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Radical revisions: Barbara Harlow and criticism beyond Partition

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Abstract: This article argues that Barbara Harlow revised her critical commitments in the early 1990s as she sought to intervene at that political conjuncture. While retaining her established engagement with cultural production documenting the persistence of imperial violence and resistances to it, Harlow's position pivoted to meet the changing global conditions, marked by the collapse of the Soviet Union, the first US war in Iraq (Desert Storm), the Oslo Accords, the end of apartheid and negotiations in the North of Ireland and Central America. These major events, which came to be associated with the New World Order, signalled the eclipsing of the revolutionary modes of resistance that appeared in the 1960s and produced not only new cultural responses to neo-imperialism, but also a distinct critical perspective, which Harlow elaborated as she addressed the contextual constraints of that political conjuncture.

Keywords: anti-colonial struggle, Arab World, Edward Said, India, Ireland, New World Order, Palestine, partition literature, postcolonial criticism, *Resistance Literature*, South Africa

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After a semester residency as a visiting lecturer in Ireland at University College Galway, Barbara Harlow returned in autumn 1992 to her teaching duties at the University of Texas, Austin, where she had been employed since 1985. That semester she taught a graduate seminar under the heading 'Poetry and Partition', for which territorial partitions of three British colonies served as the unifying concept in the study of the modern literatures of Ireland, India and Palestine. The reading list included pre- and post-partition writings. Among the titles were Yeats's 'Easter 1916' (1921), Bobby Sands' *Prison Poems* (1981), Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956), Gayatri Spivak's translation of 'Draupadi by Mahasweta Devi' (1981), Ghassan Kanafani's 'Men in the Sun' (1962) and Sahar Khalifeh's *Wild Thorns* (1985). The course attracted a large number of new graduate students, most now established scholars. 'Poetry and Partition' was for some of us a formative experience that corresponded with Harlow's expansion of her own critical approaches and fields of study beyond her established research on Third World literatures and imperial cultures. A retrospective review of Harlow's critical commitments over the twenty-five years from 1992 to her death in 2017 reveals geographic partition as one of the key categories of thought within a more general conceptual paradigm that included human rights law and international treaties. Furthermore, partition, both historic event and critical concept, in Harlow's writing can now be seen as the central figure in her re-articulation of resistance literature in the early 1990s, as she intervened in the emerging geo-political formation and reigning theoretical models of that moment, respectively the New World Order and postcolonial studies.

Harlow established her reputation as an internationally renowned scholar with the 1987 publication of *Resistance Literature*, which introduced to the US academy a new critical approach whose Arab provenance in the essays of Ghassan Kanafani disrupted the Euro-American monopoly on theory. If Harlow's interest and residency in Ireland produced the occasion for her to develop the comparative partitions project of the early 1990s, her years in the Middle East from 1977 to 1983, when she was employed as a professor of English at the American University in Cairo (AUC), shaped crucially her critical awareness of literary resistances to imperialism. In Cairo she began studying and writing about Arabic literature in earnest, publishing articles on a range of topics, such as Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migrations to the North*, 'The Maghrib and *The Stranger*' and 'E.W. Lane's *Account* and Ahmad Amin's *Dictionary*'.[1] Along with Ferial Ghazoul, she was a founding editor of *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, first published by the American University in Cairo in 1981. In the tribute to her close friend, Ghazoul writes of Harlow's enduring participation in *Alif* even after she moved back to the US: 'Barbara continued in editing and being part of the editorial team of the journal until she left Cairo in 1983, and since then she continued to be a dynamic member of *Alif*'s Advisory Board, contributing articles to *Alif* on Albert Camus, Ruth First, and Guantánamo, interviewing Jabra Jabra, Jeremy Cronin, and Terry Eagleton, and translating an essay of Ghassan Kanafani's.'[2]

It is during this initial Cairo period – Harlow returned to AUC as Acting Chair of English in 2006-2007 – that she began reading extensively and writing about Palestine. Her incisive publications on Palestinian literature and her noteworthy expertise on the writings of Kanafani, who had been assassinated in Beirut by Israeli agents in 1972, laid the foundation for her research in other contexts of anti-colonial struggle, ranging from the hunger strikes of political prisoners in Ireland to the revolutionary insurrection in El Salvador, to the South African anti-apartheid activism of Ruth First.[3] And while British human rights abuses in Ireland, US-backed dictatorships in Central America and racial violence in South Africa came to hold important places in her work, she always returned to Palestine as the crucial context for understanding the forms of imperial violence and the possibilities of resistance in the present.

In her first book, Harlow explained and applied Kanafani's critical concept of resistance literature to a range of texts from the Middle East, Africa and Latin America. *Resistance Literature* challenged students and scholars in the humanities to use their skills as expert readers to oppose the 'strategies of containment' in literary criticism that maintained a hierarchy in which 'universality, posterity and the human condition' were elevated over 'historical necessity'. As she wrote: 'controversial insistence on the "here-and-now" of historical reality and its conditions of possibility underwrites much of the project of resistance literature and the internal debate which surrounds that literature. It likewise arouses the objections of "First World" critics generally to the literature of partisanship.'[4] The book's specific focus on partisan writing stood against the dominant tendency in literary studies to value fictional texts that transcend their moment, either because of their ostensibly original stylistics or because they addressed themes presumably not bound by a determined historical context. *Resistance Literature* was an explicit rejection of these principles of valuation, and Harlow put forward a candid ideological approach that not only took a stand in support of revolutionary movements, but also opened up a polemic against the conventions in literary criticism.

Harlow's study of resistance literature is, in some respects, a reassertion of the 1950s' and 1960s' intellectual movements associated with Sartrean existentialism and the British New Left, which elaborated an engaged criticism and drew inspiration from the anti-colonial revolutionary writings in Algeria, Cuba and Vietnam. Frantz Fanon is without question the most recognisable intellectual linking these earlier metropolitan critical projects with Harlow's study of resistance literature. In 1987, the same year *Resistance Literature* appeared in print, the inaugural issue of *New Formations* was published, and included a special section on *Remembering Fanon* with Harlow's essay on 'Fanon and Resistance Literature' and Homi Bhabha's '"What Does the Black Man Want"'.[5] Not unlike the proliferation of references to the Fanon of *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) – due in large part to Homi Bhabha's foreword to a 1986 edition – rhetorical usage of the term 'resistance literature' proliferated within and beyond postcolonial studies. Harlow's

conceptualisation of resistance literature is, however, contextually specific and theoretically qualified, emphasising writing as a weapon in the armed struggles of anti-colonial revolutionary movements, such as the Algerian National Liberation Front, which is the subject of Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*.

Even as Harlow came to be associated with the ascendance of postcolonial criticism in the late 1980s and early 1990s, she remained committed to the framework of Third World literary studies, as was evident in her co-ordination of the robust Ethnic and Third World Literatures (E3W) program in the Department of English at the University of Texas.[6] Third World Literatures corresponded with the situatedness of the anti-colonial Third World revolutionary movements that interested her, but the label also signalled a tension in her relationship to an increasingly hegemonic postcolonial criticism, within and against which she intervened. It is not that Harlow rejected or stood outside postcolonial studies; rather she maintained a sceptical attitude towards the 'age called "postcolonial"'.[7] The lasting relevance of *Resistance Literature* is, therefore, less its contribution to the consolidation of postcolonial studies than its explicit advocacy of a model of engaged criticism that simultaneously defied the 1970s' backlash against commitment in literature and questioned the rise of a metropolitan-based critical model that frequently studied Third World cultural artefacts through the lens of poststructuralism, but was often detached from the ideological and armed struggles that conditioned their production.

Harlow explained Kanafani's theory of resistance literature as a genre of writing that was inseparable from political movements engaged in pitched armed struggles against the new forms of colonialism that emerged in the post-second world war era, which managed decolonisation by way of partition, and consolidated their authority in the 1990s. Throughout her career, she would follow up *Resistance Literature* with other publications equally in solidarity with insurgent cultural expression and motivated by efforts to attend to literary works that explicitly resist the historic and ongoing effects of empire and were often neglected in postcolonial studies. One of the main preoccupations of Harlow's critical work was always to bring to the foreground the writings of intellectuals actively participating in historic movements, such as the PLO, the IRA, the ANC and the FMLN, who, as a consequence of their words, were assassinated, imprisoned or exiled. Ireland, the historic site of imperial experimentation and the model for anti-imperialist struggles, became a key reference point in much of Harlow's scholarship in the early 1990s. If it would be an understatement to say that working in Cairo influenced her intellectual and political commitments, it would be an oversight not to acknowledge the place of Ireland in her work and her contributions to Irish studies. In the early 1990s, Harlow consistently connected Ireland to Palestine; for example, in a key passage from the 1993 *Callaloo* essay 'Speaking from the Dock', where she writes presciently about the centrality of colonial courts, of repression by law, and of resistance on trial across several international contexts: 'While the focus is on Ireland, the new interlocutionary engagements in

Palestine, South Africa and El Salvador, to name but a few of the colonial contexts that are currently being renegotiated, inform as well this analysis of "speaking from the dock".'[8] In the conclusion of the essay, Harlow reasserts the correspondence and difference across colonial contexts, underscoring the farce of 1990s peace negotiations and their procedural exclusions of the anti-colonial opposition movements:

> That struggle continues now, and despite the protracted violence, in the forms that have been dictated by protocols at the negotiating table . . . the Palestinians are present at the negotiating table of the Middle East peace talks, albeit still without full political status and officially only as members of the Jordanian delegation. Meanwhile, Sinn Fein, the legal party representative of Irish republicans in both the 6 and the 26 counties, has yet to be invited to join the official talks between the British government, the Dublin government, and other 'constitutional' parties to the conflict, both loyalist and nationalist.[9]

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Living and travelling in the Arab World, Ireland and South Africa motivated extraordinarily Harlow's significant scholarly contributions, which she tied persistently to solidarities there and everywhere, to revise an Edward Said quotation that she used as the title of her 2003 commemorative essay. 'Remember the solidarity here and everywhere' appeared in *Middle East Report* in winter 2003 and quotes Said:

> We have to see the Arab world generally and Palestine in particular in more comparative and critical ways . . . The Palestinian struggle for justice is especially something with which one must express solidarity . . . Remember the solidarity here and everywhere in Latin America, Africa, Europe, Asia and Australia, and remember also that there is a cause to which many people have committed themselves, difficulties and terrible obstacles notwithstanding.[10]

The passage, which calls for a comparative and critical understanding of the Palestinian struggle, must have resonated profoundly for Harlow whose own work on Palestine was increasingly tied to other sites of oppression.

Although a generation younger and coming from entirely distinct sociocultural backgrounds, Harlow's intellectual formation is not unlike Said's. They both were comparatists. Harlow's literary education was initially oriented towards an understanding of modern European stylistics read through the prism of 1970s' poststructuralist theory; she wrote a dissertation on 'Marcel Proust: studies in translation' (1977) under the direction of the famous scholar of deconstruction Eugenio Donato. Said's original research was on Joseph Conrad and autobiography; he was a contemporary of Donato and, like Donato, played an important part in the transmission of French theory to the US academy. A 1979 issue of *boundary 2* on the topic of 'The Problems of Reading in Contemporary

American Criticism' included articles by Said and Donato as well as their 'Exchange on Destruction and History'. In the transcribed discussion, Donato claims that, after the nineteenth century, there is no way of 'talking of "real history" without talking about the problematics of representation of history', to which Said responded: 'what is more important . . . is that these representations which you talked about acquire the status of objects or representations *without* history'.[11] The 'exchange', which now seems dated and rather inconsequential to considering the place of history in deconstruction, must have held great significance for Harlow who was just two years out of graduate studies, and was teaching in Cairo, immersing herself in Arabic language and literary studies at the very moment when *Orientalism* (1978) was published. Harlow never shook off completely the effects of Donato and the imprint of deconstruction, but during her years in Cairo, as she educated herself in Middle Eastern culture and politics, she turned away from Donato and towards Said with whom she developed a shared commitment to Palestinian rights.

For Said, 'the personal dimension', which is to say his 'awareness of being an "Oriental" as a child growing up in two British colonies [Palestine and Egypt]' and his later experiences, as 'an Arab Palestinian in the West, particularly in America',[12] conditioned his critical readings of European culture. In contrast, Harlow's experiences of the Arab World, her studies of Arabic, her solidarity with Palestinians, and her move to Egypt take place within the context of her employment in Cairo. Her commitment to write about Arab World issues occurred when there was little interest in Arabic literature among Anglo-American scholars in the humanities, outside of the guild of Middle East Studies experts, and no public support for Palestinian politics in the US. Despite his awareness of himself as an 'Oriental', Said built a remarkable relationship with European culture that secured his prominent position within the US academy; conversely, Harlow had to unlearn her Eurocentrism to participate in the cultural and political movements of the Arab World. In both cases, their critical relationship to cultural production arises from what Said described in 'Secular Criticism', the introductory essay to *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, as 'the transition from a failed idea or possibility of filiation to a kind of compensatory order that, whether it is a party, an institution, a culture, a set of beliefs, or even a world-vision, provides men and women with a new form of relationship, which I have been calling affiliation but which is also a new system'.[13] Harlow made reference to Said's theorisation of affiliation in *Resistance Literature*[14] and recognised how this powerful idea applied to her own professional and political motivations, which stemmed not from national, cultural or religious belonging, but rather from a secular sense of the work of a critic at a time when the imperial posture of the US in the Middle East was more aggressively interventionist.

Harlow's enduring affiliations with the Arab World were expressed in various forms, including her participation on the editorial committee of *Middle East Report* (aka *MERIP*) from 1992 to 1997,[15] a period when the magazine emerged as the

major independent North American publication on the region and when Harlow expanded her approach to address the modalities of neocolonial domination in the 1990s. But even before joining the editorial committee, her name appeared in the contents of the summer 1991 issue of *Middle East Report*, which took stock of the fallout from the first Gulf War. Her two contributions were an interview with Edward Said on 'the Intellectuals and the War' and the translation of Fawwaz Traboulsi's 'Harvest of War'. Both pieces speak directly to the moment, and at the same time retain their relevance almost thirty years later. About halfway into the interview with Said, Harlow shifts gears from questions about intellectuals and the war, and raises a distinct set of issues that suggest a coming to grips with the erosion of resistance politics in the Middle East. She makes the following comment: 'One could say that this crisis demonstrated the failure of the Palestinian movement to provide leadership for the democratic forces within the Arab world, leaving a vacuum into which Saddam Hussein was able to move.' And she follows up with this question: 'In the Arab countries democratic movements are more or less moribund at the moment. How can those movements be reactivated?'[16] Harlow's eloquent translation of Traboulsi's prescient reflections on the significance of the war are useful in understanding the US attack on Iraq in 1991 as a crucial moment in shaping the future. The following passage is notably insightful: 'this region is not destined for stability. Since it took on the political shape that we recognize today, it has been fated for fragmentation and destruction . . . It seems that we have not yet understood that imperialism, if you will excuse the "archaism," is a system of violence and war, and the dominant language with which it speaks in our region is one of violence and war.'[17]

Harlow's late 1980s research on the literature of women political prisoners, culminating in the publication of *Barred: women, writing and political detention* (1992) and her essays on the political assassinations of revolutionary intellectuals, brought together in *After Lives: legacies of revolutionary writing* (1996), continued the work begun in *Resistance Literature*. Her focus on partition literature and related contexts, such as the peace processes referenced in 'Speaking from the Dock', announce the foregrounding of a different, if related, set of concerns directed at understanding the legalistic, diplomatic and strategic modalities of neocolonial oppression in the 1990s. *Resistance Literature, Barred* and *After Lives* highlight the work of anti-colonial intellectuals, whose writings represent the antithesis of a neocolonial thesis that Harlow discloses in her many essays on territorial partition, structural adjustment, the Kimberley Process, trade agreements, international delegations, landmines, diamond mines, humanitarian intervention, extraordinary rendition, torture and drones. In an essay on partition narratives published in 1992, the same year that she taught the 'Poetry and Partition' course, Harlow gives expression to this dialectic with specific reference to partition and literature: 'But the lines have long been drawn, in literature no less than in the sand. Indeed literature, it might be argued, has helped to render those lines legible, to legislate and legitimate them, as well as to challenge that legislation

and its legitimacy.'[18] Partition literature written from within the discourse of colonial authority reinforces the structures of territorial domination, and from the side of resistance, it contributes to the movements that bring empire to crisis.

The 1992 essay just quoted is titled 'Drawing the Line: cultural politics and the legacy of partition'[19] and appeared in *Polygraph*, 'an international journal of culture and politics', which had been founded in 1987 at Duke University, and was published annually. The topic of the fifth issue of *Polygraph* was 'Contesting the New World Order' (1992). Along with Harlow, the list of contributors to *Polygraph* 5 is a veritable who's who of Third World and Marxist scholars, among them Samir Amin, Fredric Jameson, Immanuel Wallerstein, Rob Wilson, Bill Rolston, Antonio Negri, Arif Dirlik, Saree Makdisi, Eqbal Ahmad, Sumanta Banerjee and Arjun Appadurai. The US assault on Iraq in Operation Desert Storm, from 17 January to 28 February 1991, and the final dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991 were the events most urgently motivating the contributors to *Polygraph* 5 as they sought to make sense of the geo-politics of the New World Order. In setting up her essay on imperial partitions, Harlow provides the following contextualisation:

> George Bush declared his war with Saddam Hussein to be over, Kuwait to be liberated, and a 'new world order' to have begun. This 'new world order,' drawn by the United States president around a 'line in the sand,' and at a time when the middle had apparently fallen out of the conventional First/Second/Third World configuration, and for all its much-heralded vision, nonetheless left intact not only Iraq under Saddam Hussein but the inherited and still contested partitions of Ireland, India and Palestine.[20]

These words beg the question implicit in the distinctly American notion of a New World Order: has the elimination of the Second World produced any significant change in the unequal and neocolonial relations between First World and Third World? If Saddam Hussein is still in power within a partitioned Iraq (produced by the US-imposed no-fly zones), and the partitions of the first half of the twentieth century remain in place, in what way is the world order new?

For Harlow, the announcement of a New World Order did not connote a change in the distribution of global power, but rather the entrenchment of First World hegemony and the baleful demise of Third World revolutionary movements. In this New World Order, the geographic partitions of the British colonial territories of Ireland (1921), India (1947), and Palestine (1948) are construed as sites of negotiation,[21] and the new partitions in Iraq and the former Soviet Union are respectively justified on the grounds of protecting a threatened national minority (the Kurds in Northern Iraq)[22] and securing the national independence of formerly subject peoples.[23] Even as the discourse of the New World Order proclaimed the end of the division of the globe into East and West, symbolised dramatically by the demolition of the Berlin Wall, it in fact perpetuated the colonial tactic of divide

and conquer in the Third World. Harlow's attentiveness to partition questioned the myth of a New World Order under US leadership that was celebrated as a new era of world unity.

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For Harlow, partition is the signal feature in the reconfiguration of modern imperialism as it transitioned through the process of decolonisation and entered the era of globalisation; as she put it, 'a historical process, decisively contextualized within the 20th century narrative of decolonization'.[24] The partitions of Ireland, India and Palestine were strategic attempts at containing anti-colonial national liberation movements, but the latter continued their resistance in the post-partition era, especially in the cases of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). The IRA and the PLO in the period from the 1960s and 1980s became allies with other anti-colonial movements in the Middle East, Africa, Latin America and Asia, and models for revolutionary movements in the First World, such as the Red Brigade in Italy and the Black Panthers in the US. Partition marks the end of empire and is a projection of the legacy of empire into the future, securing the transition to and perpetuation of neocolonialism.

'Drawing the Line' suggests that attending to the histories of territorial partition – one of the most stubborn reminders of foreign domination – is crucial to contesting the 'New World Order'. Harlow writes in the conclusion of the essay: 'Necessary now is a radical revision, of the dichotomous distinctions that, like the imperious partition of territories, cordon off legitimate participants in the political process and literary-critical conventions from political practice. In other words, it is time now perhaps to redraw the line.' Harlow's call for a 'radical revision' has a deep ambiguity. The comma after 'radical revision' suspends momentarily the critical invocation, producing an awkward pause before the equally ambiguous phrase 'of the dichotomous distinctions', whose significance remains indeterminant despite the analogy with 'imperious partition'. As the sentence unwinds, it is evident that the objects of a radical revision are the inequities of the political processes and the segregation of literary conventions from politics.

That being said, perhaps the imperative to revise radically also applied to her own critical position, which in the early 1990s recognised that the 'erstwhile anti-colonial and national liberation struggles are no longer operative in the current historical conjuncture'.[25] The adjustment in her research emphasis to include more centrally the modalities of neocolonial domination can be seen as Harlow's response to the early 1990s political and theoretical conjuncture facing radical critics in the US academy as they sought to contest the New World Order. At that time, in her teaching, Harlow regularly invoked the notion of 'the conjuncture', a Marxist concept central to an analytical model advanced in the twentieth century by Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser, Stuart Hall and others.[26] According to Stuart Hall, '[a] conjuncture is a period during which the different social, political, economic and ideological contradictions that are at work in society come

together to give it a specific and distinctive shape'.[27] In my recollection from the 'Poetry and Partition' seminar, Harlow referred specifically to Cornel West's contrast of 'structural constraints' and 'conjunctural opportunities'. Fran Buntman cites Cornel West in her book *Robben Island and Prisoner Resistance to Apartheid* (2003), which was a revision of her dissertation written under the direction of Harlow. In a chapter on alternative modes of prisoner resistance, Buntman describes the news-gathering tactic of the Robben Island inmates, and claims that it 'epitomizes what Cornell West meant in the reconstrual of "structural constraints" as "conjunctural opportunities"'.[28]

Harlow's increasing attention to the structural constraints of imperial partitions and the New World Order aimed at intervening theoretically and politically in these peculiar conjunctures and drawing out the contradictions that defined them. For instance, in a representative essay of her interventions in the conjuncture, she analyses the 1992 Maastricht Treaty and North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) along with Irish and Chicano narratives of resistance to the international economic agreements, accentuating the logic and contradictions of imperial partitions in the New World Order. As she put it, 'Ireland, both the Six and Twenty-Six Counties, north and south of the partitioning border drawn by England in 1920s [*sic*], and southwest United States/northern Mexico delineate territorial and political perspectives for critically reformulating the very terms – sociocultural, economic, and political – proposed by the mappings of Maastricht and NAFTA.'[29] The essay exposes the cynical features of the two hemispheric agreements: 'Much as the Maastricht Treaty on European union conceals within its rhetoric of "community" the reinforcement of unequal relations of power among and between its member states, and their relation to the outside, the NAFTA needs to be reread against the grain of its discourse of "freedom".'[30] Harlow shows how the Maastricht Treaty on the Union of Europe and North American Free Trade Agreement used the language of community and freedom to dissemble the growing inequities within and beyond the borders of Europe and the United States, in effect dissimulating the brutal logic of partition that, in the twenty years since the publication of the essay, has led to fortress Europe and the militarisation of the US-Mexico border.

The 'Poetry and Partition' course was grounded in the study of colonial textual authority, but worked to reconnect the fractured territories and disjointed narratives of the three former British colonies. The design of the course also asserted the historic solidarities linking the island of Ireland to the Indian Subcontinent and to the Arab World. Harlow writes in 'Drawing the Line': 'Peculiar to Britain's participation in the processes of decolonization was the practice of partition: of Ireland in 1921 into the 26 and six counties of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland respectively; of India in 1947 into India and Pakistan; and of Palestine in 1948 into "Palestine" and Israel.'[31] She goes on in the essay, as she did in the 'Poetry and Partition' course, to bring into focus the discredited precedents and blind perpetuation of a politics of partition through an exploration of texts that

signify across the shadow lines, to use Amitav Ghosh's metaphor,[32] of territorial division and historical amnesia.

Harlow's work shows how drawing the lines across the former colonial territories coincided with the nominal end of one form of imperialism, but introduced new equally insidious postcolonial political regimes, governed by opportunists, who celebrated partition as the national independence of new states (the Republic of Ireland, the Republic of India, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the State of Israel); all of them misbegotten entities to be sure, as is evident by the violence that accompanied their creation and still defines their contentious geo-political condition. In a characteristically layered and qualified historicisation, Harlow evokes the nastiness of imperial partitions:

> Britain's withdrawal from these three of its colonially occupied and administered territories incised a deep and violently protracted scar across the political, geographical and cultural terrains of those arenas, a scar that has been writ again and again – racially, religiously, ethnically – along the unsettled 'green line' dividing Israel from the militarily occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip, on the disputed 'border' between the northern and southern parts of the island that is Ireland, and across the tense national boundaries that divide India from Pakistan.[33]

In Harlow's critical practices, lines of partition drawn across the maps of Ireland, India and Palestine are signs of past conquests and the site of ongoing resistances that remain urgently relevant in the current global politics of fragmented and fortified nation states. Harlow's approach to the literatures of partition, like her work on human rights documents and the rhetoric of international trade agreements, questioned unpretentiously, but decisively, the mandate of literary studies, undoing the fixed categories of genre, period and nation, rejecting the hierarchies of literary value, and distrusting the US academy's uncritical embrace of decontextualised theory.

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Even as she resisted the conventions of literary studies, Harlow's commitment to literature is apparent in her extensive contributions to the profession as a prolific book reviewer, editorial board member, and official of academic associations. She undertook these responsibilities with the same keen attention to politics that characterised her scholarship and teaching. An example of her astonishing capacity to connect her professional service, her scholarship and political principles is evident in the Fall 2015 *Cultural Critique* review essay '"Be it Resolved …": referenda on recent scholarship in the Israel–Palestine conflict' that is framed by the ongoing efforts to silence the expression of Palestine solidarity within professional associations like the Modern Language Association. The article was written in the wake of the membership vote on MLA resolution 2014-1, 'calling for relief from Israel's rigidly discriminatory restrictions on the "right to enter" for

U.S. academics into Israel and its occupied Palestinian territories'. MLA resolution 2014-1 on the right to enter defended the freedom of American researchers to travel to the occupied territories, challenging current Israeli policies aimed at isolating Palestinians. However, more generally the 2014 MLA right-to-enter resolution and subsequent MLA debates on the academic boycott of Israel from 2015 to 2017 draw attention to the violent legacies of the 1948 partition of historic Palestine,[34] whose contemporary forms include Israel's building of the apartheid wall in the West Bank, blockading the Gaza Strip, and shooting Palestinian protesters in the 2018 March of Return.

In the introduction to the '"Be it Resolved …"' essay, Harlow writes:

> The acrimonious public debates and vituperative intellectual skirmishes – in print, online, and before and behind the scenes of sponsored panel discussions – occasioned by these [BDS] resolutions and their eventual consideration and passage and/or defeat by important U.S. academic organizations were not without a specific context, historic and political, that provided both substance and subterfuge to the critical exchanges among and between scholars, colleagues, and solidarity activists involved in academic protocols, international human rights, and research imperatives, with regard in particular to the 'question of Palestine'.[35]

Even though Harlow expresses a certain irritation with the tenor of these academic debates, she participated in them, and was subject to the verbal abuse[36] reserved for those scholars whose critical positions challenged the historic muzzling of criticism of Israel within the US academy. In a characteristic rhetorical turn, she refers to the 'substance and subterfuge' that provides the contexts for the public exchanges on 'the question of Palestine', alluding to the deceptions, misinformation and hypocrisy (subterfuge) that has marginalised the Palestinian narrative (substance). She concludes the essay with this sentence: 'Be it resolved, then, that, at the very least, it is right – and a right – to enter this debate' (p. 204). Whereas Israel may have the military power to police the borders of the occupied Palestinian territories, blocking the entry of researchers, Harlow called for an effective opposition to the policing of academic debate, refusing to allow literature to be partitioned from politics.

In the 1992 'Poetry and Partition' seminar, partition was more than a literary trope, it was the historic moment when British imperial rule in Ireland, India, and Palestine came to an end and postcolonial futures took shape in opposition to an uncertain redistribution of land and people. As Harlow understood so well in the early 1990s, partition was an act of geographical reorganisation that signalled the end or final stage of direct imperial rule; but partition was also the means to a particular political end, one that aimed at securing the perpetuation of imperial influence in the postcolonial era. Partition may have closed the chapter on imperial rule, but it introduced an era of fractured geographies, whose logics of domination were derived from nineteenth-century political predecessors.[37] Partition of

a colonial territory – whether Ireland, the Indian subcontinent, or Palestine – aimed at managing the crisis of power, an emergency measure that projected the past into the future. The post-partition era was founded on a politics of geographic fragmentation and demographic dislocation that made the old regimes look new, foreign domination or dependence appearing in the guise of national liberation.

Harlow recognised that the moment of imperial partition that she studied was marked by contradictions and discontinuities, and constituted a historic conjuncture in which the outcome remained indeterminate, despite the evident weight of the imperial past. Anti-colonial revolutionary movements and the resistance literatures that they inspired were an important and inspiring figuration of a radical post-partition future. By the early 1990s, however, the window on that utopian future had closed. In Harlow's view, the New World Order, represented perhaps most powerfully within her optics by the US occupation of Iraq beginning in 1991 and the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process, indicated the eclipsing of those Third World revolutionary movements that appeared in the 1960s. The conjuncture of the early 1990s, and the ensuing decades leading to the present, would require the elaboration of innovative cultural responses to neo-imperialism, and a distinct perspective free from nostalgia about past revolutions and imbued with unwavering scepticism about the New World Order. As Harlow looked back at the past of imperialism and anti-colonial resistance during the last twenty-five years of her career, she revised her approach without rejecting the political principles that initially motivated her commitments, connecting historical narratives of empire to sinister forms of military domination in the present and opening possibilities for radical criticism in the future.

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20 Harlow, 'Drawing the line', p. 86.

21 Consider, for instance, the Middle East Peace Process, leading to the doomed 1993 Oslo Accords; the Northern Ireland Peace Process, started in 1994 and resulting in the 1998 Good Friday Agreement; and the start in 1997 of the largely unsuccessful India-Pakistan Peace negotiations, also known as the Composite Dialogue Process. The lines of partition remain in place despite the negotiations, which in the best case (Northern Ireland) has demilitarised the situation in the North of Ireland and in the worst case has generated greater injustice for the Palestinians living under Israeli occupation.

22 A 19 February 2001 *BBC News* report, 'No-fly zones: the legal position', explains that 'The northern no-fly zone was declared after the end of the Gulf War in March 1991 to protect Kurds against military action which had driven huge numbers of people across the borders into Turkey and Iran. Subsequently, the US, UK and France set up safe havens on the ground in northern Iraq, to which the refugees returned.' Available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/1175950.stm.

23 US Department of State, Office of the Historian, offers the following enthusiastic account of 'The Collapse of the Soviet Union', available at https://history.state.gov/milestones/1989-1992

/collapse-soviet-union: 'On December 25, 1991, the Soviet hammer and sickle flag lowered for the last time over the Kremlin, thereafter replaced by the Russian tricolor. Earlier in the day, Mikhail Gorbachev resigned his post as president of the Soviet Union, leaving Boris Yeltsin as president of the newly independent Russian state. People all over the world watched in amazement at this relatively peaceful transition from former Communist monolith into multiple separate nations. With the dissolution of Soviet Union, the main goal of the Bush administration was economic and political stability and security for Russia, the Baltics, and the states of the former Soviet Union. Bush recognized all 12 independent republics and established diplomatic relations with Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan. In February 1992, Baker visited the remaining republics and diplomatic relations were established with Uzbekistan, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan.'

24 Harlow, 'Drawing the line', p. 87.

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