

## COLONIZATION OF THE MIND

Ashis Nandy

The following text is made up of extracts from *The Intimate Enemy* (Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1987, pp. ix-xii, 1-4, 7, 10, 100-102). The book consists of two lengthy essays: 'The Psychology of Colonialism: Sex, Age and Ideology in British India', and 'The Uncolonized Mind: A Post-colonial View of India and the West'. The author explores the myths, fantasies and psychological defences that went into the colonial culture, particularly the polarities that shaped the colonial theory of progress: the male versus the female, the adult versus the child, the scientific versus the irrational, and the historical versus the ahistorical. These secular hierarchies gave new legitimacy to modern oppression, defining the modern West as the model of all social change, and Western man as the ideal for the despotic Oriental. They also identified as 'genuine' the non-West, which, even in opposition, conformed to Western norms of dissent.

Ashis Nandy also describes the undercurrent of resistance that broke the rules of 'proper' Westernized dissent and protected the indigenous vision of an alternative future. He shows how India's cultural options were kept open through critical traditionalism rather than through Western modernism.

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Modern colonialism won its great victories not so much through its military and technological prowess as through its ability to create secular hierarchies incompatible with the traditional order. These hierarchies opened up new vistas for many, particularly for those exploited or cornered within the traditional order. To them the new order looked like — and here lay its psychological pull — the first step towards a more just and equal world. That was why some of the finest critical minds in Europe — and in the East — were to

### The Colonization of the Imaginary in Mexico

Serge Gruzinski's book on the role of the Church in 'the colonization of the imaginary' in Mexico should be read in connection with Ashis Nandy's article. In this important study, the author shows how the Church set out to use the emotions, the fear, the anguish of populations by instilling into their minds the concepts of sin and damnation. Ritual techniques such as confession and penitence led to the full assimilation of the Christian themes of salvation and redemption. For Gruzinski, although this colonization seldom succeeds in destroying the springs of indigenous creativity, it does succeed more than often in weaving indissoluble ties between indigenous cultures and the imported ones. See Suggested Readings.

feel that colonialism, by introducing modern structures into the barbaric world, would open up the non-West to the modern critical-analytic spirit.

Like the 'hideous heathen god who refused to drink nectar except from the skulls of murdered men', History, Karl Marx felt, would produce out of oppression, violence and cultural dislocation not merely new technological and social forces but also a new social consciousness in Asia and Africa. It would be critical in the sense in which the Western tradition of social criticism — from Vico to Marx — had been critical and it would be rational in the sense in which post-Cartesian Europe had been rational. The ahistorical primitives would one day, the expectation went, learn to see themselves as masters of nature and, hence, as masters of their own fate.

Many, many decades later, in the aftermath of that marvel of modern technology called the Second World War and perhaps that modern encounter of cultures called Vietnam, it has become obvious that the drive for mastery over men is not merely a by-product of a faulty political economy but also of a world-view which believes in the absolute superiority of the human over the non-human and the sub-human, the masculine over the feminine, the adult over the child, the historical over the ahistorical, and the modern or progressive over the traditional or the savage. It has become more and more apparent that genocides, eco-disasters and ethnocides are but the underside of corrupt sciences and psychopathic technologies wedded to new secular hierarchies, which have reduced major civilizations to the status of a set of empty rituals. The ancient forces of human greed and violence, one recognizes, have merely found a new legitimacy in anthropocentric doctrines of secular salvation, in the ideologies of progress, normality and hyper-masculinity, and in theories of cumulative growth of science and technology.

This awareness has not made everyone give up his theory of progress, but it has given confidence to a few to look askance at the old universalism within which the earlier critiques of colonialism were offered. It is now

possible for some to combine fundamental social criticism with a defence of non-modern cultures and traditions. It is possible to speak of the plurality of critical traditions and of human rationality. At long last we seem to have recognized that Descartes is not the last word on reason, nor Marx that on the critical spirit.

The awareness has come at a time when the attack on the non-modern cultures has become a threat to their survival. As this century with its blood-stained record draws to a close, the nineteenth-century dream of one world has re-emerged, this time as a nightmare. It haunts us with the prospect of a fully homogenized, technologically controlled, absolutely hierarchized world, defined by polarities like the modern and the primitive, the secular and the non-secular, the scientific and the non-scientific, the expert and the layman, the normal and the abnormal, the developed and the underdeveloped, the vanguard and the led, the liberated and the saveable.

This idea of a brave new world was first tried out in the colonies. Its carriers were people who, unlike the rapacious first generation of bandit-kings who conquered the colonies, sought to be helpful. They were well-meaning, hard-working, middle-class missionaries, liberals, modernists, and believers in science, equality and progress. The bandit-kings, presumably like bandit-kings everywhere, robbed, maimed and killed; but sometimes they did so without a civilizing mission and mostly with only crude concepts of racism and *untermensch*. They faced – and expected to face – other civilizations with their versions of middle kingdoms and barbarians; the pure and the impure; the *kuffis* and the *moshtraks*; and the *yamanas* and the *mlechas*. However vulgar, cruel or stupid it might have once been, that racism now faces defeat. It is now time to turn to the second form of colonization, the one which at least six generations of the Third World have learnt to view as a prerequisite for their liberation. This colonialism colonizes minds in addition to bodies and it releases forces within the colonized societies to alter their cultural priorities once and for all. In the process, it helps generalize the concept of the modern West from a geographical and temporal entity to a psychological category. The West is now everywhere, within the West and outside; in structures and in minds.

This is primarily the story of the second colonization and resistances to it: after all, we are concerned with a colonialism which survives the demise of empires. At one time, the second colonization legitimized the first. Now, it is independent of its roots. Even those who battle the first colonialism often guiltily embrace the second. They caution us that conventional anti-colonialism, too, could be an apologia for the colonization of minds.

The idea of psychological resistance to colonialism should be taken seriously. But that implies some new responsibilities, too. Today, when 'Westernization' has become a pejorative word, there have reappeared on the stage subtler and more sophisticated means of acculturation. They produce not merely models of conformity but also models of 'official' dissent. It is

## Amílcar Cabral: Culture and People's Roots

Whatever may be the ideological or idealistic characteristics of cultural expression, culture is an essential element of the history of a people. Culture is, perhaps, the product of this history just as the flower is the product of a plant. Like history, or because it is history, culture has as its material base the level of the productive forces and the mode of production. Culture plunges its roots into the physical reality of the environmental humus in which it develops, and it reflects the organic nature of the society, which may be more or less influenced by external factors. History allows us to know the nature and extent of the imbalances and conflicts (economic, political and social) which characterize the evolution of a society; culture allows us to know the dynamic syntheses which have been developed and established by social conscience to resolve these conflicts at each stage of its evolution, in the search for survival and progress.

Just as happens with the flower in a plant, in culture there lies the capacity (or the responsibility) for forming and fertilizing the seedling which will assure the continuity of history, at the same time assuring the prospects for evolution and progress of the society in question. Thus it is understood that imperialist domination, by denying the historical development of the dominated people, necessarily also denies their cultural development. It is also understood why imperialist domination, like all foreign domination, for its own security requires cultural oppression and the attempt at direct or indirect liquidation of the essential elements of the culture of the dominated people.

The experience of colonial domination shows that, in the effort to perpetuate exploitation, the colonizers not only create a system to repress the cultural life of the colonized people; they also provoke and develop the cultural alienation of a part of the population, either by so-called assimilation of indigenous people, or by creating a social gap between the indigenous elites and the popular masses. As a result of this process of dividing or of deepening the divisions in the society, it happens that a considerable part of the population, notably the urban or peasant *petite bourgeoisie*, assimilates the colonizer's mentality, considers itself culturally superior to its own people and ignores or looks down upon their cultural values. This situation, characteristic of the majority of colonized intellectuals, is consolidated by increases in the social privileges of the assimilated or alienated group, with direct implications for the behaviour of individuals in this group in relation to the liberation movement. A reconversion of minds – of mental set – is thus indispensable to the true integration of people into the liberation movement. Such reconversion – re-Africanization, in our case – may take place before the struggle, but it is completed only during the course of the struggle, through daily contact with the popular masses in the communion of sacrifice required by the struggle.

Extracts from a speech on 'National Liberation and Culture',  
delivered on 20 February 1970 at Syracuse University, New York.  
Translated from the French by Maureen Webster.

### Edward Said on a Teaching of Hugo of St Victor

To Gain the Independence and Detachment of Someone Whose Homeland is 'Sweet', but Whose Actual Condition Makes it Impossible to Recapture that Sweetness

Those people compelled by the system to play subordinate or imprisoning roles within it emerge as conscious antagonists, disrupting it, proposing claims, advancing arguments that dispute the totalitarian compulsions of the world market. Not everything can be bought off.

All these hybrid counter-energies, at work in many fields, individuals and moments provide a community or culture made up of numerous anti-systemic hints and practices for collective human existence (and neither doctrines nor complete theories) that is not based on coercion or domination...

I find myself returning again and again to a hauntingly beautiful passage by Hugo of St. Victor, a twelfth-century monk from Saxony:

It is, therefore, a source of great virtue for the practised mind to learn, bit by bit, first to change about in visible and transitory things, so that afterwards it may be able to leave them behind altogether. The person who finds his homeland sweet is still a tender beginner; he to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong; but he is perfect to whom the entire world is as a foreign place. The tender soul has fixed his love on one spot in the world; the strong person has extended his love to all places; the perfect man has extinguished his.

Erich Auerbach, the great German scholar who spent the years of World War Two as an exile in Turkey, cites this passage as a model for anyone – man and woman – wishing to transcend the restraints of imperial or national or provincial limits. Only through this attitude can a historian, for example, begin to grasp human experience and its written records in all their diversity and particularity; otherwise one would remain committed more to the exclusions and reactions of prejudice than to the negative freedom of real knowledge. But note that Hugo twice makes it clear that the 'strong' or 'perfect' person achieves independence and detachment by *working through* attachments, not by rejecting them. Exile is predicated on the existence of, love for, and a real bond with one's native place; the universal truth of exile is not that one has lost that love or home, but that inherent in each is an unexpected, unwelcome loss. Regard experiences then *as if* they were about to disappear: what is it about them that anchors or roots them in reality? What would you save of them, what would you give up, what would you recover? To answer such questions you must have the independence and detachment of someone whose homeland is 'sweet', but whose actual condition makes it impossible to recapture that sweetness, and even less possible to derive satisfaction from substitutes furnished by illusion or dogma, whether deriving from pride in one's heritage or from certainty about who 'we' are.

No one today is purely one thing. Labels like Indian, or woman, or Muslim, or American are not more than starting-points, which it followed into actual experience for only a moment are quickly left behind. Imperialism consolidated the mixture of cultures and identities on a global scale. But its worse and most paradoxical gift was to allow people to believe that they were only, mainly, exclusively, white, or black, or Western, or Oriental. Yet just as human beings make their own history, they also make their cultures and ethnic identities. No one can deny the persisting continuities of long traditions, sustained habitations, national languages and cultural geographies, but there seems no reason except fear and prejudice to keep insisting on their separation and distinctiveness, as if that was all human life was about. Survival in fact is about the connections between things; in Eliot's phrase, reality cannot be deprived of the 'other echoes [that] inhabit the garden'. It is more rewarding – and more difficult – to think concretely and sympathetically, contrapuntally, about others than only about 'us'. But this also means not trying to rule others, not trying to classify them or put them in hierarchies, above all, not constantly reiterating how 'our' culture or country is number one (or *not* number one, for that matter). For the intellectual there is quite enough of value to do without *that*.

From *Culture and Imperialism*, Vintage Books, New York, 1994, pp. 335–6. (See Box on p. 178 for Edward Said.)

possible today to be anti-colonial in a way which is specified and promoted by the modern world-view as 'proper', 'sane' and 'rational'. Even when in opposition, that dissent remains predictable and controlled. It is also possible today to opt for a non-West which itself is a construction of the West. One can then choose between being the Orientalist's despot, to combine Karl Wittfogel with Edward Said, and the revolutionary's loving subject, to combine Camus with George Orwell. And for those who do not like the choice, there is, of course, Cecil Rhodes' and Rudyard Kipling's noble, half-savage, half-child, compared to whom the much-hated Brown Sahib seems more brown than sahib. Even in enmity these choices remain forms of homage to the victors. Let us not forget that the most violent denunciation of the West produced by Frantz Fanon is written in the elegant style of a Jean-Paul Sartre. The West has not merely produced modern colonialism; it informs most interpretations of colonialism. It colours even this interpretation of interpretation....

The first differentia of colonialism is a state of mind in the colonizers and the colonized, a colonial consciousness which includes the sometimes unrealizable wish to make economic and political profits from the colonies, but other elements too. The political economy of colonization is of course

important, but the crudity and inanity of colonialism are principally expressed in the sphere of psychology, and, to the extent the variables used to describe the states of mind under colonialism have themselves become politicized since the entry of modern colonialism on the world scene, in the sphere of political psychology. The following will explore some of these psychological contours of colonialism in the rulers and the ruled and try to define colonialism as a shared culture which may not always begin with the establishment of alien rule in a society and end with the departure of the alien rulers from the colony. The example I shall use will be that of India, where a colonial political economy began to operate seventy-five years before the full-blown ideology of British imperialism became dominant, and where thirty-five years after the formal ending of the Raj, the ideology of colonialism is still triumphant in many sectors of life.

Such disjunctions between politics and culture became possible because it is only partly true that a colonial situation produces a theory of imperialism to justify itself. Colonialism is also a psychological state rooted in earlier forms of social consciousness in both the colonizers and the colonized. It represents a certain cultural continuity and carries a certain cultural baggage.

First, it includes codes which both the rulers and the ruled can share. The main function of these codes is to alter the original cultural priorities on both sides and bring to the centre of the colonial culture subcultures previously recessive or subordinate in the two confronting cultures. Concurrently, the codes remove from the centre of each of the cultures subcultures previously salient in them. It is these fresh priorities which explain why some of the most impressive colonial systems have been built by societies ideologically committed to open political systems, liberalism and intellectual pluralism. That this split parallels a basic contradiction within the modern scientific-rational world-view, which, while trying to remain rational within its confines, has consistently refused to be rational vis-à-vis other traditions of knowledge after acquiring world dominance, is only the other side of the same explanation.<sup>1</sup> It also explains why colonialism never seems to end with formal political freedom. As a state of mind, colonialism is an indigenous process released by external forces. Its sources lie deep in the minds of the rulers and the ruled. Perhaps that which begins in the minds of men must also end in the minds of men.

Second, the culture of colonialism presumes a particular style of managing, ~~dissent~~. Obviously, a colonial system perpetuates itself by inducing the colonized, through socio-economic and psychological rewards and punishments, to accept new social norms and cognitive categories. But these outer incentives and disincentives are invariably noticed and challenged: they become the overt indicators of oppression and dominance. More dangerous and permanent are the inner rewards and punishments, the secondary psychological gains and losses from suffering and submission under colonialism. They are almost always unconscious and almost always ignored. Particularly strong is

the inner resistance to recognizing the ultimate violence which colonialism does to its victims, namely that it creates a culture in which the ruled are constantly tempted to fight their rulers within the psychological limits set by the latter. It is not an accident that the specific variants of the concepts with which many anti-colonial movements in our times have worked have often been the products of the imperial culture itself, and, even in opposition, these movements have paid homage to their respective cultural origins. I have in mind not only the overt Apollonian codes of Western liberalism that have often motivated the elites of the colonized societies but also their covert Dionysian counterparts in the concepts of statecraft, everyday politics, effective political methods and utopias which have guided revolutionary movements against colonialism....

Crucial to this cultural co-optation was the process psychoanalysis calls identification with the aggressor. In any oppressive situation, the process became the flip side of the theory of progress, an ontogenetic legitimacy for an ego defence often used by a normal child in an environment of childhood dependency to confront inescapable dominance by physically more powerful adults enjoying total legitimacy. In the colonial culture, identification with the aggressor bound the rulers and the ruled in an unbreakable dyadic relationship. The Raj saw the Indians as crypto-barbarians who needed to further civilize themselves. It saw British rule as an agent of progress and as a mission. Many Indians in turn saw their salvation in becoming more like the British, in friendship or in enmity. They may not have fully shared the British idea of the martial races – the hyper-masculine, manifestly courageous, superbly loyal Indian castes and subcultures mirroring the British middle-class sexual stereotypes – but they did resurrect the ideology of the martial races latent in the traditional Indian concept of statecraft and gave the idea a new centrality....

In such a culture, colonialism was not seen as an absolute evil. For the subjects, it was a product of one's own emasculation and defeat in legitimate power politics. For the rulers, colonial exploitation was an incidental and regrettable by-product of a philosophy of life that was in harmony with superior forms of political and economic organization. This was the consensus the rulers of India sought, consciously or unconsciously. They could not successfully rule a continent-sized polity while believing themselves to be moral cripples. They had to build bulwarks against a possible sense of guilt produced by a disjunction between their actions and what were till then, in terms of important norms of their own culture, 'true' values. On the other hand, their subjects could not collaborate on a long-term basis unless they had some acceptance of the ideology of the system, either as players or as counterplayers. This is the only way they could preserve a minimum of self-esteem in a situation of unavoidable injustice.

When such a cultural consensus grows, the main threat to the colonizers is bound to become the latent fear that the colonized will reject the consensus

and, instead of trying to redeem their 'masculinity' by becoming the counter-players of the rulers according to the established rules, will discover an alternative frame of reference within which the oppressed do not seem weak, degraded and distorted men trying to break the monopoly of the rulers on a fixed quantity of machismo. If this happens, the colonizers begin to live with the fear that the subjects might begin to see their rulers as morally and culturally inferior, and feed this information back to the rulers.<sup>2</sup> Colonialism minus a civilizational mission is no colonialism at all. It handicaps the colonizer much more than it handicaps the colonized....

### GANDHI: THE UNCOLONIZED MIND

Gandhi was one of the few who successfully articulated in politics the consciousness which had remained untamed by British rule in India. He transformed the debate on Indian hypocrisy into a simultaneous text on British self-doubt. In spite of his occasionally strident moralism, he recognized that once the hegemony of a theory of imperialism without winners and losers was established, imperialism had lost out on cognitive, in addition to ethical, grounds. To the Kiplings this was a threat. They liked to see colonialism as a moral statement on the superiority of some cultures and inferiority of others. For this reason, they were even willing to accept that some had the right to speak of the superiority of Indian culture over the Western. Cultural relativism by itself is not incompatible with imperialism, as long as one's culture's categories are backed by political, economic and technological power.

Gandhi queered the pitch on two planes. He admitted that colonialism was a moral issue and took the battle to Kipling's home ground by judging colonialism by Christian values and declaring it to be an absolute evil. On the second plane he made his 'odd' cognitive assessment of the gains and losses from colonialism a part of his critique of modernity and found the British wanting in both ethics and rationality. This threatened the internal legitimacy of the ruling culture by splitting open the private wound of every Kipling and quasi-Kipling to whom rulership was a means of hiding one's moral self in the name of the higher morality of history, in turn seen as an embodiment of human rationality. A naive French imperialist once said in the context of Africa, 'I know that I must take pride in my blood. When a superior man ceases to believe himself, he actually ceases to be superior ... When a superior race ceases to believe itself a chosen race, it actually ceases to be a chosen race.'<sup>3</sup> Gandhi attacked both the cognitive and moral frames of this insecure, fragile sense of chosenness.

In this respect, he differed from the other anti-Kiplings to whom colonialism was a moral statement. The final morality to them, too, was 'history', and the immorality of colonialism for them, too, was mitigated by the

historical role of colonialism as an instrument of progress. Either through a cultural renaissance set off by the impact of a more vigorous culture (as many of the nineteenth-century social and religious reformers in India and recent modernists in our times have described it) or through the growth of modern capitalism on the way to the full-blown liberalism or communism (*à la* utilitarians and Karl Marx), the modern idea of history has implicitly accepted the cultural superiority – or at least the more advanced cultural state – of the colonizing power.<sup>4</sup> It has thus endorsed one of the major axioms of the colonial theory the Kiplings advanced. As against this, Gandhi reaffirmed an autonomous world-view which refused to separate facts from values and refused to see colonialism as an immoral pathway to a valued state of being. 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 lifestyles, which had, unfortunately for both the West and India, become cancerous by virtue of its disproportionate power and spread.

### NOTES

1. On this other contradiction, see Paul Feyerabend, *Science in a Free Society*, NLB, London, 1978. In the context of India and China this point emerges clearly from Claude Alvares, *Homo Faber: Technology and Culture in India, China and the West*, 1500–1972, Allied Publishers, New Delhi, 1979. See also Ashis Nandy, 'Science, Authoritarianism and Culture: On the Scope and Limits of Isolation Outside the Clinic', M.N. Roy Memorial Lecture, 1980, Seminar, May 1981; and Shiv Viswanathan, 'Science and the sense of Other', paper written for the colloquium on New Ideologies for Science and Technology, Lokayan Project 1982, Delhi, mimeograph.
2. I have briefly dealt with this in my 'Oppression and Human Liberation: Towards a Third World Utopia', in *Tradition, Tyranny and Utopias*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1987; see an earlier version in *Alternatives*, vol. 4, no. 2, 1978–9, pp. 165–80. On this theme see the sensitive writing of Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*.
3. Psichari-Soldier-of-Africa, quoted in Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1977, p. 29.
4. Among Indians, elements of such an awareness can be found for example in Rammohun Roy, *The English Works*, vols I–VI, edited by Kalidas Nag and Debojyoti Burman, Sadharon Brahmo Samaj, Calcutta, 1945–8; Bankimchandra Chatterji, *Ratanavali*, Vols 1 and 2, Sahitya Samsad, Calcutta, 1958 (see especially 'Anandamath', pp. 715–88); Swami Vivekananda, *Pracya O Paschatya*, Advaita Ashrama, Almora, 1898; and Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, Macmillan, London, 1951.