s attempt to rally all peoples in the world in support of the African cause, even including the pro-Apartheid whites. This urged Said to critically reflect on his own stance on struggle. He asked himself, “Why has the Palestinian struggle not (yet) captured the world’s imagination and why, even more to the point, does it not appear as a great moral struggle [like Mandela’s own]?”<sup>30</sup> He concluded: “One must provide the concrete grounds for it [peace], and those can only come from moral vision. ... We have to abide by humane democratic values.”<sup>31</sup> Thus, the sense of solidarity enabled Said to distance himself from a narrow nationalistic program of resistance and embrace a more universal and all-inclusive one. It is in this way that Said increasingly saw the Palestinian struggle, proclaiming in 2003:

The Palestinian struggle for justice is especially something with which one expresses solidarity. ... Remember the solidarity shown towards Palestine here and everywhere in Latin America, Africa, Europe, Asia and Australia, and remember also that there is a cause to which – a real cause to which many people have committed themselves, difficulties and terrible obstacles notwithstanding. Why? Because it is a just cause, a noble ideal, a moral quest for equality and human rights.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Cindi Katz and Neil Smith. *An Interview with Edward Said // Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*. 2003. Vol. 21. No. 6. P. 644.

<sup>30</sup> Edward W. Said. *The Only Alternative // Edward W. Said. From Oslo to Iraq and the Road Map: Essays*. New York, 2005. P. 49.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* P. 51.

<sup>32</sup> Edward Said. *Dignity, Solidarity and the Penal Colony // Counterpunch*. 2003. September 25. <https://www.counterpunch.org/2003/09/25/dignity-solidarity-and-the-penal-colony/>.



Underscoring equality and human rights as the foundation of transnational solidarity, Said resonated with anti-colonial actors of the twentieth century, which is unsurprising given that the Palestinian struggle had already been a focus of cross-colonial solidarity long before Said's writings. In 1938, Gandhi wrote that it was "wrong and inhuman" to allow Jews to consider Palestine "partly or wholly as their national home" under the British mandate – "a crime against humanity" that "cannot be justified by any moral code of conduct."<sup>33</sup> What is striking is how, expressing transnational solidarity, Said and Gandhi held the same ideals. The recourse to universalist values is even more striking because the two men have often been characterized by modern scholars as anti-Western critics of universalism.<sup>34</sup> Gandhi's reference to both (in)humanity and (im)morality deeply resonates with Said's assertion that the Palestinian cause is "just" and "noble" because of its "moral quest for equality and human rights."

Said's social ideal is not particularistic, reserved solely for "Muslims" or "non-Europeans." Rather, he is speaking from the perspective of equality and human rights in non-culturally specific terms. This identification with universal values makes the author of *Orientalism* appear paradoxically susceptible to Eurocentric values. Bhabha has criticized Said for theoretical inconsistency because, unlike Bhabha, Said is too subjective and emotionally involved in the Palestinian question.<sup>35</sup> From the vantage point of transimperial history, subjectivity and emotions do not disqualify one's political stance but only underscore a commitment to cross-colonial solidarity. One must even ask whether Bhabha himself is sufficiently critical of colonialism.<sup>36</sup> Bhabha's theoretical consistency comes at the cost of dissociation from the object of analysis, which makes moments of hybridity both subjectless

---

<sup>33</sup> M. K. Gandhi. The Jews // Harijan. 1938. November 26. P. 35.

<sup>34</sup> For a critical discussion of Gandhism as a precursor to postmodernism, see Upasana Pandey. Problem with Postmodern Gandhi // Mainstream. 2007. Vol. 45. No. 41. <https://www.mainstreamweekly.net/article341.html>.

<sup>35</sup> On this point, see Joseph Massad. The Intellectual Life of Edward Said // Journal of Palestine Studies. 2004. Vol. 33. No. 3. Pp. 7–22.

<sup>36</sup> For a critique of Bhabha for not even recognizing the Palestinian question as a case of anti-colonialism but only as a conflict between two nations, see Massad. The Intellectual Life of Edward Said. P. 15. According to Ella Shohat, Bhabha's theory of hybridity is popular with those left-liberal Israeli intelligentsia who are critical of the hard-line policies of the right but are equally reluctant to see Israel as a colonizing nation. They criticize Said, an anti-colonial actor, for being stubbornly partisan, while embracing Bhabha, a postcolonial theorist, as sophisticated and flexible. See Ella Shohat. The "Postcolonial" in Translation: Reading Said in Hebrew // Journal of Palestine Studies. 2004. Vol. 33. No. 3. Pp. 55–75.



and emotionless. Devoid of emotions, such as despair or hope, moments of hybridity become as abstract and anonymous as instances of epistemic violence, which supposedly produce the effect of hybridity in the first place. But a subject has nothing to share if there is no lived experience of certain emotions; hence, there is little possibility for a sense of postnational/post-sovereign solidarity to develop.

Meanwhile, the post-historical paradigm allows disconnected individuals to pursue their unique life scenarios and perceptions of temporality. Various versions of non-European otherness generate numerous forms of the “world history” universal narrative’s hybridization, producing distinctive life-worlds. Bhabha’s priority would be to protect these unique isolated life-worlds rather than seeking commonalities among them. A single concept of humanity would be seen as jeopardizing the heterogeneous particularism of local cultures.

By emotionally identifying with anti-colonial struggles unfolding in different places but within a shared temporality, Said is more worried about explicit violence – physical and psychological – and why the world still allows violence to take place. Less interested in “other worlds,” Said is involved in the world shared with all those who experience such violence. It is only by personal involvement that the world can be radically transformed from within. It is this sense of engagement that makes Said a radical universalist. Worldmaking from the vantage point of the dispossessed, a historical sense of unity in the pursuit of a common goal becomes essential. From the perspective of cross-colonial solidarity, in passionately appealing to universal values, Said is being neither theoretically inconsistent nor blindly Eurocentric. Rather, he is remarkably consistent in being emotionally committed to the same cause, and it is precisely this subjective quality of engagement that makes his commitment all-inclusive: he sees the hopes and despairs of others as his own while trying to communicate his own experience to others, regardless of how distant they are. In Said’s vision of the postnational/post-sovereign, resistance is not about recognizing the otherness of others: it is about rethinking oneself and others as cosubjects, making history together.

### *The history of the present*

In our effort to rethink the postnational/post-sovereign, one focus of the debate seems to be the question about which kind of violence – real or hyper-real – is a more important challenge associated with both nationalism and globalization. I believe that the violence coming from colonialism rather than



coloniality is the most relevant today. Said died in 2003, and two decades on, the colonial violence against Palestinians that he fought against with his pen has only increased in scale and intensity. Meanwhile, the propensity for violence on behalf of the hegemonic majority defined in terms of identity politics has spread across many nations, including Trump's America and Putin's Russia. Both countries promote the majority's ethnonationalism, which contributed to a dramatic rise in physical violence and hate crimes against minorities since the late 2010s. Moreover, this is becoming a global phenomenon since postcolonial nations like the Philippines and India have become new centers of violence. In India, after the Congress lost political control of the country, the ruling regime distanced itself from secular democratic values and embraced thinly veiled Hinducentrism. This created a political environment allowing violations of minorities' rights, particularly those of Muslims, who are regarded as an "internal enemy." This confirms, just as Said and anti-colonial actors in the past had worried, that the world remains divided, tolerating exploitation and violence. Moreover, the Israeli violence against Palestinians and the Hindu majority's violence against Muslims are not isolated phenomena. In contrast to the stance taken by Gandhi, the Indian government led by the Bharatiya Janata Party now seems to regard Israel, not the Palestinians, with a sense of solidarity, because both regimes see Islam as a threat to the security of their national cores, largely defined in religious terms.<sup>37</sup> This is a serious blow to cross-colonial solidarity.

While an increasing number of states exercise violence just as in the days of colonialism, minoritized groups all over the world continue to unite in solidarity based on the firsthand experience of such violence. The Palestinian cause sustains its global visibility not least because acts of violence occur across the rest of the world. For example, when racist police violence in the United States, symbolized by the killing of George Floyd, sparked the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, it was not long before the group established contacts with the Palestinian movement. According to Sam Klug, an assistant teaching professor at Loyola University in Maryland, at the time this solidarity emerged back in the 1950s and 1960s, African American activists had seen their people "internally colonized," finding their cause for justice and equality entangled with those of colonized peoples elsewhere in the world. The recent rise of African American–Palestinian solidarity,

---

<sup>37</sup> Alessandra Barrow and Paul van Hooft. From Nehruvian Non-Alignment to Hindu Nationalism's Reactionary Internationalism // Alessandra Barrow and Paul van Hooft. India's Approach to the Russian Invasion of Ukraine: An Example of the BJP's "India First" Thinking and What It Means for the West. The Hague, 2022. Pp. 8–10.



according to Klug, emphasizes “a shared experience of enduring violence at the hands of security forces,” which we can interpret as a definition of cross-colonial solidarity. As Klug argues, there is every reason to believe that such solidarity will continue to grow, if state violence producing collective trauma persists in various parts of the world.<sup>38</sup>

Cross-colonial solidarity does not dissolve with the formal end of colonialism. It is more of an ongoing project pursuing the dream of cocreating a common world of voluntary interdependence, as envisioned by Tagore, Gandhi, Said, and other anti-colonial actors. A world based on solidarity among the oppressed would continue to evolve toward the realization of universal ideals, such as equality and human rights, transcending any ethnonationalistic majoritarian claim to exclusive sovereignty.

## SUMMARY

This is a contribution to the discussion forum “Conceptualizing Society after the Modern Territorial State and Nation.” Satoshi Mizutani conceptualizes transimperial history as an alternative to the prevailing nation-centrism of social analysis and politics, which he characterizes as an ethnonationalistic majoritarian claim to exclusive sovereignty. By contrast, a transimperial approach transcends the borders of individual polities and discards the claims of their hegemonic groups to power by promoting the cross-colonial solidarity of various subjugated communities. It is not formal status or ethnocultural markers that secure one’s belonging to the global network of cross-colonial solidarity but an active anti-colonialist stance. Mizutani refers to the processual and situational groupness of solidarity in resistance that brings together people across the globe who cannot be described in the nation-centered categories.

## РЕЗЮМЕ

Это эссе является частью дискуссионного форума “Концептуализация общества после современного территориального государства и нации”. Сатоши Мизутани разрабатывает концепцию трансимперской

---

<sup>38</sup> Sam Klug. “We Know Occupation”: The Long History of Black Americans’ Solidarity with Palestinians // *Politico*. 2021. May 30. <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2021/05/30/black-lives-matter-palestine-history-491234>.



истории как альтернативу преобладающему в социальном анализе и политике нациецентризму, который он характеризует как притязание этнонационалистического большинства на исключительный суверенитет. Трансимперский же подход предполагает преодоление государственных границ и отказывает гегемонным группам в их притязании на власть, делая ставку на межколониальную солидарность различных категорий угнетенных. Принадлежность к глобальной сети межколониальной солидарности обеспечивается не формальным статусом или этнокультурными маркерами, а лишь принятием активной антиколониальной позиции. Мизутани описывает процессуальную и ситуативную группность солидарности, возникающей в процессе совместного сопротивления. Эта солидарность объединяет людей, находящихся в самых разных уголках мира, которых невозможно описать в нациецентричных категориях.