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The Legacies of Bandung

Decolonization and the Politics of Culture

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THE URGE TO decolonize, to be rid of the colonizer in every possible way, was internal to all anticolonial criticism after the end of World War I. Postcolonial critics of our times, on the other hand, have emphasized how the colonial situation produced forms of hybridity or mimicry that necessarily escaped the Manichean logic of the colonial encounter.¹ It is not only this intellectual shift that separates anticolonial and postcolonial criticism. The two genres have also been separated by the political geographies and histories of their origins. After all, the demand for political and intellectual decolonization arose mainly in the colonized countries among the intellectuals of anticolonial movements. Postcolonial writing and criticism, on the other hand, was born in the West. They were influenced by anticolonial criticism but their audiences were at the beginning in the West itself, for these writings have been an essential part of the struggle to make the liberal-capitalist (and, initially, mainly Anglo-American) Western democracies more democratic with respect to their immigrant, minority, and indigenous—though there have been tensions between these groups—populations. Race has thus figured as a category central to postcolonial criticism whereas its position in anticolonial

discourse varies. The question of race is crucial to the formulations of Fanon, Césaire, or C. L. R. James, for example, but it is not as central to how a Gandhi or a Tagore thought about colonial domination. If historically, then, anticolonialism has been on the wane since the 1960s and displaced by postcolonial discourse in the closing decades of the 20th century, it has been further pointed out by more-recent critics of postcolonial theory and writing that even the postcolonial moment is now behind us, its critical clamor having been drowned in turn by the mighty tide of globalization.²

This seemingly easy periodization of the 20th century—anticolonialism giving way to postcolonial criticism giving way to globalization—is unsettled if we look closely at discussions about decolonization that marked the 1950s and the 1960s. Ideas regarding decolonization were dominated by two concerns. One was development. The other I will call “dialogue.” Many anticolonial thinkers considered colonialism as something of a broken promise. European rule, it was said, promised modernization but did not deliver on it. As Césaire said in his *Discourse on Colonialism* (1953):

[I]t is the indigenous peoples of Africa and Asia who are demanding schools, and colonialist Europe which refuses them . . . it is the African who is asking for ports and roads, and colonialist Europe which is niggardly on this score . . . it is the colonized man who wants to move forward, and the colonizer who holds things back.³

This was the developmentalist side of decolonization whereby anticolonial thinkers came to accept different versions of modernization theory that in turn made the West into a model for everyone to follow. This today may very well seem dated but it has not lost its relevance. One consequence of this developmentalism was a cultural style of politics that I call *pedagogical*. In the pedagogical mode, the very performance of politics reenacted civilizational or cultural hierarchies: between nations, between classes, or between the leaders and the masses. Those lower down in the hierarchy were meant to learn from those higher up. Leaders, when they spoke in this mode, were like teachers. But there was also another side to decolonization that has received less scholarly attention. Anticolonial thinkers often devoted

a great deal of time to the question of whether or how a global conversation of humanity could genuinely acknowledge cultural diversity without distributing such diversity over a hierarchical scale of civilization—that is to say, an urge toward cross-cultural dialogue without the baggage of imperialism. Let me call it the dialogical side of decolonization. Here, unlike on the pedagogical side, there was no one model to follow. Different thinkers took different positions, and it is the richness of their contradictions that speaks directly to the fundamental concerns of both postcolonial criticism and globalization theory. That indeed may be where the global movement toward decolonization left us a heritage useful for the world, even today.

In what follows, I track these two aspects of the language of decolonization, starting with the historic conference in Bandung, where some six hundred leaders and delegates of twenty-nine newly independent countries from Asia and Africa met between April 18 and 24, 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. (On the conference itself, see also the introduction to this volume by Christopher Lee.)⁴ It may be timely to remind ourselves of a recent moment in human history when the idea of nation was something people aspired to and the idea of empire wielded absolutely no moral force. Today the opposite rules: the theme of empire has made a triumphant return in historiography whereas the nation-state has fallen out of favor. 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.⁵ For some critics from the Left too, empire, variously understood, has become a key operative term for understanding global relations of domination as they exist at present.⁶ It may be salutary today to revisit a time when both the category *empire* and actual, historical European empires truly seem to have seen the sun set over them.

Dateline: 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 this would be an occasion simply for criticizing the West. Even Gunnar Myrdal, in contributing the foreword to the book that Wright wrote as a result of his experience at Bandung, 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.”⁷ Both Myrdal and Wright’s Parisian friends appear to have misjudged what decolonization was all about. It was not a simple project of cultivating a sense of disengagement with the West. There was no 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.”⁸ It was in fact the newsmen from his own country that attended the conference who, Wright felt, “had no philosophy of history with which to understand Bandung.”⁹

I will shortly come to this question of the philosophy of history that marked the discourse of decolonization. For now, let me simply note the historical moment when 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 defense pacts with the United States: Pakistan, Thailand, and the Philippines. Some others belonged to the Socialist Bloc. Bandung was attempting to sustain a sense of Asian-African affinity in the face of such disagreements. 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 December 18, 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.¹⁰

The leaders who got together in Bandung thus came from a divided world. 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 Romulo, for example, found Nehru to be a “highly cultivated intellect” but full of “pedantry” (and one might add opposed—as a believer in nonalignment—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,” writes Romulo. Nehru “typified” for him “the affectations of cultural superiority induced by a conscious identification 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.” India, Romulo judged, was “not so much anti-West as it is anti-American.”¹¹

The memoir of Dr. Roeslan Abdulgani, once Jakarta’s ambassador to the United States and an organizer of the conference, reflects some of the competitive currents that characterized the relationship between the Indian and the Indonesian leadership and officials. “The cleverness of the Indian delegation,” he writes, “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.”¹² Nehru, in turn, had trouble trusting

the Indonesians with the responsibility of organizing the conference. He wrote to B. F. H. B. Tyabji, the Indian Ambassador to Indonesia, on February 20, 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. . . ."13 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 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."14

Apart from the 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—and shocked Nehru—when on the afternoon of Thursday, April 21, 1955, referring to the Eastern European countries he 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?"15 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."16

What then held the conference together? Appadorai, the Indian member of the joint secretariat set up for the conference and a member of the Indian Foreign Service, was right in saying that “[i]n the realm of ideas . . . 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.”¹⁷ 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 to “it.” From Nehru to Romulo, the message was clear. As Romulo 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.”¹⁸ Many of the speakers at the conference inserted Bandung into a line of other international conferences held in the first half of the 20th century that signaled the spirit of anti-imperialist self-determination among the emergent new nations in Asia or elsewhere. Thus President Sukarno, in his welcoming speech made at the opening of the conference on April 18, referred to “the conference of the ‘League Against Imperialism and Colonialism,’ which was held in Brussels almost thirty years ago.”¹⁹ Writing soon after the conference Appadorai mentions “the first [ever] expression of an Asian sentiment” which he “traced to August 1926 when the Asian delegations to the non-official International Conference for Peace held at Bierville declared in a memorandum that Asia must have its rightful place in the consideration of world problems.” The Asian Relations Conference in Delhi in March–April 1947, under the auspices of the Indian Council of World Affairs, was mentioned as yet another precedence.²⁰

A pictorial album produced soon after the conference from the Netherlands on the theme nationalism and colonialism in Africa and Asia thus characterized the meeting at Bandung: “The end of Western supremacy has never been demonstrated more clearly.”²¹ Even the Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai’s much anticipated and controversial participation in the conference succeeded since his speeches

partook of this spirit of anti-imperialism. His message that China had no plans for dominating her neighbors and did not intend to spread her influence through the overseas Chinese community, “that the small nations of Asia had nothing to fear from their great neighbour, China,” resonated with the spirit that held the conference together.²² This was indeed a time when, whatever its meaning, any conscious project of imperialism had no takers.

The organizers went to some trouble to make sure that the anti-imperialism undergirding the conference was open to political ideologies on both sides of the cold war divide. Even the opening day of the conference was chosen with American sensitivity in mind. 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 the US 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 same, only the years were different?²³

Indeed, President Sukarno made this American connection on the very first day of the conference. Armed with the information provided by the American Embassy and his own staff, he said: “The battle

against colonialism has been a long one, and do you know that today is a famous anniversary of that battle? On April 18th, 1775, Paul Revere rode at midnight through the New England countryside warning of the approach of the British troops and the opening of the American war of Independence, the first successful anti-colonial war in history.”²⁴

The Pedagogical Style of Developmental Politics

The discourse and politics of decolonization in the nations that met in Bandung often displayed an uncritical emphasis on modernization. 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 is reflected in the very title of a 1971 biography of Tanzanian leader Julius Nyerere: *We Must Run while They Walk*.²⁵ The accent on modernization made the figure of the engineer one of the most eroticized figures of the postcolonial developmentalist imagination. Even the cursory prose of a stray remark by Richard Wright to a friend in Indonesia catches this precedence of the engineer over the poet or the prophet in the very imagination of decolonization. “Indonesia has taken power away from the Dutch,” Wright said, “but she does not know how to use it.” This, he thought, “need not be a Right or Left issue,” but wondered: “Where is the *engineer* who can build a project out of eighty million human lives, a project that can nourish them, sustain them, and yet have their voluntary loyalty?”²⁶

This emphasis on development as a catching-up-with-the-West produced a particular split that marked both the relationship between elite nations and their subaltern counterparts as well as that between elites and subalterns within national boundaries. Just as the emergent nations demanded *political* equality with the 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—in that they had the associated rights—but also as people who were not quite full citizens in that they needed to be educated in the habits and manners of citizens.

This produced a style of politics on the part of the leaders that could only be called *pedagogical*. From Nasser and Nyerere to Sukarno and Nehru, decolonization produced a crop of leaders who saw themselves, fundamentally, as teachers to their nations.

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 August 29, 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. Two, *Jana gana mana* is our national anthem. So it must be sung in loud and clear voices, with eyes open. You must stand erect like soldiers and sing, not hum it under our 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. 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.²⁷

Compare this with what Nyerere said at a mass rally on July 7, 1963, explaining the vice of “pomposity” in the new nation. 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!²⁸

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 there is the reference to “abroad” or “every country in the world” in these speeches. The “voice” of Bharatmata (Mother India) and the “inter-national” world had its audience. Behind the idea of pedagogical politics was the emergent and territorial nation-state putting development ahead of diversity.

Deterritorialization and the Displacement of Pedagogical Politics

If decolonization was thus generally predicated on a worldwide urge on the part of the formerly colonized countries to catch up with Europe (or more broadly the West), one could say that this was a discourse that saw an imaginary Europe as the major agentive force in the world. Decolonization thus may be thought of as the last phase in the history of what Martin Heidegger once called “the Europeanization” of the earth.²⁹ I say “the last phase” since all this was to change

from the late 1960s on, and the pace of change would hasten in the decades to follow.

Some of these changes may be easily tracked from the history of “identity politics” in India since the 1980s and particularly in the last decade. The pedagogical politics of the likes of Nehru, Nasser, or Nyerere, were firmly based on the territorial idea of the nation-state and on the assumption that names and identities involved in politics had clear and discernible historical-cultural references. Words such as *Muslim*, *Scheduled caste*, *tribal* were backed up in India of the British period or in the early years of Independence by academic studies in disciplines such as history and anthropology. It could be said, in other words, that the politics favored by decolonization was modernist in its understanding of representation.³⁰ This entire assumption is now under challenge. Politics of being *dalit* (ex-untouchable or low caste) or “tribal” no longer seek sanction from the realist prose of academic social sciences. Instead, certain deterritorialized, global imaginations of identity have come to be operative, challenging the connections once made between signs and their references.³¹

Two handy examples come from recent Indian debates around the ways leaders of the so-called Dalitbahujan (a coalition of ex-untouchable and low caste) groups and indigenous peoples in India have sought in the last two decades to globalize the politics of caste-oppression and indigeneity. A significant debate on caste broke in the Indian press months before the UN-sponsored “World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance” was held in Durban on August 31, to September 2, 2001. Many of the leaders of the Dalitbahujan groups wanted to use this forum to draw global attention to their problems by declaring that caste-oppression was no different from the oppression related to race; that caste, in effect, was the same as race. Andre Beteille, a respected and liberal anthropologist who sat on the preparatory committee the government of India had set up, resigned in protest arguing that this was “mischievous,” and that all his life-long training in anthropology had taught him that race and caste were very different and unrelated phenomena. A storm of protest was raised by intellectuals sympathetic to the *dalit* cause, their arguments ranging from the proposition that a

“conservative” thinker like Beteille could not appreciate the pragmatics of this globalizing strategy, to the idea that the *dalit* “experience” of caste-oppression was a better source of knowledge than academic “expertise” on the subject.³²

Beteille has also been at the center of arguments related to indigeneity. Whereas tribal groups in India have increasingly sought the appellation “indigenous” in order to make use of the UN Charter on Indigenous Peoples’ Right (which includes the right of self-definition), Beteille (and some other anthropologists) have raised academic objections, arguing that the category *indigenous*, although useful and right in the context of settler-colonial countries, is rendered problematic by facts specific and particular to Indian history. Intellectuals on the other side, however, have pointed out that the political and pragmatic benefits of globalizing these issues far outweigh considerations of historical accuracies. Beteille’s positions in either case, as may be easily imagined, have not endeared him to intellectual supporters of *dalit* or indigenous politics. But even without taking sides, it could be said that whereas Beteille is looking for certain connections between identity tags—*indigenous*, *untouchables*—and the historical claims they implicitly make, his opponents are clearly engaged in developing global and deterritorialized forms of political imagination that precisely breach these connections between signs and their assumed historical/social referents. In other words, one may say that although Beteille still subscribes to a modernist view of representation, the *dalits* and the tribal leaders have found it to their advantage, in these particular cases, to base their quest for further democratization of Indian society politics on premises that are reminiscent of what globalization theorists have said about deterritorialization of identities.³³ Here, clearly, the very democratizing of politics in India has moved it away from the pedagogical model of politics that the Nehruvian vision of decolonization promoted even into the early 1960s. This is not to say that the Nehruvian vision has lost all relevance. But that vision was part of the Europeanization of the earth. The “global” that *dalit* or indigenous politics partake of today no longer conjures a monolithic Europe or the West as the most important agentive force in the world. Under

conditions of globalization, the clash is often between certain norms of modernization or modernity—which took a Western model for granted—and the very global momentum of the forces of democratization. Political leaders are no longer looked upon as “engineers” of their societies.

Why all this has come about in the last few decades is for a future historian to determine. But clearly the theme of European imperialism died a global death about the same time as scholars date the beginnings of the contemporary forms of globalization: the 1970s.³⁴ Vietnam was perhaps the last war for “national liberation” that was seen as delivering a blow to a weak link in an imperial chain that was Western. Other long-term struggles—such as those of the Kurds, the Kashmiris, the Nagas, the Tibetans for self-determination that occurred in a “national” context—would never produce the depth of anticolonial and cross-cultural enthusiasm in the world that Vietnam did. The 1960s and later were also a period of some profoundly democratic changes in the West (some of which have since been reversed). Anticolonial discourse (Fanon, Gandhi, et al.) traveled back to the West at the same time as civil-liberties movements and antiwar demonstrations broke out, alongside movements of indigenous peoples and immigrant groups for cultural sovereignty and recognition. Racist policies on immigration were lifted or modified in countries such as the US and Australia in this period. Battles were joined against racism in the West in the name of multiculturalism (both official and nonofficial). Postcolonial theory emerges from this recirculation of decolonization texts within the West. It cannot be an insignificant fact that Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall, and Isaac Julien, for instance, came together to read Fanon in England of the 1970s and 1980s in the context of a struggle against British racism.³⁵ This was also the period of the rise of poststructuralist and postmodern theories in the West, theories that were, in any case, opposed to the territorial imagination of the nation-state. It was as part of this process that debates began in Anglo-American universities about questioning the canonical texts that had represented the nation or the West, resulting in the emergence of fields such as postcolonial and cultural studies.³⁶

The Dialogical Side of Decolonization

It is our contemporary interests in the circulation of humans, objects, and practices across and beyond the boundaries of the nation-state that makes this other side of decolonization—representing the thoughts of the colonized on conversation across differences—relevant to the concerns of both globalization and postcolonial theory. However, what was said by theorists of decolonization about “dialogue across difference” was often contradictory. But precisely because their debate was of necessity unfinished, it leaves us a rich body of ideas that speak to the concept of cosmopolitanism without seeking any overall mastery over the untamable diversity of human culture.

Long before academics began to talk about “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 colonizing mission. “I felt while at Bandung,” as Wright says,

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. . . . H.L. Mencken has traced the origins of many of our American words and phrases that went to modify English to an extent that we now regard our English tongue in America as the American language. 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 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.³⁷

Clearly ahead of his time, Wright glimpsed a future that would be visible much later only to the generations that would come after Rushdie. Wright’s was a vision of anticolonial cosmopolitanism. English would cease to be the master’s language. Learning it would no longer be a

matter of the colonized Caliban talking back to Prospero, the master. Instead, the vision was that as other languages gradually died into it, English would become plural from within so that it could become the new Babel of the world. The Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe would echo this vision in ten years after Wright articulated it: “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 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.”³⁸

Yet, delivering the Robb lectures—later published as *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986) at the University of Auckland in New Zealand some twenty years after these words were spoken—Ngũgĩ wa Thiongo, the Kenyan writer, adopted a position exactly the opposite of that spelled out by Wright and Achebe. An essay by the Nigerian writer Gabriel Okara in the Africanist journal *Transition* illustrated for Ngũgĩ 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 has 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.

Ngũgĩ 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?”³⁹ He for one experienced this as a “neocolonial 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.”⁴⁰

It is not my purpose to use the positions of Wright and Ngũgĩ to cancel each other out. I think they anticipate two familiar and legitimate responses to possibilities inherent in global conversation: globalization as liberation and globalization as subjugation. Globalization is no one homogeneous thing. It could indeed be both. Leopold Senghor on the other hand—of whose love of French, the reader will remember, Ngũgĩ was no fan—points us in directions that remind us that the ambiguities and the richness of the moment of decolonization were never exhausted by the antinomies set up here by what we have excerpted from Wright and Ngũgĩ. 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. 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 such as “Greek, Latin and French?” He writes: “I know the advantages of these languages because I was brought up on them.” But “the 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.” There follows Senghor’s argument for diversity in the humanities:

[I]t would be good in African secondary schools to make it compulsory to study a vernacular language along with French. We have heard for decades about the “modern humanities.” Why should there not be “African humanities?” Every language, which means every civilization, can provide material for the humanities, because every civilization is the expression, with its own peculiar emphasis, of certain characteristics of humanity. . . . This then is where the real aim of colonization lies. A moral and intellectual cross-fertilization, a spiritual graft.⁴¹

In other words, there is no cross-fertilization without an engagement with difference. 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—humankind in its concrete affiliations to the past—in favor of the figure of the abstract human, so favored by the modernizers, or some globalizers of today, from both the Left and the Right. “Man is not without a homeland,” writes Senghor,

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 Mauritian, 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.⁴²

“Incarnate man”—or man as always-already incarnate—is how Senghor imagines the world's heritage of historical and cultural diversity. It was not a diversity that got in the way of cross-cultural communication, nor was it a diversity that did not matter. For Senghor, one way that diversity could be harnessed in the cause of development is 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 Ngũgĩ. 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 multilingual 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 anticolonial modernizers 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.

Senghor's voice also militates against the tendency in much that is written on globalization today to celebrate “placelessness” as the ultimate goal of human life. Hardt and Negri's argument in their justly

celebrated book *Empire* (2000) often assumes this position: contemporary capitalism makes labor placeless, so let labor use its placelessness to wrest from capital a global right of passage as a preliminary step toward global governance.⁴³ The argument has much to commend in it but it forgets what Senghor reminds us of: the fact that global passage 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. If Hardt and Negri’s analysis takes its bearing from the tradition of the social sciences, Senghor’s thoughts speak squarely to the role that the humanities ought to play in the age of globalization. For it is within the humanities that we study texts for what they tell us about how the “ends of human life” have been debated in different parts of the world. There is nothing essentialist in this exercise. For the argument is not that the “ends of life” are given in a fixed form, once and for all, for a group or a people. The purpose of life is what a group or a people debate endlessly over generations, and in the process they, of course, listen to “outsiders” precisely to find out what is peculiar about themselves. In India, the epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* may be cited as two such texts that have had many recensions over the centuries—pro-women, anti-women, pro-lower-caste, anti-lower-caste and so on—where a certain set of moral issues, endlessly debated, help in the end to create a sense of shared and common past and place. It is the role of the humanities to make these diverse debates and their hermeneutics a part of every person’s citizenly repertoire. Without that there is no cosmopolitanism.

However, the humanities have generally suffered in the modernizing nations of the world—my generation of Indians could testify to the cult of engineering and management that went hand-in-hand with discussions of development—while at least surviving in some of the elite universities of the West in the form of area studies. This is not an argument against area studies in the West. For it may very well be a sad fact today that it is only in the West that modern, non-Western humanities are pursued with some seriousness.⁴⁴ But there

is a risk here. As the late Edward Said demonstrates, the West has seldom performed this task in a manner that transcends its own geopolitical interests. This is why it is all the more important that the developing parts of the world take the humanities seriously. And that is where Senghor's call for a plural tradition of the humanities remains a living legacy for all postcolonial intellectuals both inside and outside the West. The "dialogical" side of the discourse of decolonization, which rings through the writings of Wright, Ngũgĩ, Senghor, and others, helps us to raise for our times the question of the role that the humanities should play in a globalizing world.

Acknowledgments

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Notes

1. The classic statement of this is Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).
2. See, for instance, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 143–59.
3. Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 25.
4. On the conference and its participants, see also *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, as noted elsewhere in this book, 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: Authorpress, 2003). Bandung, however, excluded Israel, mainly because of "strong opposition" from Arab countries. See *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* [here-

after *SWJN*], Second Series, vol. 27, eds. Ravinder Kumar and H. Y. Sharada Prasad (Delhi: JN Memorial Fund, 2000), 109, 566.

5. Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (London: Penguin, 2003). See in particular the conclusion.

6. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*; David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

7. Gunnar Myrdal, foreword, to Richard Wright, *The Color Curtain: A Report on the Bandung Conference* (New York: World Publishing, 1956), 7.

8. Wright, *Color Curtain*, 71. This point is underscored in a review of the book by Merze Tate of Howard University in *The Journal of Negro History*, 41, no. 3 (July 1956), 263–65. Tate quotes the following lines from Wright: “Bandung was the last call of Westernized Asians to the moral conscience of the West” (p.265).

9. Wright, *Color Curtain*, 82.

10. *SWJN*, second series, vol. 27, 106.

11. Carlos P. Romulo, *The Meaning of Bandung* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1956), 11–12.

12. Roeslan Abdulgani, *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 a closed meeting of the political committee of the conference on April 22, 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,” *ibid.*, 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.*

13. *SWJN*, second series, vol. 28, ed. Ravinder Kumar and H.Y. Sharada Prasad (Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 2001), 98.

14. *Ibid.*, 99.

15. Abdulgani, *Bandung Connection*, 115, 117. See also John Kotelawala, *An Asian Prime Minister’s Story* (London: George G. Harrap and Co., 1956).

16. Abdulgani, *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*, second series, vol. 28, 97–98.

17. A. Appadorai, *The Bandung Conference* (New Delhi: Indian Council of World Affairs, 1955), 29. See also A. W. Stargardt, “The Emergence of the Asian Systems of Power,” *Modern Asian Studies* 23, no. 3 (1989): 561–95.

18. Romulo, *Meaning of Bandung*, 66.

19. See *Selected Documents of the Bandung Conference* (New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1955), 1. The foreword states: "The texts have been reproduced from those published in the *New York Times* or issued by the Indonesian Mission to the United Nations, New York."

20. Appadorai, *Bandung Conference*, 1. For the details and the proceedings of the Asian Relations Conference held in Delhi in 1947 see *Asian Relations: Report of the Proceedings and Documentation of the First Asian Relations Conference, New Delhi, March–April, 1947*.

21. *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*, University of London, vol.22, no.1/3, 1959, 198–99 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.'"

22. Appadorai, *Bandung Conference*, 30.

23. Abdulgani, *Bandung Connection*, 46–48.

24. *Select Documents*, 3.

25. *SWJN*, vol. 28, "Speech inaugurating the new building of the Punjab High Court, Chandigarh, March 19, 1955," 30; William Edgett Smith, *We Must Run While They Walk: A Portrait of Africa's Julius Nyerere* (New York: Random House, 1971).

26. Wright, *Color Curtain*, 132.

27. *SWJN*, vol. 29 (Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 2001), 67.

28. Julius K. Nyerere, *Freedom and Unity* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), lecture on "Pomposity" on July 7, 1963, at a mass rally to celebrate the formation of his political party TANU (7 July 1954), 223–24.

29. This, roughly, was the argument of my essay "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for 'Indian' Pasts?" first published in 1992 and then incorporated with modifications in my book *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). For Heidegger's statement, see "A Dialogue on Language" in Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), 15. Césaire in *Discourse on Colonialism* also discusses the world in terms of its "Europeanization."

30. One of the best available discussions of the relationship between colonial rule and modernist practices of representation is in the first chapter of Timothy Mitchell's *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), chapter 1.

31. I am not saying one has completely displaced the other; it is the nature of contestation that I focus on here.

32. See, for example, Yogendra Yadav, “Barna, Jati, o Kancha Ilaiah: The Golden Stag [Mirage] of International Cooperation,” *Anandabajar Patrika*, September 20, 2001; Naunidhi Kaur, “Caste and Race” in *Frontline*, 18 (13), June 23, to July 6, 2001; Andre Beteille, “Race and Caste,” *The Hindu*, March 10, 2001; Ambrose Pinto, “Caste is a Variety of Race,” *The Hindu*, March 24, 2001; Susan Shahin, “Caste is a word India just doesn’t want to hear,” *Asia Times*, April 25, 2001. See also my essay “Globalization, Democratization, and the Evacuation of History” in *At Home in the Diaspora: South Asian Scholars in the West*, eds. Veronique Benei and Jackie Assayag (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 127–47.

33. I should not be read as saying that deterritorialization always and only helps subaltern groups or that the modernist idea of the political was only for the elite. There are counterexamples for both propositions. For a discussion on deterritorialization, see Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Aspects of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). On the debates Beteille and others have argued about tribal politics in India, see Bengt G. Karlsson and Tanka B. Subba, eds., *The Politics of Indigeneity in India* (London: Kegan Paul, 2006) as well as my essay “Politics Unlimited: The Global *Adivasi* and Debates about the Political” in the same volume.

34. Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, chapter 2 dates contemporary globalization from the 1970s. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), chapter 9 dates what he calls “flexible accumulation” from the same period.

35. See David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen, eds., *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogue and Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1996), 477; Alan Read, ed., *The Fact of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1996).

36. See Simon During, “Introduction,” in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 1–28.

37. Wright, *Color Curtain*, 200.

38. Chinua Achebe’s 1964 lecture on “The African Writer and the English Language” cited in Ngũgĩ wa Thiongo, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Curry, 1986), 7.

39. *Ibid.*, 7–8.

40. *Ibid.*, xii, xiv.

41. Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Prose and Poetry*, selected and translated by John Reed and Clive Wake (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 53–55.

42. *Ibid.*, 59.

43. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, *passim*.

44. In saying this, I exclude the field of postcolonial studies for that field, as

I have already said, had its origins in the West. Postcolonial writers from outside the West are absorbed in that global field that still tilts toward the West. Nor do I mean to denigrate or deny the value of the work in modern, non-Western humanities that emanates from countries like India, for instance, for a wider audience. But voices from the world of non-Western scholarship in the humanities command much less global presence than voices from the social sciences in India and elsewhere. The humanities one comes across in global forums today are much more parochially Western than the social sciences: that is my point. And that, I think, was the gap Senghor also was pointing to.