

The Change Which Remains the Same:

Towards a Decolonisation Which Does Not Recolonise

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Abstract

In his celebrated study of colonisation, *The Intimate Enemy*, Ashis Nandy observes of Indian responses to British colonisation: 'The pressure to be the obverse of the West distorts the traditional priorities in the Indian's total view of the...universe...It in fact binds him (sic) even more irrevocably to the West.' This problem stems, he adds, from a tendency by both coloniser and anti-colonial thinker to 'absolutise the relative difference between cultures'.

This article will argue that Nandy's observation is an essential element in a South African response to colonisation which does not repeat colonialism's assumptions in the name of replacing them. In particular, it argues against an essentialism in which a reified 'Western culture' is replaced by an equally reified 'African

culture' which is just as constraining and just as likely to be used as a rationale for domination as the colonial ideology it purports to reject.

It will further argue that we avoid the trap of which Nandy warns if we define intellectual colonisation as an ideology which seeks to suppress or eliminate modes of thought which do not conform to a dominant set of values and its antidote, decolonisation, as the removal of this constraint, not as its replacement by new constraints. This decolonisation does not seek to abolish 'Western culture' but to integrate it into a world view in which it takes its place alongside African, Asian, and Latin American cultures. It therefore recognises the syncretic nature of all cultures and views of the world and seeks to enhance, rather than obstruct, conversations between them.

Introduction

'...the popular modern antonyms are not always the true opposites...in every situation of organized oppression the true antonyms are always the exclusive part versus the inclusive whole – not masculinity versus femininity but either of them versus androgyny, not the past versus the present but either of them versus the timelessness in which the past is the present and the present is the past, not the oppressor versus the oppressed but both of them versus the rationality which turns them into co-victims.' (Nandy, 2005: 99)

Since the Rhodes Must Fall protests, which began at the University of Cape Town in March 2015 (Newsinger, 2016), the decolonisation of knowledge and its dissemination have become central concerns – at least in theory – of South African universities. This has obvious implications beyond the academy, since it is hardly the only South African institution in which the values and assumptions of Europe have been normative in the two decades since the achievement of majority rule. The political commentator Aubrey Matshiqi (2011) has observed that, in South Africa's democracy, the political majority remain a cultural minority. The demand for 'decolonisation' is, therefore, not restricted to universities – it speaks to all intellectual and cultural life.

The defeat of apartheid removed the legal impediments to citizenship for all – but left many of the hierarchies of the past in place: in effect, the cultural and intellectual underpinnings of Afrikaner Nationalism were discredited, only for those which had sustained an earlier British colonialism to take over (Friedman, 2015). Given this, perhaps the only surprise about heightened demands for the decolonisation of thinking, writing, and teaching is that they took so long to appear. There is clearly an urgent need for the intellectual equivalent of the negotiation process which produced the political settlement of 1994 – an exchange on how the society's thinkers, writers, and teachers should begin to free themselves of colonial assumptions and to think about the society and its challenges in ways which do not reflect the view of the coloniser. That this discussion is overdue is underlined by the fact that a paper arguing for a broad negotiation on the nature of the university was written a quarter

of a century ago (Badat, Barends, and Wolpe, 1993).

But, while calls for decolonisation have been very loud, they have not been very distinct: clear articulations of a decolonised intellectual framework have been largely drowned out by rhetorical flourishes. Equally important is that a frequent feature of the rhetoric is its essentialism. We are exhorted to adopt African modes of thinking in tones which assume both that the continent's many and varied cultures all see the world in the same way – and that the way in which they see it is so obvious to authentic Africans that they require no explanation. It is assumed – or stated – that those who do not endorse these alternatives are colonial ideologues, a charge levelled against, among others, a prominent Black consciousness intellectual (Mangcu, 2017). This is a manifestation of a deeper problem: 'It is not uncommon to hear testimonies of students positing that they do not feel black enough, given that a singular dominant narrative of what constitutes blackness is rigorously defended often at the cost of free expression' (Nymanjoh, 2017: 264).

Those who take this view are used, no doubt, to hearing from their targets angry protestations of their anti-colonial credentials and criticism from supporters of the dominant view denouncing their demands as excessively radical. They are not used to challenges to their own credentials – to being told that their militant opposition to the colonial world view is a product of precisely that order's way of thinking. This is, however, the view of one of India's most important intellectuals, the psychologist and social critic Ashis Nandy: his seminal study of colonial and anti-colonial thinking, *The Intimate Enemy*, makes precisely this argument. While aspects of Nandy's analysis are specific to Indian conditions, much of it speaks to the current South African debate: it provides a much-needed perspective which is yet to be heard in discussion here.

This paper seeks to fill this gap. It will discuss those aspects of Nandy's diagnosis which are relevant to South African realities and seek to spell out their implications for our current condition. It will conclude by proposing an approach to decolonisation in this country which builds on Nandy's insights. Central to Nandy's critique of militant 'decolonisation' is

a particular understanding of colonialism and its cultural underpinning. An obvious objection to the colonial world view which he analyses is that it is only one way of understanding colonialism, one which South Africans have experienced but which is not necessarily either the only or even the dominant understanding among colonisers past and present. This objection is important because it enables us to relate Nandy's critique directly to South African realities. But the paper will argue that Nandy does indeed offer an adequate critique of the kind of intellectual and cultural colonisation which South Africans currently experience and so points the way to an alternative.

The Essential Colonial

Nandy builds his critique on a discussion of two contrasting figures – the author Rudyard Kipling, who was perhaps the most articulate ideologue of the British Raj, and the Indian nationalist and spiritual leader Sri Aurobindo. His purpose is to contrast Kipling's cultural essentialism with Sri Aurobindo's syncretic and inclusive alternative.

Kipling serves Nandy's purpose well because, like many ideologues of racial or national power, he does not fully belong to the dominant group whose dominance he justifies and which he initially did not feel particularly at home in. Nandy points out that Kipling was 'brought up in India by Indian servants in an Indian environment. He thought, felt and dreamt in Hindustani, mainly communicated with Indians, and even looked like an Indian boy' (Nandy, 2005: 64). At a very young age, he was sent by his parents to England, where his idyllic life in Bombay was replaced by a traumatic period in which he felt deserted by his parents and was reminded repeatedly of his Indianness and thus his strangeness. His response was a body of writing which aimed to prove that he belonged as an Englishman by offering an essentialist cultural defence of British colonialism. Besides his stress on the British right to rule India, Kipling 'absolutise(d) the relative difference between cultures'.

Kipling's defence of colonialism is built on creating a strict and unbridgeable divide between 'British' and 'Indian' culture which denies the possibility that either could be influenced by the other, let alone that they could blend: 'Kipling sought to redefine the Indian

as the antonym of the Western man' (Nandy, 2005: 79). He romanticised Indians who, in his view, made no attempt to become British and so, in his view, remained true to their identity. His scorn was reserved for the babus, the clerks and bureaucrats who adopted English ways in an attempt to become part of the dominant group. While Kipling and other British colonial ideologues who thought like him 'liked to see colonialism as a moral statement on the superiority of some cultures and the inferiority of others', they were so wedded to essentialism that they '[e]ven accepted that some had the right to talk of Indian culture as superior to Western. Cultural relativism by itself is not incompatible with imperialism, as long as one culture's categories are backed by political, economic and technological power' (Nandy, 2005: 100). It was not necessary to justify colonialism by claiming cultural superiority, as long as military superiority ensured that the culture of the coloniser dominated that of the colonised.

This implicitly recognised that colonisation rested on violence: 'Kipling correctly sensed that the glorification of the victor's violence was the basis of the doctrine of social evolution and ultimately colonialism, that one could not give up the violence without giving up the concept of colonialism as an instrument of progress' (Nandy, 2005: 69). It was, therefore, perhaps inevitable that Kipling admired but greatly exaggerated the military strain in Indian culture. He thought that 'the ideology of Ksatriyahood' – the warrior caste – 'was true Indianness, apart from being consistent with the world view of colonialism'. He thus 'missed the limited role given to Ksatriyahood in traditional Indian cosmology and the vested interest his kind had in denying these limits in a colonial culture organized around violence and counter-violence, manhood and maximised potency, and a theory of history that saw all civilisations in terms of the high and the low and the justifiably powerful and the deservedly weak' (Nandy, 2005: 78–79).

In this colonial ideology, then, essentialism is at the core. Judith Butler, in her attempt to develop a feminist alternative to essentialism, notes that it enables 'the regulation of attributes along culturally established lines of coherence' (1990: 33). Essentialisms are 'hostile to hybridity in that they promote policing the boundaries of identity and acts of exclusion and domination sanctioned by an appeal to an essential

core of an individual' (Butler, 1990: 8). Not only does essentialism ignore or suppress differences within identity groups and cultures – it denies the reality that all cultures are influenced by other cultures and that the loudest advocates of cultural authenticity are often promoting practices which are borrowed. To name but one example, the black frock coats and fur hats worn by Orthodox Jews as a badge of 'true' Jewishness is in reality the style of dress adopted by the 18th century Polish gentry who adopted it because they were trying to imitate Turks (Freeman, n.d.; *My Jewish Learning*, n.d.) So it is, in reality, a product of hybridity which cultural zealots have turned into a badge of supposed cultural distinctiveness.

It is this world view which underpins Kipling's colonial ideology. It is easy to understand why an essentialist response by Indian nationalists should be a vindication of that ideology rather than its antithesis. Violence is also at its core and so it follows again that a violent response should be understood in the same way. The implicit critique of some 'militant' expressions of Indian 'decolonisation' becomes clear – they mimic the coloniser in their purported resistance. Nandy makes this critique explicit by contrasting to it, and to Kipling, Sri Aurobindo. He is chosen because he is, Nandy points out, almost the perfect counterpoint to Kipling.

He was raised in precisely the sort of Anglophile Indian home which horrified Kipling – one of his given names was Ackroyd, although he later dropped it. He became

a nationalist and a spiritual leader, abandoning the Brahmo Samaj, the Hindu reform movement whose monotheism attracted Indians seeking a more 'Western' identity because it was seen to be more compatible with Christianity, for a traditional form of Indian spirituality which, in the context of his life, could also have been seen as an anti-colonial choice. But, Nandy insists, Sri Aurobindo did not fall into Kipling's essentialist trap. He searched for 'a more universal model of emancipation' – 'he never thought the West to be outside the reach of God's grace. Even when he spoke of race and evolution... not once did he use the concepts to divide humankind... While other Indian nationalists sought the help of Germany and Japan to remove the British, he always regarded Nazism as Satanic and abhorred Japanese militarism' (Nandy, 2005: 85–86).

This response, for Nandy, meant more than an expression of inter-cultural tolerance and goodwill. It was also an acknowledgement that Aurobindo 'did not have to disown the West within him to become his version of an Indian' (Nandy, 2005: 86). Nandy writes that '[w]hile the colonial system saw him as an object, he could not see the colonisers as mere objects... As part of his struggle for survival, the West remained for Indian victims like Aurobindo an internal human reality, in love as well as in hate, in identification as well as in counter-identification' (2005: 87). This required the acknowledgement of two realities. First, that contact with a dominant culture cannot simply be erased – it leaves indelible marks on the psyche of the colonised and to claim otherwise is to harbour a potentially dangerous pretence. Second, that since all cultures are influenced by other cultures, a human shaped only by one culture is extremely rare. A poignant example of the power of cultural influence is offered by anthropologist Maurice Godelier's study of the Baruya of New Guinea who were not subject to 'Western' influence until 1951 but, within a few years, had been catapulted into a Western-inspired modernity. Godelier describes that they 'were transformed into citizens of a new state that was a member of the United Nations, furnishing one further proof of the West's advance in that part of the world' (1991: 387). Being an authentic Indian (or African, or European, or American) inevitably entails acknowledging the influence on your world view of other cultures – this does not in any way diminish the

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authenticity of a particular cultural identity.

These insights into Kipling and Sri Aurobindo are the prism through which Nandy develops his diagnosis – that militant Indian nationalism, both before and after independence, is in reality an expression of colonial thought because it repeats its essentialism (and its violence). The real threat to colonisation and its world view, he argues, was not the Indian nationalist movements which colonialism ‘bred and domesticated’. It was, rather, the India which refused essentialism: ‘This other Orient, the Orient which was the Occident’s double, did not fit the needs of colonialism; it carried intimations of an alternative, cosmopolitan, multicultural living which was... beyond the dreary middle-class horizons of Kipling and his English contemporaries’ (Nandy, 2005: 72). To construct an essentialised ‘authentic indigenous identity’ in opposition to an equally essentialised ‘colonial identity’ is not, in this view, to antagonise the coloniser – it is, rather, to endorse the coloniser’s world view. It is not to reject colonialism but to accept it.

Colonialism, Nandy argues, could not be complete unless it ‘universalized and enriched its ethnic stereotypes by appropriating the language of defiance of its victims’. It both ‘bred and domesticated’ anti-colonial movements and so ‘the cry of the victims of colonialism was ultimately the cry to be heard in another language – unknown to the colonizer and to the anti-colonial movements’ (Nandy, 2005: 72–73). This ‘other language’ adopts an instrumental view of colonial culture – it takes that which is of use and discards that which is not. And, if this means, at times, pretending to admire the coloniser, that too is valid if it ensures survival – not only in the sense of continuing to live and breathe, but a psychic survival which enables the coloniser better to be who they really are.

To illustrate and expand on this point, Nandy recalls being told of a group of fifteenth century Aztec priests who, on being forced by their conquerors to hear a Christian sermon which proclaimed that the Aztec gods were dead, declared that they would rather die. Their conquerors promptly obliged. Nandy responds: ‘I suspect I know how a group of Brahman priests would have behaved under the same circumstances’. They would have embraced Christianity and some would have written eulogies in praise of it. In reality, they would have remained devout Hindus and,

after a while, ‘their Christianity would have looked ... dangerously like a variation on Hinduism’ (Nandy, 2005: 107–108). For Nandy, ‘the response of the Aztec priests has seemed to the Westernized world the paragon of courage and cultural pride; the hypothetical response of the Brahman priests hypocritical and cowardly’.

All imperialist observers, he argues, have loved India’s ‘martial races’ – who are seen as authentically Indian – and have felt threatened by Indians who are willing to compromise. Why do they valorise the priests and reject the Brahmans? The simple answer is that the Aztec priests oblige their conquerors by dying and leaving the scene – the ‘cowardly’ remain on the scene and may ‘at an opportune moment’ assert their presence. The more complicated one is that submission of this sort is itself deeply embedded in Indian culture. (Nandy, 2005: 207–211). It is derived not from some contemporary Western source but from ‘non-modern India which rejects most versions of Indian nationalism as bound irrevocably to the West’. Nandy suggests that ‘[p]robably the uniqueness of Indian culture lies not so much in a unique ideology as in the society’s traditional ability to live with cultural ambiguities and to use them to build psychological and even metaphysical defences against cultural invasions’ (2005: 107). The ‘cowardly’ response threatens the coloniser because it expresses the autonomous understanding of the colonised rather than that which is imposed by the coloniser.

It would be easy to misinterpret the response of the hypothetical Brahman priests as a physical survival strategy in the face of power, an expression of what James Scott (1985) has called ‘the weapons of the weak’. Scott, who was criticising the notion of ‘false consciousness’ which holds that the dominated often endorse the legitimacy of their domination, argued that the powerless do not accept the morality of domination. They avoid fighting it head on because they believe the power balance is stacked against them and that open resistance will lead to suffering and loss, not change. And so, they find ways of undermining power – by pilfering or feigning ignorance or illness – while loudly endorsing its pretensions when the powerful are listening.

If this was all the Brahmans were doing they would hardly be a model of decolonisation. For Nandy, however, they are challenging colonialism – in a

manner unavailable to the militant decolonisers – because they are refusing to buy into the myth of the ‘noble savage’ which insists that they are at their most authentic when they live out the cultural stereotypes of the coloniser. Indians who responded in this way were drawing on cultural wellsprings unknown to the British to relate to colonial power on their own terms, not that imposed by its anthropology. In that sense, they, and not those determined to live out an Indianness framed by the coloniser, are the authentic decolonisers: ‘What looks like Westernization is often only a means of domesticating the West, sometimes by reducing the West to the comical and the trivial’ (Nandy, 2005: 108). Indians who adopt this strategy refuse ‘to fight the victor according to the victor’s values, within his model of dissent. Better to be a comical dissenter than to be a powerful, serious but acceptable opponent. Better to be a hated enemy, declared unworthy of any respect whatsoever, than to be a proper opponent, constantly making “primary adjustments” to the system’ (Nandy, 2005: 111).

Colonialism, Nandy argues, ‘tried to supplant the Indian consciousness to erect an Indian self-image which, in its opposition to the West, would remain in essence a Western construction’. The authentic rebellion against that was not to mimic the Kiplings by ‘setting up the East and the West as permanent and natural antipodes’. This endorses and repeats ‘the cultural arrogance of post-Enlightenment Europe which sought to define not only the “true” West but also the “true” East’ (Nandy, 2005: 73–74). The Indian ‘has no reason to see himself as a counterplayer or an antithesis of the Western man. The imposed burden to be perfectly non-Western only constricts his... cultural self, just as the older burden of being perfectly Western once narrowed – and still sometimes narrows – his choices in the matter of his and his society’s future. The new responsibility forces him to stress only those parts of his culture which are recessive in the West and to underplay both those which his culture shares with the West and those which remain undefined by (it). The pressure to be the obverse of the West distorts the traditional priorities in the Indian’s total view of man and universe and destroys his (sic) culture’s unique gestalt. It in fact binds him even more irrevocably to the West’ (Nandy, 2005: 73).

Two examples underline this point. First ‘a sub-group of Kipling’s Indian brain-children have set up the

martial India as the genuine India which would one day defeat the West at its own game...(they) are quite willing to alter the whole of Indian culture to bring that victory a little closer, like the American army officer in Vietnam who once destroyed a village to save it from its enemies’ (Nandy, 2005: 80). The second is ‘Hindutva’ or ‘Hinduness’, the core principle of the currently dominant strand of nationalism in India and of its current governing party, which illustrates the point particularly well since ‘Hinduness’ was unknown in India until colonialism produced it to make sense of indigenous cultural and religious patterns: ‘To use the term Hindu to self-define is to flout the traditional self-definition of the Hindu, and to assert aggressively one’s Hinduism is to very nearly deny one’s Hinduness’ (Nandy, 2005: 103). Nandy’s point, that the loudest devotees of decolonisation are products of that which they decry, was poignantly captured by Tagore’s early twentieth century fictional masterpiece *Gora*, in which the eponymous character is a militant Hindu essentialist blissfully unaware that he is actually English and was adopted and brought up as Indian by his Indian foster-parents (Tagore, 2002).

For Nandy, the alternative to colonialism is, therefore, not a cultural essentialism which seeks to replace colonial assumptions with an ‘authentic Indianness’ which claims to have no truck with other cultures. It is, rather, a syncretism that draws both on ‘pre-modern’ Indian cultural understandings and those aspects of Western thought and practice which enhance it. This might entail using Western values to criticise Western practice. This, he believes, was Gandhi’s project: ‘Instead of meeting the Western criterion of a true antagonist, he endorsed the non-modern Indian reading of the modern West as one of the many possible life styles which had, unfortunately for both the West and India, become cancerous by virtue of its disproportionate power and spread’ (Nandy, 2005: 102). He saw his task, therefore, as recovering and emphasising those aspects of the Western tradition which colonialism ignored. He therefore ‘judged colonialism by Christian values and declared it an absolute evil’ (Nandy, 2005: 200). In sum, ‘one could perhaps say that in the chaos called India the opposite of thesis is not the antithesis because they exclude each other. The true “enemy” of the thesis is seen to be in the synthesis because it includes the thesis and ends the latter’s reason for being’ (Nandy, 2005: 99). Nor, in Nandy’s view, does the synthesis

necessarily need to be created by intellectuals – it is already there. Gandhi's attempt to remind the West of its own moral traditions was deeply embedded in Indian cultural understandings: 'Indian society has held in trusteeship aspects of the West which are lost to the West itself' (Nandy, 2005: 74).

Kipling and other colonisers' dismay at this response reflected '[t]he hostility which the liminal man always arouses as opposed to the proper alien' (Nandy, 2005: note 67, 103). The colonised, for them, is guilty of the ultimate sin – trying to be the coloniser. This destabilisation of the boundaries between the two destroys the safety which the coloniser derives from keeping the colonised at a safe distance. A militant nationalist stressing her or his Indianness by adopting the outward trappings of indigenous culture is an ironic source of comfort because it remains clearly alien. A cultural syncretist who uses Christian ethics to declare colonialism evil refuses to be alien and so erodes the barrier between coloniser and colonised. It is obvious which one breaks more firmly with cultural and mental colonisation.

South African Applications: From Verwoerd to Milner

If Nandy's understanding of colonial ideology is accepted, his critique of a resistance which mirrors that which it purports to reject is obviously of great relevance to current discussions of decolonisation in South Africa. At its broadest level, it challenges the notion that decolonisation should be understood as the replacement of colonial assumptions by an 'authentic' African understanding free of 'Western' influence since this would repeat precisely the essentialism which underpinned colonial thinking. It would argue even more obviously against attempts to distinguish between people who are 'African enough' and those who are not. It would insist that the antidote to colonial thought patterns is the 'hybridity' and syncretism which underpins Nandy's proposed antidote. But it could be argued, convincingly, that the strain of colonial thinking which he discusses is one which once dominated in South Africa but no longer does.

Kipling's cultural essentialism seems to fit far more closely the colonisation imposed by Afrikaner Nationalism through apartheid than the current

version against which advocates of decolonisation are rebelling. Apartheid was founded on an essentialism which claimed, spuriously, that it was giving expression to the diversity of cultures. This 'diffuse language of cultural essentialism' was pivotal to apartheid ideology because it enabled it to avoid the 'crude scientific racism drawn from the vocabulary of social Darwinism' while still justifying racial domination (Dubow, 1992: 209). Races and ethnic groups were held to possess a distinctive culture which would be fatally diluted if mixed with others and this was said to be a rationale for strict racial separation. Apartheid ideologues also constructed a rigid and static notion of ethnic identity, extolling those among the colonised who, in their view, fitted the stereotype. According to de Wet Nel, then Minister of Bantu Administration and Development: 'The Zulu is proud to be a Zulu, the Xhosa is proud to be a Xhosa and the Venda is proud to be a Venda, just as proud as they were a hundred years ago'. These ethnic groups, he added, derived the greatest 'fulfilment' from their identity (cited in Moodie, 1980: 266). The obvious antidote to this form of colonisation was not to accept the stereotype. On the contrary, it was surely to embrace a cultural syncretism which apartheid was, its justifiers insisted, designed to prevent.

But apartheid is no longer the dominant form of South African colonialism – it was defeated in 1994. As this paper suggested in passing earlier, it has been replaced, in large measure, by a cultural context which revives the pre-1948 form of cultural domination. Before the victory of Afrikaner Nationalism in 1948, South Africa was a British dominion – its Prime Minister, Jan Smuts, was a loyal servant of Empire who served in the British war cabinet in both the first and second World Wars (Steyn, 2017). The dominant cultural framework was thus British. Since 1994, the dominance would perhaps more accurately be described as white and Western, rather than exclusively British, but the elements are much the same. The dominant framework in the academy, the media, and other sources of cultural influence is that of the liberalism described by Richard Turner more than four decades ago, whose adherents 'believe that "western civilisation" is adequate, and superior to other forms, but also that blacks can, through education, attain (its) level' (Turner, 1972: 20). It is no accident that the student protests which became the catalyst for the current attempts to decolonise the academy

were aimed at the statue not of an apartheid-era government figure, but of Cecil John Rhodes, the key figure in Britain's colonisation of Southern Africa. While Rhodes was certainly not a liberal, he did represent a different form of domination, one which took over when apartheid was ended.

This form of mental and cultural colonisation seems to be the polar opposite of Kipling's essentialism. It does not romanticise African culture to justify the domination of African people. Usually by omission rather than commission, it brands that culture inferior and assumes that Black people attain 'civilised' status only by accepting 'Western' norms and assumptions. It assumes that political and social thought is the work of Westerners and marginalises African societies and their ideas and values. In this view, the African equivalent of the 'Westernised' Indian babus who Kipling despised are showing a desirable interest in thinking and acting out the assumptions of a superior culture. The antidote is then surely not Nandy's hybridity but a clean break with Western culture and the unconditional embrace of an African alternative.

The refutation of this conclusion lies in understanding what the current form of domination is seeking to do. In contrast to Kipling's essentialism and to apartheid ideology, it operates not by imposing a template on society which overtly declares some ways of thinking permitted and demonises or outlaws others. It relies far more in excluding or erasing that which it decries as contrary to its norms. Colonised education of this sort does not triumphantly declare the superiority of the 'West' and the inferiority of Africa. It simply excludes Africa except for that version of it which is seen from Western eyes. Black political thinkers are not demonised as cowards or renegades to their 'true' cultural self – they are ignored. Western frameworks are not exalted – there is no need, since they are the only ones which are taught. Much the same can be said, in myriad ways, of South African media which, while proudly proclaiming its cultural and political neutrality, assiduously presents the perspectives of a suburbia which mirrors the attitudes and perspectives of southern California (Friedman, 2017). It is also pertinent that, while the dominant way of thinking is in theory open to all who accept its assumptions, the boundaries are very firmly set and there is very little room for pluralism or hybridity within the dominant culture. To cite one topical example: Mmusi Maimane,

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then leader of the official opposition Democratic Alliance, whose white, suburban, 'old guard' is one of the key enforcers of this form of domination, regularly ran afoul of the policers of colonial orthodoxy, most notably when he had the temerity to refer to 'white privilege' and 'black poverty' at a Freedom Day rally (Van Onselen, 2018), a remark which may well have cost him the party leadership. So the vast majority of the colonised are never, in reality, integrated into the 'superior' culture which they are by implication exhorted to join (given the intolerance of the culture's policers, it is open to doubt whether any of the colonised are ever fully accepted).

The dominant form of colonisation, then, dominates through exclusion and imposition. It assumes, rather than asserts, that a particular way of seeing is the only way and withholds acknowledgement to alternatives and those who adhere to them. It is as concerned as Kipling and apartheid to set boundaries – it chooses to use other methods. Its understanding of what is permitted and what is not is as rigid as apartheid's – it too has very little room for hybridity or syncretism. It does not profess or feign admiration for indigenous culture, but it is as committed to imposing a template upon it as the overt essentialists are.

Given this, an essentialised alternative, which seeks to replace the dominant Western culture with an essentialised African rival, meets the same objection as Kipling's essentialism. It liberates no-one – it simply replaces one template with another. The term 'Western culture', used routinely by most participants

in the debate, is itself an imposition because it assumes that, in Western Europe and North America, there is only one way of thinking and seeing, when in reality there are many. Similarly, there is no 'African culture' – there are numerous African cultures and to impose on Africans one cultural understanding as the only one is itself a form of colonisation [1]. In Africa, as in the 'West', culture is inevitably contested – claims by the powerful that particular practices are culturally embedded may be challenged by alternative understandings of what a particular culture expects (Nomboniso Gasa quoted in Breytenbach, 2006).

India is, of course, no different: Nandy argues that an authentic anti-colonial position would need to recognise that 'culturally, it is a choice neither between the East and the West nor between the North and the South. It is a choice – and a battle – between the Apollonian and the Dionysian *within* India and *within* the West' (Nandy, 2005: 74) [2]. To be Indian – or African and European – is not to endorse a particular view of the world since, within each, rivals contend and no particular view can claim authentic indigeneity. Not only is ideological pluralism a constant feature of cultures – it is essential for their survival and growth: 'A plurality of ideologies can always be accommodated within a single lifestyle. Fittingly so; a living culture has to live and it has an obligation to itself, not to its analysts. Even less does it have any obligation to conform to a model' (Nandy, 2005: 82).

And so, opposing to the current dominant culture an essentialised 'African culture' which ignores alternatives or, worse, suppresses them by imposing on (African) doubters and dissenters a mandatory way of thinking does not reject the dominant colonial culture – it replaces it with a home-grown culture every bit as inclined to imposition as the dominant variety. Hybridity and syncretism are equally impossible under both templates. Despite the differences between Kipling's essentialism and the colonial culture which currently dominates South Africa, Nandy's critique applies to both. The core features of both is not that they are Western and so the antidote to both is not to be as 'African' as possible. It is, rather, imposition and exclusion (which is arguably more severe in the current version because indigenous alternatives are not patronised, as they are by apartheid and Kipling – they are removed from consciousness). The alternative cannot be a new form of imposition and

exclusion – it must, rather, be a view which is built on inclusion and in opening cultural and intellectual horizons to all influences in an attempt to build an authentic Africanness. It means recovering and validating those strains in indigenous understandings which validate hybrid, syncretic, and inclusive ways of seeing, thinking, and doing which – like Nandy's non-modern Indians – take from the dominant culture what is useful while rejecting that which is not.

Decolonisation, not Recolonisation

By now, the implications of Nandy's argument for current decolonisation debates should be apparent. But it is necessary to expand on them to avoid ambiguity. To state the obvious (which, in the current intellectual climate, needs to be stated), this is not an argument against resisting intellectual and cultural colonisation. On the contrary, it argues that colonisation's grip on our thinking may well be even more insidious than we imagined because many of the loudest current complaints against it may be deeply influenced by the colonial view of the world. It is, if anything, an argument for a more thorough decolonisation than those currently on offer. It insists that far more is needed than the adoption of 'African' ways of thinking and doing which may turn out to be as inauthentic as Kipling's or apartheid's fraudulent vision of the 'real' African, the cultural equivalents of the zealot's Polish frock coat mentioned earlier.

In essence, it argues that the core of intellectual or cultural colonisation is that it imposes and excludes. Its antidote cannot, therefore, be to re-impose and to re-exclude. The problem with the dominant form of South African colonisation is not that it sees value in ideas and cultural production which originate in 'the West'. It is, rather, that it values only the West and robs of legitimacy other ways of seeing and doing (including those within the 'West' which do not justify continued cultural colonisation). It rejects hybridity, syncretism and cultural pluralism because they import 'inferior' strands into the 'only and true' culture. Besides imposing mental and emotional burdens on the colonised, it silences their voices not because it is 'unAfrican' but because, beneath a veneer of tolerance, it insists that there is only one way of thinking about and seeing the world. To colonise is to close down and to suppress, whatever

the identity of the coloniser and the colonised.

Many of the purported antidotes on offer would perpetuate this practice in the name of offering a radical alternative. A 'real African culture' which, as it inevitably must if it makes this claim, suppresses the diversity of actual African cultures, the differences of perspective included within them, and the inevitable influence of Asian and European cultures on them, does not decolonise – it recolonises because it imposes and excludes. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that it prompts the phenomenon noted earlier, in which Black voices can be silenced by the charge that they are not Black enough. As Nandy shows, this 'decolonisation' and its claim that we can be 'truly African' only if we reject all Western thought and deny all difference between us does not decolonise at all – it retains the barriers between the 'West' and the rest while ostensibly choosing to be on the 'right' rather than the 'wrong' side of a ghetto which remains firmly in the heart and mind of the rebel.

The really radical alternative insists on not being part of any ghetto at all. It rejects essentialism, imposition, and exclusion. It seeks not to rid our minds of all that is 'Western' but to open them to all that is African (and Asian and European and Latin American). It seeks not to create a new essentialism but to open our minds to the full range of alternatives and so to allow the emergence of a plural, syncretic, and hybrid understanding which is the real antithesis of colonisation. Fortunately, there are in the current South African debate voices which recognise this. Thus, one advocate of intellectual decolonisation observes that: 'Western modes and forms of knowledge are important, but they are not the only valid or viable kinds; other forms of modern knowledge and thought, just as advanced and even ground-breaking, are available in cultures and civilisations the world over' (Omoyele, 2017). This is clearly a non-essentialist understanding which seeks to broaden, not narrow, horizons and which opens the way to hybrid understandings.

A more systematic account of what may be possible is offered by this description of the Africanisation programme of the Johannesburg alternative education centre, Khanya College. 'In contrast to some proponents of Africanisation today', the authors observe, 'Khanya College did not disregard so-called Western knowledge. Instead it drew the best from

critical thinkers worldwide to develop students' own critical insights. Some students were political activists who were accepted on the basis of their community involvement rather than strictly academic results. At Khanya, their political work was linked to more formal modes of critical analysis'. It also 'taught students the curriculum they needed to know how to succeed in a white, elite university. The students were introduced to the dominant discourses and practices within elite universities; they were taught to understand and evaluate these practices. Then they were supported in finding the tools to challenge such practices'. This, they add, 'shows how a curriculum can be Africanised without essentialising what it means to be African and what African knowledge is' (Adriansen, Madsen, and Naidoo, 2017).

It is significant that Khanya sees its approach as one which explicitly 'Africanises' rather than decolonises. For it, intellectual pluralism and hybridity are essentially African and to maintain a curriculum which includes insights from all cultural traditions is a form of Africanisation. Just as Nandy suggests that hybridity is essentially Indian and offers a textured account of Indian cultural themes which demonstrate this, so Khanya insists that it is entirely African. This invites the retrieval of those themes in African cultural understandings which seek to break down walls rather than to erect them. It is equally significant that Khanya's approach highlights two reasons why cultural essentialism imposes new controls over the colonised rather than eliminating control.

The first is the perhaps trite but sometimes forgotten point that alternatives to dominant thinking are impossible without an engagement with that thinking. Anti-colonial thinkers have, of course, developed their alternates through a careful critical reading of colonial writing, a task they would have been unable to undertake had they been persuaded that a truly anti-colonial mode of thinking requires no engagement with 'Western' thought. The second is that one of the many flaws in the essentialist understanding of decolonisation is that it ignores the power which is wielded within cultures. Khanya's commitment to including political activists without the required formal qualifications indicates a desire to challenge the use of power to dominate and to create educational models which allow that challenge. Thorough decolonisation is, as Khanya shows, not

only about rejecting imposition by engaging with all thought. It is also about engaging with power to ensure that new patterns of domination do not replace the old.

In these understandings lies a decolonisation which expands rather than narrows boundaries and which recognises Nandy's warning against a purported alternative which merely mimics the imposition and the essentialism of that which it claims to replace. The task of fleshing out a detailed decolonisation strategy which recognises this is an urgent priority.

Notes

[1] See, for example, the heated debate on whether consensus decision-making is inherent to African political culture (Wiredu, 1997; Hountondji, 2009: 6)

[2] For the distinction between Apollonian and Dionysian cultures see Benedict, 1932

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