A few years before there was any talk of the hybrid, the third space, and the in-between in the corridors of postcolonial theorising, and a couple of years after Edward Said’s *Orientalism* was published, there came out a book called *Islands and Beaches*.¹ It spoke, creatively, evocatively, passionately, and philosophically, of the importance of the in-between in the history of contact between Europeans and Natives in the human worlds of the modern Pacific. Greg Dening was a ‘natural’ ancestor of postcolonial scholarship. The allegory of the beach as an in-between space in life, as the theatre of cross-cultural exchanges, runs through his entire oeuvre.²

The in-between was not necessarily a peaceful place. It contained the play of power just as much as it acted as the theatre of cross-cultural performances. Blood was spilled. A William Gooch or a Cook died as the Natives vented their passions. Dening knew that the in-between in human affairs cannot be separated from the play of power or from the conflicts that divide us. The in-between is not necessarily an argument against the binary of the European and the Native or the coloniser and the colonised. Often it is the binary that acts as the condition of possibility for the in-between.

It is this insight, derived from Dening’s writing, that I want to illustrate in this essay by discussing the relationship between anti-colonial and post-colonial thought.

---


Scholars usually draw several distinctions to distinguish between post-colonial and anti-colonial thinking. They appear to be mutually opposed currents of thought. Anti-colonial thought, it is said with good reason, saw the coloniser and the colonised locked in a binary of total opposition to each other. The urge to be rid of the coloniser in every possible way, to see independence as a zero-sum game between the coloniser and the colonised, was internal to all anti-colonial criticism that flourished from about the end of the First World War and lasted until the period of decolonisation after 1945. Postcolonial critics of our times, on the other hand, are wary of binaries. They have emphasised instead how colonial situations produced forms of hybridity or mimicry — a condition of identity that in Homi Bhabha’s language is predicated on ‘difference within’ — something that necessarily escaped the Manichean logic of the colonial encounter.

It is not only this intellectual shift that separates anti-colonial and postcolonial criticism. The two genres have been separated also by the political geographies and histories of their origins. After all, the demand for political and intellectual sovereignty arose mainly in the colonised countries and among the intellectuals of anti-colonial movements. Postcolonial writing and criticism, on the other hand, was born in the West, and initially in the English-speaking part of it. They were influenced by anti-colonial criticisms but their early target audiences were in the West itself. For if anti-colonialism spoke to the project of decolonisation, postcolonial writings have been an essential part of the struggle to make the liberal-capitalist (and, in the beginning, Anglo-American) Western democracies more democratic with respect to their immigrant, minority, and indigenous populations (though there have been tensions between these groups). Race and the politics of recognition have thus featured centrally in postcolonial criticism while their position in anti-colonial discourse varies. Race is crucial to the formulations of Fanon, Cesaire, or C. L. R. James, for example, but it is not as central to how a Gandhi or a Tagore thought about colonial domination.

And finally there is the question of globalisation. Some have posited a periodising schema working along the following lines. Decolonisation was a process

---

3 Homi Bhabha, The Location of Culture (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).
that ended more or less with the Vietnam War in 1975. Or maybe one could extend the date to the South African scene. The anti-apartheid struggle, it can be claimed, was the last instance of bringing down the world that European colonisers made. Anti-colonial sentiments were displaced by postcolonial discourse in the closing decades of the twentieth century. More recent commentators on postcolonial theory argue that even the postcolonial moment is now behind us, its critical clamour having been drowned in turn by the mighty tide of globalisation.5

This linear periodising schema — anti-colonialism > postcolonial criticism > globalisation — that suggests itself all too easily as a way of dividing up the twentieth century, is however unsettled once we notice with some care not just the discrepant chronologies in which non-Western peoples have found themselves in the twentieth century but also the actual debates that attended the process of decolonisation. Postcolonial theory and criticism, I would argue, are more deeply rooted in the debates over decolonisation than is usually recognised. Anti-colonial thinkers, on certain registers of thinking, were as interested in the hybrid and the in-between as postcolonial critics are today.

So what were the debates that consumed the anti-colonial leaders of the 1950s? One quick way to answer this may be to look in some detail at the historic conference in Bandung, Indonesia, where some six hundred leaders and delegates of twenty-nine newly independent countries from Asia and Africa met on 18-24 April 1955 to exchange views of the world at a time when the Cold War and a new United Nations regime were already important factors in international relations.6 This conference also acts as a timely reminder of a recent moment

---


6 The countries that sponsored the conference were Burma, India, Ceylon, Indonesia, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. In addition, 24 other countries joined the conference. They were: Afghanistan, Cambodia, People’s Republic of China, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gold Coast, Iran, Iraq, Japan, Jordan, Laos, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Nepal, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Thailand, Turkey, Democratic Republic of [North] Vietnam, State of Vietnam, and Yemen. See, Selected Documents of the Bandung Conference (New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1955), 29. It should be noted that Israel was invited to participate in the Asian Relations Conference of 1947 but the delegation was called the ‘Jewish delegation from Palestine’. See, Asian Relations: Report of the Proceedings and Documentation of the First Asian Relations Conference, New Delhi, March-April, 1947, Introduced by Professor D. Gopal (Delhi: Authorspress, 2003). Bandung, however, excluded Israel, mainly because of ‘strong opposition’ from Arab countries. See, Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru [hereafter SWJN], 2nd series, ed. by Ravinder Kumar and H. Y. Sharada Prasad (Delhi: JN Memorial Fund, 2000), vol. 27: 109, 566.
in human history when the idea of empire wielded absolutely no moral force. Today the opposite rules: the theme of empire has made a triumphant return in historiography while the nation-state has fallen out of favour. Historians of Niall Ferguson’s ilk even seem to recommend a return to imperial arrangements in the interest of a decent global future for mankind.\(^7\) It may be salutary today to revisit a time when both the category ‘empire’ and actual, historical European empires truly seemed to have seen the sun set over them.

**Bandung, April 1955**

In 1955 when Richard Wright, the noted African-American writer then resident in Paris, decided to attend the Bandung Conference, many of his European friends thought that this would be an occasion simply for criticising the West. Even the economist Gunner Myrdal, in composing his Foreword to the book that Wright wrote on his experience of the conference, ended up penning an indictment of what happened in Bandung: ‘His [Wright’s] interest was focused on the two powerful urges far beyond Left and Right which he found at work there: Religion and Race...Asia and Africa thus carry the irrationalism of both East and West’.\(^8\) Both Myrdal and Wright’s Parisian friends appear to have misjudged what decolonisation was all about. It was not a simple project of disengaging from the West. Nor was there any reverse racism at work in Bandung. If anything, the aspiration for political and economic freedom that the conference stood for entailed a long and troubled conversation with an imagined Europe or the West. ‘I was discovering’, wrote Wright, ‘that this Asian elite was, in many ways, more Western than the West, their Westernness consisting in their having been made to break with the past in a manner that but few Westerners could possibly do’.\(^9\) It was in fact the newsmen from his own country who attended the conference who, Wright felt, ‘had no philosophy of history with which to understand Bandung’.\(^10\)

---


\(^9\) Ibid., 71. This point is underlined in a review of the book by Merze Tate of Howard University in *The Journal of Negro History*, 41, no. 3 (1956): 263-265. Tate quotes the following lines from Wright: ‘Bandung was the last call of Westernized Asians to the moral conscience of the West’ (265).

\(^10\) Wright, *The Color Curtain*, 82.
I will shortly come to this question of the philosophy of history that marked the discourse of decolonisation. For now let me simply note the historical context in which the conference met. The Bandung Conference was held at a time when currents of deep and widespread sympathy with the newly independent nations — or with those struggling to be independent (such as Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Central Africa, etc.) — met those of the Cold War. Treaties, unsatisfactory to the United States, had been signed in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. The French had lost in Dien Bien Phu and the Korean War had ended. Some of the Asian nations had joined defence pacts with the United States: Pakistan, Thailand, and the Philippines. Some others belonged to the Socialist Bloc.

Bandung was an attempt to sustain a sense of Asian-African affinity. This was not easy as there was pressure from the Western countries to influence the course of the conversation at Bandung by excluding China, for example. Nehru’s correspondence with the United Nations makes it obvious that sometimes he had to stand his ground on the question of neutrality in the Cold War. A letter he wrote to the Secretary General of the United Nation dated 18 December 1954, on the subject of Bandung, reads:

We have no desire to create a bad impression about anything in the US and the UK. But the world is somewhat larger than the US and the UK and we have to take into account what impressions we create in the rest of the world. … For us to be told, therefore, that the US and the UK will not like the inclusion of China in the Afro-Asian Conference is not very helpful. In fact, it is somewhat irritating. There are many things that the US and the UK have done which we do not like at all.11

The leaders who got together in Bandung, however, were divided also amongst themselves. They were not of the same mind on questions of international politics, nor did they have the same understanding of what constituted imperialism. They did not even necessarily like each other. The representative of the Philippines, Carlos Romulos, for example, found Nehru to be a ‘highly cultivated intellect’ but full of ‘pedantry’ (and also, one might add, opposed — as a believer in non-alignment — to the Manila Pact of which the Philippines were a member). ‘His pronounced propensity to be dogmatic, impatient, irascible, and unyielding…alienated the goodwill of many delegates’, wrote Romulos. Nehru ‘typified’ for him:

the affectations of cultural superiority induced by a conscious identification

11 SWJN, 2nd series, vol. 27: 106.
with an ancient civilization which has come to be the hallmark of Indian representatives to international conferences. He also showed an anti-American complex, which is characteristic of Indian representations at international diplomatic meetings.\textsuperscript{12}

The memoirs of Dr. Roselan Abdulgani, once Jakarta’s ambassador to the United States and an organiser of the conference, reflect some of the competitive currents that characterised the relationship between the Indian and the Indonesian leadership and officials. ‘The cleverness of the Indian delegation’, he wrote, ‘lay in the fact that they had thoroughly mastered the English language, and had very much experience in negotiations with the British...Some of them were even arrogant as for instance...Krishna Menon, and, at times, Prime Minister Nehru himself’.\textsuperscript{13}

Nehru, in turn, had trouble trusting the Indonesians with the responsibility for organising the conference. He wrote to B. Tyabji, the Indian Ambassador to Indonesia, on 20 February 1955:

I am rather anxious about this Asian-African Conference and, more especially, about the arrangements. I wonder if the people in Indonesia have any full realization of what this Conference is going to be. All the world’s eyes will be turned upon it...Because of all this, we cannot take the slightest risk of lack of adequate arrangements...You have been pointing out that the Indonesians are sensitive. We should respect their sensitiveness. But we cannot afford to have anything messed up because they are sensitive.\textsuperscript{14}

His particular concern, it turns out, were the arrangements for bathrooms and lavatories. It is hard to know whether he was being merely anxious or expressing a peculiar Brahmanical obsession with ritual purity and cleanliness when

\textsuperscript{12} Carlos P. Romulos, \textit{The Meaning of Bandung} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1956), 11-12. This book was published as the “Weil Lectures on American Citizenship” delivered at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

\textsuperscript{13} Dr. Roselan Abdulgani, \textit{The Bandung Connection: The Asia-Africa Conference in Bandung in 1955} (Singapore: Gunung Agung, 1981), 26. To be fair to Abdulgani, however, it needs to be said that he also expressed much admiration for Nehru’s speech at closed meeting of the Political Committee of the conference on 22 April 1955: ‘The influence of that speech was very great indeed. [Nehru] was a fighter, well-on in years, his hair going white, his voice strong, speaking in fluent English, without pretence, full of idealism and valuable ideas... I can never forget those moments. Everyone present listened spell-bound’ (143). Abdulgani also presented the following evaluation of Nehru: ‘He was very wealthy, but he lived simply full of discipline. Every morning, he did physical exercises, in the form of yoga. For a dozen minutes, he stood on his hand, with two feet in the air. In order to guard [sic] the easy coursing of blood in his veins. And in this way to clear his thoughts, he said’. Ibid.

\textsuperscript{14} SWJN, 2nd series, vol. 28: 98.
he went on to say:

I have learnt that it is proposed to crowd numbers of people in single rooms... your Joint Secretariat will not get much praise from anybody if delegates are herded up like cattle...Above all, one fact should be remembered, and this is usually forgotten in Indonesia. This fact is an adequate provision for bathrooms and lavatories. People can do without drawing rooms, but they cannot do without bathrooms and lavatories.15

Apart from such lack of mutual trust and respect, the conference, so opposed to imperialism, had no operative definition of the term. This was so mainly because there were deep and irreconcilable differences among the nations represented. The Prime Minister of Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Sir John Kotelawala, caused some tension in the Political Committee of the conference when on the afternoon of Thursday, 21 April 1955, he referred to the Eastern European countries and asked, ‘Are not these colonies as much as any of the colonial territories in Africa or Asia?...should it not be our duty openly to declare opposition to Soviet colonialism as much as Western imperialism?’16 The compromise prose drafted by the conference in trying to accommodate the spirit of Sir John’s question clearly reveals the shallow intellectual unity on which the conference was based. Rather than refer directly to ‘the form of the colonialism of the Soviet Union’, the Founding Committee eventually agreed on a statement that called for an end to ‘colonialism in all its manifestation’.17

What then held the conference together? Appadorai, the Indian member of the joint secretariat set up for the Conference, was right in saying that, ‘not much that is significantly new can be found in the Bandung Declaration. Most of the points of the historical declaration are found in the United Nations Charter’.18 Bandung surely helped the newly independent states become parts of the UN system. But it brought into the imagination of that system a shared anti-imperial ethic. Whatever the meaning of the term ‘imperialism’, there was an absolute unanimity among the participants of the conference that they were all opposed

16 Abdulgani, Bandung Connection, 115 and 117; see also, John Kotelawala, An Asian Prime Minister’s Story (George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1956).  
17 Bandung Connection, 119; It should be noted that the Bandung conference was not to make any “majority” decisions or raise divisive, controversial issues. See, SWJN, 2nd series, vol. 28: 97-98.  
to ‘it’. From Nehru to Romulos, the message was clear. As Romulos put it in his statement to the conference: ‘The age of empire is being helped into oblivion by the aroused will and action of the people determined to be masters of their own fate’. He was confident that, ‘the old structure of Western empire will and must pass from the scene’. A pictorial album produced soon after the conference from the Netherlands on the theme nationalism and colonialism in Africa and Asia thus characterised the meeting at Bandung: ‘The end of Western supremacy has never been demonstrated more clearly’. This was indeed a time when, whatever its meaning, any conscious project labeled ‘Empire’ had no takers. The pro-empire historians of today would have found few readers then.

The organisers went to some trouble to make sure that the anti-imperialist sentiments undergirding the conference was open to the most expansive definition of anti-imperialism. The American War of Independence was deliberately made a point of reference for the conference. The planning conference at Bogor had decided that the conference would be held in the last week of April in 1955. In the meanwhile, says Abdulgani, news was received from America indicating that the Americans feared, ‘that Western colonialism would be subjected to attack [at Bandung] and would be the main target. Especially so with the attendance of the People’s Republic of China’. Abdulgani writes:

I and my staff thought and puzzled for a long time about how to get rid of, or how to neutralize American fears. Suddenly, we recalled the date of 18 April in the history of the American Revolution; exactly what it was, we didn’t remember. … I telephoned American Ambassador Hugh Cummings [and] … asked him for data about the American revolution around the month of April. On the following day, Ambassador Cummings sent several books of reference…. It turned out that … [o]n 18 April 1775…amidst the upheaval of the American revolution for independence against British colonialism, a young patriot named Paul Revere rode at midnight from Boston harbour to the town of Concord, arousing the spirit of opposition to British troops, who were landing at that time. … It was clear that 18 April 1775 was an historic day for the American nation in their struggle against colonialism. Why should we not simply link these two events, the date of which was the same, the spirit of which was the

---

19 Romulos, Bandung, 66; Appadorai, Bandung, 30.
20 A World on the Move: A History of Colonialism and Nationalism in Asia and North Africa from the Turn of the Century to the Bandung Conference (Amsterdam: Djambaten, 1956), 246; A review of this book in The Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies 22, no.1/3 (1959): 198-199, in which it is remarked: ‘The real value of this book lies in the clear picture it will give to the Western students of the way Asian thinkers feel about “colonialism”’. 
same, only the years were different?21

‘Indeed, President Sukarno made this American connection in his opening speech on the very first day of the conference’.22

**the pedagogical style of developmental politics**

For the generation of leaders who spoke at Bandung, colonial domination produced two opposed kinds of discourses about decolonisation. One related to the idea of economic development. It produced what I will call a ‘pedagogical style’ of politics between dominant groups and the dominated, both within and between nations. But colonial contact also produced curiosity about the West and a desire to explore and enjoy human differences without putting them in a hierarchy. It is clearly the latter that in many ways anticipated our contemporary debates on the ‘in-between’ and the hybrid.

The idea that colonial rule hindered economic development and that decolonisation should free up nations to pursue that goal often entailed an uncritical emphasis on modernisation. Sustaining this attitude was a clear and conscious desire to ‘catch up’ with the West. As Nehru would often say in the 1950s: ‘What Europe did in a hundred or a hundred and fifty years, we must do in ten or fifteen years’, or, as it was put in the very title of a 1971 biography of the Tanzanian leader Julius Nyerere: *We Must Run While They Walk*.23

This emphasis on development as catching-up-with the West produced a particular split that marked both the relationship between the West and the Rest as well as that between elites and subalterns within national boundaries. Just as the emergent nations demanded political equality with Euro-American nations while wanting to catch up with them on the economic front, similarly their leaders thought of their peasants and workers simultaneously as people who were already full citizens or at least full members of the nation — in that they had the associated rights or were fully present in national representations — but also as people who were not-quite full citizens in that they needed to be educated in the habits and manners of the citizen. This produced a style of

---

22 *Select Documents*, 3.
politics on the part of the leaders that could only be called pedagogical. From Nasser and Nyerere to Sukarno and Nehru, decolonisation produced a crop of leaders who saw themselves, fundamentally, as teachers to their nations. Nyerere actually was known in his country by the name ‘Mwalimu’, a Swahili word for teacher. There are two remarkably similar incidents in Nehru’s and Nyerere’s lives that illustrate this pedagogical style of leadership. Both incidents involve them speaking to their countrymen on the subject of singing the national anthem. The similarities are striking.

Here is Nehru speaking at a public meeting in Dibrugarh on 29 August 1955. Mark the teacherly voice and the disciplinary insistence on military bodily postures when singing the national anthem. Nehru could have been speaking at a school assembly: ‘Now we shall have the national anthem. Please listen carefully to what I have to say. One, nobody should start singing until the word is given. I have found that in Dibrugarh people start singing even while I am speaking. It is all wrong, you must start only when I say so, not until then’. It also appears that some people had had to close their eyes while singing the anthem, overcome, one assumes, by their feelings of devotion to the nation. It was a familiar practice in traditions of Indian devotional singing for people to sing with their eyes shut. So Nehru felt compelled to add: ‘Two, Jana gana mana is our national anthem. So it must be sung in loud and clear voices, with eyes open’. He was at some pains to remind them that the national anthem was more about military discipline rather than being overwhelmed by nationalist emotions: ‘You must stand erect like soldiers and sing, not hum it under your breath. Thirdly, you must remember that Jana gana mana…has been selected to be our national anthem…It is given great honour abroad. So…everybody must stand up when the national anthem is sung because it is the voice of the nation, of Bharat Mata. We must stand erect like soldiers and not shuffle around while it is being sung. I would like to tell you that everyone must learn to sing the national anthem’. And, finally, he himself took charge of conducting the singing: ‘When the girls sing just now all of you must join in. It does not matter if you do not know the words. The girls will sing one line at a time and you will repeat it. Have you understood? All right, stand up, everybody. Let us start’.

24 Wright, *The Color Curtain*, 132; Christopher Lee tells me of a fictionalised film about Nasser, “Nasser 56,” in which Nasser, trying to gather support and expertise for nationalising the Suez, exhorts two engineers who question his judgment, by saying, ‘You are engineers, not poets’. Personal communication from Christopher Lee, 20 May 2005.

Compare this with what Nyerere said at a mass rally on 7 July 1963 explaining the vice of ‘pomposity’ in the new nation. The similarities are striking and it is not difficult to hear the same teacherly voice of the leader trying to instill in his audience the proper habits of citizenship: ‘When we became independent’, Nyerere said:

we started by singing the national anthem every time the Prime Minister arrived anywhere, even at supposedly informal dinner parties...This, already, was rather unnecessary; but, as a little over-enthusiasm was understandable just at first. I had hoped that in time we should learn to reserve the anthem for the really ceremonial functions at which its playing is appropriate. It seems I was too hopeful; for now we sing it whenever a Minister, a Parliamentary Secretary, a regional Commissioner or an Area Commissioner arrives at a gathering of any kind anywhere in Tanganyika! Nothing could be more disrespectful to our national anthem than to treat it as a popular song-hit, or a “signature-tune” to be “plugged” the moment any member of the Government appears on the scene...It is customary in every country in the world for visiting foreigners, as well as the local public, to show their respect by standing to attention while the anthem is being played. But it is not customary in other countries to play or sing their national anthem without any warning, just because some official of the government happens to have dropped in unexpectedly at a small gathering, or landed at an airstrip on a visit to his mother-in-law!

Even as these two excerpts from Nehru’s and Nyerere’s speeches confirm, the pedagogical aspect of their politics had to do with their desire to see their respective nations take their pride of place in the global order of nations. This is why the reference to ‘abroad’ or ‘every country in the world’ appears in these speeches. The ‘voice’ of Bharatmata (Mother India) had the ‘inter-national’ world as its audience. Behind the idea of pedagogical politics was the idea that nation was more about development than diversity. More than that, leaders often assumed that development was the answer to the question of diversity. The politics of recognition of various identities that flourished in the 1980s and 90s and later were yet to come.  

the death of pedagogical politics

This pedagogical model of political development, so intimately tied to anti-colonial projects of modernisation, died in the 1960s as an expression of the

---

political will of the elite in the ex-colonial countries. Why? There were many reasons but one surely was a rising level of disillusionment with the performance of the nation. Remember that the very exclusion of large sections of the colonised from the institutions of governance during colonial rule ensured that the nation, until the attainment of independence, was in the main an emotional and utopian experience achieved through mobilisation on the streets and with the aid of cultural artefacts such as literature, music, films (from the 1930s on), and rituals. Once the generation of the teacher-like, anti-colonial leaders was gone — Nehru died in 1964, Nasser in 1970, Sukarno died in 1970 but was out of power by 1965, Mao’s authority was under challenge by the mid-1960s so that he had to launch the Cultural Revolution, Nyerere, the youngest of the lot and the leader of a country that became independent later, stayed on in power till 1985 but his ujaama socialism was in crisis by the late 1970s — once these leaders died or were removed, the pedagogical spirit became an empty shell of a rhetoric for projects of modernisation that had clearly failed to meet the raised expectations of the masses. The charisma of the teacherly leaders kept people’s faith alive in the organs of the state in the face of massive administrative failures. Once they were gone, there was nothing to stop the process of popular alienation from the state. It was as if these leaders embodied a certain compact between the general population and the state that unraveled with the departure of these unifying figures.

At the same time, that is to say, by the late 1960s to early 1970s, immigration rules in the United States, Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom changed allowing for the migration of professionals from the ex-colonial countries to the metropolitan centres. This was a crucial development in the rise of postcolonialism. There had, of course, been working-class migration for years. Britain actually sought labourers from the West Indies immediately after the war for demographic reasons, and there had been much older diasporas of working-class population spread throughout the world through the history of slavery and what followed its abolition in the early nineteenth century. But working-class migration would not have, by itself, given rise to postcolonial thinking. There is no postcolonialism in a Western country without the chattering classes — the classes that read and write in newspapers or are present in the media — being continually supplied by streams of professionals from the ex-colonial countries who then make this group, literally, multi-coloured and thus multi-cultural as well. (Germany, for instance, has no public culture of postcolonial debate yet — though there is much academic interest in the topic — as its professional
classes are overwhelmingly mono-cultural.)

Also significant was the fact that the West in which these intellectuals and professionals from the ex-colonies landed was a post-imperial West — challenged internally not only through new social movements such as feminism or the student movements and the Hippie protests of the 1960s, but also by the decline of imperialism and by fact that in the settler-colonial nations such as the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand or South Africa, indigenous peoples and minority groups in search of recognition and autonomy had begun to devour anti-colonial writings for their own ends. Hence the popularity of a Fanon among indigenous leaders or of a Gandhi in the civil rights movement in America or in the struggle against apartheid.27

In some ways, then, the global space for white man’s sense of supremacy and the pedagogical spirit of anti-colonial modernisation died about the same time, the time from when scholars date the beginnings of the contemporary forms of globalisation: the late 1970s.28 If decolonisation was thus generally predicated on a world-wide urge on the part of the formerly colonised countries to catch up with Europe (or more broadly the West), one could say that decolonisation was a discourse that saw an imaginary Europe as the most important agentic force in the world. Decolonisation thus may be thought of as the last phase in the history of what the Martin Heidegger once called ‘the Europeanization’ of the earth.29 Vietnam was perhaps the last war for ‘national liberation’ that was seen as delivering a blow to a weak link in the imperial chain that was the West. Other long-term struggles — such as those of the Kurds, the Kashmiris,

27 For an interesting reading of the sixties in the West that seeks to connect the developments of this era to the later emergence of postmodernism, see, Julie Stephens, Anti-Disciplinary Politics: Sixties Radicalism and Postmodernism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

28 Arjun Appadurai, Modernity at Large, in which Chapter 2 dates contemporary globalisation from the 1970s; David Harvey, The Condition of Postmodernity (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), in which Chapter 9 dates what he calls ‘flexible accumulation’ from the same period. For a transnational history of White supremacist ideologies and struggles against them, see Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, Drawing The Global Color Line: White Men’s Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

the Nagas, the Tibetans — for self-determination that occurred in a ‘national’ context would never produce the upsurge of anti-colonial and cross-cultural sentiments in the world of the kind that attended the struggle in Vietnam.

Postcolonial theory emerges from re-circulation of anti-colonial texts within what I have called the post-imperial West. It cannot be an insignificant fact that Homi Bhabha from India, and Stuart Hall and Isaac Julien from the Caribbean, for instance, would come together to read and organise conferences on Fanon in England of the 1980s under the sponsorship of the Institute of Contemporary Art and with funding from the Greater London Council, a municipal government Left-wing in its traditions but a part of the British state nevertheless. Isaac Julien would go on to make a noted film on Fanon. It is also significant that the immediate context for their readings would be furnished by their participation in a shared struggle against British racism — Stuart Hall described in his reminiscences how they would go on anti-racist marches together (interesting to remember that the philosopher Charles Taylor was a fellow-traveler in these years — it could not have been a coincidence that he would go on to write a seminal text on the politics of recognition). But the racism they fought was itself of post-imperial origins: it was born of cultural adjustments necessitated by the loss of empire and rise in migration of coloured peoples.30

Stuart Hall’s intellectual journey culminating in his heading up the Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies may be seen as an allegory of the social changes that brought about academic changes in Britain. There had been a push towards greater working-class literacy with the enactment of the 1944 Education Act that raised the school leaving age to 15.31 The Birmingham Centre had been set up in the late 1950s. Richard Hoggart, its founding director, wrote about his own working-class upbringing in the justly famous book, *The Uses of Literacy* (1957).32 Hoggart established the Centre as he and his colleagues felt that the established departments and disciplines in the university remained invested in studying the elite — it was no surprise that a major critique of E. P. Thompson’s classic book, *The Making of the English Working Class*, would be

---


31 I am grateful to Catherine Robson for discussions on these points. Her forthcoming book on the role of literature in working-class education in late nineteenth and early-twentieth century Britain will have much to say on this history.

launched from this Centre in the 1970s by Richard Johnson.\footnote{See the essays in, \textit{Working-Class Culture: Studies in Theory and History}, eds. J. Clarke, C. Critcher, R. Johnson (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1979).} The Centre was to study popular culture — sub-cultures, to be precise — such as the formation of punks and other rebels in British society. Intellectuals associated with this movement took a deep interest in contemporary French structuralism and post-structuralism and brought out a series of booklets under the title \textit{New Accents}.\footnote{Terence Hawkes, Christopher Norris, Dick Hebdidge and others published some significant books under this series title.} Gramsci, popular in English since the publication in 1972 of selections from his \textit{Prison Notebooks}, became a theoretical patron-saint of this intellectual move. Stuart Hall, who stepped into the shoes of Hogart on the latter’s retirement, had engaged Hoggart’s writings as early as the fifties. His essay, “A Sense of Classlessness”, published in \textit{Universities and Left Review}, Autumn 1958, was a response to Hoggart.\footnote{Stuart Hall, “A Sense of Classlessness,” \textit{Universities and Left Review} 3 (1958): 26-3. I owe this reference to Catherine Robson.} Grant Farred has recently reminded us how this movement of ideas stemming from a general democratisation of British political culture took on the question of racism as Asian nationals arrived in Britain from places such as Uganda and Kenya from where they were expelled after 1972.\footnote{Grant Farred, “Out of Context: Rethinking Cultural Studies Diasporically,” \textit{Cultural Studies Review} 15, no.1 (2009): 130-150.} As he says, it was the racialised muggings in the 1970s that led to the Centre in Birmingham publishing, under the editorship of Stuart Hall, Chris Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke, and Brian Roberts the book, \textit{Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order}.\footnote{\textit{Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order}, eds. Stuart Hall, Chris Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke and Brian Roberts (London: Macmillan, 1978), cited in Farred, “Out of Context,” 131.} About the same time or soon after, intellectuals like Salman Rushdie and Homi Bhabha began to question the received litanies of both British and Indian nationalisms and formulating their understandings of identities that were ‘in-between’ and interstitial.

These struggles around low culture/high culture in the context of capitalism, decolonisation, and immigration of non-Western intellectuals into the West inspired debates in English universities about questioning the canonical texts that had until then represented the nation or the West, leading in turn to a search for more inclusive syllabi and resulting in the emergence of new fields that Kenneth Ruthven once called ‘the new humanities’ that included, of course,
postcolonial and cultural studies. Universities in different Anglo countries took different paths to this juncture but debates about academic canons and about what constituted cultural education were common to them all. Universities in the United States saw the kind of ‘culture wars’ that went on at Stanford and elsewhere in the 1980s about the content of common core courses on Western Civilization, debates were propelled by identity politics that had come out of the civil liberties and other movements for recognition. I lived in Australia in those years and witnessed the beginnings of a national process of recognising the ‘historical wounds’ that Aboriginal peoples carried as a result, or so it was claimed, of the white settlement or colonisation of the country. The Canadian debates on indigenous peoples and their rights often acted as precedents for debates in Australia. New Zealand was already further down this path than the Australians were. These debates were also fuelled by the sociological fact of the growing importance of the media in defining youth cultures. The argument for cultural and postcolonial studies rested on the fact that an idea of high culture, fashioned after the theories of Mathew Arnold or Thomas Carlyle, was no longer feasible. I participated in the debate that accompanied the name-change of the English department at the University of Melbourne (a process in which Kenneth Ruthven, Stephen Knight, Simon During, and David Bennett — at least from what I could see as an outsider — played leading roles). The department was to be called henceforth: the Department of English and Cultural Studies. As this brief history will have suggested, cultural studies was born as a close cognate of postcolonial studies in British, Australian and Canadian universities.

the dialogical side of decolonisation

Since postcolonial criticism and cultural studies were fundamentally about making the West embrace a degree of cultural pluralism, their primary polemical targets were modes of thinking that tended to understand identities as frozen in eternal essentials: black, white, indigenous, and so on. Yet at the same time they had to reject the universal in whose name the call of immigrant, indigenous, and minority communities for recognition of their identities were usually ignored. The suspicion of a particular form of the universal that, on examination, always turned out to be white and male was inherited from anti-colonial thought.

However, the answer to racism could not be reverse racism. Nor could it be a

---

shallow universalism or humanism that did not know how to deal with difference. Surely, the lesson from Fanon was that the colour of the colonised had to be both critical and ephemeral at the same time. Postcolonial criticism was an attempt to read the colonial archive to develop a politics of difference that avoided the two kinds of politics of sameness — an uncritical humanism that often underlay both the imperial stance of civilising the natives as well as the anti-colonial leader’s modernisation program and his pedagogical relationship to his people. How would one then think of difference as a real but inherently unstable object, so unstable that it would defeat all attempts, academic or otherwise, to objectify it?39

It is then not surprising that postcolonial critics should accumulate a huge intellectual debt to the so-called philosophers of difference — Lacan’s distinction between the subject of enunciation and subject of utterance, Derrida’s ideas of *différanse*, Foucault’s challenge to all foundationalist thinking in his *Order of Things* — were deployed to new ends by Bhabha and Spivak. Think of Bhabha’s formulations of mimicry — his expression ‘not quite, not white’ — and Spivak’s question ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ that had much in common, say, with Luce Irigaray’s project in *This Sex Which is Not One*.

But that only brings me back to my point about how important the 1960s and its antecedents are in any genealogy of postcolonialism, a point that Julie Stephens made in her Melbourne PhD thesis which resulted in the book, *Anti-Disciplinary Protest: Sixties Politics and Postmodernism*.40 The so-called post-structuralist thinkers all came from the Left — there is no right-wing post-structuralism or postcolonialism — searching for principles of democratic life that could go beyond the verities of Marxism.41 However, we would fall short in our historical understanding of the world if we see postcolonial thought as a simple case of some non-Western scholars applying the tools of post-structuralism to the colonial archive. My argument is this: just as the nineteenth century belonged to a world created by centuries of European expansion and colonial domination, postcolonial criticism belongs to the world fashioned by anti-colonial struggles

---

39 It could not have been a mere coincidence that all major social-science disciplines developed substantial critiques in this period of their key foundational concepts: thus Anthropology came to critique the idea of ‘culture’, History those of historical time and facts, Geography that of ‘space’, and Economics that of the ‘market’.

40 Julie Stephens, *Anti-Disciplinary Protest*.

41 One has to remember that Foucault read Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus* as a guide to non-fascist forms of living.
even though the politics of decolonisation were significantly different from those of postcolonial writing.

Nowhere is this connection between the postcolonial and the anti-colonial seen more clearly than in what I call dialogical side of decolonisation to distinguish it from its pedagogical side. Contrary to what they said when they thought of catching up with the West, anti-colonial thinkers often devoted a great deal of time to a question that eventually became a postcolonial question as well: how could a global conversation of humanity genuinely acknowledge and communicate across cultural diversity without distributing such diversity over a hierarchical scale of civilisation — that is to say, how could one express an urge towards cross-cultural dialogue without the baggage of imperialism? A utopian question but one that is critical to anti-colonial imaginations of freedom, a point I take up later.

There are clear anticipations of postcolonial positions in what the anti-colonialist thinkers said in these dialogical moments. Take, for instance, the question of ‘global English’. Bandung brought Richard Wright a premonition of the global future of this language that was once, as Gauri Viswanathan and others have shown, very much a part of the colonising mission.\(^42\) ‘I felt while at Bandung’, wrote Wright:

> that the English language was about to undergo one of the most severe tests in its long and glorious history. Not only was English becoming the common, dominant tongue of the globe, but it was evident that soon there would be more people speaking English than there were people whose native tongue was English...What will happen when millions upon millions of new people in the tropics begin to speak English? Alien pressures and structures of thought and feeling will be brought to bear upon this mother tongue and we shall be hearing some strange and twisted expressions...But this is all to the good; a language is useless unless it can be used for the vital purposes of life, and to use a language in new situations is, inevitably, to change it.\(^43\)

The Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe would echo this vision in ten years after Wright:

> Is it right that a man should abandon his mother tongue for someone else’s? It looks like a dreadful betrayal and produces a guilty feeling. But for me there is

---


\(^43\) Wright, *The Color Curtain*, 200.
no other choice. I have been given the [English] language and I intend to use it. I felt that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communication with its ancestral home but altered to suit new African surroundings.44

Or listen to Aime Cesaire, Fanon’s one-time teacher, speaking, in 1978, in opposition to Sartre and others who thought the French language could not be an effective vehicle for the expression of Africanness or blackness. Césaire said:

I am not a prisoner of the French language. I try and have always wanted to bend French. That’s why I have had a strong affection for Mallarmé, because he has shown me...that language at bottom is arbitrary. It is not a natural phenomenon...I re-create a language that is not French. If the French rediscover their language in mine, well, that’s their affair”.45

It is striking to notice how much these positions anticipate what critics would marvel at later in the postcolonial novels of Salman Rushdie: his capacity to make his Urdu or Hindusthani warble or bubble through his English.

Yet, delivering the Robb lectures — later published as Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature — at the University of Auckland in New Zealand as recently as 1984, Ngugi wa Thiongo, the Kenyan writer, adopted a position exactly the opposite of that spelled out by Wright, Cesaire, and Achebe. An essay by the Nigerian writer Gabriel Okara in the Africanist journal Transition illustrated for Ngugi the ‘lengths to which we were prepared to go in our mission of enriching foreign languages by injecting Senghorian ‘black blood’ into their rusty joints’. Okara had written: ‘[I]n order to capture the vivid images of African speech, I had to eschew the habit of expressing my thoughts first in English. It was difficult at first, but I had to learn. I had to study each jaw expression I used and to discover the probable situation in which it was used in order to bring out their nearest meaning in English. I found it a fascinating exercise’. Ngugi disagreed. ‘Why’, he asks, ‘should an African writer, or any writer, become so obsessed with taking from his mother-tongue to enrich other tongues?...What seemed to worry us more was this: after all this literary gymnastics of preying on our languages to add life and vigour to English and other foreign languages, would the result still be accepted as good English


or good French?"\textsuperscript{46} He for one experienced this as a ‘neo-colonial situation’ and went on to describe the book resulting from his lectures as his ‘farewell to English as a vehicle for any of [his] writing: From now on it is Gikuyu and Kiswahili all the way’.\textsuperscript{47} 

It is not my purpose to use the positions of Wright and Ngugi to cancel each other out. I just wanted to show the degree to which the debates about globalisation and postcolonialism had been anticipated in the discourses of many an anti-colonial thinker. Take the question of place and its relationship to culture difference. Some theorists of globalisation — such as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in their widely-discussed book, \textit{Empire}, or David Harvey in his many writings — take the position that how a place is produced is really a more important question rather than how it is lived. They think that our sense of spatio-temporal difference is actually only an effect of the ultimately placeless logic of capital. The critical question, according to them, is how capital generalises itself by turning ‘anthropological difference’ into consumer preferences.\textsuperscript{48} Yet see how Leopold Senghor — of whose love of French, you will remember, Ngugi was no fan — both anticipated and argued against the position occupied by these thinkers. Senghor’s thoughts — even in what he wrote on the (somewhat unpopular) topic of ‘assimilation’ to French culture in 1945 — have much to say to us about what it might mean to inflect our global conversation by a genuine appreciation of human diversity. Senghor reminds us of the fact that simply acquiring the rights of global passage by following the placeless logic of capital may not define the ends of life for many. We may indeed all want the same rights — and this may very well include the right of global passage — but we may want these rights in order to pursue precisely those diverse ‘meanings of life’ that make the history of one part of the world debate issues that may not resonate in another corner of humanity. 

Clearly, Senghor was not for nativist isolation. He wrote, for instance, ‘mathematics and the exact sciences...by definition have no frontiers and appeal to a faculty of reason which is found in all peoples’. This, he thought, was true for even ‘History and Geography’ which had ‘attained a universal value’. But what about languages like ‘Greek, Latin and French?’ He wrote: ‘I know the advantages of these languages because I was brought up on them’. But, ‘the

\textsuperscript{46} Cited in Thiongo, \textit{Decolonising the Mind}, 7-8. 
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., xii, xiv. 
\textsuperscript{48} I owe the expression ‘anthropological difference’ to Etienne Bal bar.
teaching of the classical languages is not an end in itself. It is a tool for discovering human truths in oneself and for expressing them under their various aspects. But this could work only if there were subjects like ‘African’ and other ‘humanities’.

Senghor’s thoughts received an even sharper focus when, writing in 1961 on the question of Marxism, he made a passionate plea against overlooking the always-situated human being — man in his concrete affiliations to the past — in favor of the figure of the abstract and placeless human, so much the favorite of the nationalist modernisers — or some globalisers of today — from both the Left and the Right. ‘Man is not without a homeland’, wrote Senghor, as if arguing directly against the Hardt-and-Negri’s of his times:

He is not a man without colour or history or country or civilization. He is West African man, our neighbour, precisely determined by his time and his place: the Malian, the Mauritanian, the Ivory-Coaster; the Wolof, the Tuareg, the Hausa, the Fon, the Mossi, a man of flesh and bone and blood, who feeds on milk and millet and rice and yam, a man humiliated for centuries less perhaps in his hunger and nakedness than in his colour and civilization, in his dignity as incarnate man.

‘Incarnate man’ — or man as always-already incarnate — was how Senghor imagined the world’s heritage of historical and cultural diversity. It was not a diversity that got in the way of cross-cultural communication but nor was it a diversity that did not matter. For Senghor, one way that diversity could be harnessed in the cause of development was by deliberately creating a plural and yet thriving tradition of humanities in the teaching institutions of the world. The vision was different from those of Wright or Ngugi. Neither ‘global’ English (or French) nor a return to one’s native language was the option Senghor outlined. The way forward was a world of multi-lingual individuals who would appreciate language both as means of communication and as repositories of difference. A philologist’s utopia perhaps, but how far from the vision of anti-colonial modernisers such as Nehru or Nasser who, in their single-minded pursuit of science and technology in order to catch up with the West, ended up leaving to the West itself the task of preserving and nurturing the world’s plural heritage of the humanities.

---


50 Léopold Sédar Senghor: Prose and Poetry, 59.
returning to Dening, in conclusion

Here then is what I see as the quintessential difference between postcolonial thought and recent theories of globalisation, particularly of the Marxist variety. Globalisation theorists do not share the deep fascination of postcolonial thinkers with difference. The world, in their eyes, has been so profoundly consumed by the same and universalising logic of capital that all particularities they consider only surface effects of capital. Many anti-colonial thinkers, on the other hand, who were both universalists and humanists at the same time, began by taking difference seriously: this place, my skin colour, my identity, my people, and so on. Even Franz Fanon, the most universalist of them, began with the fact of his blackness. He questioned it, but that (his blackness, and not a universal theory of placeless capital) was his point of departure. None of them – the anti-colonial thinkers we have considered here – froze their ideas of difference into any form of essentialism. Difference, for them, was part of the human condition. Someone like Senghor wanted to celebrate it – something colonial domination seldom allowed. To be able to celebrate difference without either closing himself off to others or losing himself in some universal sameness was, for Senghor, a condition of freedom. Difference does not tear me off from others; difference is what connects me to them. It is because they exist that I know I am different. Such would have been his position. It did not mean, as I said in the very beginning, the absence of conflict. After all, what in life can be outside of the field of power? But difference, thus conceived, is necessarily open to the in-between, the hybrid, and the interstitial. Postcolonial criticism preserved and developed this impulse that lay deep in the history of what I have called the dialogical side of anti-colonial thinking. Dening anticipated much of this, because in the histories he wrote and thought, the past and its people were caught up in the politics of difference. His Gooch, his Marquesans could not be thought without thinking the in-between that mediates all experience of difference. For Dening, difference and the in-between — his beaches — were a part of his understanding of human existence. He would often say: all history is cross-cultural history. Indeed, it is only when we read Dening and people like Senghor and Fanon together that we realise the existential dimension of postcolonial thinking. It is Dening’s success in giving us a sense of history in which the human has no choice but to chance his or her all for the joy of experiencing the thrills and dangers of difference that we begin to see what the struggles of anti-colonial

51 See Dening, Performances.
thinkers like Senghor or Fanon or Cesaire or Gandhi were all about: to make our enjoyment of difference not a condition of enslavement of one by the other but a state of freedom.

dipesh chakrabarty
university of chicago

Revised version of the Second Greg Dening Memorial Lecture delivered at the University of Melbourne on 5 August 2009. I am grateful to the authorities of the History Department of the University of Melbourne and to Donna Merwick for the invitation to deliver the lecture.