Unlearning the Empire: Indigenizing Sovereignty and Decolonization

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Abstract

The meanings are laid out in the local social realities and the identity of any nation. The newly independent states continue to assimilate the previously contextualised methods they once had as colonised states instead of creating new social realities and histories for future generations. Recreating history to decolonise such colonial settings will be indispensable. This can only be done by 'unlearning the empire' and de-contexting the Eurocentric meanings attached to indigenous realities of newly independent nations. This 'unlearning' necessitates a critical study of the age of modernity, which promised progress but fostered the growth of colonialism and imperial violence. The nascent nation-states will have to decolonise the existing social realities to sensitise the populace with political and economic consciousness for an ultimate new identity of a free nation. Post-colonial nations will have to produce their knowledge to theorise the challenges of lack of history and indigenise their sovereign identity.

Key Words: Decolonisation, Postcolonial, Social Reality, Unlearning the Empire

Introduction

The meaning of anything is derived from the social reality in which it locates itself, and discourses are the vehicles for disseminating them. Interpretation of any event or situation outside its context or social reality can be hazardous to any established theory because new interpretations will create new social realities that will differ from the simulated contexts in which the meanings were initially generated. Such practices are usually not encouraged and are rebuffed by the European masters fearing revolutions in their former colonies. The governments of the post-independent states also take an easy job of not creating new identities and histories for themselves and usually are pleased with the former past; after all, it gives them an excuse for their failure in the present. Despite abhorring their colonial history, they continue to carry the burden of being called postcolonial nations.

The particularisation of an understanding of an event limits its multiple possible outcomes and leads to the redundancy of the meaning of any situation. The interpretation of the same event independently will bring new answers and will have the opportunity to create a new context. This unlearning does not mean that the states struggling for new realities on their own do not acknowledge their past but an effort to develop new possibilities of interpretation of their past to welcome a unique history. Since this is a conscious effort in the beginning, but gradually once they continue reinterpreting their social realities, their new generations would already have internalised the new method of looking into their past. So, the trauma of having no history can be averted by creating new accounts and social realities independently from what the West has elucidated for their former colonies. One of the major problems is the very term 'postcolonial nation' because the adjective that defines the identities, i.e., 'postcolonial', keeps reminding the newly independent nations that their presence will be studied in terms of their past as interpreted by the west. This practice should be reciprocated by evolving methods of creating new social and economic realities that can help decolonise any nation.

Unlearning the empire will demand us to cease the hierarchy that declares certain nations as superiors and others inferior. This unlearning will desire to question such categorisation that caused damage to the postcolonial nations. Decolonisation is a long-term process of decentering western thought and culture which is difficult to initiate. It involves dismantling the structures that sustain the

status quo and valuing indigenous knowledge and culture. Colonial and structural violence and epistemic exploitation have undermined the process of decolonisation in post-independent states. These contemporary forms of violence expose populations to specific political and economic systems to multiply the mortality and morbidity of the masses. In addition to dominating and abusing people, the colonial era has helped normalise the western capitalist system, often referred to as a "globalised" system. Taking a break from the Western economic system, favouring trade and aid only in their currency, can be the starting point of alienation from the Western imperatives. Without this break, third-world countries can hardly raise their standards. Samir Amin (1931-2018), an Egyptian-French economist, terms this alienation from the world economic system as "delinking". It demands the discontinuation of the reproduction of the world capital and a refusal to submit a nation to the western world of economics based on rationality and modernity. A polycentric economic system is now required, in which nations demonstrate a sense of refusal to submit to western monocentric globalisation.

Under various disguises, imperialism has made it difficult for newly independent nations to decolonise their governments. As a result of these new imperialistic forms, the former colonial masters impose the western 'law of value' on these nation-states, which does not conform to the mainly agricultural and partially industrial world of these struggling states. According to Amin, the western way of looking at the "law of value" is by dividing the sector's value by the total number of people employed in that particular sector. The per-capita value in the agriculture sector in these post-independent nations still stands higher than in the industry despite the large populace involved in the agriculture sector. Most newly independent countries, mainly African and Southeast-Asian nations, belong to this mode of production. The industry has always been a red flag for such nations because most of the raw material has been excavated already by their former colonial powers, so even if these states try to get industrialised, they will have to bring back their raw material purchased in the currency of the plunderer.

Such nations were completely absent during the industrial revolution, which is why the non-western nations are considerably behind in industrialising themselves. These countries were preoccupied with serving their masters and showed little interest in the broader political and economic transformation that the world was experiencing at the time. Nevertheless, the native people of colonised countries are the rescuers of aboriginal and primitive communities. These countries do not hunt to look for encroachments, in contrast to the western capitalist states that share a migratory inclination with hunters to settle everywhere they see opportunity. On the other hand, the industrial revolution was a new form of imperialism and a major driving force behind the expansion of the European nations, which led to increased colonialism. Despite being primarily frigid regions, the colonial governments could not feed their sizable populations independently. Colonisation was necessary for industry to function in western countries because they could only use the non-western colonies for raw materials.

There is an urgent need to decolonise the identity of a postcolonial nation. Post-independent nations still hold onto their colonial identity and try to find their roots in western history narratives. As ironic as it may seem, they accept all forms of neocolonial methods and aid from the white man to be recognised as sovereign states. The postcolonial narrative ought to have been anti-colonial, but for many years, the regimes in charge in postcolonial nations have used it to justify ongoing crimes. The existing social realities of these nations must be changed; reinterpreting the context can be used to create discourses that theorise freedom for them.

According to Michel Foucault (1926-1984), to govern the people, discourses are constructed to shape social realities. His conception of power relations does not include violence. Foucauldian power can only be applied to free subjects, not chained or imprisoned. To him, violence and power are mutually exclusive since his idea of power, which he called "biopower", rehabilitates populations while violence involves coercion. Colonial nations are ruled, and an infringement is made on their freedom; however, they are not imprisoned. In this instance, the colonial authority and its colony have functional power relationships in which the people serve as power vehicles. Power is disseminated through

discourse, which can be defined as more than just ways of thinking and the proliferation of certain forms of knowledge.

Foucault describes discourse as a formalised method of conceiving or expressing reality. Discourse can be oppressive or liberating, and everyone is subjected to discourse; hence everyone is a part of constructing discourse. Discourse outside social existence in any way is not possible (Cultural Reader, 2017). Context or social reality is not created in a day or two; instead, meanings are created and institutionalised over time. After the colonial milieu was decontextualised, an individual could fight back against the causality of equating the pre-colonial past with the present. In this way, the nation's capacity for indigenous cultural production can be improved.

Foucault asserts that the institutions then adopt these created discourses. Then a particular authority has the power to apply them to its subject, for instance, the discourse of law and order that includes a matter of the force which receives the impact of it. This authority can imprison someone and can declare innocent the same person. The discourse of madness nominates someone to be called sane or mad. These discourses work successfully because they are accepted as the same social reality (context) without creating another social reality (context) that can replace the existing one. For instance, the discourse of madness will sanction someone as a mad person and immediately be considered an object of doubt. He will be deprived of all rights to face a public trial and prove innocent, as in the case of Louis Althusser (1918-1990), a French philosopher who strangled his wife to death due to extreme mental condition. He was denied a free public trial.

Unlearning history can be presented as an alternative theory to combat colonial imprints. The colonial nation's imperial past must be unlearned to create new history. The role of academia and media is inevitably pivotal in the proliferation of this counter-narrative because a lot needs to be said and shared with the masses to decolonise their minds. To decolonise, we must work on "epistemic reconstruction" (Nigam, 2020) and demolish the existing epistemological culture. Thus, de-contextualizing colonial history can help indigenise the minds and ways of living of post-independent nations by creating their local social realities without the former source of assimilation, i.e. the west.

The former colonies have always been understood in binaries but are always on the underprivileged side compared to their former colonisers, who already stood as privileged. Binaries, found in Saussurean structural linguistics, involve two elements at a time where the meanings attached to each of these binary relations are arbitrary. Still, one has to be more privileged than the other for this relationship to exist. Ideally, this relationship should have been fragile and non-fixed, like a 'dyad' where any group member could have changed the position or left the group then the group would cease to exist in this exact form.

Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) has given an alternative to binary thinking, "spectrum thinking", where the identities associated with the elements in comparison are non-fixed and more options are available to be associated with any such comparison. In his 'Deconstruction', Derrida brings the solution to avoid binary through the concept of 'Difference' with which the meanings are infinitely deferred in any signifying system. If the meaning of one signifier lies in an endless list of signifiers, why have the postcolonial nations ceased their evolution with a fixed meaning assigned to them by the west? The newly independent nations should seek help from Derridean *differance* to avoid the typical homogenous attitude of considering such countries less developed just because they were once colonised. The world should acknowledge that countries like China and Australia are now no more low-income countries just because they had been inhabited once; hence, the binaries constructed by the west are faulty and self-benefiting.

Non-western countries were primarily excluded from the global knowledge system due to the West's metaphysical and material presence, ignoring the East's crucial role in knowledge production. Young nations, after independence, failed for decades to combat the effects of colonialism because they relied heavily on their presentation of the West without seeking the permission of the so-called postcolonial nations. Such countries need to evolve an indigenous self rather than letting the west define

a modern rational self for their former colonies, eventually making them benign to the twisting truths and misguided history. They anchored instead on evolving through the-political segregation and ignored the work of the human psyche, which might have internalised power structures designed by western ideologies.

Most of these young nations developed theological and mythical ideologies leaving international capitalist law to nurture in their homelands without any resistance. On the other side, the clerics and leaders built fewer schools and more madrasas to feed on religious dogmatism because the fashion of putting anything into question had been considered heretical. Myths, texts, and other religious scripts had been studied and perceived without focusing on their substantial relevance to help the lived experience of the colonial nations. These cultural myths and scriptures can play a pivotal role in decolonising people's minds by empowering their readers to negotiate with the text and its cultural mythology. Institutions like the military and religion have dominated society, normalising the atrocities on the locals. In Albert Memmi's (1920-2020) words, a French-Tunisian writer, sometimes they are more structured than the state itself. Military also has shaped people's lives and thoughts, like Bourguiba in Tunisia, General Ayub and Zia in Pakistan, Kaddafi in Libya, Ben Bella in Algeria, Nasser in Egypt, and many more. When institutions within institutions and states within states get intense, the progress of such nations is always abhorred by their people. The national elites support new imperialistic regimes in collaboration with the former colonies.

According to Freudian psychoanalysis, the unconscious governs the more significant part of one's life, not the conscious self. A nation that has not fully developed itself and still thought of itself as a member of a peripheral community must be treated and reprimanded because it failed to internalise freedom. It still scoops on loads of sympathies and aids in sustaining their liberty and freedom, of which the results will be preposterous. The 'self' of the nation has embedded colonialism so profoundly that her instincts keep identifying herself as a part of the binary which has been excluded from power and politics. The internalised colonial reality of the people has barred them from creating an indigenous parallel identity.

In *Decolonizing Theory: Thinking Across Traditions* (2020:28), Aditya Nigam has termed the need for decolonisation as an existential question that needs to be taken care of. Indigenizing the theory, art, and culture will take its route, but it will not be developed in the void. Although it can be based partly on pre-colonial societal models, Western theory and philosophy must be addressed thoroughly. It will also be used as a tool to think across the traditions, but here the purpose will not be to reestablish the western interpretation of reality but to create parallel social realities. Besides making their indigenous narratives and literature, former colonial nations must also read western scholarship and reinterpret texts that have always been viewed through western eyes. Many post-structuralist philosophers believe that the meaning lies in the difference; we need to find out how the text produced during the past several decades represented non-western people without their consent and how different meanings and nuances could not emerge from those texts. Also, how have the texts and their interpretations evolved and changed over time? Abandoning western philosophy altogether will be equally devastating; they have spent decades studying the people they have written about and developing their version of postcolonial discourse.

There is also the question of whether the local philosophers of non-European nations are producing valuable literature and philosophy, or do they resort to anti-western rhetoric by creating self-professed theories of nihilism or 'nothing can be done' rhetoric? This is very unfortunate that overflowing nationalism and exceedingly insensitivity to the cause have resulted in an irreparable loss to the process of decolonisation. The national consciousness should be replaced by the economic and political consciousness of the people so that the locally developed reality could take over power structures based on political and economic relations. The local theorists and philosophers will have to be well-equipped to deal with the challenges to maintain a grip on the contemporary scholarship on the said topic before making any move in the field. However, academia should intervene to prevent the reader and the young critic from being duped by inaccurate information and the glamour of the West.

Hamid Dabashi (2013) examined the false belief of the west in his essay "Can non-Europeans Think?" He suggests that the European people have this innate hubris of centrism that gives them a false sense of superiority. However, non-European nations can now think independently without considering the Eurocentric worldview. However, he asserts that philosophers must be self-aware of their non-European cosmopolitanism and embrace their worldliness. In his view, Europe should not consider non-European philosophers like Slavoj Zizek (b. 1949), who does not consider non-European authors as canonical as European ones, nor does he think of them as "public intellectuals". The West believes the philosophical contributions of the non-western as ethnophilosophy, which Dabashi criticises. It is only within the context of the construction of this knowledge and information that western philosophers can be termed intellectuals. In contrast, others are non-European intellectuals or philosophers of the global South. Unlearning such beliefs will create the opportunity for a fresh identity, but the post-independent nations will have to strive hard to reinterpret the context in which they live.

The age of Modernity was portrayed by Western rhetoric as a complete package of happiness that could eliminate hunger, poverty, and disease. Still, it promoted futuristic imperialist forms and did the opposite of its promise. Along with starvation and fatal ailments, the world witnessed concentration camps, atom bombs, and the holocaust; however, the postmodern age challenged the former absolute truths and fundamental realities. Postmodernism's maxim that no "metanarrative" is a meta-reality because these meta-structures still rule the world. "Reality is always becoming and not a being", so repeating this process of decontextualising history will affect the minds of the people through which they produce knowledge. Gilles Deleuze's (1925-1995) idea is that repetition leads to 'difference', which gives identity. He calls humans' desiring machines' and parted his ways from Lacanian psychoanalysis by claiming that desire is innate and that lack does not create it. Lacan, however, believed that the lack makes a desire in humans. As part of the process of decolonisation, the non-western nations are internalising western interests, and it becomes alarming when these nations leave their own space to represent and protect their class interests. What makes them guard the interests of the white man? The deeply embedded idea of western supremacy and an assurance that only the white man can protect him has forced him to think this way; therefore, class interest locates itself where the desire wants it to be.

Formerly, colonised people did not need to live their entire lives using this identity and on a borrowed theory that makes them part of the postcolonial nation. One must develop a theory of one's own to explain the heterogeneity. Nigam has emphasized developing indigenous theory greatly, but he does not reveal how young nations attempt to indigenise their approach. First, nothing can be decolonised without decolonising the people's minds. Memmi in *Decolonization and the Decolonized (2006)* asserts that the nations that have failed to decolonise themselves have been the victims of institutionalised violence in different forms. Such nations lack standardised institutions, so evils such as corruption and violence can use institutions to control people. As decolonisation begins, structurally violent programs are initiated by the challenged western powers and local elites against their people.

Such local violence cannot be curbed until a more violent phenomenon usurps the existing one. In such a country, power takes another terrible shape because the elimination of poverty is not one of the primary concerns of such nations. This resulted in turmoil in the country that began with violence. Memmi also laments the threatened role of intellectuals who are expected to be silent, trapped in the clutches of the institutions that otherwise would accelerate the process of decolonisation. The French philosopher Frantz Fanon (1925-1961) blamed Memmi for the generality of such assumptions about national elites, but in most cases, these assumptions seem to be true. The local elites, as described in *The Wretched of the Earth (1963),* have also plundered their people, and the structural violence of the local elites has replaced the colonial violence. A change of master does not bring much positive difference to the people's lives. The local, new masters usually have been greedier than the old ones. Nigeria is the wealthiest African country but still faces poverty and starvation. It is not because the government does not have the resources. Instead, they failed to develop a system to harness these sources and utilise them for the betterment of people. Organising an independent means of survival that is least dependent on aid from former colonial powers will be necessary to spread de-colonial thought in economic relations.

How far can decolonisation be successful if the people from the former colonies expect immigration as a rational punishment for the crime committed by the colonisers in the form of colonial sin? Through interpellation, the people have internalised this notion that only the white man and his country can give them their dream houses and lifestyles. Usually, they need to invest in their own country and still blame their nations for not being on the roads of development. They look towards the white man to invest in their home countries and provide jobs and residence in foreign lands. As a result of the internalised superiority of the west, their lived experiences do not end their coloniality of being. According to Louis Althusser (1918–1990), the process of assimilation of the same cultural and economic conceptions persists in any shape of state apparatuses, i.e. repressive or ideological. The people interpellate the process without giving it much thought. The indigenous inhabitants are afraid to question or update their views because post-independence countries have ingrained the superiority of western philosophy and history. History and ideology are both based on a Eurocentric authority, but the problem does not stop there. The local elites take a similar approach to seizing the power of discourse, which they use to stifle any unfavourable circumstance that challenges their control. In this instance, they adhere to the same western law of value production, privileging the authority.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Social realities can be multiplied, and new meanings can be attached to the existing facts to dismantle the learning of the empire. Western imperialism has shaped new imperialism to maintain supremacy over its former colonies. The imperial powers manage populations today by controlling and distributing death among the masses. The US-led war against terror is an example that has hunted down groups in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Achille Mbembe has used the term "necro-politics", whose literal meaning is the politics of death. This is one of the new-imperialistic ways to authorise the west to decide who should die and who should be allowed to live, again highlighting the need for indigenising sovereignty in these young nations. History, minds, power, and knowledge can be decolonised only if the existing meaning attached to that particular social reality can be unlearned, and the energies can be devoted to re-creating new local realities or reinterpreting the current contexts can be invested.

Decolonisation and a parallel theory can help the course to unlearn imperial knowledge and to create indigenous realities. It will destabilise the identities and definitions attached to each former colony by its former or new master. Additionally, post-independent nations must work on their psyche and invoke their indigenous self to understand and resist already internalised patterns of power. The centre of power has to be shifted because power cannot be eliminated as such; it has to be there, but by fragmenting the context, power is no longer fixed. In "The Subject and Power (1982)," Michel Foucault (1926-1984) defined power as something that cannot be possessed nor fixed and as the vehicle of power. To make this change, the newly freed nations must go a long way in crafting new social realities where power should not be perceived as static and unchanging. Such nations need to delink themselves from the law of value production of the west and fight against the unequal distribution of power and wealth within their country.

Living in the pre-colonial context without creating new possibilities of social realities and evolving new identities is impossible. Only after creating their contexts and narratives will such nations be able to be part of the global knowledge system. Their heterogeneity will be recognised only if the post-independent nations learn the ways to produce a rebuttal against the existing social realities. Unlearning imperialism is challenging because the postcolonial nations have interpellated it. However, that is the only way to indigenise their sovereignty, thinking, and history to recreate and reinterpret their realities as free nations.

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