



# Decolonisation: history, concepts, & questions for the University

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# Colonialism: cooption, coercion and corruption



Eagleton (1990) another post-colonial literary theorist, noted that "**the metaphysics of nationalism speak of the entry into full-realisation of a unitary subject known as they people...**this monadic subject must somehow curiously pre-exist its own process of materialisation- must be equipped, even now, with certain highly determinate needs and desires" (28).

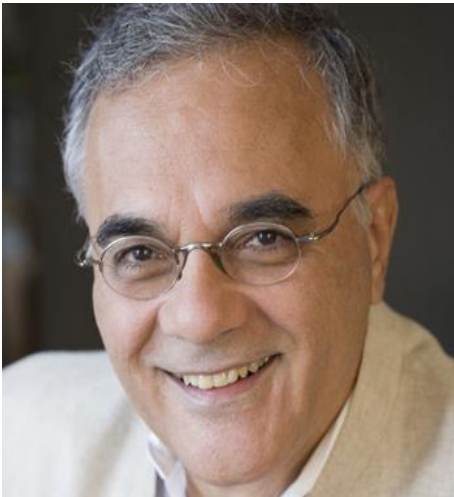
**What did colonialism do?** It occupied territories, enslaved people, and perverted particular institutions (missions, as well as traditional authority structures) towards its own ideological and economic ends (many of the slaving powers had rich and fruitful exploitative relationships with African kingdoms which used them to deal with competitors and enemies, for example), and by so doing set up patterns of corruption and exploitation which live on today.

The collaboration of elite groups in the above characterised this history.

# The nation in Africa: dilemma and problematic



Fanon criticised nationalism and specifically the middle class for its anticolonial discourse which he argued was aimed at the (re) attainment of nationhood through means of the capture and subsequent "occupation: of the colonial state in the interest if the elite indigenous classes...it was "quite simply...[to] transfer into native hands - the hands of the bourgeois nationalists- those unfair advantages which are a legacy of the colonial period" (Fanon, **Black skin, White masks**, 1967, 152).



In this light the post-colonial nation state is as noted by Mamdani (1996), represents a continuity of colonial practices in another form (imperialism).

# The burning goes on after the fire goes out: what was lost, what as found?

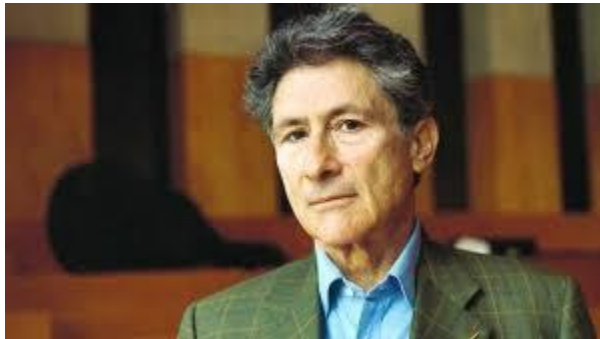
Colonialism did not obliterate local culture and custom; it subverted, perverted and coerced it into exploitative forms and practices. For Fanon colonialism is a history of pillage (or looting). The Guptas, state capture are contemporary examples.



Fanon argued in **Wretched of the Earth** (1968, 3) that colonialism entailed "The death of the aboriginal society, cultural lethargy, and the petrification of individuals". Yet, as Lazarus notes many many aspects of precolonial culture, languages and traditions, beliefs and values survived colonialism. Colonial powers may have dominated, may have inscribed hierarchies of race, and language, imported and imposed ideas of gender and sexual orientation, but it cannot be claimed that colonial power was or is hegemonic. Beyond Christianity there was little attempt to seek hegemony.

## Counter-colonialism or the absence of revolution?

Hegemonic ideas associated with colonialism (for example, racism or westernization) have been successfully refuted by a host of scholars from Spivak, Said and closer to home Odora-Hoppers. If contestation is an underlying design principle of knowledge-construction, **how are some values to be taught (value for diversity) or unlearnt (racism)?**



**Edward Said** in **Culture and Orientalism** demonstrated that Western images of the Orient and Africa have long been exoticized. Europe needs the Other to be defined as inferior. This makes conquest justified.



**Catherine Odora-Hoppers** shows that knowledge has come to be seen as Western, as though nothing else existed before the Voyages of Discovery

# How relevant is colonialism now OR "why can't we all just get over it"? Language matters.



Who then were the willing recipients of colonial hegemony? Certainly it must be and historically was, those classes willing to benefit from collaboration with the colonial project of exploitation, or those receiving education through and in colonial institutions.

Patrick Taylor (1989) argues that language was the best means through which the colonizers culture, values and lifestyle could be presented as norm (60).

In these terms are we satisfied that only Afrikaans and English are used at NWU?

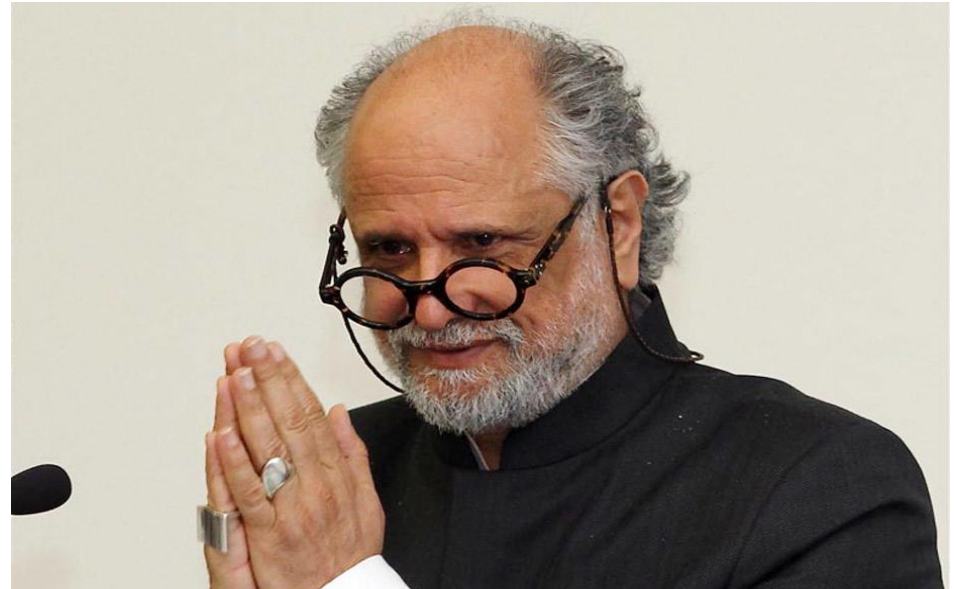
If no, how do we aim to include other languages?

Is the University a preparation for the future or the preservation of the past?

How can we talk about diversity without being diverse?

# What is the nation in Africa, Australia or South America? Who are the First Nations?

For it is clear that a profound hostility toward nationalism is in evidence in the work of such influential colonial discourse theorists as, say, Homi Bhabha, and Trinh Minh-ha. Nationalist discourse-both metropolitan (i.e. colonial) and anticolonial-emerge variously in the writing of these and other theorists, as coercive totalizing elitist, authoritarian, essentialist. Who came first? Who displaced who? (Lazarus, 71).





# Why education for the working class is critical for the survival of a democracy?



Ranjit Guha (1989) has argued in the case of India, that the labouring classes (those far from power, or not involved in politics) were able to exist, survive, thrive and resist the colonial order. Conscientization as noted in the political and military struggles of the colonised, was not a necessary consequence of cultures being shattered or damaged beyond repair.

This explains why after independence countries such as Algeria as well as Zimbabwe seem to have allowed themselves to be dominated by new elites as capable of exploitation, extraction and looting as the previous elite.

**But there are limits to passivity.** The Arab Spring (2010), the change of government in Zimbabwe (2017) confirms that oppression and exploitation, even when local and legitimised, is never tolerated indefinitely.

# Empire and Multitude: **liberation but not yet free**



Indeed the elites of the world continue to collaborate on long-existing projects that even if they had their roots in precolonial Africa (for example, human trafficking), or colonial South America (for example, mining) or post-colonial-India (for example, out-sourcing).

Hardt and Negri (2001) suggest, while the nation appeared in the early twentieth century to be the necessary vehicle for political modernisation, it “...is the **poisoned gift of national liberation**” (132-4).

Participation in a global order has created internal tensions for new nation states, as Mamdani points out in his analysis of the despotic power of postcolonial African state (26) suggesting the previous forms of despotism made for difficult conditions in the transition to democracy. In this view Mugabe and Amin represent a disturbing continuity rather than change.

## From discourse to the University: power and difference (diversity)?

There is an established scholarship on difference and inequality in HE and other sectors: Morley (2012) argues that formal **equality does not equal quantitative change**: declaring the equality of people, without making provision for redress of disadvantage keeps power relationships unequal and unstable for a vulnerable group. Similarly then for race: where groups dominate they set norms and make the rules for who is admitted, belongs and benefits.

Barad (2007) states that **differences are made and re-made depending on the relationship between observer and observed**. Leaders are made via the politics of difference. In institutions in which heteronormativity is aligned with patriarchy, heteronormative culture makes for a struggle for recognition.



# The post-colonial space is **risky**? and also potentially heroic? **Let's move beyond binaries**

## **What risk?**

It is so because of the dangerous space of the post-colonial state, already networked, already compromised (but not shattered, and not without power or agency) that local knowledge (or indigenous knowledge and indigenous languages are so important ) need to be secured and privileged in the knowledge production and reproduction system of higher education.

What potential value lies in retaining Afrikaans? **Diversity.**

Certain questions are no longer worth exploring: for example: **how does English promote exclusion or the perpetuation of colonial values?** This is a question already asked answered by Achebe and Ngugi, albeit in different ways.

And, the world, despite its histories of colonial brutality, needs **common languages.**



# Are old questions still relevant for new times?

Other questions must enjoy more attention now: for example, what are the purposes of planning to develop and introduce indigenous languages in the curriculum? To achieve higher literacy rates, better academic performance and more bridges to intercultural awareness than simply Afrikaans or English can provide. But more than this, we all need to be learning more languages to become better citizens.

How should indigenous knowledge be explored, defined and included everywhere into the curriculum? Because important knowledge is local, remains obscured in colonial debris and opens up new understandings of context, space and place and being.

What are the implications for English and Afrikaans, or western knowledges in terms of sharing space in the curriculum with indigenous languages and indigenous knowledges?

Does diminishment of presence mean sharing space **OR** losing place in learning and in the curriculum? **Instead of defending positions we should be building bridges.**



# Conclusions: what's in it for me, you, us?

What kind of student leader is needed in a post-colonial society dedicated to rebuilding and revaluing human beings? Certainly this person cannot act as all-knowing and impose solutions on the people. Nor can s/he live apart from the people and extract or condone the extraction of wealth from the people. The kind of leader must be inclusive, must as Fanon notes, "**realise that the truths of the nation are in the first place its realities**" (Wretched of the Earth, 1968, 222-23).

What are South Africa's realities now? there is a need for ethical acknowledgement and treatment of all its people. **There is a need for recognition of past pain and an effort to mitigate, address and enable growth beyond simply a recollection of past injustice, or the rewards claimed by virtue of the liberation struggle.**

**Past entitlements, and present entitlements** are dangerous because there are very close relations between post-colonial states and metropolitan centres; in the interests of privilege.

**Thank you**

