Decolonising World Politics: Anti-Colonial Movements Beyond the Nation-State

From the Indian National Congress to the National Liberation Front in Algeria, anti-colonial movements were organised and executed along the lines of nationalism. The end of colonialism has thus been marked by the emergence of new sovereign nation-states across the world. However, the success of national liberation does not necessarily imply the success of anti-colonial movements, as the colonial structure of power remains deeply embedded in contemporary society; capitalism, patriarchy and racism are few examples of oppression that live on as legacies of colonialism today. Therefore, this essay aims to evaluate whether nationalism was a betrayal of anti-colonial movements. Firstly, the question of whether nationalist consciousness is sufficient to tackle the problems of coloniality will be discussed. Secondly, the essay will analyse the purpose and nature of anti-colonial movements as a continuous political and epistemic project. Thirdly, the essay will examine the unequal power relations that remain after national liberation, with a focus on the interrelated domains of economy and gender. This essay will argue that nationalism is only a means towards decolonisation, not an end. Anti-colonial movements extend beyond the territories of a nation-state; they are fundamentally transnational and intersectional.

Nationalism and Its Discontents: Is Nationalism a Product of Colonialism?

The end of World War II had sparked a multitude of anti-colonial movements towards achieving self-determination. Decolonisation had thus been a national liberation project: it was organised along the lines of nationalism in order to challenge the colonial powers and dismantle their empires. For many new nation-states, independence had been achieved through the triumph of nationalism, successfully marking the end of colonialism. However, the nation-state and its related concepts, such as nationalism and national unity, are questionable in terms of its origins and implications. Therefore, the following question emerges: is nationalism a product of colonialism?

The nation-state is not only a European invention, but also a colonising tool. For example, India was invented by European colonial powers despite the many "ethnic, linguistic, dynastic, social and confessional" fragmentations that existed; there was no shared 'national unity' nor a centralised state to control a certain territory (Anderson 2012: 4). Similarly, the European system of nation-states were implemented in the Middle East, where the Ottoman Empire had operated under a patrimonial system, by "establishing a centralized administration, legal system, a flag and internationally recognised boundaries" (Owen 2004: 9-15). The European colonial powers had drawn arbitrary borders and assigned identities without consideration of the "great diversity [that is] inhabited by many different peoples with their own distinct languages, cultures and ways of life" (Lockman 2009: 97-98). This had only created more division in an already segmented society, enabling the European colonial powers to colonise without any serious opposition. Therefore, nation-states were implemented as an apparatus of colonisation by the European colonial powers.

Post-colonial nation-states that have emerged through anti-colonial nationalist struggles have not dismantled colonial ideology and practices. Although nationalism is derived from the colonial invention of nation-states, it was used by anti-colonial movements to mobilise diverse communities. For example, India's national independence movement drew the masses by propagating Hindu culture, despite the country being home to many other cultures (Krishna 1966: 429; Spodek 1971: 372). Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian National Congress had "inculcated habits of

Decolonising World Politics: Anti-Colonial Movements Beyond the Nation-State
Written by Yatana Yamahata

personal and communitarian praxis (charkha, or weaving by hand; khadi, or making hand-spun, hand-woven cloth; satyagraha, or non-violent resistance)" as well as "created and sustained a climate of ideas (swadeshi, swaraj, ahimsa)" which made achieving national independence the "principal political project of the age" (Anderson 2012: 11). Additionally, Gandhi's notion of nonviolence was inspired by "his reading of Emerson, Thoreau and Tolstoy, even though his vision of an ideal society evoked a specifically Hindu vision of 'Ram Rajya' or the legendary reign of Lord Rama" (Loomba 2005: 146). Post-colonial nation-states like India were produced by the processes of colonialism: their territories were determined by colonial powers and their nationalist consciousness was forged after the European model.

Furthermore, the basis of anti-colonial nationalism is forged by the idea of difference. According to Edward Said, Orientalism creates an ontological division between the Occident ('the Self') and the Orient ('the Others') that assumes the superiority of the former over the latter by "making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, teaching it, settling it, ruling over it" (Said 1978: 10-11). For example, Leopold Senghor's 'objective' Negritude relies on the Orientalist distinction between Europe and Africa to reclaim 'authentic' or pre-colonial African culture. His embracement of the racial dichotomy created by "Eurocentric misconceptions about continental and diasporan Africans" as a basis of national liberation reproduces the colonial power's model of the world (Rabaka 2009: 113-114, 134). Emphasising that there are fundamental differences between colonisers and the colonised only reinforces the Orientalist ideology that served as a basis of colonialism.

However, reducing nationalism and anti-colonial movements as a derivative discourse of colonialism denies the colonised world agency. Although the phenomenon of nationalism is European in its ideological origin, its political and cultural development in anti-colonial movements is fundamentally different. Anti-colonial nationalists had employed an 'ideological sieve' in which European ideas were filtered in order to "fashion a 'modern' national culture that is nevertheless not Western," creating its "own domain of sovereignty within colonial society" (Chatterjee 1993: 6-7; Loomba 2005: 159). In India, the local intellectual class asserted the use of mother tongues over English, which is the language that they were schooled in. Partha Chatterjee further explains that "the bilingual intelligentsia came to think of its own language as belonging to that inner domain of cultural identity, from which the colonial intruder had to be kept out," assigning language as a medium in which the colonised population was able to "declare its sovereignty and then had to transform in order to make it adequate for the modern world" (Chatterjee 1993: 7). Ultimately, it is important to locate agency in anti-colonial nationalist consciousness; reducing nationalism as a derivative discourse only gives the colonial rulers the power to continue colonising the imaginations of the colonised populations.

Anti-colonial nationalist movements is best understood in terms of hybridity: nationalism "often drew upon Western ideas and vocabularies to challenge colonial rule" and then was juxtaposed with "indigenous ideas, reading it through their own interpretive lens, and even using it to assert cultural alterity or insist on an unbridgeable difference between coloniser and colonised" (Loomba 2004: 146). Although nationalism is a colonial invention, asserting that it was "a betrayal of anti-colonial movements" denies the agency of the colonised world. However, the triumph of national liberation should not be understood as an end to anti-colonial movements either. Organising them on national lines had worked as a strategy—a means to an end—but it remains insufficient in the wider project of decolonisation. Anti-colonial movements require the unity of the colonised peoples that transcends the nation-state in order to challenge the coloniality of power in the contemporary world.

Anti-Colonial Movements: Challenging the Coloniality of Power

Although the success of worldwide anti-colonial nationalist movements had marked the demise of colonialism, its system of exploitation and oppression continues to be embedded in contemporary society. National liberation had removed the European colonial powers from the colonised world. However, the new and sovereign nation-states remained in the system where "the dominance of the European or Western powers was expressed not only in their superior economic and military power and in their commanding intellectual and authority but also in the rules and institutions of international society" (Bull 1984: 217). Anti-colonial movements in the contemporary world should therefore be understood as a continuous political and epistemic project that extends beyond national liberation. They challenge the coloniality of power as well as shift the state-centric focus of decolonisation.

Decolonising World Politics: Anti-Colonial Movements Beyond the Nation-State
Written by Yatana Yamahata

The coloniality of power is a structure of control that continues to dominate the world system. According to Anibal Quijano, "coloniality is constitutive of modernity" as imperialism, slavery and capitalism have given rise to a hegemony established by the former colonial powers (Mignolo 2007: 162). Furthermore, the coloniality of power constitutes the "hierarchical forms of power (e.g., Eurocentric/Western-centric hegemony), forms of knowledge (e.g., technoscientific instrumental rationality), forms of (inter)subjectivity (e.g., possessive individualism), forms of human interrelations (e.g., racism, classism, heteropatriarchalism, etc.), and forms of human dominion over land and mastery of "nature" (e.g., anthropocentric property/dominion/sovereignty) that have become entrenched and continue to be reproduced throughout the world as an ongoing consequence of colonisation" (Figueroa Helland and Lindgren, 2016: 432). Although old-fashioned colonialism has ended, coloniality has not. Anti-colonial movements today are thus aimed at "the liberation of intercultural relations from the prison of coloniality" which implies the freedom from all forms of power "organized as inequality, discrimination, exploitation and as domination" (Quijano 2007: 170).

The new global world order is "both postcolonial (in the sense of being formally independent) and neo-colonial (in the sense of remaining economically and/or culturally dependent) at the same time" (Loomba 2005: 12). Although colonialism is most commonly defined by the dichotomy between the coloniser and the colonised, there are other unequal power relations that constitute the international system, perpetuating the various forms of oppression. These unequal relations make up the neo-colonial world, where national independence does not guarantee liberation from the coloniality of power. The next section will discuss the domains of economy and gender in the neo-colonial world to conclude that the legacies of colonialism are transnational and intersectional. Therefore, anti-colonial movements should also look past nationalism and the postcolonial independence of nation-states.

The Control of Economy: Capitalism in the Neo-colonial World

The global capitalist order shows that the contemporary legacies of colonialism are transnational. The concept of transnationalism offers a paradigm shift from the state-centric analysis of world politics. It refers to the extension of political, economic and social processes beyond the borders determined by nation-states. Instead, transnationalism refers to the global system as an alternative unit of analysis (Robinson 1998: 562).

Colonialism was established alongside capitalism, generating an unequal relation of dependency and control between the colonising powers and the colonised subjects. Vladimir Lenin explains in *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1947) that the growth of capitalism in Europe had created "an enormous superabundance of capital" which required the European colonial powers to "move out and subordinate non-industrialised countries to sustain its own growth" (Loomba 2005: 10). Europe's expansion into the global markets had implications on the control of labour as well. Colonialism had organised capitalist wage-labour relations along racial lines: unpaid labour was assigned to "the colonial races originally American Indians, blacks, and in a more complex way, mestizos in America and, later on, to the remaining colonised races in the rest of the world," while salaried labour was "assigned to the colonizing whites" (Quijano 2000: 539). Such practices of unequal power relations during colonialism led to the emergence of a global capitalist order that is centred around the Western powers today.

Frantz Fanon argues that anti-colonial national movements have not dismantled the ideologies of the colonial system. In fact, the national middle class "assumes power at the end of the colonial regime" to serve as the "business agent of the Western bourgeoisie" (Fairchild 1994: 196). The new, independent postcolonial states become rentier states that serve as markets for foreign governments—only this time, it is not under the coercion of direct colonialism. As a result, the native bourgeoisie replaces the colonial system as a "tool of capitalism" that allows itself to be the "willing slave of that revolutionary capital which is the people" (Fanon 1963: 149). The bourgeois nationalists' mimicry of the relationship between the colonising powers and the colonised populations was "geared towards neo-colonial class consolidation" as it reproduced the unequal power relations that had been established during colonialism (Lazarus 1993: 71). For example, African elites have "higher education, lucrative business ownership or skills, or power within the traditional groups of chiefs" that give them the resources as well as the incentive to ally with foreign multinational corporations (Blake 1990: 41-42). As a result, rather than endowing the nation "with taxation revenues and employment," they are more interested in serving their self-interest as "regressive interventions might provide private 'rents' for co-opted African elites beholden to foreign interests" (Langan 2018: 37). Therefore, Fanon concludes that the mission of the national middle class "has nothing to do with transforming the nation; it consists, prosaically, of

Decolonising World Politics: Anti-Colonial Movements Beyond the Nation-State

Written by Yatana Yamahata

being the transmission line between the nation and a capitalism, rampant though camouflaged, which today puts on the mask of neo-colonialism" (Fanon 1963: 152). The coloniality of power in the global capitalist system is a transnational issue that pervades the postcolonial nation-states; although they may be independent in terms of territorial sovereignty, they remain embedded in unequal economic relations with the former colonial powers.

The Forgotten Struggle: Women in Anti-colonial Movements

The term, intersectionality, refers to the interconnected and oppressive experiences of different social groups that overlap. Kimberlé Crenshaw explains the concept as follows: "consider an analogy for traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happened in an intersection, it can be caused by cars travelling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination" (Crenshaw 1989: 149). Similarly, postcolonial feminist scholars argue that women in anti-colonial movements were fighting a 'two-pronged' struggle. However, anti-colonial movements that only address a nationalist agenda neglects women's issues.

Focusing on nationalist historiographies of anti-colonial movements reduces the agency of the women involved in the struggles. Women are instrumental agents in anti-colonial movements, regardless of whether they participate in public or private spheres. Many narratives focus on women who were involved in "the picket, writing in public journals and preaching in the street" but often forget to acknowledge those who "helped to politicise the home and assert their agency in a space often read as one of silence and subjection" (Legg 2003: 23). Not acknowledging their agency perpetuates the unequal relationships between men and women, in which the former dominates the latter. Women are therefore forced to fight 'two colonialisms': "once to convince women and the second time to convince men that women have the same rights as men" (Urdang 1975: 30).

Furthermore, anti-colonial movements represented the beginning of a wider liberation project for women's rights. Joyce Chadya expands on this idea by explaining that nationalist revolutions were also patriarchal revolutions, as "African nationalists' support of women's causes was part of a tactic of social and political inclusion that was meant to yoke as many people as possible to the nationalist struggle" (Chadya 2003: 153). However, unequal power relations between men and women remain embedded in postcolonial societies today. Men continue to dominate political, economic and social organisations while women are side-lined in the public sphere, despite their contributions in anti-colonial struggles. The coloniality of power is hence intersectional: hierarchical power relations of gender cannot be ignored in the wider project of decolonisation.

Conclusion

Decolonisation cannot be equated with the success of anti-colonial nationalist movements after the demise of colonialism. Although the term is "suggestive of a temporal break with colonialism," anti-colonial movements are continuous and dynamic processes that cannot be restricted to the geographical entity of nation-states (Ahluwalia and Zegeye 2001: 466). Constraining anti-colonial movements to national liberation overlooks all other forms of oppressive rule. Therefore, this essay argues that nationalism does not capture the transnational and intersectional nature of the legacies of colonialism and anti-colonial movements.

Firstly, solely focusing on nationalism is insufficient in making sense of anti-colonial struggles. Nationalism and the nation-state are colonial inventions that have been mobilised by the local anti-colonial leaders in their efforts to achieve national liberation. However, reducing nationalism to this derivative discourse is also problematic as it denies the colonial world any agency. It should instead be understood in terms of hybridity that incorporated European ideas as well as indigenous inspirations. Secondly, the concept of nationalism does not encompass the purpose and nature of anti-colonial movements. Decolonisation is a continuous political and epistemic project that aims to achieve liberation from all forms of oppression produced by colonialism that exist today. Thirdly, the unequal colonial power relations are explained to be transnational and intersectional. The global capitalist order is a transnational issue that perpetuates inequalities in the division of labour. On the other hand, the marginalisation of women in the political sphere is an intersectional issue that reinforces the patriarchal system of contemporary society.

Decolonising World Politics: Anti-Colonial Movements Beyond the Nation-State
Written by Yatana Yamahata

Asserting that nationalism was a betrayal to anti-colonial movements undermines the local agents involved in the processes and successes of national liberation struggles. Nationalism should instead be understood as a strategy, rather than a goal of decolonisation; anti-colonial movements will continue to be relevant as long as unequal power relations remain in society. Therefore, there is a need for a political and epistemic shift in the understanding of anti-colonial movements beyond the nation-state as the problems of coloniality are both transnational and intersectional.

References

Ahluwalia, P. and Zegeye, A. (2001). Frantz Fanon and Steve Biko: Towards Liberation. *Social Identities*, 7(3), pp.455-469.

Anderson, P. (2012). Gandhi Centre Stage. *London Review of Books*, 34(13), pp.3-11.

Blake, C. (1990). *Through the Prism of African Nationalism*. Freetown: W D Okrafo-Smart, pp.41-42.

Bull, H. (1984). The Revolt Against the West. In: H. Bull, ed., *The Expansion of International Society*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, pp.217-228.

Chadya, J. M. (2003). Mother politics: Anti-colonial nationalism and the woman question in Africa. Journal of Women's History, 15(3), 153-157.

Chatterjee, P. (1986). *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*: A Derivative Discourse. Zed Books. pp.

Chatterjee, P. (1993). *The Nation and its Fragments*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp.3-27.

Crenshaw, K. (1989). 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics.' University of Chicago Legal Forum, 139-167.

Fairchild, H. (1994). Frantz Fanon's the Wretched of the Earth in Contemporary Perspective. *Journal of Black Studies*, 25(2), pp.191-199.

Fanon, F. (1963). The Pitfalls of National Consciousness. In: F. Fanon, ed., *The Wretched of the Earth*. Grove Press, pp.148-205.

Figueroa Helland, L. and Lindgren, T. (2016). What Goes Around Comes Around: From the Coloniality of Power to the Crisis of Civilization. *Journal of World-Systems Research*, 22(2), pp.430-462.

Krishna, G. (1966). The Development of the Indian National Congress as a Mass Organization, 1918-1923. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 25(3), p.413.

Langan, M. (2018). Neo-Colonialism and Foreign Corporations in Africa. In: M. Langan, ed., *Neo-Colonialism and the Poverty of 'Development' in Africa*. Newcastle: Springer, pp.33-60.

Lazarus, N. (1993). Disavowing Decolonization: Fanon, Nationalism, and the Problematic of Representation in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse. *Research in African Literatures*, 24(4), pp.69-98.

Legg, S. (2003). Gendered Politics and Nationalised Homes: Women and the anti-colonial struggle in Delhi, 1930-47. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 10(1), pp.7-27.

Lockman, Z. (2009). *Contending Visions of the Middle East*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.70-98.

Loomba, A. (2005). *Colonialism, Postcolonialism*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, pp.145-179.

Decolonising World Politics: Anti-Colonial Movements Beyond the Nation-State
Written by Yatana Yamahata

Mignolo, W. (2007). Introduction. *Cultural Studies*, 21(2-3), pp.155-167.

Owen, R. (2004). *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East* . New York: Routledge, pp.9-15.

Quijano, A. (2000). Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism and Latin America. *Nepantla: Views from South*, 1(3), pp.533-580.

Quijano, A. (2007). Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality. *Cultural Studies*, 21(2-3), pp.168-178.

Rabaka, R. (2009). Aimé Césaire and Léopold Senghor: Revolutionary Negritude and Radical New Negroes. In: R. Rabaka, ed., *Africana Critical Theory: Reconstructing The Black Radical Tradition*. Lexington Books, pp.130-165.

Robinson, W. (1998). Beyond Nation-State Paradigms: Globalization, Sociology, and the Challenge of Transnational Studies. *Sociological Forum*, 13(4), pp.561-594.

Sabaratnam, M. (2011). IR in Dialogue … but Can We Change the Subjects? A Typology of Decolonising Strategies for the Study of World Politics. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 39(3), pp.781-803.

Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books, pp.1-12.

Spodek, H. (1971). On the Origins of Gandhi's Political Methodology: The Heritage of Kathiawad and Gujarat.*The Journal of Asian Studies*, 30(02), pp.361-372.

Urdang, S. (1975). Fighting Two Colonialisms: The Women's Struggle in Guinea-Bissau. *African Studies Review*, 18(3), p.29.