

# Theoretical Reflections on the Epistemic Production of Colonial Difference

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**Declaration**

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

.....

**Signature**

.....

**Date**

## **Dedication**

The thirty seven black people/miners we lost at Marikana in August 2012 - were all good and dear to us. They were brutally murdered, their black lives cut short by a black ANC government in collaboration with white capital. They had committed no crime – they did not have to die such violent death – their sin was to have been born black in a world that is anti-black. Their massacre was an affirmation of the post-Enlightenment ethic which considers black people necessarily eliminable. This thesis is dedicated to their memory so we as black folks may never forget them. They were known to their families and to us all by the following names:

**Mgcineni ‘Mambush’ Noki**

**Semi Jokanisi**

**Thembinkosi Gwelani**

**Akhona Jijase**

**Janeveke Liau**

**Tokoti Mangcotywa**

**Bongani Mdze**

**Telang Mohai**

**Thabiso Mosebetsane**

**Babalo Mtshazi**

**Mphumzeni Ngxande**

**Bongani Nqongophele**

**Andries Ntsenyeho**

**Mvuyisi Pato**

**Fezile Saphendu**

**Thabiso Thelejane**

**Nkosiyabo Xalabile**

**Bonginkosi Yona**

**Thobisile Zibambele**

**Tembelakhe Mati**

**Pumzile Sokanyile**

**Sitelega Gadlela**

**Jackson Lehupa**

**Mafolisi Mabiya**

**Anele Mdizeni**

**Makhosandile Mkhonjwa**

**Khanare Monesa**

**Thobile Mpumza**

**Michael Ngweyi**

**Ntandazo Nokhamba**

**Mongezeleli Ntenetya**

**Molefi Ntsoele**

**Motisaoitsile Sagalala**

**Mzukisi Sompeta**

**Mphangeli Tukuza**

**Cebisile Yawa**

**Kutlwano Ledingoane**

## Prologue

“Does the white man understand our custom...?”

How can he when he does not even speak our tongue?

But he says our customs are bad; and our own brothers who have taken up his religion also say that our customs are bad... The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart” (Achebe; 1957: 155-156).

By the early 1800s an epochal though disconcerting process of societal disintegration was afoot in the village of Umuofia. For the whole community this process had from inception been a source of considerable anxiety and anguish. Its trigger was the sudden appearance within the community of colonial missionaries, alongside them a foreign law, culture, religion, cosmology and/or mode of being. For Okonkwo, son of Unoka, the seven year absence from his village of Umuofia in exile heightened his sense of apprehension. Upon return, bearing witness to cultural dislocation and eventually societal dissolution on account of the presence and activities of the colonial merchants of salvation (missionaries) with obvious discomfort, he enquires from his old friend Obierika whether the ‘white man understands our custom...? How can he when he does not even speak our tongue’, is Obierika’s answer.

Languages do not divide the world in the same way, linguists tell us. Moreover, thanks to the French post-structuralist Michel Foucault, we now do know that the world does not ‘turn towards us a legible face which we would have only to decipher; the world is not an accomplice of our knowledge’. To access the world, appropriate and render it intelligible we turn to language. Imbedded in language are a series of meanings and notably a cognitive structure which orders, categorises and domesticates what would otherwise confound the human imaginary. It is Fanon who tells us that to speak a language is to appropriate its world and culture. Long before him it was the German Romantic philosophers, Herder in particular, who argued that language which is the

legacy of a distinctive tradition is the means through which man becomes conscious of his personality. Language he continues is what embodies and expresses the essence and particularity of a people.

However, what irks the mind for Okonkwo, his friend Obierika and the people of Umuofia, Mbanta and other villages of Igboland is a fact broader than the linguistic hiatus between the Igbo cultural world and that of the colonial merchant(s) of salvation. With what audacity - when they had shown tolerance and refrained from concluding on the integrity of the white man's culture – does he proclaim with all the hubris that, 'our customs are bad, our gods are false gods, gods of wood and stone, gods of deceit?'. With an evident sense of bewilderment they wonder. And when the missionary is asked against his counsel: '[I]f we leave our gods and follow your god, who will protect us from the anger of our neglected gods and ancestors', without consternation he declares: 'your gods are not alive and cannot do you any harm. They are pieces of wood and stone'.

For the colonial missionary the situation we read of here does not signify an encounter between two distinct cultural world-views capable of co-existing alongside each other. Neither is it a gesture towards two not necessarily compatible but internally adequate forms of epistemology with none at liberty to claim authority over the other. Epistemological difference and cultural difference are banished. A logical question to ask then is what accords the colonial missionary the privilege or empowers him while remaining outside of a culture to declare contrary to the view of those who dwell within it that its customs, its gods are mute? Posed differently the question is: what is the ratio between the colonial missionary's position or locus of enunciation and the (place of-) non-Western culture(s) he speaks of?

To illuminate the complex which arises here it will benefit us to re-read Lyotard's concept of legitimation. Stated with brevity, legitimation denotes the process by which

the 'legislator' is authorised to set the minimum conditions each statement of necessity must satisfy in order for it to be considered scientifically true. Intricately linked to the right to decide what is true is the right to decide what is just - the gulf separating the regions or domains to which these two statements belong notwithstanding. So as Lyotard rightly points out there exist since the modern times a 'strict interlinkage between the kind of language called science and the kind called ethics and politics'. We have learnt of this in Foucault as the interface between will to power and will to truth or truth as being inside power. The right to decide what is true and the right to decide what is just accordingly then 'stem from the same perspective, the same "choice" if you will – the choice called the Occident'. At this point the riddle thanks to Lyotard no longer overwhelms – the authority of the colonial missionary is Occidental Authority.

To-date the colonial missionary and his co-travellers; the colonial anthropologist, explorer, slave trader, colonial administrator, is no longer the figure of Occidental authority. It now pervades the whole of the modernist human sciences powered by a battery of collusive conceptual apparatuses. For those over whom this authority is exercised the effect is that their historical difference hangs precariously in the taxonomic grid of cultures. More appropriately they have come to inhabit a new textually imposed identity – of ontological nullity\non-being. To demonstrate the present day effectivity of Occidental authority let us search the pages of the **Mail and Guardian** – a South African weekly newspaper.

That its readership is drawn mainly from the middle and upper classes is as widely acknowledged as its relations with **The Guardian** of London. This, in part, is indicative of the modernist sensibilities to which the paper appeals. Perhaps more importantly, it tells of the viewpoint from which it speaks – the dominant modernist viewpoint. Rationality, reason and capital, analytical categories that found their most decisive theoretical formulation in the works of classical modern social theorists such as

Weber, Durkheim and Marx, are the three constitutive if not crucial elements of this viewpoint. Each of these concepts, i.e. rationality, reason and capital, would within modernist discourse acquire a non-temporal, trans-historical and trans-cultural meaning or value. Essentially, modernist thought claims for itself and its categories universal validity, that is, it thinks of itself as existing outside of cultural, historical and temporal strictures. Stripped of their cultural, historical and temporal specificities these concepts/categories travel unencumbered by the much feared charge of ethnocentrism and not so feared methodological charge of conceptual stretching. Emboldened by the claim to universality, simultaneously with reason and rationality, capital intervenes in every society to effect a supposedly inevitable transition from irrational to rational, pre-capitalist to capitalist, traditional to modern society or from *gemeinschaft* to *gesellschaft* to evoke the German sociologist Ferdinand Tonnies.

Embedded in the modern human sciences is a teleological sense of history which sees all societies as moving through a chronological time from a similar originary (pre-modern) past and tending towards a singular (modern) future. Thus, the plurality of futures is in this mode of thought occluded as a possibility. Between pre-modern and modern societies exists a cultural gap or distance. In their attempt to close this gap pre-modern societies must mimic the modular example furnished by Western societies that have successfully made the transition. Interestingly, post Enlightenment Europe has not been content to avail itself as the mirror in looking at pre-modern societies see their future image. It has beyond that self-servingly invested itself with the obligation of tutoring these immature Kantian subjects through the transition. In earlier times this tutorial lesson was organised under the sign of Enlightenment thought and/or Orientalism. From the sixteenth century onwards it came under the aegis of classical modern social thought. Closer to our times, in the post-colonial era, it has come under the banner of bourgeois rational social thought – the modernist human sciences. Just as the colonial missionary was, bourgeois social thought remains resolute in its Enlightenment bequeathed mandate - as guardians saddled with the

sacred mission of tutoring those who are waylaid by some form of unreason or still live enthralled by culture, affinal ties, spirituality and community through to modernity.

The date is September 14, 2007. Niren Tolsi, a senior reporter for the **Mail and Guardian**, in an article titled, '*Dancing to Archaic Rhythms*', pens a commentary on the Zulu traditional ceremony – Umkhosi womhlanga. If the prose in the article seems suffused with hubris, the tone condescending and therefore inclines one to dismiss the work as the product of an ethnocentric mind, a more sober reflection may be necessary. Mr. Tolsi is no oddity but like the merchant(s) of salvation he speaks deep from within a certain tradition, a long venerated tradition of European Enlightenment reason. He, together with the colonial missionary and those who guard the institutional platform from which he speaks, share a moral conviction that theirs is a benevolent act/service - an epistemic movement/project to civilise Africa and Africans.

Before we pause to savour Mr. Tolsi's locution let us set the context. The occasion is Umkhosi womhlanga. For centuries now, it is custom for young ama Zulu girls fully clad in traditional attire, annually, led by the princesses, to assemble at the King's kraal to assert, recognise and celebrate the virtue of preserving their virginity until marriage. For those with a lived relationship to the custom, who dwell within the culture, this is one of the many ways of inhabiting the world or one of the modes of being-in-the-world. For the many ama Zulu (girls) who partake in the custom and have a lived as opposed to an analytical relationship with it, it is not an anachronism or unvanquished remnant of the past. Rather it defines their 'now', their 'present'. In a sense, it defines their life-world in which they are participants (subjects) not observers (objects). It constitutes their everydayness to borrow from the vocabulary of the German philosopher, Martin Heidegger. It does not belong to another time, the time of the past - neither is it an object of anthropological, archival or historical excavation - but rather to the time of the now. For their sense of time, is not the unilinear modern

homogeneous empty time, which schematically divides the history of human life into three time periods; i.e. ancient, medieval and modern.

Notably their idea of ‘worlding the world’ allows them the possibility of recognising the plurality of times existing together - what philosophers variously refer to as entangled times, temporal heterogeneity, timeknots, hetero-temporality, etc. It bears stating that the said present or now is marked by a plurality, it admits of diverse modes of being-in-the-world or peopling the world. Indeed, at other moments the same amaZulu girls adeptly slip into other modes of being-in-the-world as university students, young professionals in modern bureaucratic institutions, members of radical and/or conservative political parties without contradiction. And, like true children of Enlightenment, they adorn a rational scientific outlook or consciousness and claim for themselves a modern sense of reason. This in post-Althusserian thought we have come to know as the dispersion of subject-positions.

Of the occasion, what it signifies, about those who part-take in it and their consciousness, Mr. Tolsi enlightens us thus:

“There is nothing arousing about the sight of 36 000 bare-breasted, barely clothed virgins. Blame it on the relentless sun... or perhaps the litany of speeches which defiantly positioned Zulu culture in direct conflict with the constitution, but as the annual Umkhosi womhlanga (Reed Dance Ceremony) at King Goodwill Zwelithini’s, Enyokeni Palace in Northern KwaZulu-Natal last weekend ground painfully to its conclusion, the virgins gathered began to resemble disoriented refugees rather than any male strumpet fantasy. The Reed Dance may traditionally be the smorgasbord from which Nguni Monarchs like Zwelithini and Swaziland’s King Mswati III add to their personal harems. It may also be used as an open-air peek-a-porno session by the ordinary males who gather, but to find even a sliver of sexual arousal in the affair is near impossible. That male-orientated libidinous anomaly is perhaps the least consequential of the many which plagued the Reed Dance. ‘We, as a Zulu nation, cannot be told what to do about our culture. We cannot apologise about our tradition,’ said Zwelithini

during his keynote address in response to the recently promulgated Children's Act outlawing virginity testing for girls under the age of 16....On how provincial government could use taxpayers' money to sponsor an event that not only exposes the tensions between progressive modernity and patriarchal traditionalism, but more disturbingly, incorporates illegal activities, spokesperson for the provincial department of arts and culture, Ncumisa Fandesi, said the department sponsored the actual event...and not any activities prior. The ceremony itself is stupefying in its mundanity. The king and a regiment of leery old men position themselves in the main kraal as the virgin princesses sprung from Zwelithini's own loins deliver their reeds to him personally...But there we have it. South Africa's muti of science, traditionalism and tourist attractions has much to offer. But perhaps not to taxpayer's pockets, gender equality or the rule of law"

Curious parallels exist between the terms of discourse deployed by Mr. Tolsi and the colonial missionary we encountered earlier. What for the moment I wish to foreground is how both discourses rest secure in the epistemological and ontological security of their means - Occidental Authority. Initially trained against '36 000 bare-breasted, barely clothed virgins' the superiority or enigma of Mr. Tolsi's position of enunciation grows to eventually equal that of the colonial missionary who in his singular voice is empowered to declare against the wisdom of the whole of the Igbo people that their culture is dead. And so it is that under the gravity of Mr.Tolsi's privileged gaze the totality of the Nguni traditional ceremony – Umkhosi womhlanga – becomes 'stupefying in its mundanity'.

Knowledgeable people will realise that, to make his point, Tolsi calls forth a discourse which not only divides the world into two binary opposites locked in an asymmetrical relationship but inflects these categories with certain normativity. Of these two worlds one speaks the language of rights the other in the idiom of culture. The former is the world of the constitution the latter of tradition. One is the world of the taxpayer the other of the bare-breasted barely clothed virgin(s). Accordingly, the former is the world of progressive modernity whilst the other is that of patriarchal traditionalism.

Of the fact that the former is indeed progressive and the latter archaic, Tolsi bears no obligation to convince us for; Hegel had in *Philosophy of World History* already done so, as Kant had before him in his 1763 treatise **Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime**, Marx in his *Consideration of the Future Effects of British Rule in India*, in 1852, and Joseph Conrad in his celebrated novel **Heart of Darkness** penned in 1899. Of course what Mr. Tolsi self-servingly hides from view is the fact that the dominance of the modern discourse he appeals to has always depended on the successful mobilisation of violence on its side. Were this epistemic violence acknowledged it would become glaringly obvious that if non-western cultures are backward, it is not by their own standards, it is by standards alien to them, which they did not form for themselves but were violently imposed upon them by imperial cultures. The centrality of violence in the construction of the modern regime(s) of truth and categories of meaning is what Mr. Tolsi suppresses. A larger question perhaps is: what other narratives of the self and community does modernist thought repress in order to maintain its pre-eminence?

To be sure, the taxpayer in Mr. Tolsi's narrative is a metonym for the abstract secular figure of the human, the citizen-subject. This is the sovereign autonomous rational subject who emerges in Europe between the sixteenth and eighteenth century as both subject and object of power, subject and object of knowledge, and explains everything in the cosmos by appealing to reason. So, rather than see the world as 'ready-at-hand' this modern subject sees the world as having only one mode of presentation as 'present-at-hand', *a la* Heidegger. Inadvertently, the only way possible in which this world that is present-at-hand can be made meaningful is through objective scientific inquiry. Notably, this subject who is a product of the modern construction of public life or politicisation of society is defined by a singular/homogenous mode of being: human being-as-citizen. This product of political modernity is the peasant that the French Revolution turned into a Frenchman *a la* Eugene Weber. As a citizen he/she lives in a secularised Benjaminian empty homogenous time. For this modern subject,

citizenship – that secular modern rational outlook – becomes an overarching identity whose primacy dictates the subordination of all other collectivities, forms of human solidarity and sociality to its logic. Do we not, in Burke’s hierarchy of loyalties, encounter citizenship’s will to dominate?

However, this will to dominate has in identity (difference actually) found its match. Modernist thought perennially bemoans the salience of communal, ethnic, spiritual, religious, cultural and other non-political identities. Literature that explicitly sets as its goal resolving, fixing, transcending the conflict, contradictions, incompatibilities between citizenship and difference now abounds (see amongst others Engin Isin and Patricia Wood’s book **Citizenship and Identity** or Kymlicka’s book **Multicultural Citizenship**). In trail are innumerable antidotes this literature proffers. But as each fails to smother the incommensurability(-ies) modern thought slides unfazed from one formulaic solution to the next. So have we been witness to many of these moves from federalism to multiethnic democracy, consociationalism to multiculturalism, minority/group rights to differential citizenship, cosmopolitan to radical citizenship - but the fault lines remain. Identity (perhaps difference) refuses the sovereignty of citizenship. At variance with the logic of modern rational thought from which derive many of the above measures we must, if the history of postcolonial societies is to be any lesson with Heidegger’s fundamental ontology as our compass, intervene in the discourse on difference not to reconcile citizenship with identity. Rather we must instantiate a fundamental shift by enquiring whether there are ways of being-in-the-world which the theoretical lexicon of political modernity is incapable of explicating, hence falling beyond its disciplinary boundaries?

Postcolonial societies, particularly those as diverse as India, Nigeria and South Africa, are a veritable repository of such life-worlds (ways of peopling the world and/or worlding the world) which expose the limits of citizenship and the realm of the political in accommodating non-Western life in its totality, not as unitary but in its many

fragments. These fragments, it would seem, belie the assumption in modernist thought that political modernity has succeeded in domesticating all facets of everyday life. More tellingly, they point us to a plurality of modes of being-in-the world where the rational, objective modern way of being is merely one existing alongside many. The major deficit or lacuna in the literature on difference in Africa, the present study contends, is that it constructs the discourse on difference within the discursive condition/framework of political modernity, citizenship to be precise. Simply, it assumes that all other forms of human sociality and lived difference must be subsumed within the totalising frame of citizenship. Thus, difference is discussed by first acknowledging the universality or primacy of modern rational secular citizenship within whose confines must remain any expression of difference. Political modernity, in this sense is the norm that sets the bounds of difference, subjecting every expression of it to its logic, declaring those forms of it which fail the rationality test illegitimate, mundane and stupefying, to let Mr. Tolsi speak.

One enduring lesson to be earned from a terse reading of Heidegger's **Being and Time** is that there are varied modes of being-in-the-world. Knowing is only but one of the possible ways in which the self may exist. The knowing self according to Heidegger is only one aspect of being, of human existence. Another mode of being is characterised by a pre-analytic relationship to the world never completely amenable to the objectifying protocols of modern rational secular thought and/or consciousness. Any inquiry into the meaning of 'Being' (*Dasein*) must begin from an exploration of this form of existence, which Heidegger is certain the model of scientific inquiry cannot access. The notion of 'everydayness' is, in Heidegger's text, deployed to capture this form of existence. If our reading of Michel Foucault's **Power/Knowledge** is correct that is what he, quoting Deleuze, calls 'minor knowledges', the validity of which, he avers, is not dependent on the approval of the established regime of thought. In fact, his proposal is that once liberated these 'minor knowledges' must become tools with which to challenge the scientific hierarchisation of knowledges.

The import for us is that citizenship, therefore, may no longer be held sacrosanct as an adequate sign under which to order, even in thought, the lives of non-Western peoples which are meaningfully lived and enacted in spaces and practices beyond the political. Invariably, citizenship may no longer be ‘good to think with’ in its original and unreconstructed form. Rather it must be made to circulate ‘under erasure’ - to use Derrida’s formulation – meaning it has to be subjected to an unsympathetic and thoroughgoing critique to expose and perhaps rid it of the foundational normative assumptions imbedded within it. Used in such a deconstructed form it may enable us think about the ‘being’ of non-Western or colonial peoples in a manner that does not de-legitimate their difference. Let us therefore, following that member of the subaltern collective Dipesh Chakrabarty, see reason as but one way of being-in-the-world, co-existing with numerous other forms that may and need not be compatible with it. In that way, I suspect, we shall have liberated difference from the totalising discourse of citizenship and in the process earned ourselves, as colonial people, the right to difference and to being-in-the-world without becoming anthropological oddities of Mr. Tolsi’s modern mind.

To end this beginning, we return to where we begun - in Chinua Achebe’s timeless novel **Things Fall Apart**. The novel should be read not as a eulogy for an idyllic Igbo past. Its main concern which the present study shares is the life of colonial cultures in the era of Empire. Michael Gelven in an insightful commentary on Heidegger’s *magnum opus* – **Being and Time** – opens up an avenue for thinking through and from colonial cultures without the epistemological absolutism of rationalist thought weighing oppressively on us. He writes; “[I]n all of the ways in which a human person can be said to be, the understanding of such ways is limited by man’s finitude. Even the so-called non-temporal truths of logic are temporal in the sense that they are understood by an agent or mind that is determined by temporal dimensions”.

Emboldened by such an understanding, we may with a wry smile return to Europe its categories of reason, rationality, capital and citizenship now visibly branded with their cultural, temporal, and historical markers. It will of course be illusory to imagine that we can completely jettison these analytical and political categories for one of the most enduring effects of colonialism is to have over-written these categories of political modernity over non-Western (read African) social formations where they now exist in tandem with spirituality, difference, culture and community.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Since this text is written as a general prelude to the work, I have in order to enable an unencumbered reading not cluttered it with tedious referencing. As we return to most of the ideas broached here in the main work, proper references will be provided.

## **Introduction**

“...why is it that non-European colonial countries have no historical alternative but to try to approximate the given attributes of modernity when that very process of approximation means their continued subjection under a world order which only sets their tasks for them and over which they have no control?” (Chatterjee; 1986: 10)

Of major concern to this thesis is the problem of (African) difference in its different dimensions. Early European perspectives emerging out of Enlightenment reason consider the problem of difference to be the distance of non-European (read African) societies generally and modes of being-in-the-world more specifically from the Western norm of civility. Difference in this sense is the distance separating savagery from civilisation. While Enlightenment generated myths constructing the non-Western as an empirical anthropological type, an inferior ‘Other’ of Europe’s superior Self, a rude/primitive counterpoint of European civility, are all part of the early European discourse of non-Western difference there emerges within colonialism a particular variation of the discourse of difference. This discourse takes further the task of constituting the African as different. The challenge of difference in this second sense presents itself as colonial difference (Memmi; 1965). Unlike early European perspectives concerned generally with non-Western difference, the discourse of colonial difference because of its location right within the matrix of Empire is faced with a more immediate and pragmatic task of continually producing and reproducing the African as different – as fit for colonial domination.

Simply, the burden of the colonial discourse of difference is to fit the African culturally, aesthetically, epistemologically, socially etc, for colonial rule. Without exception colonialism everywhere is underwritten by difference – difference as it were supplies the colonial enterprise with requisite cultural capital. But here arises a paradox. According to the discourse of colonial difference the burden of colonialism on the one hand is to turn the savage African into a civilised man – to present him/her with the gift of human subjectivity. On the other hand because the same discourse must

produce the truth of colonial difference it represents the African as incapable of the human sentiment or civility. This is the simple contradiction which dogs the reality of colonial modernity: in the face of colonially promised *sameness* colonial modernity together with its attendant disciplinary knowledges continually (re-)produces the African as an exemplary figure of difference – an anthropological type. Despite its fidelity to the idea of progress for its orthopaedic support the political rationality of colonialism of necessity must produce African difference, which means excluding Africans from humanity, history, civilisation and rooting them in tradition and geography. Through various disciplinary practices and technologies of political rationality the African is transformed into a colonial subject of difference. Better still he/she is hailed into colonial subjectivity? To dwell in the zone of colonial subjectivity we note is to dwell in the zone of the occult, the zone of alterity, the zone of ontological nullity. Colonial subjectivity therefore must be thought of as the non-place of culture – a cultural void.

Beyond critically examining European epistemologies and sensibilities responsible for the production of colonial difference the thesis is equally concerned with the right of colonial Africans to historical difference: how to write their life-worlds, their modes of being-in-the-world without affirming ‘the colonial discourse of an allochronic other, living in another time, still lagging behind’ (Shohat; 1992: 104). Put differently the problem is how to transform African cultural worlds into legitimate spaces of signification, how to restore to non-political traditional systems of thought the capability to represent without the act representation being modulated by objectifying protocols of modern European rationality. The problem becomes even more urgent once we recognise that for the once colonised; coloniality of thought amounts to coloniality of being. It is precisely the coloniality of thought which licenses the recasting of African modes of ‘worlding the world’ often enacted beyond the bounds of political modernity as primitive, anachronistic remnants of a primordial past. What then is the possibility of shifting the locus of enunciation from the circuits of modern

Western rationality to the interior of 'African gnosis' (Mudimbe; 1988)? Perhaps the challenge as Maldonado-Torres (2008) correctly points out is how to found an alternative locus of reason, one that permits us to think about the lived reality of African peoples structured otherwise than modern without modernist and white prejudices?

The problem does not only exist at the level of signification. In the aftermath of the defeat of formal colonial rule by nationalism the concern with difference morphs into a preoccupation with engendering within African social formations the model of the modern. In line with the model of the modern which supplies the image after which nationalists seek to remake the New States, citizenship as a normative category takes precedent over all other forms of sociality. Banished from the consciousness of the citizen are other 'narratives of the self and community that do not look to the state/citizens bind as the ultimate construction of sociality' (Chakrabarty; 2001: 37). Nowhere in the model of the modern is it asked by what authority does citizenship demands the subordination and/or pre-emption of all other modes of being-in-the-world by its logic. Against the foregoing the thesis subjects the non-Western careers of both nationalism and citizenship to critical scrutiny. It enquires whether the narratives of citizenship and nationalism do not superimpose over Non-European (read African) modes of sociality a modernist form of political rationality that is singular and totalising. Is citizenship for example which nationalism through the model of the modern privileges over all other forms human solidarity capable of capturing the totality of life in non-Western societies? Can citizenship together with its attendant order of knowledge, access, render visible, and/or adequately represent African forms of difference lived beyond the border of the political, at variance with the logic of modern objective rational consciousness, without anthropologising it?

All these questions the thesis poses against a point argued by Althusser (1970) that every form of historical individuality is locatable within a particular constellation of the

relations of production. The implication put bluntly is that citizenship cannot be a universal empty statutory category. As a form of historical individuality it emerges within a specific constellation of the relations of production. It emerges the thesis argues in tandem with and/or within the modern capitalist social formation. Over and above proletarian and bourgeois subjectivities the thesis considers citizenship to be the overarching form of human subjectivity within capitalist modernity. Instrumental reason, rationality, objective relation to the world, secularity and individual self-determination are but a few in the long index of features characteristic of the said form of human individuality. All of these features gather in the figure of the citizen, the citizen-subject.

The citizen-subject therefore is arguably the most overarching form of historical individuality within any modern capitalist social formation. In it are united both the worker and capitalist subjectivities. As a form of historical individuality citizenship cannot therefore be located outside of the historically concrete social formation – capitalist modernity – which spurs it into existence. Hence the claim earlier that it is not a universal empty statutory category. To claim universality for citizenship therefore is to universalise a particular, concrete and contingent historical development. In a sense it is to be anti-history. The question is what is the career of both nationalism and citizenship in the non-Western world where modes of being which often display no aspiration towards rationality, reason, individuality, define the present? Does citizenship remain a useful sign under which to order the lives of non-European (read African) people constituted and lived otherwise than modern? These are some of the questions the thesis confronts.

Thought through from the position of colonial people those held to be culturally decrepit, the challenge of difference manifests in the inability (refusal perhaps) of post-Enlightenment reason and its categories to access non-Western modes of being without transforming difference into values. A pertinent question which the thesis

canvasses is what other traditions of scholarship have emerged within African Studies to challenge European epistemologies of colonial difference. And how successful have they been? African studies unfortunately the thesis will argue like nationalism is proof that nothing precludes complicity with the very structure of oppression in the discursive formation of critique (Maldonado-Torres; 2008). It accepts the universality of the European epistemic and political order as well as the moral superiority of its cultural norm. Since the 1960s African Studies betrays an obsession with the model of the modern – how to placate its defects and thus ensure its consolidation in Africa.

Why is it, we ask following Partha Chatterjee (1986), that non-Western (read African) societies have no alternative but to mimic the modular example set for them by the West as though no historical alternative exists? Does it not amount to epistemic colonialism to preclude from thought the possibility of a plurality of futures (on the basis of a plurality of pasts), and to declare that there is only one way in which the world can be habited and known? At the moment when it acquiesce to the universality of the Western political and epistemic order and the moral superiority of its cultural norm does African Studies turn itself into a moment of the Hegelian Idea? To pose the same riddle differently: to what extent has African Studies been complicitous with the modernist project of assimilating into the master narrative of European rational reason, non-Western ways of peopling the world?

The thesis is intended as a work of critique. It is best read as an exercise in philosophical essayism. Driven by an audacity to question and displace the truth claims of European modernist discourse, it seeks to join in the efforts of those who work towards destabilising the authority of both rational citizenship and modern political rationality. The totality of the thesis is constituted by six different essays. While they each contribute to the overarching objective which is to inquire into how colonial difference is epistemologically produced within European thought, they can be read separately. Present within the structure of each essay is a self-contained argument. In the first essay the thesis samples four texts drawn from different regions of European

epistemology. Using these texts the essay unravels the mechanics of the European discourse of colonial difference within or through which Africans are constituted into objects of curiosity. The second essay is a critical commentary on the debates within modern philosophy and contemporary political theory about how modernity constitutes subjects. We survey this European philosophical tradition from Descartes (1997) to the more recent post-structuralist/postmodernist theories of the subject, subjectivity and subjectivation. The third essay demonstrates using as an example a field called South African Studies the effectivity of modernist discourses of colonial difference. To achieve its object the essay inquires: what does the pathology of apartheid look like when written and theorised from the perspective of the colonised pathological black majority?

The fourth essay returns to political philosophy via Charles Taylor's (2002) concept of the modern social imaginary. Through the perspective provided by Taylor (2002) the essay demonstrates that both nationalism and citizenship are not universals but particulars that speak to the history of a particular place, Europe. It is historicism of a Hegelian type that today makes them appear universal the essay argues. The fifth essay renders even more complex the understanding of difference. It examines its articulation within different paradigmatic frameworks that is within colonial thought and postcolonial thought. While the essay avails itself of the language of postcolonial deconstruction it transcends postcolonial theory as a standpoint. Instead it explores within the bounds of phenomenology the possibility of writing non-European modes-of-being-in-the-world without the Western epistemic code weighing heavy over them. The last essay is not a conclusion but registers a few thoughts about the possibility of thinking outside the framework of modern European rationalistic knowledge. The essay asks: can modernity be transcended or has modernity been transcended?

## Chapter I

### The Production of Colonial Subjects of Difference within European Thought

#### Setting the Context

“...trans-coding concerns the integration of some external, contingent traumatic kernel into the subject’s symbolic universe, it is the way to “gentrify” a traumatic experience, to efface its traumatic impact by transforming it into a moment of meaningful totality” (Zizek, 1991:215).

The primary object in this first of the six philosophical essays which constitute the present study is to inquire into the mechanics of the processes within European thought through which colonial subjects of difference are produced. To move into the interior of Western thought thus gain an intimate understanding of its structure of representation, signifying practices and the battery of collusive concepts it deploys the essay engages in a critical reading, textual and discourse analysis as it were, of major texts within European thought. Accordingly the essay is divided into two parts. The first part reads critically a sample of four texts drawn from deep within the regions of European thought. To discipline our curiosity we ask how is colonial difference produced within European thought. While the concern at a general level is with colonial difference more specific focus is given to those discourses within European thought which labour to produce or manufacture Africans as subjects of colonial difference. In the *long duree* the productivity of these discourses is to have rendered being African synonymous with difference. In the second section the essay reads closely a field called African Studies. The intent to find out what traditions of scholarship have emerged within the field as a counter to the universalising structure of European thought. And how successful has the field been in moving to the exterior or transgressing the normative bounds of the totalising framework of European thought? On the whole this essay assumes the process of subjectification. It assumes the possibility of transforming through discourse

concrete individuals into subjects endowed with (colonial) consciousness. To inquire into this process becomes the burden of the second essay.

To attend to the task at hand we have allowed ourselves the possibility of starting off from an encounter between two discourses of difference. That is, two discourses locked in a relationship homologous to that of a Hegelian dialectic and its self-relating negativity or negation. The first of these discourses is European/Western with a genealogy bending over backwards toward Enlightenment reason. Drawn to the present, it finds expression in the modern sciences of man. We shall refer to it as the colonial discourse of difference or Western discourse of colonial difference. The second discourse, fairly recent, is African. It comes into being as a counter to the former and is locatable within the larger field of African studies. Its latter day flag bearers are students of plural and/or heterogeneous societies (Nnoli; 1978, Jinadu; 1985, Osaghae; 1988, Osaghae; 1989). This discourse – African discourse – claims for itself a modicum of autonomy from the former, in fact it thinks of itself as its negation and/or negativity. Like Laclau's (1990) floating signifier it holds itself to be laden with sufficient materiality to engage in an articulatory practice necessarily leading to transformation. For that reason it refuses the authority of and/or splits itself from the European discourse. Its stated object is to transgress the discursive bounds of the European discourse and establish the conditions for its own specificity as well as that of historical or African difference.

My claim is that it fails – reason being that wittingly or unwittingly it styles itself into a Hegelian self-negation of the European discourse. Erroneously considering itself to be the external opposite of the European discourse, it essentially becomes comprehensible not as its negative but more appropriately: it is the first moment of Western discourse itself as its own other, as the negative of itself (Zizek; 1991: 180).

Unlike most chroniclers of Hegelian thought who foreground the impossibility of freedom from the absoluteness of Spirit, a quandary alternately referred to as the Hegelian closed circle or finite totality, Žižek (1991) volunteers a less than theological reading of the Hegelian dialectic. In this reading we pass from the Hegelian *cul-de-sac* to its outside and it is this sense or possibility of freedom that fails to materialise in the current African discourse of difference. For the moment let us follow the example set for us by Žižek (1991) and briefly highlight the elements of the Hegelian *cul-de-sac* into which as we have said the African discourse of difference writes itself into. Žižek's (1991) reading of the Hegelian dialectic takes off from the last chapter of the **Science of Logic**. In it Hegel posits that;

"[I]n the turning point of the (dialectical) method, the course of cognition at the same time returns to itself. As self-sublating contradiction this negativity is the *restoration* of the *first immediacy*, of simple universality; for the other of the other, the negative of the negative, is immediately the *positive*, the *identical*, the *universal*" (Hegel; 1969: 836).

The point at which the course of cognition returns to itself or in a sense becomes self-determining is the originary moment of immediate positivity. Effort at the negation or mediation of this immediate positivity does not constitute its immediate contrary or opposite. Conversely, 'it comes forth precisely when we endeavour to grasp the first moment, the immediate, *in and for itself, as such*' (Žižek; 1991: 180). And so the mediation does not constitute the negative of the originary moment but as pointed out above, it is the first moment itself as its own other, as the negative of itself. To illustrate Žižek juxtaposes "nothingness" to "being" and posits that the former is not the external opposite of the latter. The route to "nothingness" entails first determining the properties of "being". In his words; "we arrive at "nothingness" by simply trying to specify, to determine the content of the notion of "being"". And from this he concludes; "[H]erein consist the fundamental dialectical idea of "inner negativity": an entity is

negated, passes over into its opposite, as a result of the development of its own potential” (1991: 180). It is precisely this fundamental dialectical idea – of inner negativity - that the African discourse of difference remains oblivious to, thereby making it complicit in the process of the elaboration of the originary Western discourse of colonial difference whose enduring claim is the alterity of the African identity. Put differently, to establish African identity as an ontological void has been one of the major achievements of the Western discourse of difference. Citizenship, the study hopes to demonstrate has been the key conceptual apparatus in that process.

Thus to regain freedom from the totality of the originary moment - Western discourse of colonial difference - what we may for now consider to be the immediate positivity we must of necessity first negate its own inner negation. This is the reason why Žižek says ‘negativity must be counted twice: effectively to negate the starting point, we must negate its own “inner negation” in which its content comes to its “truth”’ (1991: 180). To restate differently a point we made earlier - the fundamental flaw in the African discourse of difference is that it fails to count negativity twice hence despite its intellectual offensive the theoretical edifice of the Western discourse of colonial difference is spared. The Western discourse of colonial difference as a consequence begins to approximate the Althusserian world of ideology from which there is no possibility of escape or Saussure’s linguistic structure which presents itself as an enclosed meaning totality wherein slippage from the inside to the outside is foreclosed. To avert its transformation into a moment of the Western discourse, what Žižek (1991) refers to as trans-coding, the African discourse need first come to a realisation that Western thought reconstructs reality from certain categorical principles which admit of certain values, institutions and norms. The claim these categories, institutions and values lay to universality is not epistemological but reflective of the power of the West to make everyone think about their realities and meaning of things through questions

posed by it – through its own modern social imaginary. In this scheme where the Western social imaginary through its alliance with power is projected into a world prism modernity emerges as the very norm of truth, the standard code. Rationality, actually, appeal to rational argument, valuation and judgement becomes the final arbiter that decides acceptability, plausibility and veracity. More urgently the challenge for the African discourse of difference is to enact an alternative locus of enunciation, the corollary of which is to refuse the sovereignty of the Western philosophical location (Mignolo; 2000).

We read from Bhabha's (2004) work titled; **The Location of Culture** wherein he develops a sobering critique of multiculturalism a tentative outline of this alternative philosophical locus. That liberal pluralism does not equate historical difference is one of his main arguments. To restate the same point liberal pluralism does not amount to recognition of historical and/or cultural difference. Cultural diversity which has 'given rise to the liberal notion of multiculturalism' treats culture as an object of empirical rationalist knowledge and this for him constitutes its major defect (Bhabha; 2004: 50). It freezes culture out of its context of social existence and everyday practice wherein considered as a knowledgeable and authoritative form of address it attends adequately to the task of constructing systems of cultural identification and modes of sociality. What multiculturalism can at best achieve according to Bhabha (2004) is recognition of ossified 'pre-given cultural contents and customs', this resulting in a miscellany of formulaic accommodation measures aimed at obscure cultural objects retrieved from time out of mind but now read within the framework of an historicist imagination of time.

It is these ideas sponsored by the notion of multiculturalism which legitimate at the level of political practice the "neutralisation of *cultural* differences in the name of

‘universality’ of rights” where modernity supplies both the “ideological and institutional definitions of what counts as ‘human’...” (Bhabha; 2004: xvii). As an antidote Bhabha (2004) drawing from Balibar’s (1994) perceptive study, **Masses, Classes, Ideas** recommends what he calls a ‘right to difference in equality’. Such a right to difference-in-equality encompasses a will to revise the ‘customary components of citizenship - political, legal and social citizenship - by extending them to include the realm of ‘symbolic citizenship’’. The symbolic aspect of citizenship, he continues, ‘raises affective and ethical issues connected with cultural differences...’(2004: xvii). It goes without saying, however, that as long as thought continues to unfold from the modernist frame of valuation the possibility of moving towards non-modern circuits of knowledge as envisaged by Bhabha (2004) remains foreclosed. Its condition of possibility is the will to create a place of enunciation unmarked by rationalist modernist discourse. In a sense this means, to use Bhabha’s terms ‘identifying with the ‘starting points’ of other national and international histories and geographies’ (2004: xx). Later in the study we elaborate on what we consider to be the essential features and intellectual productivity of these alternative starting points or geocultural locations.

Let us now proceed to read more closely Western thought in order to underline within it the mechanics of the processes leading to the secretion of colonial difference and/or colonial subjects of difference. Mudimbe (1988) has with rare perspicacity drawn us in one stroke the historical map, epistemological geography and theoretical architecture of the Western discourse of colonial difference. This he does beginning from the fifteen through the sixteen to the eighteen and nineteen hundreds. Picking his way through a mass of scholarly evidence he teases out signifying practices at work within this discourse, spells out how Western thought and its disciplinary knowledges has for centuries constructed versions of the non-Western world alongside an image of its inhabitants. I do not wish to press all this any further on general speculative theoretical

grounds. It seems to me that the value and credibility of our case can only be established by being more specific. As such the study samples four canonical texts in order to get a closer appreciation of how the colonial subject of difference – the African – is produced within European thought. These will constitute the background against which we intend illuminating the limits of the African discourse of difference. More precisely, how the latter has been trans-coded to borrow from Žižek’s vocabulary into a moment of the Western discourse of colonial difference. Drawn from different regions of epistemology the following texts are not only symptomatic but occupy the frontline in the larger Western epistemological project to herd Africans into the zone of non-being.

### **Reading Western Epistemologies of Colonial Difference**

Written in 1763 (1960), **Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime** antedate Kant’s trilogy of Critiques. In the evolution of his thought it is by his more enthusiastic readers assigned a place in what is considered to be pre-Critical Kantian philosophy. Most commentators aver that its remarkable contribution is to evacuate the aesthetic from the domain of subjectivity and ground it in reason (see the introduction to the text by Goldthwait; 1960). For colonial peoples, however, its significance has to lie elsewhere. Kant (1960) declares in the text that unlike Western virtually all non-European societies possess neither a sense of beauty nor the sublime. Odd as this sounds it is no symptom of a less endowed mind. It is a view whose salience is so sedimented within the structure of Western reason and Western consciousness such that we read it more than a century later in Sir Harry Johnston’s work named; **History of the Colonisation of Africa by Alien Races** penned in 1899. In it Johnston [1899](1913) enlightens us of the exceptionality of the race, the avowed Victorian belief that Europeans are not like other man. Of the totality of humanity it is ‘the white-skinned sub-species which alone has evolved beauty of facial features and originality of

invention in thought and deed' (1913: 450). In **Black Skin, White Masks** Fanon (1952) speaks of this truly Manichaeian view of the world that is black and/or white in the following terms; 'I am white; in other words, I embody beauty and virtue, which have never been black. I am the color of day. I am black...' (1952: 27).

To return to Kant's (1960) text we must consider it not for the sense of revulsion it triggers but more importantly for its revelatory currency. Essentially, the text bears testimony to an already existing structure of signification and rules of representation at the centre of which was and remains faith in the idea of progress. We learn from Robert Nisbet an avid defender and historian of the idea of progress that by then 'the spell of the idea of progress - and with it the Eurocentric view of the entire world - had grown to such proportions that little if anything in the world could be considered in its own right. Everything had to be seen through the West and its values' (1980: 150). Indeed Kant prefaces his comments on the African sense of beauty and the sublime (or lack thereof) with a survey of fine discerning superior notions of beauty definitive of Western societies. More than reason one gets a sense from the structure of representation that it is these Western societies and their discerning notions of beauty that provide the standard against which Kant assesses their non-Western counterparts. We observe for instance from the text that with the necessary provisos the Arabs become the Spaniards of the Orient, Persians the French of Asia, Japanese the English etc., (Kant; 1960: 109-110). In a sense then non-Western societies cannot in their own right constitute analytical categories – they cannot be understood on their own. Meaning is lent to them by the West as an epistemic category. The West provides the prism through which to view them, it is the standard, the norm, a universal norm against which they are measured. I am white; in other words I embody beauty and virtue, for that reason I am the norm, the standard!

About Africans who possess no sense of finer feeling Kant's views are worth reproducing at length;

"The Negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the trifling. Mr. Hume challenges anyone to cite a single example in which a Negro has shown talents, and asserts that among the hundreds of thousands of blacks who are transported elsewhere from their countries, although many of them have even been set free, still not a single one was ever found who presented anything great in art or science or any other praiseworthy quality, even though among the whites some continually rise aloft from the lowest rabble, and through superior gifts earn respect in the world. So fundamental is the difference between these two races of man, and it appears to be as great in regard to mental capacities as in color. The religion of fetishes so widespread among them is perhaps a sort of idolatry that sinks as deeply into the trifling as appears to be possible to human nature. A bird feather, a cow's horn, a conch shell, or any other common object, as soon as it becomes consecrated by a few words, is an object of veneration and of invocation in swearing oaths. The blacks are very vain but in the Negro's way, and so talkative that they must be driven apart from each other with thrashings" (1960: 110-111).

Without any sense of trepidation Kant assigns an unbridgeable chasm, difference he says, between whites and Africans which is as great in mental capacities as in colour to the domain of aesthetics. But the import for us is how race and mental capability come to undergird or become markers of difference. By turning race and intellectual capability into measures of difference, Kant (1960) registers his commitment to the project of constituting non-Western people into the West's inferior Other. Of course this long standing project predates him by centuries - it has similarly outlived him by centuries - we continue to read it today in several modernisation leaning texts. But Kant (1960) was not done yet engendering the veracity of the claim - of a peculiar racial psychological make-up of the African. Thus we must indulge him as he addresses us now on the coterminality of race (being African) and cognitive capability or its lack (stupidity):

"[I]n the lands of the black, what better can one expect than what is found prevailing, namely the feminine sex in the deepest slavery? A despairing man is always a strict master over anyone weaker...Of

course, Father Labat reports that a Negro carpenter, whom he reproached for haughty treatment toward his wives, answered: “You whites are indeed fools, for first you make great concessions to your wives, and afterward you complain when they drive you mad””.

More telling perhaps than the encounter between Father Labat and the Negro carpenter is Kant’s peroration delivered with such poignancy typical of a regal judge:

“[A]nd it might be that there were something in this which perhaps deserved to be considered; but in short, this fellow was quite black from head to foot, a clear proof that what he said was stupid” (1960; 113).

The second in our sample of four texts comes from yet another eminent philosopher of German Idealism – Hegel. Between the years 1818 – 1831 Hegel, at the time professor at the University of Berlin, delivers lectures on various subjects including; aesthetics, philosophy of religion, philosophy of history and history of philosophy. These lectures would subsequent to reworking and refinement be published posthumously after he fell in 1831. **The Philosophy of History** published from Hegel’s lectures given under the same rubric declares the philosophical history of the world as its subject matter. Before we read closely this text a caveat is necessary. Hegel’s intervention within the Western discourse of African difference happens at two levels: methodological and substantive. While his substantive contributions earn our extended focus below a brief note on his method (Hegelian dialectic) is called for. In the Hegelian dialectic the ‘Idea’ or ‘Spirit’ essentially constitutes the essence where every other thing, history particularly, becomes an expression or culmination of this essence. Contained within the Idea or essence is the entirety of the historical process which is merely an inexorable or teleological expression of the originary moment or single cause (Hudson; 1994). History then unfolds in a pre-determined manner toward a pre-determined *telos* following the logic inscribed in the cause.

To understand history and historical processes one must discount the contingency of historical developments and the peculiar constellation of forces within concrete historical moments and turn toward the essence within which is contained all the necessary and sufficient conditions for historical progress. Because of the notion of expressive causality – where history is the expression of the essence - operative within this method once one apprehends the cause the totality of human history becomes possible to understand and to state in an *a priori* fashion. A parallel can be drawn here in the way in which it becomes possible to understand and explain apartheid in its totality once one has identified its cause or essence in the backward frontier Afrikaner outlook. The motor for its subsequent development is locatable or envisaged within the originary essence, the backward frontier Afrikaner outlook. The teleological sense of history where the spirit originates in one part of the world, evolve and ultimately reach its culmination in another part of the world which Hegel adumbrates today pervades the modern sciences of man as modernisation theory. Of course its Hegelian ancestry is now hardly acknowledged (on the Hegelian dialectic see: Riedel; 1984).

To access Hegel's substantive contributions to the Western discourse of colonial difference we return to his text **The Philosophy of History**. Whilst its concern is history, Hegel's (1952) text is shot through with such plenitude of signification that within its territory a multiplicity of discourses, from various other epistemological regions of the Western canon co-habit. Present within its register are traces of the missionary, anthropologist, colonialist, explorer and slave trader's narratives. Our intent as we read Hegel (1952) is to bring to the surface three of his substantive contributions to the Western discourse of colonial difference, viz. constitution of Africans into non-beings; denial of any historical development and capability to Africa and lastly a portrait of African primitivity.

In an illuminating study **Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object** Fabian (1983) maps the spatial and temporal distance established within Western thought, anthropology specifically, to remove colonial Africans from co-humanness or coequality. Useful for a time Fabian's notion of coequality loses its appeal when read against phenomenological expositions of the lived experience of the colonised. This is because its posited situation is that of inequality between human subjects. Drawing from Fanon (1952), Maldonado-Torres (2008), shows that in a context defined by colonial relations of power to inhabit the space of blackness is to exist outside the bounds of being. For blackness in a colonial situation, according to Fanon, signifies the zone of non-being, 'it is a relational term that represents an area of exclusion from the reign of humanity' (Maldonado-Torres; 2008: 104). It is partly for this reason that ontology – the science of being – fails in the colonial context. If there is truth in Maldonado-Torres' claim that in the colonial milieu 'blackness signifies something like the anti-thesis of being, or, using Heideggerian parlance, the veritable house of *non-being*', ontology and coequality cannot but exhaust their purchase (2008: 104). Both fail to realise that the lived experience of the black colonised is that of non-being and that the relation between the West and its colonial others is a relation between beings and non-beings.<sup>1</sup>

The discussion above on the limits of ontology in the colonial context helps to situate Hegel's effort to constitute the African into an epitome of non-being. Accordingly his contribution was not to remove the African from human coequality rather it was to construct the African as being outside of humanity, as less than human. His effort in **The**

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<sup>1</sup> I am quite conscious that for Maldonado-Torres (2008) as well as Fanon [1952] to establish the non-humanity of the colonised other (African) they both engage in a critique that moves away from the Hegelian dialectic. On the other hand to arrive at the same point or to underpin the non-humanity of the African I move into the interior of Hegel's exposition of the dialectic or culmination of Spirit as set out in **The Philosophy of History**.

**Philosophy of History** to convince us of the ontological nullity of the African hinges on a number of theoretical points. To begin with he argues that for one to be Human one must be a moral being. It certainly will repay future effort to decipher what influence Rousseau – who we know Hegel read – had on Hegel in this regard. Writing almost a century earlier in Chapter VIII of the **Social Contract**, Rousseau [1762](1955) argues that a fundamental change marks the transition of man from the state of nature to the civil state. And this change is that in a civil state man's actions acquire the 'morality they had formerly lacked', without which man remains a mere instinctual thing in the state of nature (1955: 15). According to Hegel (1952) the discovery of morality for oneself and its appreciation for its intrinsic value marks the coming into consciousness. Because this consciousness has not developed in the African he/she has not as yet crossed the threshold of humanity. Those who for themselves have discovered the norms of human deference, justice, and feeling must then in dealing with the African suspend these principles – 'lay aside all thought of reverence and morality, all that we call feeling' - Hegel (1952) extols his fellow Europeans. This is how Hegel articulates the point;

"The peculiarly African character is difficult to comprehend, for the very reason that in reference to it, we must quite give up the principle which naturally accompanies all *our* ideas-the category of universality. In Negro life the characteristic point is the fact that consciousness has not yet attained to the realization of any substantial objective existence-as for example God, or law-in which the interest of man's volition is involved and in which he realizes his own being...The Negro, as already observed, exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state. We must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality, all that we call feeling, if we would rightly comprehend him; there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character" (1952: 196-197).

What amounts to history, universal history that is, according to Hegel (1952), is the development of the consciousness of freedom on the part of spirit – this Rousseau calls moral liberty - and the consequent realisation of that freedom. This process unfolds

gradually in successive waves whereupon the successive stage transcending an earlier one gains a 'richer and more concrete shape' (1952: 182). The ultimate of this process, its final consummation, is political constitution – the state. Viewed in this light Hegel's admiration for Napoleon – 'that world soul' – the purveyor of political constitution(s) becomes more than an arbitrary personal affective fascination. In societies where the consciousness of freedom lacks and no movement towards its consummation has been recorded people descend to the level of mere things – objects of no value. This is the second anchorage point at which berths Hegel's denial of being to Africans - for they are a people devoid of the consciousness of freedom. Neither have they shown a capability of movement towards its realisation. To advance the point Hegel writes:

"Another characteristic fact in reference to the Negroes is slavery. Negroes are enslaved by Europeans and sold to America. Bad as this may be, their lot in their own land is even worse, since there a slavery quite as absolute exists; for it is the essential principle of slavery, that man has not yet attained a consciousness of his freedom and consequently sinks down to a mere thing—an object of no value" (1952: 198)

In a study of the crisis in Darfur, **Saviours and Survivors: Darfur, Politics and the War on Terror**, Mamdani (2009) protests the Hegelian tendency in Western thought to portray African societies as places of no history. So pervasive is this understanding of African social formations that today it passes unnoticed in many scholarly writings. The toxicity of this tendency is that it legitimates external interventions as well as lends credence to the self-serving view that initiative always has to reside or emanate from outside the continent. Didn't Marx in 1852 (2000) rationalising British colonial rule in India celebrate it as an impetus for historical development fulfilling a double mission: 'one destructive, the other regenerating—the annihilation of old Asiatic society and the laying of the material foundations of Western society in Asia' (2000: 332)? If for Marx (2000) colonialism is the motor for Hegel (1952) it is slavery that ushers African societies into

history. Slavery in this wise becomes such a noble act in itself that Hegel would be impelled to declare it; 'a phase of advance from the merely isolated sensual existence, a phase of education, a mode of becoming participant in a higher morality and the culture connected with it' (1952: 199). The elaboration of this tendentious view of Africa's ahistoricity constitutes as noted earlier Hegel's second substantive contribution to the Western discourse of African difference.

In its most common version, banal nonetheless, this tendential understanding proclaims Africa's encounter with the West as the beginning of its history. Indeed it is a view held and espoused by many authors within South African studies that 1652, the year of effective colonisation marks the beginning of the country's history proper. Hegel (1952) however does not stop at emptying the continent of its history but goes further to deny to Africa capability for historical movement. So pervasive is this strand of thought within the West that even Marxism, despite its usual accent on history, is not immune to it. To turn again to Marx of 1852, we encounter a determined effort to paint India (read colonial societies) as a place languishing at the bottom pit of historical stagnation. He is emphatic in how he makes the point: "Indian society has no history at all, at least no known history. What we call its history is but the history of the successive intruders who founded their empires on the passive basis of that unresisting and unchanging society" (2000: 332). But it is Hegel we must read for a more pointed expression of this negation. The detail with which Hegel (1952) presages his argument is interesting not because it proves the point but for its incredulity;

"In Dahomey, when the king dies, the bonds of society are loosened...All the wives of the king (in Dahomey their number is exactly 3333) are massacred...The wives of the king regard this, their death as a necessity; they go richly attired to meet it".

After jolting our sensibilities with the above detail Hegel's adverse comment on the internal stagnation of African societies is supposedly meant to find us already sullied;

"From these various traits it is manifest that want of self-control distinguishes the character of the Negroes. This condition is capable of no development or culture, and as we see them at this day, such have they always been" (1952: 199).

Having in his view mastered enough evidence to prove the historical immobility of the continent and its peoples, Hegel (1952), makes bold to conclude in his now (in-)famous statement;

"At this point we leave Africa, not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the world; it has no movement or development to exhibit...What we properly understand by Africa, is the unhistorical, undeveloped spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of the world's history" (1952: 199).

The last of Hegel's (1952) contributions to the Western discourse of African difference we bring to view is his portrait of African primitivity. The productivity of his labour in this regard surpasses even the best of known anthropological efforts. About the primitive brutes, Africans that is, he writes;

"The undervaluing of humanity among them reaches an incredible degree of intensity. Tyranny is regarded as no wrong, and cannibalism is looked upon as quite customary and proper. Among us instinct deters from it...But with the Negro this is not the case, and the devouring of human flesh is altogether consonant with the general principles of the African race; to the sensual Negro, human flesh is but an object of sense—mere flesh. At the death of a king hundreds are killed and eaten; prisoners are butchered and their flesh sold in the markets; the victor is accustomed to eat the heart of his slain foe. When magical rites are performed, it frequently happens that the sorcerer kills the first that comes in his way and divides his body among the bystanders" (1952: 198).

Need we say more?

The third in our sample of texts is Joseph Conrad's novel, **Heart of Darkness**. Phenomenology has long recognised the value in literature. The profit in it is that it offers subjective immediacy to the reality portrayed. Further it has the benefit of capturing to the full the structure of consciousness. Written in 1899 after his sojourn in the Congo, Conrad's novel allows us encounter with immediacy the subjective recess of the European conscious - it permits us a handle on both the conceptual and cultural capital available to the European mind as it seeks to apprehend, perhaps construct the non-European world and subjects. Although Conrad (1983) through Marlow (in the novel Conrad fictionalises his life and biographical experience into that of Marlow the main character) for instance paints us an elaborate image of Africa and the African, the views he expounds are not exclusive to him. Rather he works within a paradigmatic cultural model – what Foucault (1980) refers to as the conceptual terrain in which knowledge is produced. In a sense Conrad (1983) works within an existing archive. And to this paradigmatic model and/or archive he betrays religious fidelity. Achebe (1997) notes in his review of the book, that Conrad (1983) simply availed himself of the dominant image of the African already existent within Western imagination.

Mudimbe (1988) has in another context made a similar observation in relation to the explorer's text. **Heart of Darkness** like the explorer's text is not epistemologically inventive. They are both characterised by path dependency. As Mudimbe (1988) notes and this would be true also for Conrad's text (1983); '[I]n what the explorer's text does reveal, it brings nothing new besides visible and recent reasons to validate a discipline already remarkably defined by the Enlightenment' (1988: 16). One such disciplinary

knowledge upon which Conrad (1983) sought to bring his skills to bear is colonial cartography, textual mapping more precisely.

The centrality of map making to the colonial enterprise has commanded the attention of a number of scholars (Comaroff; 2001; Garuba; 2002). Colonial cartography for a time tended to be understood in its narrow traditional conception - as the delimitation in space of boundaries, rivers, mountains and other features of the landscape. In this sense it acquires an aura of scientific objectivity because it is thought of as representing the terrain in a mimetic form. In a study titled *'Mapping the Land/Body/Subject: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies in African Narrative'*, Garuba (2002) however alerts us to the significance of yet another aspect of colonial cartography. This he explains is 'the textual tradition of mapping the Other in European culture' (Garuba; 2002: 92). While shifting our gaze towards textual mapping or literary maps Garuba (2002) does not discount the presence within cartographic constructions of space signifying strategies which admit of certain 'silences, positional enhancements, and representational hierarchies' (Harley; 1988, cited in Garuba; 2002: 89). Our reading of Conrad's novel **Heart of Darkness** leverages then conceptual resources sedimented within the Western tradition of textually mapping the Other.

In his discussion of what he refers to as the fourfold mandate of empire, John Comaroff (2001) gestures towards this tradition of textual mapping at whose centre is 'the 'discovery' of dark unknown lands, which were conceptually emptied of their peoples and cultures so that their 'wilderness' might be brought properly to order – i.e. fixed and named and mapped' (2001:39). From Paul O'Prey's (1983) introduction to the Penguin edition of the novel we read that indeed at the tender age of nine Conrad is already immersed in the tradition of emptying non-Western lands of their peoples and

cultures turning them into wilderness or blank spaces. Conrad himself reports in **A Personal Record**, that;

“It was in 1868 when nine years old or thereabouts, that while looking at a map of Africa of the time and putting my finger on the blank space [the Stanley Falls Region] then representing the unresolved mystery of that continent, I said to myself with absolute assurance and an amazing audacity...: when I grow up I shall go there” (cited in O’Prey; 1983:11).

Of course we hear Marlow in the actual pages of the novel when looking for a ship repeat Conrad’s childhood desire to go to Africa (Congo) – and resolve the unresolved mystery of that continent. How Congo whose Central African inhabitants and cultures predate by centuries Conrad’s young mind could suddenly under his Western gaze turn into a blank space and what precisely is the unresolved mystery that Congo represents we are left to wonder. Garuba (2002) does however inform us that; ‘[T]he gesture of textually emptying territories and creating virgin lands waiting for European penetration is a well worn colonialist strategy as is the projection of fantasies of savagery and cannibalism upon unknown territories’ (2002: 93). These textual manoeuvres are of monumental service the colonial project to such an extent that without them the whole colonial enterprise hangs in jeopardy. First they help assuage the anxieties of the colonialists arising from their (anticipated) encounter with an unknown social, cultural and geographic terrain. Secondly, textually inscribing into these blank spaces certain notions of cannibalism, primitivity, and/or sensuality, however far-fetched, imposes a certain order of things and corresponding disposition of character. Moreover it domesticates or textually stabilises these territories thereby readying them in the process for colonial violation. To return again to the pages of the novel, we encounter Conrad\Marlow who now in his adult years realises that ‘the biggest, the most blank’ of the spaces on earth was by this time not a blank space anymore:

“[I]t had got filled since my boyhood with rivers and lakes and names. It had ceased to be a blank space of delightful mystery – a white patch for a boy to dream gloriously over. It had become a place of darkness’ (1983: 33)

At this material point the continent ceases to be a space since it has been textually mapped into a place – a place of darkness. Even though the continent unfortunately remains a place of darkness, its terrain no longer disorients the European mind because it had by now become cognitively accessible, it had been textually stabilised, it had acquired names, even if it is, ‘names that seemed to belong to some sordid farce acted in front of a sinister back-cloth’ (Conrad; 1983: 40). What we are witness to here is the staging of a typically Foucauldian logic where the subject is first appropriated, normalised then judgement passed over it. Similarly the continent once textually mapped or normalised into a place of darkness then becomes available for cognitive appropriation. We learn from Hamer’s (1989) essay titled, *‘Putting Ireland on the Map’* that, ‘[A]n abstracted and standardised representation of terrain challenges direct local experience and removes, as it were, the terrain from the cognitive ownership of those who inhabit it’ (1989: 184). Even if the reflex here is to think of the discursive dispossession effected in South Africa through the colonial names that continue to mark the landscape that temptation must for now be kept in check. Pertinent to our task is the discountenance by Conrad (1983) of local understanding, history and meaning world arising out of indigenous people’s interaction with and use of the land. This erasure is of course a preamble to the declaration of European cognitive ownership of the colonised land(s).

Nowhere has this act of textually emptying the land been more perfected than in South African studies. South African studies, is replete with literature arguing that the settlement of the interior by white colonialists proceeds at the same time with the arrival of indigenous African people from the north, presumably from Central Africa.

Less ideologically jaundiced scholars however do acknowledge anthropological, archaeological and linguistic evidence which suggests a longer history of settlement by indigenous Africans dating back to the Stone and Iron Ages. Didn't while delivering the Rhodes Memorial Lectures at Oxford in 1929, General Christian Smuts perform the same manoeuvre of emptying the land of its peoples and culture(s)? He claims with tacit approval from his erudite audience that 'when the white emigrants entered and occupied Natal, they found the entire territory between Zululand and Pondoland unoccupied; it had been laid bare and made a waste...' (1930: 101). Conrad (1983), in a similar fashion reports that in his two hundred mile long tramp that took fifteen days to the Central Station he encounters not a single human settlement. All that comes in his way are;

"Paths, paths, everywhere; a stamped-in network of paths spreading over the empty land...and a solitude, a solitude, nobody, not a hut. The population had cleared out a long time ago. Still I passed through several abandoned villages" (1983: 47-48).

By virtue of this pre-emptive move Conrad expunges at once all possible oppositional narratives of local experience and arrogates unto himself the task of inscribing on the body of the land a new identity/narrative. Consequently, Congo, that vast land larger than the whole of continental Europe becomes knowable through the Western mediated sign; the Company Station, the Inner Station, the Central Station, the Coast, etc. In light of the above Garuba's (2002) assertion that 'colonial mapping represented landscapes of mobility for the coloniser' while the colonised for whom their land had suddenly become unknowable, 'it presented a circumscribed landscape of constraint' rings true (2002: 96). One can surmise that at this stage the unresolved mystery that Congo earlier represented unravels as Western cognitive propriety over it is discursively and textually encoded.

We alluded earlier to the fact that Conrad (1983) in the novel is in constant dialogue with several other texts which constitute the discursive field within which his own narrative acquires meaning. It is this field which authorises, legitimates and/or lends gravity to many of his statements and assumptions. More pointedly these texts provide for Conrad's novel what in **The Archaeology of Knowledge** Foucault (1982) refers to as conditions of possibility or what we can think of as an epistemological context. Secured in the authority of this context, and absolved of the need to found or ground in reason his postulations, Conrad (1983) for example: divides the world into binary opposites – civilised/savage; assumes all societies to be moving through a diachronic line of progress- 'and this also has been one of the dark places of the earth'; and projects Europeans as an embodiment of the superior universal norm/spirit – 'we whites from the point of development we had arrived at..., must necessarily appear to them [savages] in the nature of supernatural being' (1983: 29, 86).

Throughout the novel Conrad (1983) labours to maintain spatial and temporal distance between the civilised West and savage Africa(ns). **Heart of Darkness** for instance opens at the river Thames. In the narrative river Thames becomes a metonym for that historical part of the world, the civilised world. Its virtues are those of the broader Western world. On the other hand river Congo stands in for the whole of pre-historic Africa – its features synonymous with those of a barbarous continent. When Conrad (1983) at the beginning of the novel celebrates what at first appears like natural and aesthetic attributes of the river he is actually paying tribute to the brilliance of the race, European race. Europe of the Enlightenment thinkers, home to the Human race, a place of history, a place whose inhabitants are endowed with agency, are emissaries of light - in Hegelian terms this Europe is the place where the Spirit originates. To appreciate the gap Conrad (1983) accentuates between Europe and Africa, let us contrast the rhetoric

deployed in the novel to describe these two rivers. Following is the eulogy for river Thames:

“Forthwith a change came over the waters, and the serenity became less brilliant but more profound. The old river in its broad reach rested unruffled at the decline of day, after ages of good service done to the race that peopled its banks, spread out in the tranquil dignity of a waterway leading to the utmost ends of the earth...The tidal current runs to and fro in its unceasing service, crowded with memories of men and ships...It had known and served all the men of whom the nation is proud... Hunters for gold or pursuers of fame, they all had gone out on that stream, bearing the sword, and often the torch, messengers of the might within the land, bearers of a spark from the sacred fire. What greatness had not floated on the ebb of that river into the mystery of an unknown earth” (1983: 28-29)

If river Thames opens up the way to the utmost ends of earth, inscribed on its waters is the history of service to the nation, it has been the launch pad of progress to those distant lands, mysteries of unknown earth. River Congo its counter-point is a place of lack, bereft of any history of service, its riotous vegetation and unsavoury climate robs it of dignity, profundity. It lacks human creativity, agency, nothing in fact that goes under the name history is attributable to it. Conversely, it is a long stream to the nether world, impenetrable to human thought. In a word river Congo (Africa) is to river Thames (Europe) what the picture is to Dorian Gray – ‘a carrier on to whom the master unloads his physical and moral deformities so that he may go forward, erect and immaculate’ (Achebe; 1997: 123). When Conrad (1983) underwrites the gap between Europe and Africa he precludes the plausibility of European and African co-presence;

“Going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings. An empty stream, a great silence, an impenetrable forest. The air was warm, thick, heavy, sluggish. There was no joy in the brilliance of sunshine. The long stretches of the waterway ran on, deserted, into the gloom of overshadowed distances... you lost your way on that river as would in a desert, and butted all day long against shoals, trying to find the channel,

till you thought yourself bewitched and cut off for ever from everything you had known once-somewhere-far away – in another existence perhaps...And this stillness of life did not in the least resemble a peace. It was stillness of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention” (1983: 66)

Two different rivers - two categorical worlds. One characterised by the tranquil dignity of its waterway. The other in which you are most likely to lose your way till you think yourself bewitched. Surely such worlds cannot co-habit within the same cognitive space. They must of necessity belong to two incongruous cognitive spaces. One accessible through the Western mediated sign, i.e. nation, history, etc., the other ‘impenetrable to human thought’ (Conrad; 1983: 94). Taking his train of thought to its logical conclusion Conrad (1983) as it were evokes Hegel and declares Africa as essentially existing outside of historical time. This unbridgeable spatial and temporal lag between Europe and Africa settles ultimately into the impossibility of mutual comprehension. It is best here to take Conrad (1983) at his own word;

“We penetrated deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness...We were wanderers on pre-historic earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet...The steamer toiled along slowly on the edge of a black and incomprehensible frenzy. The prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us – who could tell? We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings...We could not understand because we were too far and could not remember, because we were travelling in the night of first ages, of those ages that are gone, leaving hardly a sign – and no memories” (1983: 68-69)

Note that the first ages that are said to be gone leaving behind no memories, hardly a sign, constitute the existent condition of Africa’s present. Conrad’s (1983) claim basically is that Africans, prehistoric man he says, live in an undecipherable void. To end off this reading of Conrad’s novel we record its denial of historical individuality to Africans. An intricate relationship exists between the appreciation for time (temporal aptitude) and

modern historical individuality or human subjectivity. As is now well known modern subjects dwell within a certain structure of time, the modern homogenous empty time. Yet again, we are now well aware that the moment of the modern is the moment of the political. Thus to be modern is to dwell within the political. The denial of human subjectivity to Africans within **Heart of Darkness** could then easily be explained as a logical consequence of the fact that Africans exist beyond the bounds of modern historical time and the bounds of the political. Be that as it may Foucault's genealogy of the modern subject offers a more profitable line of inquiry. From it we learn that for the concrete individual to attain historical individuality it must be constituted both into an object and subject. A distinct marker of the subject is the capability to represent itself. Over and above its many other attributes, it is a speaking subject. For evidence of the native's incapability for language we only need to follow Conrad (1983) as he describes the native's response to their impending departure with the sickly Kurtz;

"...they shouted periodically together strings of amazing words that resembled no sounds of human language; and the deep murmurs of the crowd, interrupted suddenly, were like the responses of some satanic litany" (1983: 108-109)

To prove once more the want of historical individuality amongst natives let us juxtapose two figures in the novel. One is the figure of the 'woman with helmeted head' Mr Kurtz' primitive lover, the other is the figure of yet another woman who 'had a mature capacity for fidelity, for belief' – Mr Kurtz's white wife. When upon return to Europe Marlow goes to see the latter with a batch of papers Mr. Kurtz had left in his care, she at once exhibits all the features of a modern rational speaking subject: '[S]he came forward, all in black, with a pale head, floating towards me in the dusk...She took both my hands in hers and murmured, "I heard you were coming" (1983: 117). As if to validate her capability for rationalist modern consciousness, with certitude she insists that something of significance must be retrievable from Mr. Kurtz's fall. And that we

find according to her to be: 'His example' (1983: 120). The metaphor of the example we recall in modernist European thought performs a crucial signifying practice. Relative to the non-Western world Europe provides an example, a modular example, available for mimicry. When she thinks in the course of the conversation her long unceasing speech must overwhelm her polite company Mr Kurtz's white wife explains that it is because she has for long mourned in silence. Curiously this capability for human feeling - mourning - does not come forth when we encounter the 'barbarous and superb woman' whose sexual partner was about to leave her after a considerable number of years. She shows no emotion of sadness. Neither does she speak of any treasured or lost memories of their sexual liaison, for I doubt it could in all reasonableness be called a mutual love affair. Coerced intimacy best characterises the relationship, I think. She remains as inscrutable as the wilderness itself. Perhaps fit for the many of Europe's cabinets of curiosity.

To close the circle around our sample of four canonical texts we read lectures dated November 1929, delivered by General Jan Christian Smuts on the occasion of the Rhodes Memorial Lectures at Oxford University. Appreciating the honour of having been nominated to deliver the series of prestigious lectures Smuts confesses to what he considers to be his limitation which is that he speaks neither from a resigned nor privileged intellectual position. Unlike his immediate predecessors his only qualification as a Rhodes lecturer is that he like Rhodes was an active politician. They both were invested in the growth and prosperity of Empire - in his words the 'progress of European civilisation on the African continent' (Smuts; 1930: 39). Ironically, it is precisely this point which Smuts considers to be his limitation that reserves for his lectures an eminent position within the venerated tradition of Enlightenment bequeathed colonial thought.

Because of his active, intimate and deep involvement in the politics of Empire his lecture titled 'Native Policy in Africa', offers a manifold access to official colonial discourse: the colonial conscious of leading European colonial administrators and practical political sensibilities that shaped colonial/imperial policy making. In the said lecture General Smuts is seized with what had become the question within colonial circles the 'Native Question' – how best to govern natives. Smuts' impressive experience at various high level policy positions did not fail him on the occasion. Like a seasoned student of colonial administration, that he was, he avers that to develop an appropriate native policy the task is first to gain a full understanding of the target or object of such policy - the character of the native.

Smuts of course could as well have been heeding Rousseau's (1955) counsel to a wise legislator who 'does not begin by laying down laws good in themselves, but by investigating the fitness of the people, for which they are destined, to receive them' (1955: 35) Without prior knowledge of this 'distinct human type' any effort therefore to legislate for them will as a consequence amount to no more than a false start. Expectedly, Smuts (1930) expends quite an effort enlightening both his audience and reader about the character of the African. Let us follow him as he delights his audience with the following details spoken with the authority and self-assurance that often pertained to a European recently returned from Africa bearing a treasure trove - of recent discoveries;

"The negro and the negroid Bantu form a distinct human type...This type has some wonderful characteristics. It has largely remained a child type, with a child psychology and outlook. A child-like human cannot be a bad human, for are we not in spiritual matters bidden to be like unto little children? Perhaps as a direct result of this temperament the African is the only happy human I have come across. No other race is so easily satisfied, so good-tempered, so care-free. If this had not been the case, it could scarcely have survived the intolerable evils which have weighed on it like a nightmare through the ages.

A race, which could survive the immemorial practice of the witch doctor and the slave trader, and preserve its inherent simplicity and sweetness of disposition, must have some very fine moral qualities. The African easily forgets past troubles. This happy-go-lucky disposition is a great asset, but it has also its drawbacks. There is no inward incentive to improvement, there is no persistent effort in construction, and there is complete absorption in the present, its joys and sorrows. Wine, woman, and song in their African forms remain the great consolations of life...These children of nature have not the inner toughness and persistence of the European, nor those social and moral incentives to progress...It is clear that a race so unique, and so different in its mentality and cultures from those of Europe, requires a policy very unlike that which would suit Europeans" (1930: 74 - 76).

What is it with the metaphor of childhood that makes European explorers, merchants of salvation and white colonial leaders of thought alike, turn to it with such frequency when describing the African? Hegel (1952) we recall more than a century earlier had mythologized the continent into 'the land of childhood'. Similarly one time Prime Minister of colonial South Africa J. B. Hertzog, Smuts' contemporary claims that 'against the European the native stands as an eight-year-old against a man of mature experience' (cited in Marks and Trapido; 1987: 9). Smuts (1930) goes further, rendering the metaphor of childhood even more productive. In Smuts' (1930) lecture the child-like features of the African are not assumed but clearly spelt out. Gingered by the discovery of these features he then concludes that between Africans and Europeans exists both cultural and mental difference. In colonial South Africa this mental and cultural difference begot us the deplorable policy of separate development in addition to the usual colonial semantic staple – the 'girl', the 'house girl', the 'boy', 'garden boy', - garnished differently in French colonies. The outcome though was one – it fed full the colonial palate for racial vituperative. Having acquainted his audience with the peculiar character of 'these children of nature' Smuts (1930) implores his fellow Europeans to adorn an attitudinal and behavioural disposition appropriate to these child-like humans.

A psycho-social and psycho-analytic investigation of social interactions between whites and blacks in colonial and post-colonial South Africa is a worthwhile study that awaits an inspired mind. This however is not to discount laudable even if tentative efforts by Chabani Manganyi (1972, 1973). We do from Manganyi's (1973) book titled **Being-Black-in-the-World** get a sense of how generalised the 'baasskap' attitude was (and perhaps still is) in colonial South Africa. In the book he reports that in his professional life as a psychiatrist he was accustomed to hearing patients saying 'Baas' or 'Master' to white doctors, but never did he observe a sense of shock or discomfiture on their part. Manganyi (1973) goes further to make the following observation on the nature of communication between blacks and whites in colonial South Africa:

[M]y first reaction would be to say that blacks and whites talk down and up to each other. This is another way of saying that what seems to do the talking in the white person is the master and what does the responding in the black man is the servant. In practical terms this has meant that white people always experience themselves as communicating instructions...The black person has tended to communicate an apology not for any conceivable palpable reason. One instructs, the other apologises!(1973: 56).

His study however does not go far enough to point out that actually since the Enlightenment white European Man generally is governed by a complex of authority, of leadership and ontological primacy. In turning to Fanon (1952) himself a psychiatrist we encounter more telling evidence of this complex. Having observed black and white interactions in a settler colonial situation he reports that a 'white man talking to a person of color behaves exactly like a grown-up with a kid, simpering, murmuring, fussing, and coddling'. So generalised is the attitude that he found it present in every class, strata or category of the white populace. For them '[S]peaking to black people in this way is an attempt to reach down to them, to make them feel at ease, to make oneself understood and reassure them' (1952: 14–15).

No one colonises innocently—we have learnt from the Martinican revolutionary theorist Aime Cesaire (1972). General Smuts might have opposed slavery but he was no benevolent benefactor of the indigenous African peoples. It is more apposite to think of him as a colonialist of Olympian heights. So when he implores his fellow Europeans to extend guidance and provide tutelage to African people ‘not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world’, this cannot be read as a benevolent act undertaken for the greater glory of God (Smuts; 1930: 88). He is as it were no way different from Conrad who Achebe (1997) describes as the purveyor of comforting myths. Discussing their various uses Ekeh (1975) refers to these self-same comforting myths as colonial ideologies of legitimation. One such ideology central to Smuts’ evocation is the idea of Europe bearing a God given duty to civilise Africans. Europe’s fidelity to this ideology would lead to the inscription into the Covenant of the League of Nations, Act 22 – the crafting of which Smuts claims personal responsibility for – whose provision is that in territories;

“inhabited by peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world, there shall be applied the principle, that the well being and development of such peoples form a sacred trust of civilisation, and that this trust shall be carried out by advanced nations...”(Smuts; 1930: 88).

In a move that would become the trademark of bourgeois social science, Smuts (1930) divides the world into binary opposites; developed-undeveloped, civilised-uncivilised. These two worlds are locked in an asymmetrical relationship with the latter being the not yet of the former. Put simply the former represents an analytical category with its own historical specificity understandable in its own terms while the latter is a category of negation. Of course developed and/or civilised are both euphemisms for the West – underdeveloped and/or uncivilised represent the non-Western world (read Africa). To

develop Africa must not only mimic the modular example Europe avails but like a good ward obey its guardian authority. Kant [1784] (1996) in an essay titled, '*An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment*', warns of the danger imminent in following this guardian authority. The danger he explains is that the guardians who have arrogated unto themselves the burden of tutoring their wards will ensure their continued servitude by forever denying to them the possibility of autonomy. To keep them in leash they dissuade them from venturing to walk unaided or taking the first crucial steps towards maturity warning them of the dangers attendant to such an attempt. However for them to be enlightened Kant (1996) insist they must not be deterred from taking the first steps, for after a few falls they shall learn to walk unaided - perhaps it is now our turn to read Kant more charitably (Kant; 1996).

Beyond their location at the centre of the Western discourse of colonial difference, Kant (1960), Hegel (1952), Conrad (1983) and Smuts (1930) together fulfil a crucial role within Western thought. They alongside such other names as Marx, Weber, etc, constitute what Foucault calls 'founders of discursivity'. By this is meant those thinkers who provide the conceptual vocabulary, 'paradigmatic set of terms, images, and concepts which organise thinking and experience about the past, present, and future of society, doing so in a way which enigmatically surpass the specific claims they put forth' (Rabinow;1991:25).

It is at this moment now apposite to turn to the African discourse of difference. As stated at the beginning the latter styles itself as the negation of the Western discourse. It purports to withhold assent to its truth claims and conclusions. In fact its stated object is to de-substantialise its truth claims.

### **African Studies as the Moment of Return of the Idea to itself**

To demonstrate the failure of African studies to successfully negate the inner logic of the Western discourse of difference, I want to propose an analogy. Whilst it is tempting to think through the life of African studies in relation to European epistemologies of colonial difference via the analogy of a Hegelian dialectic - where a simple original idea unfolds from within itself and splits into opposites which are nothing but an expression of the same interiority and ultimately return at the moment of final resolution to their original unity – I propose we look elsewhere. A similar logic governs, I argue, both African studies and nationalism. To unpack this analogy we must first have to think of the Western discourse of difference as being characterised by two decisive moments: the political and the epistemic. The contemporary political moment or manifestation of this discourse is colonialism. Its epistemic moment or manifestation is the totalising/universalist structure of post-Enlightenment reason.

Protestations against the political moment of the Western discourse of African difference everywhere coalesced into anti-colonial movements - nationalism being their ideological standpoint. By the turn of the last century the contest between nationalism and colonialism had been settled in favour of nationalism. While nationalism succeeds in liquidating the political moment of the Western discourse, colonialism that is, what it fails to defeat is the epistemic moment. On this front the Western discourse sponsors an abstract universalist framework of knowledge, at whose centre is the modern subject and a host of founding categories and assumptions - the most fundamental being universal history, instrumental reason, abstract rationality and progress. Nationalist thought unfortunately does not challenge this post-Enlightenment European framework of knowledge. Contrary to expectation it internalises this framework of thought as its own motif. In addition it presents itself as the only legitimate vehicle for the engendering of capitalist modernity within non-Western societies.

In a study titled, **Nationalist Thought in the Colonial World**, Chatterjee (1986) underlines the fact that nationalist thought ‘in agreeing to become ‘modern’, accepts the claim to universality of the ‘modern’ framework of knowledge’ (1986: 11). It locates itself within the Western philosophical position and accepts as its own the logic of culturally specific conceptual categories and assumptions set by the Western founders of discursivity. The above is however not to deny a subtle but significant current which animates early forms of colonial resistance. We do know, from history, that pre-nationalist resistance whether spiritual, cultural, intellectual or millenarian betrays a single-minded determination to breach both the political and epistemic frameworks of modernity (Peires; 1989). Present in this early form of resistance but lacking in modern nationalist opposition/movements is the desire to transgress both the modern discursive condition and colonial inter-subjective space as legitimate bounds within which non-Western difference is enounced.<sup>2</sup>

I have permitted myself the above remarks on the epistemic limits of nationalist thought in order to cast light on the inadequacies of African studies - the larger field within

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<sup>2</sup>Partha Chatterjee in **Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World** and **The Nation and its Fragments** argues that nationalism in the non-Western world carves out for itself a realm of autonomy from which colonial modernity is kept at bay. The spiritual realm is the domain of autonomy according to Chatterjee (1986). Its counterpoint is the material realm. The latter is the space in which modern norms of subjectivity prevail. Chatterjee (1986, 1993), whose lesson I have followed in re-reading early form(s) of colonial protest, avers that ‘anticolonial nationalism creates its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society...It does this by dividing the world of social institutions and practices into two domains – the material and the spiritual. The material is the domain of the “outside”, of the economy...The spiritual, on the other hand, is an “inner” domain bearing the “essential” marks of cultural identity’. Furthermore: ‘nationalism declares the domain of the spiritual its sovereign territory and refuses to allow the colonial power to intervene in that domain...The colonial state, in other words, is kept out of the “inner” domain’. It is near impossible to disagree with Chatterjee’s sentiment that; ‘[T]he dynamics of this historical project is completely missed in conventional histories in which the story of nationalism begins with the contest for political power’ (1993: 6). However in generalising the South Asian spiritually centred civilisational culture’s inherent disposition to style itself as a motive of resistance to any external intrusion, to Africa, Chatterjee (1993) over-reaches its reality. Evidence abounds which suggests that early forms of colonial protest in Africa do not divide the world into two domains prefiguring in one possible future coexistence of between African cultural forms and colonial modernity – as is the case in India (Peires; 1989). We must nonetheless continue to read Chatterjee’s (1993) observations as our compass in an unexplored area of research: the history and content of early forms of anti-colonial protests which completely transgress the bounds of political modernity.

which is located the African discourse of difference. In a manner similar to nationalist thought African studies proclaims itself as the negation of the Western discourse whilst it locates itself within its intellectual traditions. As a consequence it turns into a negation which contains in itself the very term negated. We know from Hegelian thought that negation of the negation equals the maintenance of what has been negated in its very negation. Thus the radical potential within the African discourse of difference is inevitably diminished by its acceptance of the normative conditions of modern epistemic and political order. Whether as history, ethno-philosophy, Marxian or bourgeois social science, African studies has in its outlook and commitment been rationalist read nationalist – it continues to think of itself as being in the service of the modern nation-state. Such that even as critique African studies has never been directed at thinking through an alternative to colonially instituted modernity. Rather like nationalist thought it has remained loyal to modernity – modernity as a particular domain of rationality. Moreover it assumes Western modernity to be an inevitability.

By affirming rather than refuse the discursive framework of modernity it becomes complicit in the continued constitution of non-Western (read African) people as subjects of colonial difference. An unintended consequence of internalising the modern epistemic and social order is that African studies like nationalist thought fails to question power relations imbedded within and constitutive of modern rationality. What notions of power and what structural differentiation of cultures does rationality promote? These questions elude African studies. Once established African studies becomes indifferent towards both epistemic and discursive conditions of its emergence. This becomes even more disturbing once we recall that the Africa (and African) of African Studies is like Said's (1978) Orient and Oriental world discursively constituted – as an obscure object of desire (Mudimbe; 1988). This is the point where the African discourse of difference falters– evinced by its failure to negate the inner negation of the originary Western

discourse of colonial difference. Inadvertently, it allows itself to be transformed into a Hegelian moment of a meaningful totality.

For this to become a little clearer let us map rather perfunctorily the genealogy of African studies beginning from the illustrious Ibadan School of Social History – also known as the episodic school. In the decades that count as part of its productive life the Ibadan School produced an impressive volume of literature. Ade Ajayi, Kenneth Dike, and Alan Ogot count among its leading luminaries. If the discussion below references only two texts by Ajayi (1968, 1969), the schools' key intellectual figure, it is not for lack of awareness of other significant contributions to its growth. What justifies our focus on the two texts, i.e. *'The Continuity of African Institutions under Colonialism'* and *'Colonialism: An Episode in African History'*, is the fact that these represent the best attempt to formulate into a concise theoretical statement the key intellectual concerns which catalysed the school's movement forward.

The Ibadan School of Social History marks the first African scholarly effort to counter in a systematic way the epistemic violence of colonial historiography - Western historical thought generally and the Western discourse of colonial difference particularly. As a result of internal contestations grew out of the Ibadan school the Abdullahi Smith led school of history housed at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. In his most recent work, **Define and Rule: Native as Political Identity** Mamdani (2012) analyses the latter school's effort at puncturing the claim to truth which animates modernist historiography of the continent. Mamdani (2012) befittingly pays tribute to the discerning contributions of one of its most productive and eminent members, the late Bala Usman. His major contribution in this regard is to have shown the inappropriateness of the concept of ethnicity for the understanding of pre-colonial northern Nigerian social formations. Differences in their concerns and methodological

considerations, notwithstanding, the two schools do share the same motivation: to found an alternative historical knowledge of African social formations. Observably both schools refuse the authority and the claim to universality of basic Western categories of rationalist thought. In the ultimate the two schools burdened themselves with restoring to Africans their right to historical, cultural and epistemic difference. Unfortunately, the radical potential contained within most of their illuminating studies today constitutes no more than a road not taken within Africa studies.

Let us now read more closely the episodic school's efforts. In the two texts mentioned Ajayi (1968, 1969) highlights numerous challenges thrown up by the Western discourse of colonial difference. We encountered earlier in a different guise the first of these challenges when we discussed the failure of ontology within the colonial situation. What passes for history or is documented as the history of the colonial period according to Ajayi (1968) are policies and intentions of the colonisers – Europeans he says. On the obverse when one searches the same historical literature for policies and intentions of Africans there is scarcely anything at all. What accounts for this elision? It is the fact that history is concerned with actions and motivations of man whereas what obtains in the colonial context does not approximate an interaction among humans. In the colonial period, writes Ajayi, 'there were not really men dealing with other men, but a race of gods and heroes communing with naughty mortals; Prospero communing with Caliban, Europeans with Natives' (1968: 189).

It is what this interaction between a race and infrahuman natives lead to that is the kernel of the problem and this is that 'it makes of the colonial period a mythical situation more suitable for legend than for history' (1968: 189). Of course in a mythical situation, things inconceivable in a historical milieu where man interacts with man become possible – not only possible they pass for historical fact. Otherwise how else

may we make sense of: Conrad's (1983) natives who walked on all fours or who for feeding kept with them a ration of rotten smelly hippo meat; Hegel's (1952) imaginary Dahomey king whose wives numbered exactly 3333 or the spectacle where, 'it frequently happens that the sorcerer kills the first that comes in his way and divides his body among the bystanders' (Hegel; 1952: 198). What Ajayi (1968) rightly protests is the fabrication of fables which then fulfil in the scientific study of history the critical task of validation as evidence.

The second problem which earns mention is the felt need prevalent among Europeans to declare Africa a *tabula rasa*. Long before literary theory began to think in terms of textually mapping the land, Ajayi (1968) tells us that denying any form of history to Africa prior to the colonial encounter buttresses three colonialist claims. Firstly it means that since 'Africans had created nothing worthy of respect and, in fact, had no history, African society was a sort of clean slate on which the European administrator could write whatever pleased him' (Ajayi; 1968: 191). Secondly, it means that in terms of history writing the pre-colonial period has nothing to contribute to the understanding of society as it existed. Since there is no possibility of building on anything that had hitherto existed 'the colonial period had to mean a complete break with the African past, a new departure marking the dawn of a completely new era' (Ajayi; 1968: 191). Thirdly, if Africa had no history of note prior to the colonial period, it follows that 'in all African history, social change and reform are to be found only in the colonial period'. For evidence of this conjured up historical stagnation Ajayi (1968) points us to the salient tendency to think through '[T]raditional African institutions as if, once evolved at some point...these institutions remained static until our colonial rulers began to temper with them" (1968: 192).

To surface the Ibadan School's most enduring contribution to the African discourse of difference it will benefit us to read closely its retort to the challenges posed by Western historiography. To master sufficient armour for its intellectual combat against Western historiography and in a sense the Western discourse of colonial difference members of the episodic school conducted detailed historical studies which bent over backwards deep into the pre-colonial recess. Through these studies they retrieved long complex histories of state formation, empire building, long distance trade, internal African slavery, urbanisation, etc. The intent partly was to erode the near hegemonic influence of colonial historiography in African history writing. This influence would manifest in the obsession with the colonial period as though nothing else worthy existed in African history. To that extent colonialism becomes the starting point of African history – for anything to be considered historically important it has of necessity to derive its meaning and significance from colonialism.

Aijaz Ahmad (1996) criticises in a different context the obsession with colonialism or its privileging as the primary principle of structuration in the history of colonial societies. The consequence he points out is that 'all that came before colonialism becomes its own prehistory and whatever comes after can only be lived as its infinite aftermath' (1996:281). Like adherents of the Ibadan School, Ahmad (1996) blames this attitude on those who write the history of non-Western societies from Western geo-historical location. He writes; '[T]his may well be how it appears to those who look at that history from the outside – to those, in other words, who look at the former colonies in Asia and Africa from inside the advanced capitalist countries – but not to those who live inside that history' (Ahmad; 1996: 281). The dividend in re-writing African history from the perspective proffered by the Ibadan School is that capability to instantiate historical movement or social change previously assumed to be an exclusive European preserve is restored to Africans. To make life/history is of course a human capability. But for this to

be true, Africans first have to liberate themselves from the mythical or unhistorical view of Africa and reclaim their humanity. As such writes, Ajayi (1968):

“[O]nce we have broken the myth about the colonial period and we establish that Africans, even under colonialism were human beings, people, and not just Natives, it seems hardly profound or significant to go on arguing about whether or not their institutions had any continuity in the 70 or 80 years of colonial rule” (1968: 192).

Central to the School’s intellectual project as may now be obvious was the writing of African history proper or African history as such.<sup>3</sup> Not from the outside European standpoint projecting inwardly towards Africa its sensibilities, categories and normative prescripts. Partly for this reason the Ibadan school refuses the authority of the Western paradigmatic lens and the privileged Western locus of enunciation. The danger warns Ajayi (1969) in writing African history from the European lens is the tendency prevalent until today, especially within South African studies, to want to understand historical moments like colonialism by merely studying the ‘European impact and the reactions of African peoples to Europeans as such without relating these to the internal history of Africa and of the African peoples’ (1969: 499).

To illustrate we turn to a tradition of history writing synonymous with South African studies. The flag-bearer of that tradition for our purposes is Worden (1994) whose study named; **The Making of Modern South Africa. Conquest, Segregation and Apartheid**, currently in its second edition is published under the auspices of the Historical

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<sup>3</sup> Perhaps it is President Mwalimu Julius Nyerere who when giving the opening address at the Congress of African Historians held at University College, Dar es Salaam, in 1965, with Ajayi and other members of the Ibadan School in attendance offers a lucid explanation of what is African history as such. This is how he explains its concern; “[M]ost people who study our history...throughout the world, still learn of the ‘discovery of Africa’, and the journeys of the great explorers. They learn of the slave trade, and the European invasions; they analyse the economic motivations and effects of these events. But it is only in very recent years that the continuously changing pattern of African life, and the effect on that pattern of these external events, has really begun to be appreciated. And it is only when these things are looked at from Africa outwards that an ‘African history’ will develop” (1968: 4).

Association Studies. The author claims in the introductory chapter that in scope the book ranges from the pre-colonial period to the present though focus will be on the years between 1910 and 1960s. What he writes as the pre-colonial history of SA are basically historical activities of the colonisers culminating in the formalisation in 1910 of colonial conquest. Once the pre-colonial history of South Africa intriguingly captured in the activities of white colonialists is recorded he then pronounces what the subject of the book proper is; '[T]he conquest of the land was thus formalized by the Act of Union under a unitary state entrenching white political power. The impact of this process for the lives of its inhabitants is the subject of the remainder of this book' (1994: 32-33). By this Worden implies that the history of South Africa is better written as the impact of European activities on the lives of the colonised Africans and the reaction of the latter to them. He makes no effort to locate these activities within the longer internal history of Africans. Worden (1994) of course is no exception, we must emphasise.

Generally, this is how South African history continues to be written and taught, basically as activities of Europeans and the reaction of African inhabitants to these processes – be it land dispossession, modernisation, proletarianisation or racial oppression. No effort is made to relate these activities to centuries long autochthonous history of Africans. The folly in writing African history from the outside European perspective and through Western categories as Worden (1994) and most other students of South African studies do is that it;

“...exaggerates the extent to which the activities of Europeans can be seen as the central events of African history from which all others derived. It equates the reactions of Africans to European activities with the totality of African history or, rather, it neglects African initiative throughout African history” (Ajayi; 1969: 500).

Against the tendency to read African history off the activities of the colonisers the Ibadan School locates these activities, particularly colonialism, within a long term historical perspective, stretching centuries prior to the violent penetration of the land by European colonialists. Only under such circumstances could African history as such emerge or African initiative be restored. Emboldened by the school's success in re-constructing centuries long history of pre-colonial empires, civilisations, kingdoms, and wars of state formation, Ajayi (1969) is led to conclude in a statement to which the school's overall intellectual project has erroneously been reduced that:

“[I]n any long-term historical view of African history, European rule becomes just another episode. In relation to wars and conflicts of people, the rise and fall of empires, linguistic, cultural and religious change and the cultivation of new ideas and new ways of life, new economic orientations...in relation to all these, colonialism must be seen not as a complete departure from the African past, but as one episode in the continuous flow of African history” (Ajayi; 1968: 194).

To elaborate their critique, critics of the episodic school fasten on to the above statement seeking mainly to argue that the Ibadan school fails to appreciate the epochal nature of colonialism. Peter Ekeh in an inaugural lecture titled *Colonialism and Social Structure*, delivered at Ibadan University in 1980, fires the first salvo at the episodic school. In the process he heralds a shift away from the episodic understanding of colonialism towards what is euphemistically known as the epochal conception of colonialism. The argument of these reflections is that something more fundamental happens within African studies in tandem with the shift from the episodic to epochal understanding of colonialism. Post the episodic school there is within African studies an overt concern with the model of the modern. Driving the intellectual evolution of African studies post the episodic school is a much felt need to engender the modern political order within the continent. Subsequent perspectives to emerge within African studies, in their orientation betray absolutely no concern for instance with specifying

intellectual conditions under which Africa's right to historical difference becomes possible to uphold.

Most of the paradigmatic studies produced rather than work towards de-substantialising the universalising claims of Western rationalist thought and attendant discourse of colonial difference defer to Western signification. In accord with post-Enlightenment reason they subordinate African difference to the normative rationality of Western categories. From this moment, African studies, accepts the universality claimed for analytical and rational categories of modern ideological disciplines of sociology, anthropology, economics, etc. It now becomes the concern of most studies within the field to isolate factors which account for the failure of Western political modernity to take root within Africa. Because they assume Western modernity to be a universal norm most studies do not inquire into the desirability and compatibility of the Western nation-state model with non-Western modes being-in-the-world. To date this single-minded determination to placate the deficits of political modernity in Africa blinds African studies and by implication the African discourse of difference to the coloniality of Western epistemology and Western modernity generally. What African studies ignores is the fact that both political modernity and modern epistemology carry on their shoulders the burden of coloniality.

Ekeh (1980) in his critique of the episodic school builds on Georges Balandier's conception of the colonial situation which connotes the complex of relationships, activities and dispositions of both colonisers and the colonised. The limitation of Balandier's notion of the colonial situation is that it does not permit the appreciation of the continuity of colonial effects beyond the immediacy of the time and space of their occurrence. Expanding on this limited understanding Ekeh (1980) urges that to the activities of the colonisers and the colonised must be added yet another dimension. In

addition colonialism according to Ekeh (1980) 'may be considered to be a *social movement* of epochal dimensions whose enduring significance, beyond the life-span of the colonial situation lies in social formations of supra-individual entities and constructs' (1980: 5). At this point the disagreement between the epochal and the episodic school becomes palpable.

In Ekeh's (1980) reckoning the episodic school fails to appreciate that colonial effects far out-live the time and space of their occurrence, which means that they continue to be felt long after colonial rule itself has ended. In order to comprehend colonialism, in its totality, it must then be placed alongside other comparable epochal movements such as the Industrial and French Revolution. To be gained from such a comparative analysis is the fact that colonialism, properly understood as an epochal movement, wreaked fundamental socio-economic changes that altered the nature and trajectory of non-Western social formations. Its biography would thus be incomplete without registering its central role in the institution in Africa of modern forms of epistemic, social and political organisation of life. In a sense, colonialism midwives the birth in Africa of political modernity as well as its corresponding form(s) of historical individuality.

Ekeh's (1980) insistence that we understand colonialism as an epochal movement has undoubtedly enriched our conceptual horizon. However the limit is that this perspective which is primarily aimed at liberating colonialism from the limited conceptualisation, imputed to it by the episodic school does not offer us conceptual resources with which to contest the Western discourse of colonial difference. Moreover the colonality of knowledge made visible by the Ibadan School of History is here rendered invisible. Ekeh (1972, 1975) in fact goes further in his intellectual endeavours. With the zeal of a modern social reformer he impels us to submit to the authority of Western modernity. In his often cited article titled, '*Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical*

*Statement'* Ekeh (1975) argues that the public realm in Africa is segmented into two; the civic public and the primordial public. The failure of political modernity in Africa according to him occurs because unlike in Europe the civic public is subject to the dictates of the primordial public - whereas the norm as exemplified by Europe is the reverse.

The need for the civic to predominate over the primordial is again deployed in an earlier book chapter by Ekeh (1972) on the Nigerian civil war named, *'Citizenship and Political Conflict: A Sociological Interpretation of the Nigerian Crisis'*. Simply stated the argument is that the war was triggered by the failure of civic citizenship to take precedence over primordial citizenship/identities. In a manner characteristic of Edmund Burke and typical of modernist thought generally Ekeh (1972) claims that to civic citizenship must be subordinated all other forms of identity and human solidarity. Read together these three texts by Ekeh (1972, 1975, 1980) place his thoughts squarely within the circuit of Western rationality. The move towards the centre of modern rationalist thought fanned even further by the popularity of modernist Marxism is as stated above in consonance with a larger trend within African studies post the episodic school – failure to problematise the coloniality of knowledge.

Despite his indifference to the coloniality of modernist epistemology of Africa, Ekeh's (1980) insistence that colonialism be understood as an epochal movement, the totality of whose after-effects are summed in the three resultant social structures; i.e. transformed indigenous social structures (exemplified by chieftaincy), migrated social structures (exemplified by modern pedagogy), and emergent social structures (exemplified by ethnicity), enables an entry into African studies of colonialism as

something larger than an economic project.<sup>4</sup> The long dominance since the 1960s of the radical political economy school had meant that colonialism was narrowly theorised as determined to the last instance by Western economic considerations.

By freeing colonialism from economic reductionism, Ekeh (1980) inadvertently redeems the utility of previously suppressed conceptual categories; i.e. social customs, ethnicity, community, spirituality, culture, religion, regionalism, etc. Hastily dismissed in the 60s and 70s by champions of development and dependency approaches as primordial, pre-modern, pre-capitalist, reactionary, pre-political remnants of the past, these categories regained their theoretical traction within African studies. Obsessed with market based categories and convinced of the transformative power of capital, radical African scholars had remained dismissive of communal, cultural, ethnic, regional, religious and other non-market identities. They were content to declare them reactionary remnants of the pre-modern past, bound to wane in significance as capital penetrated the hinterland. Ironically, this is one point where there is mutuality between radical African scholars and votaries of the modernisation perspective. Within the South African social science context a similar convergence brought together liberal, revisionist and Marxian scholars.

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<sup>4</sup> Long before Ekeh (1980) the Tunisian revolutionary intellectual, Albert Memmi (1965) had poignantly made the point. Prefacing his book, **The Colonizer and the Colonized**, he writes; ‘to observe the life of the colonizer and the colonized is to discover rapidly that the daily humiliation of the colonized, his objective subjugation, are not merely economic. This relationship has other characteristics...’(xii). Unfortunately colonial authorities succeeded in hiding away this important study as the book was confiscated by colonial police throughout the world. In a different context the point has been emphasised by the Ugandan scholar Mahmood Mamdani. It is no co-incidence that Mamdani elected the occasion of the year 2000 Claude Ake Memorial Lecture to decry the crippling effects radical political economy had had on the first generation of African scholars and African studies generally. Like Claude Ake, Mamdani belongs to the first generation of post-colonial African intellectuals. Moreover they both had been members of the famous Dar-es-Salaam school of radical political economy. This is how he articulates the point; ‘[W]e were Africa’s first generation of postcolonial intellectuals...we were convinced that the impact of colonialism in our societies was mainly economic. We were convinced that political economy was the most appropriate tool to come to analytical grips with the colonial legacy...The limits of political economy as a framework for political analysis began to surface in the face of postcolonial political violence, for political economy could only explain violence when it resulted from a clash between market-based identities...In the face of political violence that cut across social classes rather than between them explanations rooted in political economy offered less and less analytical clarity. This limit provided an opening for a second coming of cultural explanations of political conflict, most obviously those addressing the political resurgence of ethnicity” (2001: 1-2).

Of course the intent in Ekeh (1980) is neither to celebrate nor embrace uncritically these analytical categories. The import is that as conceptual tools they remain indispensable in any attempt to make sense of non-Western life-worlds constituted as otherwise than modern.

Ensnared between the episodic and epochal school are two macro-approaches within African studies, i.e. development and underdevelopment perspectives. These two contending approaches would of course continue beyond the early 80s to find expression in a whole host of discourses be it on nation-building, development, governance, etc. The longer history of both these approaches point us to a shared lineage extending back to Enlightenment thought. This however is not to discount fundamental differences between the two. In its most simple version modernisation school claims that factors which account for Africa's backwardness are innate within these societies; culture, economy of affection, low levels of capital formation, lack of structural and role differentiation taking much of the blame. Conversely defenders of the underdevelopment perspective argue that Africa's underdevelopment is both externally and historically produced. For the purposes of the present study a shorter history of the two approaches will suffice.

The aftermath of the defeat of colonial rule by nationalism in the post WW II era is the emergence of new African states as sites of ideological and military contestation between the capitalist West and the communist Soviet Union. Because of the devastation the war visits on continental Europe the centre of capitalism and capitalist ideological reproduction shifts to America. It was thus America's responsibility to fashion on behalf of the West appropriate ideological measures to insulate Africa from the influence of the Soviet Union, its development paradigm to be specific. The title of W.W. Rostow's (1960) book, **The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist**

**Manifesto** best captures the essence of America's response. Africa's immediate contact with the ideological baggage of the American fashioned response was through a number of studies produced under the aegis of the American Social Science Research Council sponsored Committee on Comparative Politics of Non-Western Societies established in 1954, with James Smoot Coleman being its long-time intellectual figure-head.

On the other hand the underdevelopment perspective was the culmination of a need to explain persistent underdevelopment in Latin America and to fashion an alternative non-capitalist development framework. This need for an alternative development paradigm was made even more acute by the deteriorating economic conditions of Latin American countries at the time. Before taking root in Africa in the works of radical political economy scholars its main proponents were neo-Marxist Latin American scholars. It has been necessary briefly to re-state what is by now a well rehearsed genealogy of the two approaches partly to enable us tease out what their dominance has meant for African studies and the African discourse of difference. Firstly, save for the brief moment when the Ibadan school was intellectually dominant within African studies its *haute couture* unfortunately has been to re-cycle locally externally derived intellectual viewpoints. Secondly, because of their preponderance within African studies amid their modernising tendencies these ideologically invested viewpoints for long tended to crowd out of Africa's intellectual agenda concerns with the historical specificity of African social formations. Consequently, African difference as such has hardly featured within African studies as a sustained intellectual concern.

Very briefly let us tease out the main tenets of the two approaches. Modernisation perspective locates all societies within a continuum where they move from being traditional to being modern. Development then translates into a unilinear process or movement from the originary pre-modern state to the penultimate modern state of

development. The inevitability of this transition for the rest of non-Western societies is admitted to credence solely on the basis of evidence furnished by the historical processes which unravelled in eighteenth century Europe. Mamdani (1996) calls this history by analogy – because it happened in Europe it is bound to happen in Africa. Notably, modernisation leaning scholars recognise that this process was in Europe driven by internal contestations, its outcome a reflection of both structural and contingent conditions. However when the self-same scholars turn to non-Western societies, Africa specifically, they banish history or become ahistorical. Because these are no places of history, in fact history has already been enacted for them from the elevated theatre stages of Europe and the West generally. All they need do is to parody that modular historical process. Beyond mimicking this process African societies must hold Europe as the epitome of development/modernity. Better still it is the standard against which they measure their own progress.

Curiously one finds present within the dependency perspective the same distinction between modern and pre-modern societies. For dependency scholars Africa represents underdeveloped pre-capitalist social formations whereas Europe stands for developed capitalist social formations. Despite Marxism's known accent on history, dependency scholars like Marx rob non-Western societies of the right to history. The history of these societies is *a priori* knowable, because all societies in their historical development necessarily go through three time-periods, modes of production if you wish. One reads in the modernisation perspective a similar teleological sense of history. It bears stating though that Marx draws these supposedly universal stages of history from the actual history of Europe. In fact to an extent that, African societies can be said to have a history they must first be placed alongside Europe. Outside of Europe and its historical processes non-Western societies as self-contained fully fledged entities are not knowable – they remain an impenetrable mass. From the above discussion it becomes

obvious that the concern for both the modernisation/development and dependency approaches is to re-make pre-modern Africa in the image of modern capitalist and modern Marxist Europe. If these two approaches continue post 1980 to inform many scholarly works within African studies it is hardly surprising then that the African discourse of difference has betrayed very little originality (Mudimbe; 1988). More concretely my point is that African studies lacks the conceptual refinement needed to represent African difference in a non-oppressive and non-manipulative way.

In the early 1980s the African discourse on difference does receive fillip from the recognition of social customs, ethnicity, culture, community, regionalism and religion as areas of scholarly research and sites of interest aggregation and grievance articulation. Interestingly, radical African scholars tended to be at the forefront of ethnic mobilisation even though they continue to hang on to the Marxist rhetoric seductively characterising these struggles as being directed at the resolution of the National Question. Those whose energies were devoted to the study of ethnicity no longer condescendingly labelled as reactionary elements distracting attention from the all-important task of nation-building, the anaesthetising hold both modernisation and dependency perspectives had over African studies loosened. It did seem as though African studies was well on its way to recognise that life is not only political. Bearing evidence to this mood is a remarkable efflorescence of studies banking on the analytical power of concepts such as ethnicity, culture, community, religion and regionalism.<sup>5</sup> My

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<sup>5</sup> To demonstrate the extent to which the situation had changed let us consider two studies by two prominent members of that first generation of African intellectuals Mamdani spoke of. The first of these penned by a South African sociologist, Bernard Magubane, appearing in 1969, under the title; *Pluralism and Conflict Situations in Africa: A New Look*, for its assertion that focus on ethnicity beclouds serious efforts to understand the more urgent problems of development received undisguised acclaim. Two decades later, Claude Ake had realized the futility of holding ethnicity in contempt and engaged with this phenomenon in a curiously titled 1993 article; *What is the Problem of Ethnicity in Africa?* I underline here the approval ethnicity receives in Ake's concluding remarks. He writes approvingly of ethnicity thus: "[T]o the question, 'Is there a problem of ethnicity in Africa?', I am inclined to answer that there is no such problem, that is, in the sense that ethnicity is inherently a problem...Most importantly, we tend to forget that even though ethnicity might be constructed it is also a living presence, an important part of what many Africans are" (1993: 13).

claim to the flowering of the African discourse of difference is rendered even less dubious by admission in the 80s into Africa's intellectual agenda of the study of plural /heterogeneous societies and the 'politics of difference'/'politics of recognition'. Masipula Sithole (1985), Sam Oyovbaire (1984), Okwadiba Nnoli (1978) and Eghosa Osaghae (1986) were in that respect worthy pioneers. Two fundamental flaws dog these studies though; one is their indifference to colonial difference imbedded within rationalist knowledge of Africa, secondly their narrow conceptualisation of difference as the problem of the political.

In mapping the history of African studies focus has been on those strands of thought which at various moments were on an ascendancy. The positive commentary on the entry into African studies of ethnicity, culture, religion, or regionalism does not suggest that African historical and cultural difference is reducible to or understandable solely through these conceptual categories. Considering all we have said above to what extent then can African studies be said to succeed in its stated object of negating the inner negation of the originary Western discourse of colonial difference? Mudimbe (1988) poses in a different context the same riddle in his work **The Invention of Africa**. He challenges practitioners within the field of African studies on the use of categories and conceptual systems which depend on the Western epistemological order. According to him:

"Even the most explicitly "Afrocentric" descriptions, models of analysis explicitly or implicitly, knowingly or unknowingly refer to the same order. Does this mean that African *Weltanschauungen* and African traditional systems of thought are unthinkable and cannot be made explicit within the framework of their own rationality? My own claim is that thus far the ways in which they have been evaluated and the means used to explain them relate to theories and methods whose constraints, rules, and systems of operation suppose a non-African epistemological locus...What does this mean for the field of African studies? (1988: X)

Because African studies internalise the assumptions, normative and ideological values, conceptual categories of Western modern rationalistic knowledge and adopt its philosophical locus and will to rational truth as its own it fails to call the structure of the field into question. In Hegelian thought the concept for this is supersession - maintenance of what has been negated in its very negation (Hegel; 1969). This has been the implication for African studies.

## Chapter II

### How Modernity makes Subjects: Notes on Modern Theories of the Subject, Subjectivity and Subjectivation<sup>6</sup>

#### Introductory Notes

So far the thesis has assumed the plausibility of subjects that are produced entirely in discourse. The effectivity of (European) discourse itself in producing (colonial) subjectivity has not earned the study's sustained attention. Subjects we must recall are not substantive transcendental bodies which have a prior existence outside of historical time and then enter into the world laden with full consciousness necessary for the determinate roles and functions they come to occupy in particular concrete social formations. In his work titled, **For they know not what they do. Enjoyment as a political factor**, Žižek (1991) acknowledges as much. According to him subjects are not the "effective" presence of "flesh-and-blood", (1991: 201). Foucault (1977) argues in **Discipline and Punish** that the subject is not a substance, it basically serves as a support meaning it is defined by the 'place it occupies in a series, and by the gap that separates it from the others' (1977: 145). We read a similar observation in Marx particularly in his more scientific works of the post 'epistemological break' (Althusser; 1969). In these works Marx argues that the categories of labour and that of capital are composed not of concrete individuals who possess an essence that defines their being as workers or capitalists, but these more appropriately must be understood as differentially determined places and functions. A worker is not a concrete empirically identifiable entity with specific individual human-species attributes – neither a capitalist. What they

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<sup>6</sup> In the second term of the 2011 academic session, Peter Hudson, offered at Wits University a post-graduate seminar titled 'From Structuralism to Post-Marxism' into which he kindly admitted me. In the seminar he led us through a thicket of philosophical works with such admirable clarity of thought, awareness of epistemological turns within political theory and exemplary commitment to knowledge. While many of the thoughts expounded in this section build on the contents of the seminar they do however acquire a different meaning as I give to them my own interpretation.

are basically is human beings who have come to submit to the forms of historical individuality inscribed in the places they inhabit. They are merely what Marx calls bearers (Trager) or supports of determinate social identities (Althusser; 1970).

In Althusser (1969, 1970) the Marxian conception of how modernity constitutes subjects receives its most elaborate treatment. To explain for instance how concrete individuals are historically constituted as bearers or supports, Althusser (1970) counter-poses the notion of 'the role of the individual in history' to that of the 'historical forms of existence of individuality' (1970: 111-112). The latter concept roots determinate social identities within particular historical social formations. Thus each historical constellation of the relations of production throws up its own forms of historical individuality that are essential for its functioning and reproduction. In **Capital** for instance Marx according to Althusser (1970) defines for the 'capitalist mode of production the different forms of individuality required and produced by that mode according to functions of which the individuals are 'supports' in the division of labour' (1970: 112). Thus to each mode of production pertain peculiar forms of historical individuality internal and exclusive to it. And these are distinct from those of other social formations hence 'the slave-individual is not the serf-individual nor the proletarian-individual...' (Althusser; 1976: 53). Implied in all of this is that each mode of production calls forth a certain configuration of consciousness or forms of historical individuality.

In their respective attempts to account for the constitution of subjects within modernity, post-structuralists (Laclau and Mouffe; 1985, Laclau; 1986, 1990 and Zizek; 1991, 1994) take-off from Althusser's (1969, 1970) notion of the subject as an effect of structure. They however escape what they consider to be the immobility of the structuralist subject by deploying the two concepts of a 'barred subject' and/or 'floating signifier'. These allow them restore agency to the subject. To make their point they

begin by underlining the fact that the subject has to be posited since it has no 'substantial existence of its own and it is not an object of possible experience' (Hudson; 2003:79). The subject proper they argue actualises itself only when it performs the act of negation. As a reflex its being is captured in the movement from the moment of 'undecidability to the decision' (Laclau; 1990).

Therborn (1980) in his book; **The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology**, criticises Althusser for his failure to recognise the existence of other distinct and autonomous domains of experience where forms of subjectivity, i.e. ethnic, gender, religious or regional, which are not direct expressions of class antagonisms and material interests prevail. These he refers to as other 'dimensions of human subjectivity' (Therborn; 1980). Principally his argument is that class does not suture the field of subjectivity – in the universe of ideological interpellations there are multiple dimensions of human subjectivity. Failure to recognise this fact issues directly from the tendency within Marxism to reduce ideology within and through which concrete individuals are called to subjectivity into an epiphenomenon of the real (material) interests. In this trend of thought ideology in and of itself has no meaning; it is merely a site of class struggle, more euphemistically a continuation of class struggle by other means. While these other dimensions of human consciousness are in various ways linked and interact with class interests their economy is not wholly and exclusively reducible to the logic of the relations of production. A measure of relative autonomy is claimed for them by Therborn (1980:5).

When in his essay; '*Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*', Foucault (1971) teases out the principles of genealogy he refuses like Laclau and Mouffe (1985) to accord essence to subjects (and things). The burden of genealogy is that of revealing as he says 'the secret that [things] have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in piecemeal fashion

from alien forms' (1971: 142). Perhaps it is when Foucault (1977) maps the genealogy of the subject that he is on a better ground to dispense with the subject as transcendently given. The method of inquiry he calls genealogy exposes the subject as an historical achievement. Since subjects are devoid of any fixed essence or metaphysical finality the task then is to inquire unencumbered by the constituent subject which 'runs in its empty sameness throughout the course of history', into specific historical processes within and through which it is constituted (Foucault; 1980:117). The brief survey above summarises the substantive content of this essay - theories of modern subjectivity. Notably they all foreground the fact that subjects are not transcendental bodies, they have no essence but emerge within and through particular social and epistemological formations, relations of production, historical processes, relations of power, acts of negation and/or ideological interpellation.

The modest task this essay has set for itself is to comment on the debates within modern philosophy and contemporary political theory about subjectivity - how modernity makes subjects. It is divided into seven sections. In the section following these introductory remarks it examines the structure of modern intentionality which undergirds all modern theories of the subject. The question is: what is the career of this modern intentionality in non-Western societies? Put differently the concern is to uncover what happens at the moment of the encounter between the modern rational sensibility of such theories and non-Western modes of being or forms of self-understanding. In the third section a critical exposition of the Cartesian project is entered. Its significance within modern philosophy is now a matter of common knowledge. It is Descartes [1637][1641] (1997) in fact who inaugurates the whole field of modern philosophy whose concern at least until Heidegger [1929] (1962) is subjectivity. Like the other modern theorists surveyed above Descartes (1997) is concerned with explaining how subjects become conscious of their consciousness. This

section examines also critiques that have been responsible for the displacement of Descartes' (1997) epistemologically-centred philosophy and his unencumbered subject governed by the light of reason.

From the late 60s through to the early 80s political theory is witness to a re-activation of a concern with modern subjectivity. It is the works of two French philosophers, Althusser (1970) and Foucault (1977, 1980) which seem more than any to be responsible for the renewed allure of the field of subjectivity. In the fourth section the study gets behind Althusser's (1969, 1970) elaboration of what is now euphemistically referred to as the structuralist subject – the subject as effect of structure. Close attention is given to the imprint the linguistic turn, more specifically the linguistic concept of overdetermination, leaves on Althusser's (1970) thought structure. The fifth section provides notes on post-structuralist notions of the subject developed mainly as a response to Althusser (1970) by Laclau and Mouffe (1985), Laclau (1986, 1990) and Žižek (1991, 1994). Therborn's (1980) contributions to the Marxian theory of the subject are the subject of the sixth section. Unlike post-structuralist critics of Althusser (1969) he is not driven by the desire to transcend Marxian analysis but to address its limits. Focus in the seventh and last section of the essay shifts to the Foucauldian conception of the subject highly favoured among postcolonial theorists.

### **On the Unreason of Political Reason**

Common among all theories of the subject is a shared modern intentionality. Modern theories of the subject from Descartes [1637] through to Žižek (1994) inhabit a common grid of intelligibility - the grid of the modern. But the moment of the modern as we now know is the moment of the political. The space of the modern is the space of the political. Since the Copernican Revolution this space of the political has been governed by a certain temporality, the empty secular time of the modern – a key component of

which is the Gregorian calendar. More pertinent is that all of these theories take the space (and time) of the political as the only legitimate space within which humans are constituted and constitute themselves into subjects. Implied here is that it is only within the space of the political that human beings gain consciousness or self-understanding. Owing to Descartes [1637] we understand this space of the political to be defined by a peculiar form of reason - the reason of the political. In this reason exist an apodictic point, in fact reason itself is the Archimedean point from which the enquirer projecting from an encumbered privileged position is able to explain rituals and practices by which modernity in all regions of experience constitute subjects.

Confronted with those regions of experience or regions of being which lie beyond the space of the political and do not obey the injunctions of modern empty time the enquirer inhabiting the Archimedean point of political reason arrives at the limit-point of his/her privileged gaze. Here is a paradox, if we may call it that, that I want read more forcefully into this reason of the political. In the non-European world it is colonialism that marks the moment of the modern – it is colonialism which inaugurates the political management of society, serialisation of populations, etc. And thus the moment of the political is the colonial moment. Therefore in the colonies a peculiar form of reason attends the space of the political and that is colonial reason.

Colonial reason professes on the one hand its will to make of colonised Africans modern civilised beings/subjects. On the other hand everywhere in the colonies and this is where the gravity of the paradox weighs heavy, colonial reason continually produces and re-produces colonial people as non-beings bereft of any human sentiment/character. We are now given to understand that colonial difference is the foundation of colonialism. As such in the colonies the productivity of the rhetoric of modernity is to exclude *sui generis* colonial people from the zone humanity and/or

category of Man. In fact it is precisely their inhumanity or incapability for human subjectivity/existence which authorises their colonial subjugation - if we think for a moment of colonial subjugation as the production of those lives which are fit only to die. What inheres in colonial reason is the authority to determine the eliminability of non-European or colonial populations.

If the claim that there are non-European modes of being which are enacted beyond the bounds of the political is indeed correct we can then reasonably conclude that in the non-European world colonial modernity does not suture society. It does not fully define the norm and ethic of life - there is an excess that escapes it. It is that excess that the historically constituted forms of life constituted otherwise than modern on the non-modern grid of intelligibility represent. My hesitancy to call these non-Western modes of sociality, forms of human subjectivity, stems from the fact that reason is the primary element of modern subject formation. However in life-worlds that are constituted otherwise than modern, life-worlds that are at once material, spiritual, mythical, non-rational and ancestral modern reason does not enjoy an assumed priority. Chakrabarty (2001) has argued the point that there is nothing synchronous between these other historically constituted forms of selfhood, non-European lived experiences, their narratives and the logic of modern subjectivity. These other narratives of the self and community speak in an 'anti-historical consciousness, that is, they entail subject positions and configurations of memory that challenge and undermine the subject that speaks in the name of history' (Chakrabarty; 2001: 37). They disrupt the intimate unity of the modern self. That is fairly clear but my point has to go beyond this.

Without resolving the complexity that arises therefrom, what I want to do now is problematise the formulation which has so far supplied the point of departure for these reflections which is that non-European modes of being dwell outside of political reason.

The problem is that this assumes an underlying structural unity to the unfolding of history from the pre-modern (pre-capitalist) to modern (capitalist) stage in every part of the world. Inherent in the claim is that all modes of being or life-worlds necessarily move from the outside of reason to its interior. As a consequence it becomes possible to describe these non-Western forms of sociality as being pre-political either tending necessarily toward being political or as abhorrent eruptions (anachronisms) of a backward past into the continuing consciously progressive present of modernity. It is historicism of a Hegelian type which is at the root of the above line of reasoning. We do know that non-Western modes of being are not driven by the will to master political rationality neither by the desire to commensurate themselves with the logic of political reason.

In the colonial world as Ranajit Guha (1983) has established in his work: **Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India** these supposedly pre-political non-European modes of being are contemporaneous - exist in the present alongside, in contestation, at times without contradiction - with the modern political logic of secular consciousness. And so for the present study modern theories of subjectivity remain useful only in so far as they help us account for the processes through which colonial modernity transfigure within its colonially constituted space of the political concrete Africans into colonial subjects, subjects of difference. For this study the sphere of the political, political reason as well as the time of the political, do not constitute a privileged analytical domain. Difference for this study does not have to be thought through within the bounds of the political. The complexity then that thought needs to resolve is how may we make sense of the encounter/relationship between political reason and non-European modes of being/sociality? Do the latter represent the limit of political modernity or does political modernity represent the limit of these forms of sociality? I do not intend resolving all at once the complexity above. My inclination

though is to argue that non-European modes of being-in-the-world constitute or rather are evidence of the unreason of the reason of the political. At this point of the encounter political reason reaches its limits, comes face to face with its failure. To transcend this moment of failure, this moment of immobility it turns into its exteriority, its unreason. The point I am trying to illuminate here is that the 'unreason'/primordality of non-European modes of being is not an inherent feature interior to their logic. Rather it follows necessarily from the unreason of rational reason which comes forth at its moment of failure, at the moment of its collapse.

Therefore to make sense of African difference not from the privileged gaze accorded by subject-centred reason but from the discursive tradition and field of meaning constituted by and through the lived experiences of those who enact their lives beyond the space of the modern, outside of modern political time, those for whom life is marked by a constant overflow of the ancestral and the spiritual into their everyday this thesis begins elsewhere. We spoke of this elsewhere earlier in the opening chapter in terms of alternative starting points, as Bhabha (1994) calls them. What I think Bhabha (1994) conveys through this concept is that other than the modern West exist other geo-cultural locations and epistemologies whose foundational logic/starting point may not necessarily and need not be the capacity for rational consideration. The position the thesis advances is that to write African difference we have to begin from a horizon of meaning shared by participants as they make their world that is equally shared. In this elsewhere, in this world of shared meanings, the primacy of the subject as an originary source of first principles and founding totality is displaced by the inter-subjective experience where one is in the world with and for others.

In various essays collected into a book under the title, **Philosophy and Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers Vol. 2** Taylor (1985) establishes the legitimacy of commonly held

knowledge, inter-subjectively produced meanings, whose proprietorship is not and cannot be apportioned to an individual knowing subject. His work in fact clears the way for the possibility of conceiving knowledge as an inter-subjective enterprise. In order to fully appreciate these socially organised knowledge claims/common meanings it is imperative that we move away from the liberal ontology of the social which considers what is collective to be a constellation of individual elements. More appropriately we must distinguish as Taylor (1985) tells us that which is shared 'in the sense that each of us has it in our individual worlds, and that which is in the common world' (1985: 40).

We read in Husserl's [1935](1970) text **The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology** of this elsewhere of inter-subjective experience as the habitual background of the knowing subject wherein the subject lives together with others and together they constitute the world as they know it. This habitual background constrains what the 'I' sees because there is already a structure of meaning within which it experiences the world. Here one is always already in a particular historical cultural situation. In this elsewhere the point of departure is not the originary subject but the perspective of those for whom their modes of being are not expressive but constitutive of what/who one is. Impelled in part by the need to restore to these modes of being their self-determining character, ability to give meaning to themselves, to determine their own laws – the thesis turns to Heidegger (1962), his notion of modes-of-being-in-the-world to be precise. Through this notion we are able to steer away from the tendency to distil the substance and value of practices constitutive of the range of non-Western ways of being using normative elements of modernity, i.e. relation between production and value, work and wealth, reason and unreason, etc.

The limit therefore of modern theories of political subjectivity is that they remain indifferent to their own indifference towards the modernist desire to commensurate

non-European modes of being with the normative integrity of the reason of the political. It is difficult also to overlook the fact that within African studies little effort has gone into interrogating the totalising hold the rationalist normative frame exercises over the production of knowledge on and about Africa. What is worse, African Studies has not only not established the specificity of African thought outside of the normative bounds of modern rational epistemology, it actually does not investigate the complicities inscribed in its own origins, i.e. the humanist values of man, subject-centred reason, rational man, etc. In that respect, that is in its failure to interrogate the fictive narrative of modernity: its founding premises, its rationalist knowledges of man which put the Western-type of political community and its values at the summit of human political achievement, African Studies unfortunately lags behind other bodies of thought emanating from those regions of the world with shared histories of colonial domination, i.e. Subaltern Studies (South Asia) and Modernity/Coloniality/Decoloniality Studies (Latin America).

What these non-Western schools of thought must teach African Studies is the moral imperative for knowledges coming out of colonial regions not to take modernist thought at its own valuation, to problematise the division of labour within it, the ratio between those who represent who are thus already in science, and therefore have monopoly over the production of scientific knowledge and those who are marked out to be represented, who are outside of science whose discourses are dubbed as non-scientific and thus do not merit being called knowledge. What makes of all of this possible is the subject-centred reason which as we now know, claims for itself 'a singular universality by asserting its epistemic privilege over all other local, plural, and often incommensurable knowledges...' (Chatterjee;1993:l). Not only does this subject-centred reason of the political proclaim its own unity it also serves as the standard for the

disavowal of non-analytical modes-of-being leading for non-European people to the coloniality of their being (Maldonado-Torres; 2007) .

Tellingly Althusser (1970) does not rely on the modern subtlety of concepts he deploys, i.e. relations of production, productive forces, etc. to secure the connection of his theory of political subjectivity on to the modern grid of intelligibility. He is more forthright. Of concern to him is the category of the subject, which as he claims, emerges in tandem with the rise of bourgeois society. More specifically it is bourgeois legal ideology, he enlightens us, 'which borrowed the legal category of 'subject in law' to make an ideological notion: man is by nature a subject' (1970: 44, footnote # 15). Michel Foucault's preoccupation with bio-power and disciplinary technologies all of which in a sense help him map the genealogy of the modern subject are sufficient proof of his location within the grid of modern sensibility. Whether it is in **Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison** or in **The History of Sexuality, Volume I** Foucault (1977, 1978) is explicit that the subject which in Western societies emerges at the junction of disciplinary institutions and the new form of power, bio-power, is a modern development. The modern subject, which is also an object of certain forms of knowledge and a target of certain disciplinary practices, emerges within the background of the capitalist mode of production. For Foucault (1978) it is not just the subject but also the new disciplinary institutions and the new form of power, bio-power, whose origins must be located within the historical matrices of the capitalist mode of production. In **The History of Sexuality, Volume I**, he writes; 'bio-power was without question an indispensable element in the development of capitalism...' (1978: 140-141). Below the study proceeds with the task of re-reading the modernist theories of the subject cognisant of their modern intentionality and the limits it imposes on their reach in the non-European world.

### **Cartesian Subject: An Illusion of the Epoch**

Students of modern philosophy acquiesce to the foundational status of Descartes' [1637][1641](1997) oeuvre. His work essentially pioneered a new tradition. On the one hand it hastened the lessening relevance of religious revelation on the other hand catalysed the ascendance of the human subject into a foundation of all knowledge (Ferry; 2010, Tarnas; 1991, Mansfield; 2000). Descartes' (1997) impact on the development of modern subject-centred philosophical thought has led Dreyfus and Kelly (2011) to go this extent in eulogising him: "[J]ust as Jesus established our Christian World with its saints and sinners, Descartes established our Modern World in which we understand ourselves as self-sufficient *subjects* standing over against self-sufficient *objects*" (2011: 137). To appreciate fully the radical transformation Descartes' (1997) work instantiates it must first be situated within the context in which it arose.

In his productive intellectual life Descartes (1596-1650) is witness to the disintegration of an age – the Medieval Age. His work in fact abetted and is itself benefited by the collapse of the Medieval world-view of the cosmos as a meaningful order within which man occupies a precise and determined place. In this age to be European is to be Christian. In the Middle Age being Christian means far more than internalising nominal Christian precepts and injunctions. It means living the totality of one's life in the thralldom of theological dogma. The most prevalent religious doctrine is the Great Chain of Being. The overarching principle of the Great Chain of Being is that everything on earth is an expression of both the will and authority of God. This is true also of the divine rulers who ruled by divine right. Together with the Church they were God's representatives on earth. Thus to disobey their authority was to go against the will of God. For ordinary people who experience themselves and their world as determined by God to make sense of everything in their lives they turned to this fundamental idea, this religious dogma. Whether it is fortune or misfortune in their personal lives they were

seeking an answer to, all these were given *a priori* in the all encompassing theological doctrine. In effect to pose existential questions, questions about identity, what constitutes knowledge, the basis for choice is in this age superfluous because everything is transcendently (pre-) determined.

At the time Descartes [1637] [1641] publishes his works this Medieval world-view is being unhinged from its moorings by several vicissitudes which benefited and are in turn benefited by his endeavours. There is on the one hand the Scientific Revolution and the religious Reformation of the sixteenth century on the other. The Scientific Revolution's major concern is to explain using scientific methods of observation, empirical measurement and mathematical exactitude, planetary movements, the natural disposition of things on earth, laws governing nature and furthermore to obtain certain and objective knowledge of the world. At the height of medieval orthodoxy these concerns are precluded from the realm of legitimate intellectual enquiry. That at all it was now possible to pose them suggest something had changed in the spirit of the age.

As for the Reformation its major *coup de grace* was to displace the church and restore the individual on to an unmediated relationship with God. Salvation as a result was to be dependent no longer on membership in the church. The church and its institution of priesthood also lost monopoly over the correct interpretation of Scripture. That now depended on the authority of the individual conscience – priesthood of all believers becomes the motto. In fact it now becomes the responsibility of every fellowshipping self to seek and discover disinterested truth and repudiate doctrinal teaching(s). The Reformation and its attendant spirit of critical enquiry would locate the self at the centre of truth and undercut the capability of the Church to enforce new orthodoxies. In a word the self becomes not only the measure of things but a self-determining source of truth. Truth writes Tarnas (1991) becomes 'truth-as-experienced-by-the-self'

(1991:243). The above constitutes the context within which must be located Descartes' (1997) intellectual interventions.

Descartes' (1997) major contribution to modern philosophy is the notion of the modern subject supposedly inhabiting the Archimedean point of knowledge, endowed with objective consciousness and a privileged access to the world. This subject which is the basis of all knowledge does not emerge from the transcendental waiting room neither is it metaphysically posited. It is a culmination of a tedious process of meditation. The path to its discovery opens up in the first meditation where employing the method of radical scepticism, Descartes (1997) subjects every knowledge claim he has held before to critical scrutiny. Through the layered process of radical scepticism Descartes (1997) doubts the entirety of what he has known before including his very own existence. To wipe the slate clean he withholds assent to all knowledge claims which may be found to have in them some even if the least reason for possible doubt. Eventually all knowledge previously held be it data from the senses or from mathematical deduction(s) is repudiated. To it he finds does not attach a measure of certitude. This is because as Descartes (1997) explains it may so happen that he is under the spell of an evil genius who deceives him and implants in him illusions and appearances.

Continuing down the path of doubt, Descartes (1997) hopes to arrive at a point where he is met with facts of indubitable quality at the Archimedean or apodictic point of knowledge. In the self that doubts, in the self that is engaged in these reflections, Descartes (1997) finds something in which even the least reason to doubt does not inhere. So secure is the existence of this self that doubts such that even if it were that there is some evil genie of supreme power deceiving it for that reason alone its existence would be firmly established because; 'if he is deceiving me, I exist. Let him deceive me as much as he will, he can never cause me to be nothing so long as I shall be

thinking...’ (1997: 140). Certain that it exist this self is then seized with inquiring into what exactly it is. A thing that thinks concludes Descartes (1997).

One of the key moments in the journey down the path of doubt is the discovery that no other feature pertains to the thinking thing other than the fact that it is a thinking substance. Its whole essence consists solely in the fact that it is a thinking thing – *res cogitans*. To wit, this unextended thinking substance, mind, consciousness or soul, must be kept distinct from the extended corporeal substance or body - *res extensa*. This distinction is what in modern philosophy is known as the ‘Cartesian dualism’. The claim here basically is that the subject is made of two incommensurable substances: the body and consciousness. But these two do not exist at the same level for as Descartes (1997) claim:

“[I] possess a distinct idea of body, inasmuch as it is only an extended and unthinking thing, it is certain that this I [that is to say, my soul by which I am what I am], is entirely and absolutely distinct from my body, and can exist without it” (1997: 181).

The above exposition summarises briefly Descartes’ (1997) intellectual project both in the **Discourse on Method** and **Meditations on First Philosophy** to found the modern subject. Its backhand move was to sound the death-knell of the medieval notion of being. Alongside the modern notion of the subject, Descartes (1997) launches a new modern conception of knowledge. In tow is a phalanx of collusive dualisms; subject-object, body-soul, instinct-reason, mind-matter, drives-consciousness, etc. The novelty of Descartes’ (1997) philosophical project is however not limited to the notion of the modern subject which is present unto itself, autonomous and self-determining. In the wake of both **The Discourse on Method** and **Meditations** an expansive intellectual vista opens up where it becomes for the first time possible to inquire, without Gods’ plan to ground us, who we are and on what basis are we to make our existential choices

(Dreyfus and Kelly; 2011). Perhaps more radical at the time was the suggestion that answers to these questions could not be arrived at other than through human reason. Human reason thus ascends into the place of God as the 'supreme authority in matters of knowledge' (Tarnas; 1991: 279). In this milieu the human subject becomes the legitimate and self-sufficient source of truth/knowledge about anything and everything including God's existence. From this moment there is no framework of meaning imminent in the universe. The primacy of the human subject in the world was the obverse of a disintegrating divinely ordained and harmonious cosmos where the individual as a constituent part of the totality has to find its place among other elements. Liberated from this harmonious totality or holism the individual becomes an end in itself. For many herein lie the roots of (modern liberal) individualism.

From Descartes' (1997) intellectual oeuvre emerges the modern subject, the subject *stricto-sensu*, which is a source of its own reason whose many other ontological attributes we now know too well to rehearse here. This modern subject for instance is held to be the cause of itself. As the subject *causa sui*, it appeals to no outside authority for its existence. While the ontology of the Cartesian subject hardly needs elaboration what for the purposes of this commentary must be brought to the surface are two conceptions of the subject present in Descartes' (1997) scheme of representation. Sedimented in both the **Discourse on Method** and **Meditations on First Philosophy** as stated are two distinct conceptions of the subject; the subject as substance which endures and the subject as a reflex.

To surface the two conceptions of the subject present in Descartes (1997) it will help to pose the following question: when is the subject? In the second meditation when Descartes (1997) seeks to validate his existence as the thinking thing he asserts that '[A]nd thus, having reflected well, and carefully examined all things, we have finally to

conclude that this declaration, *Ego sum, ego existo*, is necessarily true every time I propound it or mentally apprehend it' (1997: 140). Descartes (1997) is clear enough in his answer here - the subject only exists or its moment becomes an actuality only when it is performed. The proposition 'I am I exist' is true every time I pronounce it or think of it. So the subject in order for it to be, it first must be performed. Outside of this performance it cannot continue to subsist. Only when I am conscious of the fact that I am conscious can I be certain that I am conscious. Consciousness as consciousness of consciousness is the moment of the subject (Hudson; 2012). In **Being and Time** Heidegger (1962) makes a somewhat similar claim as Descartes' (1997): the subject as performative. In division II of the book when discussing death Heidegger (1962) for instance emphasises the fact that to attain full consciousness (he says authentic life) the subject of Dasein must be able to constantly anticipate its death. Early on in the text he is more pointed in his projection of the instantaneous character of Dasein. He argues that 'Being' of Dasein is not a static entity. On the contrary he considers 'Being' to be an activity 'to be'. He argues further that 'Being' itself is only possible because Dasein is capable of inquiring about itself. In making the point he writes;

"Thus to work out the question of Being adequately, we must make an entity-the-inquirer-transparent in his own being. The very asking of this question is an entity's mode of Being; and as such it gets its essential character from what is inquired about-namely Being" (1962: 26-27).

In Laclau (1990) and Zizek (1994) resurfaces the same notion of the subject as performative. In their elaboration of the post-Althusserian subject both building on Lacan (1977) hold the subject to be evanescent, flickering, and/or vanishing - it only exist at the very moment when it disappears. This instantaneous subject exists in the moment of becoming. It is never fully one with itself. As a vanishing mediator it causes its own disappearance. But we are getting ahead of ourselves. What for the now must be underlined is that Descartes (1997) is not ambivalent about the instantaneous

character of the subject. In the second meditation he removes any possibility of doubt. He writes; '*I am, I exist*. This is certain. How often? As often as I think. For it might indeed be that if I entirely ceased to think, I should thereupon altogether cease to exist' (1997: 141-142).

The second notion of the subject as substance which endures, impervious to accidents is best apprehended in contra-distinction to the vanishing subject (Descartes; 1997). Whereas the latter must constantly be performed to exist the subject as substance contains within itself necessary and sufficient conditions for its existence. Once established its existence as a thinking thing – *res cogitans* - endures, it faces no possibility of being extinguished. To underscore not just its enduring character as substance but also to foreground its self-sufficiency Descartes (1997) in the **Discourse** posit that: 'I would have had no reason to believe that I existed; I thence concluded that I was a substance whose whole essence or nature consists only in thinking, and which, that it may exist, has need of no place, nor is dependent on any material thing' (1997: 92). In the synopsis of the meditations, Descartes (1997) again registers the enduring character of the subject: '...the human mind is not similarly composed of any accidents, but is a pure substance' (1997: 131). We encounter in Althusser (1970) a similar notion of the subject as substance whereupon once ideology interpellates concrete individuals into subjects their identity is sedimented and comes to rest on itself. It was necessary briefly to refer to the two distinct notions of the subject inherent in Descartes' (1997) works because as we have shown they recur in contemporary debates about the subject and subjectivity.

There is undoubtedly a sense in which Descartes (1997) must take credit for inaugurating a new field of modern rational thought – what earlier we spoke of as the modern grid of intelligibility. The path-breaking character of his work is hardly in dispute

among students of modern philosophical thought. However most interpreters of Descartes' (1997) work who celebrate it for founding the modern subject possessed of universal reason, objective consciousness and rationality do so on the basis of two silences. First, the centrality of the Judeo-Christian God in his structure of thought. This is not to deny the debate which has unfolded within modern philosophy about whether the Cartesian subject itself is not dependent on God or more specifically whether it does not issue directly from God. This has come to be known as the Cartesian circle. This can be read from Descartes' (1997) suggestion that the mind cannot be derived from the qualities of matter but must be specially created by God. In the synopsis of the fifth meditation he is more explicit; '[A]nd further I show in what sense it is true to say that the certainty of geometrical demonstrations is itself dependent on the knowledge of God' (1997: 133).

Within this debate on the Cartesian circle there are two tendencies. One fleetingly, acknowledges the overbearing presence of the Judeo-Christian God within Descartes' (1997) scheme of thought. Once acknowledged the presence of God is then relegated to the margins without any effort to fully ponder its implications for the veracity of his argument in non-Christian regions. More disconcerting is the unmistakable undertone with which votaries of this viewpoint browbeat those who inhabit non-Christian geographies to get on and engage with Cartesian thought the centrality of God notwithstanding as though the Occidental Christian God is an integral part of the natural state of the world. The second tendency is a subtle manoeuvre aimed at establishing the primacy of human reason over God. Here the claim is that the certainty of God's existence itself is established by human reason. Tarnas (1991) eloquently pleads the case for the primacy of human reason over God thus;

Although the self-evident certainty of God's existence was guaranteed by God's benevolent veracity in creating a reliable human reason, that conclusion could be affirmed only on the basis of the clear-and-distinct-idea criterion, in which authority was fundamentally rooted in a judgement by the individual human intellect. In the ultimate religious question, not divine revelation but the natural light of reason had the final say" (1991: 279).

For those who claim that human reason trumps God, the point is not that God may not be the source of truth and knowledge but rather that God himself who may indeed be the provider of truth must, however, first be known by the human subject through human reason. My claim then is that because both the above positions issue from the same philosophical location of the Western modern episteme they both do not contemplate what the implications of the mere presence of the Judeo-Christian God in Cartesian thought are when weighed against the reality of those for whom the Christian world-view and its attendant sensibilities does not hold. To be sure the Judeo-Christian God is not a universal God, it is an Occidental God. The fundamental question then not posed by Descartes' (1997) interpreters is what is the status of Cartesian thought and/or consciousness in those regions of the world whose cognitive structure, order of knowledge, cosmology, and cultural world-view is incommensurate with the Western Judeo-Christian God? Descartes' (1997) God centric notion of modern subjectivity therefore can only resonate with people who dwell in societies of comparable social relations and moral values. For those who habit the non-Western cultural meaning world it will not suffice to fleetingly acknowledge the centrality of God and then proceed without musing over its full implications.

At this point we have come to the second of the two silences interpreters of Cartesian thought are sworn to. Modern students of Descartes (1997) eager to safeguard the supposed universality of Western philosophical thought silence in their reading both the inter-subjective character of knowledge and the plurality of reason, Descartes (1997)

himself explicitly acknowledges. We do not have evidence that Descartes in his life travelled wider than the Occidental world. We do however from his writings get a sense that he was conscious that reason is not a universal category but an emanation from bounded meaning worlds. And these meaning worlds he notes could be other than the Western world. In Part (3) three of the **Discourse** Descartes (1997) spells out the code of morals he was going to live his life guided by. In the process he draws a geography of reason much wider than the Occidental world:

“[F]or since I began to count my own opinions as nought, because I desired to place all under examination, I was convinced that I could not do better than follow those held by people on whose judgements reliance could be placed. And although such persons may possibly exist amongst the Persians and Chinese as well as amongst ourselves, it seemed to me that it was most expedient to bring my conduct into harmony with the ideas of *the Occident* those with whom I should have to live...” (1997: 85-86 italics added).

Thus when Foucault (1982) in *'The Subject and Power'* attributes to Descartes' (1997) project the desire to found a universal and unhistorical subject possessed of trans-cultural reason he is being typical – he is merely giving expression to a view prevalent within Western thought. His claim is symptomatic of the refusal within Western thought to heed the lesson present in Descartes (1997) to consider reason not as objective, universal, trans-historical and trans-cultural but as inter-subjective and decentred in multiple localities and/or meaning worlds. This is how in the **Discourse** Descartes (1997) formulates the lesson modern Western reason eager to universalise itself has with such dogged determination elected to ignore;

“[I] further recognised in the course of my travels that all those whose sentiments are very contrary to ours are yet not necessarily barbarians or savages, but may be possessed of reason in as great or even a greater degree than ourselves. I also considered how very different the self-same man, identical in mind and spirit, may become, according as he is brought up from childhood amongst the French or Germans,

or has passed his whole life amongst Chinese or cannibals...I thus concluded that it is much more custom and example that persuade us than any certain knowledge..." (1997: 81).

What the counter-intuitive reading of Descartes (1997) attempted above suggest is that while he may be considered the father of modern rational thought/philosophy, and celebrated for inaugurating what amounts to an illusion of the epoch<sup>7</sup> - the sovereign, rational autonomous subject inhabiting the Archimedean point of knowledge with privileged access to a transparent world - it bears asking to what extent this is an achievement rather of the collective European conscious(-ness) which eager to universalise Western rationality silences in its reading the inter-subjective nature of meaning, the bounded nature of reason and its plurality Descartes (1997) himself commit to.

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<sup>7</sup> We are now given to understand that there is no transparent world that readily avails itself to human consciousness. Just as we are given to know that there is no autonomous subject with unencumbered accesses to a transparent world standing on a privileged Archimedean point. Let us therefore grant an audience to Friedrich Nietzsche (1990) as he spectacularly mocks this illusion of an autonomous Cartesian subject: "[T]here are still harmless self-observers who believe 'immediate certainties' exist, for example 'I think'...: as though knowledge here got hold of its object pure and naked, as 'thing in itself', and no falsification occurred either on the side of the subject or on that of the object. But I shall reiterate a hundred times that 'immediate certainty', like 'absolute knowledge' and 'thing in itself', contains a *contradictio in adjecto*: we really ought to get free from the seduction of words! Let the people believe that knowledge is total knowledge, but the philosopher must say to himself: when I analyse the event expressed in the sentence 'I think', I acquire a series of rash assertions which are difficult, perhaps impossible, to prove – for example, that it is I who think, that it has to be something at all which thinks, that thinking is an activity and operation on the part of an entity thought of as cause, that an 'I' exists, finally that what is designated by 'thinking' has already been determined – that I know what thinking is. For if I had not already decided that matter within myself, by what standard could I determine that what is happening is not perhaps 'willing' or 'feeling'? Enough: this 'I think' presupposes that I *compare* my present state with other known states of myself in order to determine what it is...In place of that 'immediate certainty' in which the people may believe in the present case, the philosopher acquires in this way a series of metaphysical questions, true questions of conscience for the intellect, namely: 'Whence do I take the concept thinking? Why do I believe in cause and effect? What gives me the right to speak of an "I", and even of an "I" as cause, and finally of an "I" as cause of thought?' But Nietzsche was not done yet. He continues elsewhere in the same text: "[T]he *causa sui* is the best self-contradiction hitherto imagined, a kind of logical rape and unnaturalness: but mankind's extravagant pride has managed to get itself deeply and frightfully entangled with precisely this piece of nonsense. For the desire for 'freedom of will' in that metaphysical superlative sense which is unfortunately still dominant in the minds of the half-educated, the desire to bear the whole and sole responsibility for one's actions and to absolve God, world, ancestors, chance, society from responsibility for them, is nothing less than the desire to be precisely that *causa sui* and, with more than Munchhausen temerity, to pull oneself into existence out of the swamp of nothingness by one's own hair" (1990: 45-51).

Descartes (1997) we noted above sponsors the collapse of the view of the cosmos as a meaningful order within which man occupies a marked and determinate place. From the ruins of this order emerges the modern subject endowed with reason. What however his work does not achieve is to completely write out the critical role Christianity plays in European thought such that Christianity continues to this day to set the widest stage of modernity. It delimits the world of modernity and the kind of actions that are compatible with that world, i.e. one man one wife injunction.

### **Of Overdetermination, Structure and the Subject in Althusser**

Next we consider Althusser's (1970) contribution to the contemporary debates on how concrete individuals are called into subjectivity. For Althusser's (1970) ideas on subjectivity to make sense we first have to consider the path-breaking contribution to structuralism by the Swiss born linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure [1917](1974). In the **Course in General Linguistics** Saussure's (1974) primary object is to found the discipline or systematise the study of linguistics. His work however would come to have a much larger impact – it ignites the structuralist revolution within the social sciences. Anthropologists, sociologists and literary scholars alike embraced structuralism as a methodological approach, applied in their respective disciplines the model of linguistics. It is precisely this linguistic model Althusser (1969, 1970) brings to bear in his interpretation of Marxian thought. The fallout is structural Marxism and a corollary structuralist notion of the subject.

Briefly let us tease out the main threads of Saussurian linguistics. To begin with language as a system (*la langue*), which constitutes the subject matter proper for linguistics, is distinguished from the actual manifestation of language in the acts of speaking or writing (*la parole*). While the acts of speaking and writing are individual attributes language as system has a collective social life. Language we learn is actualised in and

through interpersonal interaction by a community of speakers. Basically language as a system, *langue*, connotes a set of norms, rules of combination, interpersonal rules, and an underlying system which governs the re-production of (meaning) language in speech and writing. Language, claims Saussure (1974), is a system of signs that express ideas (1974: 16).

Saussure (1974) is perhaps more popular among social scientists for establishing the arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign. Language was for long erroneously held to be a simple naming process or a list of words corresponding to outside referents they name. By implication words were mere expressions of predetermined and pre-existing ideas. Meaning in that regard is constituted outside of words and language generally. Since the publication of the **Course in General Linguistics** the relationship between the object and its name has been recast in fundamental ways. The linguistic sign we now know does not unite a thing and a name but a concept and sound-image, the latter meaning the psychological imprint of the sound, the impression that it makes in our senses (Saussure; 1974: 66). For reasons of conceptual discipline Saussure (1974) substitutes the two notions; concept and sound-image with signified and signifier respectively. What constitutes the linguistic sign then is the association between the signifier and signified. However the arbitrary nature of the relation between the signifier and signified is emphasised. To say that the nature of the linguistic sign is arbitrary is not to imply that the choice of the signifier is left entirely to the speaker such that it will vary from one speaker to the other depending on their individual predilections. It means more appropriately that the relationship between the two is unmotivated – there is no natural link or bond between the two, the signifier and signified.

We learn further from Saussure (1974) that in a language each word, element or unit does not contain within itself its full meaning – there are no positives, only differences.

Linguistic elements therefore must be considered in their synchronic solidarity meaning each word or linguistic unit acquires its meaning relative to other elements or words. Simply the meaning or identity of each linguistic element is overdetermined by that of other elements in relation to which it stands in a linguistic system. Elements which by their nature have no intrinsic value change their meaning for instance once inserted into different sequences. The meaning of a term that is to say alters in accord with modification dictated by the new term preceding or following it. Language Saussure (1974) avers is a system of interdependent terms in which the value of each term results solely from the simultaneous presence of the others (1974: 114). Words do not have predetermined value, they lack any positive content. Their value issues from their negative and differential relation to other terms in the system. Language basically is a system of differences.

The larger point not to be missed in this is that ideas (and perhaps meaning) are not predetermined outside of the linguistic system, they emerge within it. If language depends entirely on relations of difference, where the most precise characteristic of concepts is in being what the others are not, a real danger exist where this chain of difference may continue *ad infinitum* with meaning never getting fixed at any point. As an antidote to what he calls the arbitrariness of the sign, Saussure (1974) offers the notion of relative motivation. To arrest this flow of differences, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) in **Hegemony and Socialist Strategy** introduce the concept of nodal points which according to them partially fixes meaning. These nodal points which essentially serve a similar end - to attain relative fixity of meaning - as the Saussurian notion of relative motivation, are privileged discursive points, signifiers or reference points in a discourse that bind together a particular system of meaning (Laclau and Mouffe; 1985: 112-113).

The abbreviated presentation above is meant to enable us decipher the extent of Althusser's (1969) indebtedness to the field of linguistics. This debt Althusser (1969) incurs in the course of his career-long project to save Marxian thought of its intellectual deformities largely a result of its entanglement with the Hegelian speculative thesis (this thesis holds the concrete of a political situation as the contingency in which necessity is realised). The currency of this debt is the concept of overdetermination. Simply stated, the entirety of Althusser's (1969) intellectual project arguably depends on the productivity of the term the field of linguistics loans to him, that is, overdetermination.<sup>8</sup> What follows is an attempt to calculate the extent of Althusser's (1969) indebtedness to structural linguistics. We made the point earlier that his object is to establish the specificity of Marxian thought, not as an inversion of the Hegelian dialectic. This endeavour sees him originate a field known as structural Marxism supported by or built on the concept of overdetermination. To ascertain the criticality of the concept we follow it at work at different theoretical sites/levels where Althusser's (1969) projects is articulated.

Applied to the study of social formations, the linguistic concept of overdetermination, leads to an the understanding of society as something far more complex than a mere collection of simple isolated and self-contained identities, elements and/or structures. In the last instance it enables the characterisation of society as a complex structured social whole. In this complex whole unlike in a Hegelian totality where elements present

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<sup>8</sup> Interestingly when Althusser first registers his indebtedness to linguistics in his 1962 essay 'Contradiction and Overdetermination' he is ambivalent about the productivity of the term. At this point he disparagingly confesses: "[I] am not particularly taken by this term *overdetermination* (borrowed from other disciplines), but I shall use it in the absence of anything better..." (1969: 101). A year later in his essay 'On the Materialist Dialectic' there is a marked shift in attitude. He is more explicit about its origins in linguistics and psychoanalysis – "[I] did not invent this concept. As I pointed out, it is borrowed from two existing disciplines: specifically, from linguistics and psychoanalysis" (1969: 206, footnote #46). Moreover he is more earnest about the indispensability of the concept for his intellectual endeavour to establish the specificity of the Marxist (theoretical) practice as distinct from the Hegelian dialectic. In his words: "[I]t is this very peculiar type of determination (this overdetermination) which gives Marxist contradiction its specificity...Only overdetermination enables us to understand the concrete variations and mutations of a structured complexity such as a social formation..." (1969: 210).

themselves as moments of the development of the Idea, in which differences are only posed to be negated they are instead locked in an interdependent relationship wherein each element is neither self-contained nor self sufficient. Moreover these elements are not expressions of an essence into which they return in the final moment of negation when the simple unity of the totality is restored (recall our discussion earlier of the position African Studies holds in relation to Western rational thought). Rather as in language they only gain their meaning in a complex milieu where multiple elements intervene in the determination of each other's meaning. Notably the complexity of the milieu is not that of a plurality of moments in a single process of self-unfolding or auto-development. This complexity does not equate the expression of the concept in the real - it is not the self-unfolding of an essence. Rather each element or structure sits in a relational position where it confers meaning to others just as they determine its own meaning.

To demonstrate how the linguistic model enables the understanding of society as a complex structured whole wherein multiple and uneven determinations are at play Althusser (1969) elaborates on what is contemplated in the distinction between the principal contradiction and secondary contradictions; secondly in the distinction between the principal aspect and secondary aspect of each contradiction; and lastly in the concept of the uneven development of the contradiction. His debt to Lenin and Mao who before him laboured to establish this theoretical field as definitive of the Marxian contradiction, he acknowledges. Simply what is contemplated in this field is the existence of a complex process with a plurality of contradictions which unevenly determine each other. The invocation in this outline of the multiplicity of contradictions is meant as a metaphoric representation of the layers of complexity characteristic of or existent within society. In short the plurality of contradictions is taken to signify the complexity of society. What distinguishes this complexity from a typically Hegelian

contradiction where there is a splitting of a single whole into two of its contradictory parts is that it entails far more than a single pair of opposites. To accentuate the distance between the Hegelian dialectic which is a simple process with two opposites and the Marxian dialectic, Althusser (1969) writes;

“...no complex process is presented as the development of a simple one, so the complex never appears as the phenomenon of the simple – on the contrary it appears as the result of a process which is itself complex. So complex processes are never anything but given complexities, their reduction to simple origins is never envisaged, in fact or in principle” (1969: 195)

To vivify the notion of a complex overdetermined structure let us read it against the conceptualisation of apartheid as a ‘white democracy’. In so doing we proceed conscious of the fact that every simple category, ‘white democracy’ in this instance, always entails the existence of a structured whole. More precisely the presupposition is that simple categories themselves are products of complex processes, i.e. colonial social relations. In this regard to talk intelligibly of ‘white democracy’ in colonial South Africa is not to talk of a simple universal - democracy - which in its culmination begins in one part of the world as exclusion incrementally integrating different segments of society until it is fully realised in complete inclusion or until differences within it are finally negated. Rather it must be situated (white democracy) within the determinate colonial social relations – that is in a concrete structured social whole – where white colonial identities are overdetermined by colonised non-white identities. We can at this point surmise that white identity which appears like a simple category actually emerges within a particular social configuration, that is, a society in which had developed a certain constellation of concrete colonial social relations. Thus what appears like a simple category (white democracy) is not original; on the contrary, it is the structured complex whole (concrete colonial society with its relations) which gives its meaning to the simple category. This

according to Althusser (1969) summarises the thesis Marx set to prove in the **Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy**, which is that:

“the simple only ever exists within a complex structure; the universal existence of a simple category is never original, it only appears as the end-result of a long historical process, as the product of highly differentiated social structure; so where reality is concerned, we are never dealing with the pure existence of simplicity, be it essence or category, but with the existence of ‘concretes’ of complex and structured beings and processes” (1969: 196-197).

Without explicitly naming it, Althusser (1969) broaches into the field a radically innovative concept of structural determination or structural causality alongside the concept of a structured complex social whole which as we have noted is distinct from the Hegelian notion of a simple original unity. The latter unfolds from within, splits into two opposites which are no more than an expression of the same interiority. It is impelled forward by its own negativity only to return to its original unity ‘enriched by its fragmentation, by its alienation, in the negation of the abstraction which negated their previous unity’ (Althusser; 1969: 197). Ultimately the new simple unity of the totality is restored by and through the negation of the negation. In contra-distinction to the Hegelian dialectic founded on the simple original unity which is reproduced at every moment of the process from within itself by virtue of its negativity without ever losing its simplicity and unity the Marxian dialectic:

“...establishes in principle the recognition of the givenness of the complex structure of any concrete ‘object’, a structure which governs both the development of the object and the development of the theoretical practice which produces the knowledge of it. There is no longer any original essence, only an ever-pre-givenness, however far knowledge delves into its past. There is no longer any simple unity, only a structured, complex unity. There is no longer any original simple unity (in any form whatsoever), but instead, the *ever-pre-givenness of a structured complex unity*. If this is the case, it is clear that the ‘womb’ of the Hegelian dialectic has been proscribed...” (Althusser; 1969: 198-199)

Anxiety on the part of Althusser (1969) to expel from Marxian thought the ghost of the Hegelian dialectic is palpable, it comes forth not evanescent but as substance. The obviousness of the above concern however should not crowd out a correlative desire to save Marxism from itself – more precisely from its early excitement with theoretical humanism/philosophical anthropology. In the more ideological works of the pre-1945 ‘epistemological break’ Marx points to the ‘Essence of Man’ as the motor of history. Or shall we say Man becomes an a priori necessity and cause of history. For the young Marx the whole of history is reducible to the essence of man. Freedom and reason for a time were constitutive elements of this essence of man. History unfolds as the inexorable expression of a single cause – Man. It becomes knowable *a priori*. The privileging in Marx’s early works of man as the single cause of history infests his body of thought with a hoard of intellectual deformities including; philosophical subjectivism, historicism, empiricism of the subject, voluntarism to mention but a few (Hudson; 1994).

To cue Marxism from its affliction – which for now we shall refer to as philosophical anthropology - Althusser (1969) highlights the effectivity of structure upon its elements wherein the interdependent relation of elements in society means that none (history) is an expression of another (essence of Man). Through this corrective procedure Althusser (1969) expunges from the body of Marxian thought the notion of expressive causality. Marx himself post the ‘epistemological break’ of 1945 jettisons this notion of a single cause as a new scientific problematic comes to animate his work. By the ‘epistemological break’, a concept Althusser (1969) loans from his teacher Gaston Bachelard is meant a ‘qualitative’ theoretical and historical discontinuity between the scientific and ideological theoretical practice (1969: 167). The ideological theoretical practice which in the main refers to forms of knowledge that make up the prehistory of

a science is definitive of the intellectual concerns of the young Marx. Substitution of the scientific in place of the pre-1945 ideological problematic in Marx's work, leads to both the displacement of old pre-Marxist ideological concepts as well as the formulation of the theory of history and politics on the basis of radically new concepts, i.e. social formation, social relations, relations of production, productive forces, etc.

At this material point the category man gives way to social relations as Marx's basic unit of analysis. A supremely important development in the aftermath of the epistemological break is the new Marxist theoretical practice whose emergence renders Marxism itself an object – an object of philosophical inquiry. Dialectical materialism – the theory of theoretical practice – is the name of the new philosophy, its concern being to account for the nature of theoretical formations and their history. In and through dialectical materialism Marxism becomes a theoretical practice capable of accounting for itself by taking itself as its own object (Althusser; 1969: 39). The inevitable is the displacement by the newly emergent theoretical practice – dialectical materialism – of epistemological assumptions of philosophical anthropology within Marxian thought.

Accentuating, the transition from the ideological to the scientific problematic, enables the progression of the larger Althusserian project to its other site of iteration. In this instance the concern becomes the 'Marxist dialectic: what is the specificity that distinguishes it rigorously from the Hegelian dialectic?' (1969: 164). No explicit theoretical statement of the dialectic exist in any of Marx's writings, we are given to understand. His more discerning readers however with resolute conviction insist that it has for a considerable period existed in a practical state within Marxist theoretical as well as political practice. Already sedimented within Marxist practice the task, deceptively simple, is to drag it up to the surface and provide it with a theoretical form a little more adequate to its nature. 'So to pose and resolve our theoretical problem',

writes Althusser (1969) 'ultimately means to express theoretically the *'solution' existing in the practical state'* (1969: 165). Giving theoretical expression to the solution existing in a practical state within Marxist practice however involves more than a simple task of reconstitution. It implies a double move: it entails constituting the theoretical knowledge of the practical resolution as well as formulating a radical critique of the ideological inaccuracies that may attend it (Althusser; 1969). It is at once a production of knowledge and a critique. Dragging up the dialectic, giving it a theoretical form of existence and critiquing ideological illusions that may attach to it is a task of theoretical practice, which itself is a particular form of practice belonging to a larger category – 'social practice' – alongside other practices, such as, political practice, ideological practice and production practice (1969: 167).

To grasp the particularity of theoretical practice we first must appreciate what the concept of practice in general mean. Permeating Althusser's (1969) definition of practice in general are all the trappings of the linguistic concept of overdetermination. Of practice in general he writes;

"...I shall mean any process of *transformation* of a determinate given raw material into a determinate *product*, a transformation effected by a determinate human labour, using determinate means (of 'production'). In any practice thus conceived, the *determinant* moment (or element) is neither the raw material nor the product, but the practice in the narrow sense: the moment of the *labour of transformation* itself, which sets to work, in a specific structure, men, means and a technical method of utilizing the means" (1969: 166-167).

Of all the forms of practice scientific theoretical practice whose determinate given raw material are concepts, facts, representations, etc. which it transforms through its own tools and method into a determinate product; knowledge, constitutes the central kernel of the materialist dialectic. Althusser (1969) himself notes; 'the knowledge of the

process of this theoretical practice in its generality...constitutes a first theoretical elaboration of Theory, that is, of the materialist dialectic' (1969: 173). The use of Theory with capital T is meant to highlight its meta location and/or function as a Theory of theoretical practice – its moment being the moment when theory or science feels the need for the Theory of its own practice (Althusser; 1969). Adamant that the dialectic exist in Marx's works albeit in a practical state Althusser (1969) does however concede that practical recognition of an existence does not equate a theoretical knowledge of it – it is partly for this reason then that it must be thought through in order that its theoretical knowledge may be gained.

In thinking the dialectic through Althusser (1969) places an accent on Marx's more scientific works of the post-1945 break particularly the **Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy**. Scientific theoretical practice we learn begins with general concepts, Althusser (1969) refers to as Generality I. More specifically, its determinate given raw material are the general concepts/abstract generalities, i.e. labour, exchange, etc. It is these concepts which the labour of scientific practice transforms into concrete generality, the concrete-in-thought, which Althusser calls Generality III – simply meaning knowledge. However, the raw material which scientific practice works over, general concepts, are not empirically given existents, pure given objective facts 'whose essence is pure immediacy and singularity' but are themselves products of preliminary scientific labour (1969: 184).

So far our rudimentary appreciation of the process of scientific theoretical practice is that essentially it transforms its determinate raw material, Generality I into its determinate product knowledge, Generality III. Abstracting from Althusser's (1969) earlier definition of practice in general what bears asking is what is the moment of the determinate means of production – what in the theoretical practice does the work of

transforming Generality I to Generality III? This which Althusser (1969) calls Generality II, is constituted by 'the corpus of concepts whose more or less contradictory unity constitutes the 'theory' of the science...the 'theory' that defines the field in which all the problems of the science must necessarily be posed' (1969: 184-184). Generality II or 'theory' basically enables the transformation or statement of a general difficulty into a scientific problem. We can now update our understanding by noting that in the theoretical practice Generality II is what works on Generality I in order to produce Generalities III. Add to this understanding the fact that between Generality I and Generality III there is never an identity of essence because of a real transformation which we must note all happens in thought.

Drawing on the outline above it now becomes possible to elaborate what distinguishes the Marxian from the Hegelian dialectic. Better still to arrive at a point where the Marxian dialectic acquires its own specificity and peculiarity not as an inversion. The abstract generality with which the process begins, that is Generality I and the concrete-in-thought, that is Generality III with which the process closes we have made the point are not expressions of the same essence - an originary general concept which unfolds propelled by its own inner logic until it reaches its culmination in the concrete. To suppose such a process of auto-development as Hegel does is to banish the labour of scientific production by holding Generality I which the labour of theoretical practice is meant to transform into knowledge, Generality III, as the motor of its own transformation. What Hegel in his dialectic denies is the reality of Generality II which does the work on Generality I to produce the concrete-theoretical - knowledge. In the Hegelian scheme the whole process is encapsulated in Generality I which in the process of self-unfolding works on itself or transforms itself from 'the in-itself to the for-itself' (Althusser; 1969: 188). No real transformation or possibility of 'real qualitative discontinuities' is envisaged in such a simple development (Althusser; 1969: 189). The

limit in Hegel's dialectic is not just the refusal of the reality of theoretical practice and of the work of Generality II but also of a much larger dialectic of qualitative transformation at play between the three Generalities. As a consequence Hegel earns himself and his dialectic the following critique by Althusser (1969):

"Hegel denies this reality of theoretical practice, this concrete dialectic of theoretical practice, that is, the qualitative discontinuity that intervenes or appears between the different generalities (I, II and III) even in the continuity of the production process of knowledges, or rather, he does not think of it, and if he should happen to think of it, he makes it the phenomenon of another reality...: the movement of the Idea. He projects this movement on to the reality of scientific labour, ultimately conceiving the unity of the process from the abstract to the concrete as the auto-genesis of the concept, that is, as a simple development via the very forms of alienation of the original in-itself in the emergence of its end-result, an end result which is no more than its beginning" (1969: 189).

One more observation and we shall consider the case sufficiently argued that the Marxian dialectic is not an inversion. We recall that in the Hegelian dialectic the process begins with an Idea or essence which through its own 'movement of auto-determinant auto-genesis' ultimately realises itself in a unified totality or begets through its own self-interiority its 'concrete universal' (Althusser; 1969: 190). Marx as Althusser (1969) notes does not substitute the notion of the Idea with the notion of the material which is what an inversion would mean. Were this to be the case all the Marxian dialectic would achieve is a short step from the essence of the Idea to the essence of the material – from Idealism to empiricism which basically amounts to the same thing. Instead of the empirical or the concrete-real the process of the scientific theoretical practice begins from the 'abstract, from a generality, and not from the real concrete' (1969: 190). Given that scientific theoretical practice which is not a speculative science does concern the concrete-real it is crucial to note that it is the knowledge of the concrete-real which is itself produced wholly within theoretical practice that constitutes its starting point –

Generality I. This discreet category of the concrete constituted in thought is ultimately what sets the Marxian dialectic a world apart from empiricism and Hegelian Idealism.<sup>9</sup>

The claim that overdetermination constitutes the specificity of the Marxian contradiction calls for elaboration. In fact Althusser (1969) goes so far in his claim - insisting on the impossibility of conceiving the Marxian contradiction and theoretical practice without the concept of overdetermination. Underlining the indispensability of the concept he writes:

“Only overdetermination enables us to understand the concrete variations and mutations of structured complexity such as a social formation... Do we now need to repeat that unless we assume, think this very peculiar type of determination once we have identified it, we will never be able to think the possibility of political action, or...the structure of the ‘current situation’” (1969: 210).

What Althusser (1969) does here is more than register his (1969) indebtedness to structural linguistics. Rather he situates the concept of overdetermination as the main support of his theoretical edifice. Ironically it is this gesture towards the concept which turns out to be the impetus for the ferment of post-Althusserian notions of both the subject and society – actually the impossibility of both society and subject according to

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<sup>9</sup> To underline differences between the Hegelian Idea/concept characterised by self-interiority and the Marxian notion of the concrete (Generality I) Althusser (1969) turns to Marx whose discussion of the concrete, I want to suggest, reveals the fact that while Marx may have lacked the concept of overdetermination it was already at work in his structure of thought. About the concrete he writes; “The concrete is concrete because it is the synthesis of many determinations, and therefore a unity of diversity” (cited in Althusser; 1969: 186 footnote # 22). What decidedly does the work of differentiation between the Hegelian Idea and the Marxian concrete here is the concept of overdetermination. While the Marxian concrete appears overdetermined by many other elements - determinations - the Hegelian concept remains suffused with enough substance – a self-contained essence. Thus far we have in Althusser’s (1969) elaboration of the Marxian dialectic been encountering the concept of overdetermination subtly deployed without any explicit reference to it. Below we accost it again without a tag, hard at work nonetheless, in his effort to explicate the character of the concrete: “[G]enerality I, for example the concept of ‘fruit’, is not the product of an ‘operation of abstraction’ performed by a ‘subject’ – but the result of a complex process of elaboration which involves several distinct concrete practices on different levels, empirical, technical, and ideological. To return to our rudimentary example, the concept of fruit is itself the product of distinct practices, dietary, agricultural, or even magical, religious and ideological practices – in its origins (1969: 191).

Laclau and Mouffe (1985). More pointedly it is his failure to show consistent fidelity to the concept that his critics reference as the reason for the need to transcend his theory of complex formations and differentially determined identities (for a review of these critiques see, Hudson; 2003, 2006). Therefore while the object in our immediate reading is to map the outline of the Marxian contradiction, which Althusser (1969) elaborates using the concept of overdetermination, we also signpost that moment when post-structuralist critics break ranks with him. And that moment is the moment when Althusser (1969, 1970) asserts the primacy of the determination in the last instance by the economy over the logic of overdetermination. But on the contradiction first!

In elaborating the specificity of Marxian contradiction, Althusser (1969) begins from Lenin's concrete analysis of the concrete situation in Russia making possible the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution and Mao's theoretical explication of the contradiction. Mao isolates first the principal contradiction and the secondary contradictions; secondly the principal aspect and the secondary aspect of each contradiction. These contradictions which of course determine each other exist at an uneven level of development. Following the logic of Mao's explication we find articulated in any complex whole a number of contradictions, i.e. principal and secondary contradiction, which because of their variable levels of development unevenly determine each other with the most developed contradiction prevailing over others. However the domination of one contradiction over others is not coincidental rather it is an inherent feature of any complex social whole – it is essential to the unity of the structure. This is what Althusser (1969) mean when he says that the 'complex whole has the unity of a structure articulated in dominance' (1969: 202). Marxism 101 indeed teaches us that it is the principal contradiction which determines the historical (progression) movement in/of any society.

So far we can ascertain that a contradiction exist within a complex whole whose unity of a structure is articulated in dominance while the complex whole itself cannot be countenanced devoid of its contradictions, and of their uneven relations. Thus while each contradiction finds expression within an existing complex whole the latter is itself contingent upon the ‘articulation of the structure and the general relation of the articulations in the structure in dominance’ (1969: 205). What we see at play here is the logic of differential determination leading ultimately to the reversal of the everyday but erroneous reading of the Marxian contradiction. Hence the superstructure (relations of production) now emerges not as a pure phenomenon of the structure (forces of production) but also as its condition of existence. Acknowledging the effectivity of the superstructure on the structure - and this crucial to note in light of the charge by critics that Althusser posits the economy as being outside of any concrete historical and social situation - Althusser (1969) writes:

“In plain terms this position implies that the ‘secondary’ contradictions are not the pure phenomena of the ‘principal’ contradiction, that the principal is not the essence and the secondaries so many of its phenomena, so much so that the principal contradiction might practically exist *without* the secondary contradictions, or without some of them, or might exist *before* or *after* them (1969: 205).

To buttress our understanding of an overdetermined contradiction wherein the secondary contradiction(s) constitute the conditions of existence for the principal contradiction and vice versa, Althusser (1969) enlist Lenin’s reflections on the ‘current conjecture’, on the conditions, on the historical situation which made possible the Revolution in Russia in 1917. In a somewhat indexical enumeration of the conditions that made for the success of the Russian Revolution in 1917, Lenin includes factors such the weather, natural wealth of the country, its geographic size, and its backward conditions compared to the rest of Europe, etc. Equally important is the international context – the imperial war which ensured that ‘humanity entered into an objectively

revolutionary situation' (1969: 95). That Russia in 1917 had not industrialised, its agriculture not yet mechanised, land still in the hands of Kulaks, and the peasantry still more preponderant than the working class imply, and this is telling for the understanding of the overdetermined character of the contradiction, that nowhere does the contradiction exist in a simple and pure form – as the contradiction between capital and labour.

As the example of the Russian Revolution teaches it is the accumulation and exacerbation of historical conditions or a vast accumulation of 'contradictions' that often lead to a revolutionary rupture. It is when this ruptural unity is achieved not when there is an *a priori* trans-historical principal contradiction posited outside of any concrete situation that the revolution becomes the task of the day. Simply since the contradiction is not an abstract ahistorical development it is inconceivable outside of the total structure of the social body in which it is found. Here is a point being underlined: the multiple contradictions which converge into a revolutionary rupture are not a pure phenomenon of the general contradiction, but derive from the relations of production or superstructure and with their own effectivity intervene to determine the character of the general contradiction just as they are also determined by it in the same movement. Althusser's (1969) observation in this regard is apt:

"the Capital-Labour contradiction is never simple, but always specified by the historically concrete forms and circumstances in which it is exercised. It is specified by the forms of the superstructure; specified by the internal and external historical situation" (1969: 106).

Lenin's enumeration of factors or conditions the break out of the revolution in Russia depended on, it is important to emphasise does not signal a turn towards empiricism. While his concrete analysis of the concrete situation may appear like an appeal to empiricism, read closely it is a theoretical statement. The many conditions he volunteers

must thus be read not as a long list of isolated empirical factors. Rather they specify the very existence of the complex whole in a determinate situation. Lenin's conjecture is essentially a theoretical exercise, it tells of the complexity of life in a particular social formation, its social relations at a given historical period, of the many contradictions that constitute the whole - 'the complex relation of reciprocal conditions of existence between the articulations of the structure of the whole' (Althusser; 1969: 207). Were these conditions to lack theoretical traction they would not be able to explain why the revolution broke out in Russia in 1917 and not anywhere else? They would be no more than a pedestrian statement about what merely exist. They would not be able to encapsulate the overdetermined character of the contradiction.

Although, Althusser (1969, 1970) testifies to the criticality of overdetermination for the correct understanding of the articulations of the structure of the whole he resists, his critics allege, the full implications of the concept, electing, paradoxically, to show fellowship with the contrary Marxian principle of determination in the last instance by the economy – the primacy of the structure over the superstructure (Laclau and Mouffe; 1985). By so doing, he invariably pushes overdetermination to the outside of his thought circuit – 'the concept of overdetermination tended to disappear from Althusserian discourse and the growing closure led to the installation of a new variant of essentialism', writes Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 98). Indeed in his famous essay 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' Althusser (1970) is unambiguous about the dominance of the economy:

"[T]hus the object of the metaphor of the edifice – base and superstructure – is to represent above all the 'determination in the last instance' by the economic base. The effect of this spatial metaphor is to endow the base with an index of effectivity known by the famous terms: the determination in the last instance of what happens in the upper 'floors' (of the superstructure) by what happens in the economic base" (1970: 9).

Insisting on the determination in the last instance by the economy as Althusser (1960, 1970) does dislodges the cogency of his argument. To begin with it lands him at a new form of essentialism. Economism if you will. The unsettling feature of this essentialism is that it edges the Marxian contradiction closer to the Hegelian totality. We must recall here that the primary reason for inquiring into the concept of overdetermination is to decipher the power of illumination it lends to the Marxian notion of society. According to Althusser (1969) we must ask 'what is the content, the *raison d'être* of the overdetermination of Marxist contradiction, and how can the Marxist conception of society be reflected in this overdetermination' (1969: 107). However if contrary to the logic of overdetermination the economy is determinant in the last instance 'for every type of society' it will have to be defined outside of any contingent historical articulation/social formation (Laclau and Mouffe; 1985: 98). Ultimately like the Hegelian essence it becomes an *a priori* necessity whose conditions of existence would no longer be readable from the terrain of any concrete social formation. Instead they would be an 'internal moment of the economy itself' (Laclau and Mouffe; 1985: 98).

Yet again, an overdetermined complex whole is one where each element and/or identity is located in a differential relation. There is no instance and/or element that is positive and closed in itself – each is constituted as difference. But the Marxian notion of determination in the last instance Althusser (1970) privileges removes the economy from the purview of overdetermination. The economy appears as a self-enclosed instance. To sharpen the contradiction let us return to the linguistic turn. Since that moment the overall marker of an overdetermined society is the differential nature of relations wherein elements/identities acquire their meaning because of their relation with others. None possesses a positive essence - all identities gain their meaning from the complexity of the system/structure. Therefore just as it is that no form of subjectivity is self-inscribed, similarly no principal form of subjectivity singularly

determines the other spheres of subjectivity. This is the moment where the determination by the economy clashes with the logic of overdetermination. Because it holds the economy as something that precedes or emerges outside the concrete system of social relations, immune from the effectivity of other determinate conditions while it remains determinate over them to the last instance, it inevitably projects economic (class) subjectivity as primary. To sum: what Althusser (1970) refuses to avail himself of is the possibility the concept of overdetermination opens up to make sense of the 'precarious and relational character of every identity' – including the economic (Laclau and Mouffe; 1985: 99).

Althusser's (1969, 1970) critics undoubtedly do have a point (Laclau and Mouffe; 1985, Laclau; 1990, Žižek; 1991). My only contention though is that while Althusser (1969) is under no illusion about the impossibility of coterminality between overdetermination and determination in the last instance by the economy this they conveniently overlook when formulating their charge. Althusser (1969) actually anticipates the tension that characterises the co-presence of both overdetermination and the principle of determination in the last instance by the economy in his schema. Therefore the absolutism they attribute to the principle of determination in the last instance is hardly sustainable when read against Althusser's (1969) pre-emptive notes against it. Warning against the possibility of essentialism he specifies what sets true Marxist tradition against economism. He insists that it is economism:

"and not the true Marxist tradition that sets up the hierarchy of instances once and for all, assigns each its essence and role and defines the universal meaning of their relations; it is economism that identifies roles and actors eternally, not realizing that the necessity of the process lies in an exchange of roles 'according to circumstances'. It is economism that identifies eternally in advance the determinant-contradiction-in-the-last-instance with the *role* of the dominant contradiction...whereas in real history

determination in the last instance by the economy is exercised precisely in the permutations of the principal role between the economy, politics, theory, etc" (Althusser; 1969: 213).

This admittedly may not amount to anything more than a presentiment since it does not offer a theoretical solution to what the nature of the relations should be. At best it shifts the locus of the solution from theory to the terrain of the actually existing situation where permutations can be observed. But Althusser (1969, 1970) like Lenin believes in the supremacy of theoretical practice. Does he then run into a theoretical cul-de-sac? My hunch is that Althusser (1969) conscious of the difficulty the co-presence of the two concepts poses and the need to theoretically resolve the relation between them he transforms this into a challenge for post-Marx Marxist theoreticians. He basically is challenging students of Marxian thought not to be content with interpreting Marx but to use his insights for further theoretical development/production. This is how in his chapter, '*Contradiction and Overdetermination*' he states the challenge into what we today would call a future research question:

"Of course, these specific *relations* between structure and superstructure still deserve theoretical elaboration and investigation. However, Marx has at least given us the 'two ends of the chain' and told us to find out what goes on between them: on the one hand, *determination in the last instance by the (economic) mode of production*; on the other, *the relative autonomy of the superstructures and their relative effectivity*" (1969: 111).

A tentative attempt to find out what goes on between the two ends of the chain exist, Althusser (1969) points out, in Engels' 1890 missive against the young economists. Engels berates these young communists for misreading the meaning both he and Marx meant to convey through the principle of determination in the last instance. The benefit Althusser (1969) harvest from this earlier effort by Engels is summed in the novelty of the following formulation: 'accumulation of effective determinations deriving from the

superstructures...on the determination in the last instance by the economic' (1969: 113). We must be careful not to misconstrue Althusser's (1969) words. What this proposition puts beyond question is the effectivity of the superstructure on the economy – overdetermination in one word. The intent is not to defend Althusser (1969) but simply to establish that even if he does not offer us a convincing theoretical solution to what the nature of the relation between overdetermination and determination in the last instance should be, he errs on the side of overdetermination. This we see in the many instances when he denounces the absolutism of the determination in the last instance. One more reading from Althusser (1969) and I shall end my effort:

“the economic dialectic is never active in the pure state; in History, these instances, the superstructures, etc. – are never seen to step aside when their work is done or, when the Time comes, as his pure phenomena, to scatter before His Majesty the Economy as he strides along the royal road of the Dialectic. From the first moment to the last, the lonely hour of the 'last instance' never comes” (1969: 113).

Indeed Althusser (1969) is correct where overdetermination reigns the lonely hour of the last instance never comes.

Earlier we made the following compound claim: Althusser's (1969) primary object is to establish the specificity of Marxian thought as distinct from Hegelian Idealism and for this he relies on the concept of overdetermination borrowed from structural linguistics. We must now avail ourselves of the opportunity to modify that and add yet another proposition: being that Althusser's (1970) intellectual project is enveloped in an overarching commitment to drain the classical humanist subject - Cartesian subject if you will – of its autonomy, consciousness, sovereignty and essence by showing it to be no more than an effect of structure and for this he leverages Saussure's (1917)

systematisation of language into a structure of interconnected relations within which meaning is instituted.

Allowing, himself to profit on the projected similitude between language and society Althusser (1970) holds society to be a synchronic articulation of identities. In this wise the Saussurian structure of language serves as a metaphor for society. There emerges within structuralism an image of society wherein like in language no element contains within itself necessary and sufficient conditions for its existence. No identity, like linguistic units in a language, has an essence. Since there is nothing intrinsic about each identity, they all acquire their meaning thanks to their insertion within a differentially determined complex of structures. Indeed since the linguistic turn structuralist social science thinks of identities as relative. Relatedly, it thinks of identities as situational – they change their meaning depending on their location within a sequence of articulation(s). In a sense this points to the fact that no identity comes into society already shot through with an unchanging essence or meaning. Armed with the above understanding of society as a system of differentially determined relations wherein identities are constituted, structuralism is able to rid the Cartesian subject of its claim to being self-determining - being able to give meaning to itself.

The essence of a differentially determined system structuralism learns from Saussurian linguistics is that its elements lack any positive content. Consequently since society is constituted by a set of differentially determined relations identities within it lack any positive content. It is constituted by a system of differences with no positives. These identity elements are negative because they cannot be defined independently of what they are not. Their content lies outside of them. To use an example from Saussure (1917) we know that the word 'son' means what it does because the other words 'father', 'mother' exist which have a meaning different from it. So we arrive at its

meaning by differentiating it from those other words. We know the colour red because it is not white, it is not yellow, etc. We did earlier point out and resolved through a turn to Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) nodal points and Lacan's (1977) *points de capiton* the possibility of meaning eluding us, running off *ad nauseum* down the chain of differences. From the above exposition of structuralism we observe Althusser's (1969, 1970) debt increase exponentially beyond the nominal currency of overdetermination, it now equals the whole economy of Saussurian linguistics.

In his endeavour to de-centre the auto-determining subject Althusser begins and ends with one principal claim that: structure is the cause of the subject. In a sense, structure sutures identity. Structuralism repudiates the notion of a foundational and/or originary subject because as it proves consciousness or subjectivity is not internal to the concrete individual. Contrary to the Cartesian understanding the subject it emerges is an effect whose existence is dependent on a system of differences which exceed it. No subject therefore within a structured complex is self-sufficient or contains within itself intrinsic conditions of its consciousness. If no subject is self-inscribed we may then deduce that the subject of difference/colonial subject is neither given *a priori* nor a concrete given. It is an effect. It is constituted in and through structure. We cannot read the content of the subject's form of historical individuality off the surface of its body. The object then must be to inquire into the structure, be it the cultural, epistemological, political, social or juridical, it is an effect of.

Remaining true the logic of structural overdetermination – meaning that the component instances of society are themselves internally overdetermined - Althusser (1970) correctly argues that no structure is able to totalise itself. To oversimplify no structure is complete. None of these structures contain within themselves sufficient content for their existence, identity and reproduction. Since none are self-contained and/or self-

sufficient it is more appropriate, and this is crucial for our understanding of structure as an absent cause, to think of these structures as 'effects of the relations of interdependence existing among them' (Hudson; 1994: 256). What may then with a measure of obviousness appear to be a function of the epistemological structure is actually impacted upon and thus an effect of an invisible cause, the differential relation of structures. It is in this context that we must understand structure as an invisible or absent cause that manifest itself through its effects. Since structures are invisible, Althusser (1970) tells us, they can only be established conceptually or through scientific theoretical practice.

When Althusser (1970) claims that structures are invisible and therefore can only be established conceptually he is cautioning us against what, stretching this formulation beyond its context, we may call, 'the opacity of the immediate' (Althusser; 1970: 16). We are given in our reading of society to take it at its obviousness, at its transparency – this is a consequence of an ideological reading of society for which Althusser (1970) berates the young Marx of the 1844 Manuscripts. Post the 1945 break Marx departs from this imaginary understanding by appealing to scientific theoretical practice. The import for us is the resultant understanding of society, which Althusser claims 'is inscribed in its *structure*'. Structure whose peculiarity is the ability to ensure, 'a distance and a dislocation such as to make their own effects themselves illegible, and the illusion of an immediate reading of them the ultimate apex of their effect: *fetishism*' (1970: 17). There are two senses we must not lose to the subtlety of the formulation above.

One, we have already established which is that structure is an invisible and/or absent cause. Yet to be specified is the second, though in that now familiar Marxian concept fetishism we have been provided with a helpful allusion. To be precise it is that the ultimate effect or accomplishment of structure is to induce in us an illusionary reading

of it. What we are getting at is that the illusionary reading of structure is itself an effect of structure. It is difficult to resist the analogy with ideology here. Althusser says 'one of the effects of ideology is the practical denegation of the ideological character of ideology by ideology: ideology never says I am ideological' (1970: 49). But the analogy we must follow through is the one Althusser (1970) guides us towards – the fetishism of commodities. When we look at a commodity, what we think of immediately as its attribute is its economic value/identity. But the economic value/identity of a commodity is not determined solely at the production line. Amongst other things it is determined by abstract social labour power that is expended in producing it, its location in the larger relations of production, etc. Although each commodity produces in us an illusionary effect we must appreciate it for what it is in actuality - a 'site' upon which has been accumulated multiple layers of effectivity or value. As to what this suggest for our endeavour to understand society as structure let us paraphrase Althusser (1970): 'the truth of society cannot be read in its manifest discourse, because the text of society is not a text in which a voice speaks, but the inaudible and illegible notation of the effects of a structure of structures' (1970: 17).

In **Reading Capital**, Althusser (1970) criticises the Marx of the 1844 **Manuscripts**. Part of his criticism is that Marx (1844) erroneously reads the 'species being' to contain within itself all the necessary conditions for the unfolding of human history. Simply Marx holds the subject to be the cause of history. What accounts for this is that Marx (1944) at this point is enamoured by the notion of expressive causality over and above being mired in an ideological or manifest reading of the discourse of society. However post the epistemological break thanks to structural determination a shift in perspective occurs where it becomes possible to see that the 'the real stage directors of history' are the differential relations existing among the structures of the complex whole (Althusser; 1970: 140). In this system of relations we see structure standing in a position of primacy

over the subject. In light of this Althusser (1976) goes so far as to conceive of a possibility of history without a subject – he says rather ‘process without a subject’ (cited in Hudson; 1994: 260). It is precisely the possibility of history without subject together with the controversy over the determinate role of the economy that has been responsible for the ferment of post-structuralist subject centred notions of history and society.

Repeated use is no substitute for meaning. We have so far been referring *ad lib* to the concept: subject. Subjects contrary to everyday understanding do not possess the materiality of flesh made over into concrete human bodies. Subjects, we noted earlier, are occupants of differentially determined places and functions. The black colonised subject for instance is not an empirically given human being on whose biological brown body is inscribed natural markers of primitivity, sensuousness, inferiority, moral depravity, backwardness, disadvantage and other multiplicities of lack; i.e. humanity, culture, intellect, civility, etc. Strictly speaking this black colonised subject/subject of colonial difference is an individual who occupies a place marked out for him/her or determined by the system of colonial relations. Every system of relations including colonialism, conjures up attendant configurations of consciousness or different forms of historical individuality, to which individuals who occupy the places and perform the functions determined by it must submit. Consequently, the characteristic features often assigned to the subject of difference do not equate natural human attributes. (Good) Colonial subjects of difference merely act out forms of historical individuality inscribed in the places allotted to them in the existent system of relations. Subjects of difference are simply, ‘bearers of determinate social identities, which are themselves produced by a determinate set of relations’ – colonial relations (Hudson; 1994: 262). This is how in **Reading Capital**, Althusser (1970) explains what is entailed in thinking about subjects as supports:

“the fact that the structure of the relations of production determines the *places* and *functions* occupied and adopted by the agents of production, who are never anything more than the occupants of these places, insofar as they are the ‘supports’ (Trager) of these functions. The true ‘subjects’ (in the sense of the constitutive subjects of the process) are therefore not these occupants or functionaries, are not, despite all appearances, the ‘obviousness’ of the ‘given’ of naive anthropology, ‘concrete individuals’, ‘real men’ – but the *definition and distribution of these places and functions. The true ‘subjects’ are these definers and distributors: the relations of production* (and political and ideological relations). But since these are ‘relations’, they cannot be thought within the category *subject*” (1970: 180, italics in the original).

When Althusser (1970) says that the true subjects, constitutive subjects of the process are not the occupants but the relations of production he is being consistent. Yet again he is positing the possibility of history and process without subject. He is bidding us to conceive of history as a function of structure. Or shall we say his is a gesture towards a structure led process and moreover since structure - relations he says - are not reducible to anthropological inter-subjectivity they cannot be thought of within the category of the subject. Rather it is within ideology that these relations must be thought through. In fact it is within ideology that the idea of society actualises. Ideology is what holds society up. The obverse is that society is not conceivable without ideology. It cannot be imagined outside of ideology. Ideology, writes Althusser (1969):

“is such an organic part of every social totality. It is as if human societies could not survive without these specific formations, these systems of representations, their ideologies. Human societies secrete ideology as the very element and atmosphere indispensable to their historical respiration and life (1969: 232).

Beyond the fact that human beings live their lives in and through ideology, what must earn our focus, is a related question of how in and through ideology human beings acquire what Althusser (1969) refers to as a ‘form of specific unconsciousness called ‘consciousness’” (1969: 233). How ideology begets concrete individuals their subjectivity

or consciousness. How are individuals, socialised into their respective roles and for the effective performance of functions (role enactment) assigned them in society, is to pose the same concern using concepts borrowed from bourgeois sociology.

In a letter written in the year 1868 to Kugelmann, Marx is adamant that any 'social formation which did not reproduce the conditions of production at the same time as it produced would not last a year' (cited in Althusser; 1970:1). Earlier we alluded to the fact that every mode of production or social formation calls forth corresponding configurations of consciousness, essential for its continued existence. In light of this let us read back to Marx the following plausible claim: the reproduction of the conditions of production necessarily entails conditioning those who occupy the differentially determined places and functions within the system into forms of historical individuality or consciousness necessitous for the effective occupation of their roles as supports. To simplify the reproduction of the conditions of production requires subjection of concrete individuals. This processes of ensuring that concrete individuals are indeed imbued with the necessary consciousness for the tasks the socio-technical division of labour assigns to them is performed in and through ideology. In any constellation of contingently articulated structures it is ideology, the ideological state apparatuses, which equips individuals as supports for the differentially determined places and functions. For Foucault (1977) it is the prison while for Althusser (1970) it is the school which best exemplify the site, wherein individuals are constituted at the same time as they constitute themselves into subjects.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>'What do children learn at school', asks Althusser. And the answer is technical know-how. But in addition to this they learn to be good subjects, to perform their tasks conscientiously. This is how he explains the process of subjectification at school; "children at school also learn the 'rules' of good behaviour, i.e. the attitude that should be observed by every agent in the division of labour, according to the job he is 'destined' for: rules of morality, civic and professional conscience, which actually means rules of respect for the socio-technical division of labour and ultimately the rules of the order established by class domination" (1970: 6).

Of course the comparison with Foucault (1977) must be qualified. For Foucault (1977) regardless of whether it is the school, clinic, prison, psychiatric institution, factory floor, barracks, etc, all these institutions as sites where bodies are made over into subjects (as well as objects) are governed by the same logic and ethic. On the other hand for Althusser (1970) these sites must be segmented to two different categories each governed by logic peculiar to it. On the one end of the spectrum is the Repressive State Apparatus, viz. army, prison, police, etc. On the other the Ideological State Apparatuses, viz. family, church, school, etc. What sets the two categories apart is the fact that the former function 'massively and predominantly' by violence or repression 'while functioning secondarily by ideology' whereas the latter function 'massively and predominantly' by ideology, only employing violence in the last instance in an attenuated and symbolic form (Althusser; 1970: 19). Thus in the life of any social formation the Repressive State Apparatus serve primarily to secure by repression the political conditions for the reproduction of the relations of production – (re-)production of conscientious subjects if you will (Althusser; 1970: 24). This distinction is observably muted in the way Foucault (1977) thinks about the process of individualisation.

What is meant by the category or concept of ideology if we may ask? By ideology it is meant a system of representations, including concepts, ideas, myths, etc, in and through which individuals represent to themselves an 'imaginary relation to their real conditions of existence' (Althusser; 1970: 36). It is not we must note their real conditions of existence but an imaginary relation to those conditions of existence that individuals represent to themselves in ideology. That individuals represent to themselves an imaginary relation to their real condition of existence is however concealed to them by the obviousness of ideology. To inhabit ideology is to live in the realm of the unthought. In his work **For Marx** Althusser (1969) in fact goes so far as to suggest that ideology is actually unconscious. It is customary he writes;

“...to suggest that ideology belongs to the region of ‘consciousness’. In truth ideology has very little to do with ‘consciousness’...It is profoundly unconscious, even when it presents itself in a reflected form. Ideology is indeed a system of representation, but in the majority of cases these representations have nothing to do with ‘consciousness’... They are perceived-accepted-suffered cultural objects and they act functionally on men via a process that escapes them. Men ‘live’ their ideologies...as their world itself” (Althusser; 1969: 232-233).

As a feature of its obviousness ideology expresses itself in the language of everyday conduct and practice. Ideology says to individuals this is how the world is structured and there is no other way to make sense of it and of your location within it. It is partly for this reason that ideology is held to be the world of pre-reflective, spontaneous living. Because individuals live naturally in ideology, Althusser (1970) concludes that ‘man is an ideological animal by nature’ (1970: 45). Ideology as an everyday consciousness serves a crucial purpose in society. Minimally it reproduces the status quo but more significantly it serves as an anchor – it holds society up. Contrary to Marx, Althusser (1970) considers ideology to be integral to the life and functioning of every society such that, he insists, it does not disappear with the advent of a classless society. To contemplate the disappearance of ideology is to contemplate the end of society itself because society cannot support itself. It is obvious, writes Althusser (1969) that ‘ideology is indispensable in any society if men are to be formed, transformed and equipped to respond to the demands of their conditions of existence’ (1969: 235).

Key to ideology’s task of transforming individuals is the ability to create an illusion whereby individuals think of themselves as self-determining. Because individuals live naturally within ideology, within the imaginary that is, they think of themselves in their everyday life-worlds as subjects, as being free, as being the law of their lives. The permanency of this illusion *qua* ideology precludes the possibility of passing over to its outside. Simply the possibility of escaping ideology is nigh impossible. To reinforce the

fact we may indeed enquire: at what point does one externalise himself or herself from the everyday? Only at the moment when one engages in scientific thought. Only at this moment does it become possible to breach the apparently impermeable boundary of ideology. This ability to breach the everyday scientific thought owes to its feature of being in absolute proximity with itself, transparent to itself. Through thought we come to appreciate our immersion within eternal practice of ideological recognition. In the ultimate it is only at this material moment when individuals engage in scientific thought that they regain their liberty from ideology.

Like structure ideology has a metonymic character, it manifests itself in something else - as an effect. It is more apposite then according to Althusser (1970) to think of ideology as endowed with materiality whose modality at best can be read off from the actions of individuals who subscribe to a determinate system of representations (ideology). This individual, a colonialist for instance, is a subject in whose consciousness exist ideas he/she at his/her own accord recognises to be synonymous with his beliefs from which logically flows his/her material practices. We may then say that the materiality of ideology manifests in the practical outlook of an individual who having internalised a particular system of representations participates in the ritual practices that pertain to the ideological apparatus on which lives the ideas he/she has 'in all consciousness freely chosen as subject' (Althusser; 1970: 41). Ideas of a subject acting in all consciousness according to his/her beliefs manifest in his/her participation in ritual practices of the ideological structure(s) necessary for the reproduction of the ideas to which he/she believes.

However, this subject, endowed with all consciousness, with a soul, is not a trans-historical figure. Subjects as effects of structure emerge within particular historically concrete constellation of contingently articulated structures. Referring to subjectivity as

a historical form of individuality has the value of foregrounding the variable character of consciousness – the fact that it changes from one historical social formation to the other – meaning that consciousness is not an innate or natural attribute of concrete individuals. Rather it is ideology that ‘has the function (which defines it) of constituting concrete individuals as subjects’ (Althusser; 1970: 45). The process whereby ideology transforms concrete individuals into autonomous self-determining subjects is by Althusser (1970) referred to as interpellation or hailing. Ideology interpellates all individuals as subjects without exception. Meaning there is not a possibility of escaping ideological subjection. When ideology interpellates individuals it simply calls them to their respective places allocated to them in the socio-technical division of labour and imbues them with a corresponding consciousness necessary for the effective performance of their tasks. It confers on them their identity as workers, capitalists, citizens, etc.

If as we noted earlier each mode of production require as its condition of existence corresponding form(s) of consciousness, it is possible then to conclude that citizenship is that form historical individuality required for the reproduction of capitalist modernity. As a form of historical individuality citizenship the thesis contends is not an empty statutory category. Neither is it a normatively neutral trans-cultural subject-position. As a modern form of sociability citizenship is a product of a contingent historical articulation - it emerges within a particular concrete social formation called capitalist modernity. Citizenship is in fact one of capitalism’s conditions of reproduction.

Implicit in Althusser’s (1970) claim that once ideology hails individuals to their positions they recognise the hailing as being addressed to them is a suggestion that in the work of ideology a singular, unidirectional process unfolds whereby individuals are hailed then accept and internalise their hailing. As such he does not anticipate the possibility of

contestation, failure of the ritual, neither a possibility of it yielding an unintended outcome. As we see below Althusser's (1970) critics be it; Therborn (1980), Laclau (1990) or Zizek (1991) chide him for precluding the possibility of contradiction, struggle and therefore change. In her formulation of the same criticism Macdonell (1986) writes; 'that notion (*of hailing*) risks taking us out of history and making change and revolt unthinkable' (1986: 39 emphasis added). Laclau (1990) and Zizek (1991) do not end at criticising Althusser (1970) for denying the possibility of subjects contesting, resisting or refusing the hailing of ideology. Using this criticism as a scaffold they have developed elaborate post-structuralist notions of the subject, subjectivity and subjectification. We shall shortly give consideration to these alternative formulations of a subject which transcend structure.

For now to think through the impasse arising from the absolutism of ideology – the impossibility of the subject contesting its imaginary subjection - it will be helpful to turn to Pecheux (1982) particularly his work; **Language, Semantics and Ideology**. Through the three notions of; identification, counter-identification and disidentification he offers us tools with which to imagine the possibility of something going wrong in the ritual of ideological subjection. The three notions are as it were mechanisms through which subjects are constituted. Identification which is the only mechanism Althusser (1970) envisages refers to the act of 'good subjects' who recognising the hailing ideology addresses to them out of their own free will accept and internalise the form of consciousness/identity it holds out. As a counterpoint counter-identification entails the reversal of those meanings lived by good subjects, without, however getting out of them. In counter-identification the working on and against occurs in a terrain which accepts the underlying assumptions of identification. Attempt at reversal occurs within the field constituted by identification itself. In a somewhat dialectical entanglement

between identification and counter-identification we see one serving as a support for the other.

The spectacle of which we read in Foucault's (1977) **Discipline and Punish**, best demonstrates the workings or internal mechanics of counter-identification. As Foucault (1977) explains, in the process of inflicting upon the body of the condemned absolute Monarchical power, supported by the discourse of sovereign condemnation, the spectacle often is met by a counter-discourse from the people. Instead of massing insults on the signifying body of the condemned man the people often use the moment to 'denounce punitive power, at times violently ceasing the condemned man from the hands of the executioner or obtaining his pardon by force' (1977: 59). But here is what all of this amount to: a counter discourse that does not overturn the prevailing discourse of sovereign power. In fact this counter discourse does not only speak within the discursive bounds of the discourse of sovereign condemnation it is authorised by it - 'in calling on the crowd to manifest its power, the sovereign tolerated for a moment acts of violence, which he accepted as a sign of allegiance, but which were strictly limited by the sovereign's own privileges' (1977: 59).

What the discourse of the people does is to reverse not dismantle the prevailing discourse. Prevailing discourse retains the responsibility of setting up the podium from which the people speak, agitate, and in the process affirm the authority of the sovereign. It is in the third mechanism, disidentification that the possibility for antagonisms hence transformation materialises. Disidentification means 'working on and against' imaginary subjection (Macdonell; 1986: 40). It allows for the contestation of the forms of consciousness/identity ideology holds out to individual subjects. Nevertheless contested as they are these forms of consciousness which ideology holds

up are never completely repudiated or escaped but can be dislocated, displaced and/or transformed.

To the extent that Althusser's (1970) framing begins with concrete individuals, concluding with concrete subjects after ideology operating in the intermediate space has worked on concrete individuals, it is programmatic. Althusser (1970) concedes as much that the possibility of such a sequential understanding is contained within the structure of his thought but he cautions us against it. Because ideology is eternal and because ideology has no outside a moment when concrete individuals stand outside of ideology virgin of its hailing is inconceivable. To illustrate the point, Althusser (1970) calls forth the example of an unborn child who by virtue of being expected into an existent 'familial ideological configuration', a hetero-normative family milieu for instance has a path already charted for him/her towards sexual subjectivity (1970: 50).

To stretch the illustrative productivity of the example let us imagine a black infant born into an already articulated system of colonial relations as always already interpellated into a colonial subject/subject of difference. His/her identity is always already determined for him/her (within the ritual of birth itself are inscribed elements of this identity). Better still, his/her position as a primitive, sensuous, libidinous, uncultured subject is always already pre-determined. Following Althusser's (1970) counsel we should not entertain the possibility of temporal succession and understand an individual black child as 'always-already' interpellated by ideology into a subject of difference (1970: 50). Even though ideology may appear to do all the work of re-configuring individuals for their positions within the articulated system of relations, as the source and centre of their own law, subjects actually work by themselves towards their own subjection. Subjects are interpellated in order that freely, according to their own

consciousness, they participate in (at times originate) the ritual practices and actions that ensure their own subjection.

Earlier we entered the claim that Descartes' notions of the subject and reason provide the launch-pad for modern theories of the subject. Given Althusser's (1970) spirited effort to dispense with the subject *stricto sensu* – the subject that consciously intervenes in its identity formation – ought we to modify our earlier proposition? More so since we do now know that Cogito, 'I think therefore I am' that secures the sovereignty of the subject for Descartes is what Althusserian structuralism dislodges, instead posing the subject as an effect of structure. The answer is no. To modify our earlier proposition will be to misconstrue the difference(s) between Descartes (1997) and Althusser (1970). To be sure they both acquiesce to the existence of the modern subject. Where they differ is on the process - how the modern subject comes about. One holds it to be the cause of itself, to bring itself into existence while the other considers it to be an effect, an effect of structure. However beyond this point there is a sense in which they both should to an equal measure be thought of as purveyors modern subjectivity or the modern subject whose foremost ontological attribute is political reason.

What I want for now to interrogate is not this convergence but the derision for pre-reflective knowledge, for phenomenological knowledge of the experience of everyday life. This we may note follows logically from the privileging of rational/scientific reason. Althusser's (1970) contempt for the data of unexamined experience, phenomenological knowledge, leaves Althusser's thought system unable to account for the lived experience of those whose modes of being-in-the-world are pre-reflective and/or constituted otherwise than modern. To account for the pre-analytic non-Western forms of life one must of necessity inhabit a horizon of thought wherein it is permissible to

countenance the authenticity of knowledge of the world as it reveals itself to us in our experience as well as the possibility of an unmediated access to lived experience.

However for Althusser (1970) no amount of lived experience can lead to knowledge. Knowledge is not given, cannot be observed, it can be produced only in thought through concepts. True knowledge, Generalities III, comes forth through scientific practice – through Generalities II working on Generalities I. Phenomenological knowledge therefore does not amount to authentic knowledge. Althusser condescendingly dismisses it as ‘rudimentary and naive representations of everyday lived experience’ (Hudson; 1994: 248). We must read in Althusser’s (1970) attitude towards data of unexamined experience - phenomenology – something more fundamental. I want to propose that when he insists that no amount of lived experience can give us knowledge he is being true to the impulse of modernist reason within whose framework certain forms of knowledge and ways of knowing are excluded in advance. I want to suggest again that at work in his attitude is the refusal by modern reason to recognise that the modern form of sociability characterised by a rational calculative relationship to the world, where the world is always present-at-hand, does not exhaust the vast array of existent modes of being.

The refusal notwithstanding this form of sociability that has at its centre the conception of man is no master empty signifier, it is no veritable house for the entire diversity of particulars but is itself a particular, a function of a particular local history and a particular geographical place called Europe. Unfortunately Europe’s ability since the post-Enlightenment to foster over non-European societies political modernity and rationalism as ethics of domination has blinded it to the non-universality of the modern social imaginary. To correct its amnesia, which unfortunately is a critical aspect of its retrospective self-making, it will help to read back to it a lesson delivered to it with such

perspicacity by Foucault (1988). In an interview conducted with Rux Martin Foucault (1988) to Europe's hearing claims:

"[T]hrough [these] different practices – psychological, medical, penitential, educational – a certain idea or model of humanity was developed, and now this idea of man has become normative, self-evident, and is supposed to be universal. Humanism may not be universal but may be quite relative to a certain situation... What I am afraid of about humanism is that it presents a certain form of our ethics as a universal model..." (1988: 15).

### **Post-structuralist Critiques of the Structuralist Subject**

Having sketched the silhouette of Althusserian structuralism and its attendant form of political subjectivity we now turn to the responses these have elicited from theorists of post-structuralist persuasion. To be sure, Therborn (1980) particularly in his work, **The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology**, unlike post-structuralist thinkers is not driven to transcend the Marxian field of ideological subjection elaborated by Althusser (1969, 1970). His intention is to fill its lacunae or perhaps to mute its loud omissions.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand post-structuralist critics; i.e. Zizek (1990) Laclau (1996), Laclau and Mouffe (1985), seek to go behind both the notions of society and subject as proffered by Althusser (1969, 1970). These critics however affirm Althusser's (1970) refusal of a unified transcendental subject. Like Althusser (1970) they return the subject into a system of differential relations where the presence of some elements/identities in others prevents any identity from being fully fixed and constituting itself into a unified totality. They all acquiesce to the reality of an overdetermined subject. For them, like

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<sup>11</sup>Therborn (1980) does not silently evoke Althusser but explicitly acknowledges in the text what are as it were his Althusserian credentials. He writes: 'This essay is situated in a particular theoretical conjuncture – a conjuncture of Marxist discourse on ideology opened by Althusser and his essay 'Ideology and ideological State Apparatuses'' (1980: 7). He then proceeds to celebrate the essay for its perceptiveness on two fronts; first for linking Marxist social theory to psychodynamics and psychoanalysis, secondly for re-orienting the study of ideology away from the conventional understanding of it (ideology) as an elaborate set of ideas to its consideration as a social process inscribed in material social matrices (1980: 7).

Althusser (1970) subjects acquire their identity by being positioned in society through a series of unconscious ritual practices.

These critics however go further and argue that the subject cannot be fully realised, it is never self-transparent since structure does not suture identity as suggested by Althusser (1970). The subject is never positive but always incomplete and always pierced by contingency. Outside of the system of differences which provide the only anchor for it, this subject cannot exist because it lacks any positive essence, it is constituted as a difference. What sets Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) position in **Hegemony and Socialist Strategy** apart from the otherwise influential structuralist theory of the subject is that they take the subject out of structure and locate it within what they call the 'field of discursivity', which becomes the locus of its constitution, without however allowing it to slip beyond the socio-symbolic order (1985: 111). The importance of this field is that it determines the discursive character of any object including subjects. The proviso of course is that because there is no discourse that is ever able finally to monopolise meaning subjects are always open to disruptive effects of dislocation. Beyond rendering the contingency of discursive structures visible the notion of discursivity enables, Laclau and Mouffe (1985), critic the structuralist subject's 'supposed unity and homogeneity of the ensemble of its positions' (1985: 115). The fluidity of meaning within the field of discursivity means that the subject is simultaneously constituted or articulated in different terrains as a racial (black), economic (worker), religious (Muslim) subject, etc. Simply this means that within the field of discursivity a concrete individual can at the same time be called into multiple subject-positions. Unlike the subject who is an effect of ideological techniques of disciplinary subjection, the subject constituted within the field of discursivity is characterised by the dispersal of its subject positions.

Lets us now highlight points of divergence between Althusser (1970) and his post-structuralist adversaries. The first moment of disagreement we noted earlier is when Althusser (1970) attempts to render compatible the concept of overdetermination with that of determination in the last instance by the economy. The result claims Laclau and Mouffe (1985) is that 'the concept of overdetermination was unable to produce the totality of its deconstructive effects within Marxist discourse' (1985: 98). If this concept of overdetermination were allowed the theoretical effects it was called upon to produce it would lead to the dissolution of the social – 'the impossibility of society' says Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 99). That said the burden is to demonstrate how. Overdetermination we shall recall enables Althusser (1969) differentiate his notion of society as a 'complex structured whole' from the Hegelian totality. Through the concept of overdetermination Althusser (1969) is led to understand society as a system of differences where both structures and social identities in it lack any positive essence. If society is constituted as a system of differences it cannot be governed by any single underlying determinative principle including the economy. Were the economy to be a source of an underlying principle or to be determinate in the last instance that would mean 'with reference to that instance, we are faced with simple determination and not overdetermination' (Laclau and Mouffe; 1985: 99).

What we are witness to here are signs of the disarticulation of the concept of overdetermination within Althusser's (1969) structure of thought. Because he insulates the economy from the effects of overdetermination, Althusser (1990) is able then to pose it as that single underlying principle which reconciles the entire field of differences. Erroneously then he concludes that society is a self-defined sutured totality. At this juncture his critics impel him to renew his faith on the concept of overdetermination, the consequence of which would be a realisation that in an overdetermined society where both structures and identities are characterised by a surplus of meaning,

constituted as difference, their meaning can only be partially fixed. At no point do structures and identities within an overdetermined society exist as fully constituted. Put differently no overdetermined society ever attains the form of a given positivity. It is rather always defined by the impossibility of fixing ultimate meanings. Allowed a little more effectivity the concept of overdetermination transforms the social into a 'precarious and ultimately failed attempt to domesticate the field of differences' (Laclau and Mouffe; 1985: 96).

In the openness of the social – the existence of society as an impossible ideal - the deconstructive effects of overdetermination can be read off primarily at two instances. Firstly to recall an observation made by Althusser (1969) whose full implication is however lost to him: the fact that everything in the social is overdetermined by implication dispenses with the conception of society as an ensemble united by an immanent law. Since there is no single determinative principle no necessary relation among elements of the social can be posited. Social relations do not have any essential character. They owe their regularity to the tentative and partial fixity of the system of differential relations. An overdetermined character of social relations, writes Laclau and Mouffe (1985), 'implies that they lack an ultimate literality which would reduce them to necessary moments of an immanent law' (1985: 98). Once the necessary links between the elements of the social have been deconstructed the social loses any claim to being a unified totality. We are thus impelled by Laclau and Mouffe (1985) to 'renounce the conception of 'society' as a founding totality of its partial processes' (1985: 95). Yet another instance where the deconstructive effects of overdetermination are felt is at the level of elements themselves - elements of a social system. The fallout in this instance is that elements themselves lose the necessary character of their identity. Located as they are within the system of differences it is logically impossible to specify

their identity with any ultimate literality. Like social structures they gain their regularity from the relative and precarious fixity of differences (Laclau and Mouffe; 1985).

Subjected to the full deconstructive effects of overdetermination society as a unified self-defined totality becomes unthinkable, any single causal or determinate societal principle is precluded, a non-essential and non-necessary relation among elements of the social is instituted. The elements/identities themselves can only lay claim to a tenuous/contingent existence since they cannot be sutured or completely fixed. Ultimately the effect is dissolution of society. Or shall we say the impossibility of society as a sutured totality. This is how in **Emancipations** Laclau (1996) explains the ultimate implication of overdetermination for the concept of society: 'although the fullness and universality of society is unachievable, its need does not disappear: it will always show itself through the presence of its absence' (1996:53).

From the above we can deduce that the synchrony of the system is always susceptible to the disruptive effects of dislocation. Howarth and Stavrakakis (2000) however point out that dislocations are not 'solely traumatic experiences'. They also have a regenerative function. On account of their disruptive effects break out a; 'lack at the level of meaning that stimulates new discursive constructions, which attempt to suture the dislocated structure' (2000:13). It is this ever present lack or fluidity in the field of discursivity which then guarantees the perennial non-fixity of identities – their incomplete, open and negotiable character. In another context Derrida (1978) arrives at the same conclusion about the openness of the field of signification. Once we began argues Derrida (1978) in **Writing and Difference** to think that there was no possibility of a recourse to a centre, origin or transcendental signified located outside of the system of differences this absence would stretch 'the domain and the play of signification infinitely' (1978: 280). What Laclau and Mouffe (1985) redeem from this infinite play of

signification is the possibility of the subject being articulated in multiple and diverse discourses – what they refer to as the ‘dispersion and fragmentation of its positionalities’ (1985: 105).

Via a different route Therborn (1980) arrives at the same conclusion about the multidimensionality of ideological subjectivities. His object basically is to evacuate space within capitalist relations of productions for non-material/non-class forms of subjectivity and ideology. He arrives at this point by first establishing that even in capitalist societies the ‘meaning of a person’s life and world is an existential question not wholly answerable by reference to the relations of production’ (1980: 26). Even under conditions of capitalist social relations we must then regard seriously the complexity of social heterogeneity. At moments when the class subject-position (worker) may appear to be the most salient, the same human being (worker) inhabits at the same time multiple other subjectivities, i.e. ethnic, cultural, which are not materially determined but with the same currency determine how he/she lives the different fragments which together constitute totality of his/her life.

Without abandoning the concept of overdetermination Laclau and Mouffe (1985) appeal to the concept of articulation in order to theorise the dispersion and fragmentation of subject positions. Articulation they define as; ‘any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice’ (1985: 105). A closer reading would reveal a measure of similitude in the functions performed by ideology, which calls individuals into subjectivity, and an articulatory practice which establishes a relation among elements. By establishing relations among elements or constituting them into a structured totality an articulatory practice in a sense to stretch the comparison begets a symbolic order. For Laclau and

Mouffe (1985) the end product is what they call discourse – if we understand the social as discourse.<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps it will be more productive to think of the constituted totality of an articulatory practice as a discursive formation where diverse subject-positions contend with none ever able to fully (dominate) suture the system. Articulation then functions at two ends: on the one end it temporarily fixes at other it dislocates the field of signification/flow of differences/system of relations. A corollary of the incomplete character of the constituted discursivity is the absence within it of any totalising subject-position which then permits the simultaneous articulation of the subject into diverse historico-discursive projects. A class-subject could at the same time be an ethnic-subject just as a citizen-subject could at the same time be a subject of Umkhosi womhlanga, without contradiction. This I want to submit is the logic of dispersion of subject-positions modernist reason refuses but must be made to reconcile itself to in order that the self-making process of non-European societies may not remain imprisoned by its supposed unreason.

The second point of disagreement between Althusser (1969) and his critics is crucial because it serves as the springboard for the post-Althusserian notion of the subject Laclau (1990, 1996) develops alongside Žižek (1990) post **Hegemony and Socialist Strategy**. This is the subject of transformation, the ‘subject before subjectivation’ which

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<sup>12</sup> The concepts; subject(s), elements and moments, some of which we encountered earlier in our discussion of structural linguistics are not only central to Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985) text **Hegemony and Socialist Strategy** but in it they each acquire a specific meaning. Of subjects they write; ‘[W]henever we use the category of ‘subject’ in this text, we will do so in the sense of ‘subject positions’ within a discursive structure’ (1985: 115). What they are in effect foreclosing here is the eventuality of the subject acting out of concert with the strictures of its discursive position or location. By moments is meant ‘differential positions, insofar as they appear articulated within a discourse’ whereas elements are those differences not ‘discursively articulated’ (1985: 105). The openness or fluidity of the social ensures that the transformation of elements into moments itself is never complete. Elements then have the status of a floating signifier which defies any discursive attempt to commensurate it with the signified.

we have to posit because it has no substantial form and is no object of possible experience (Laclau; 1989). Insofar as Laclau (1996) and Žižek (1990) agree in their theorisation of the subject we shall present their viewpoints as one, without however obliterating those moments where they do diverge. What if we may ask is the source of this second disagreement between Althusser (1969) and his interlocutors? Essentialism of structure is the answer. Essentialism of structure is a short-hand for a much larger claim within Althusser's (1970) oeuvre which is that ideology/structure eclipses the subject. Having displaced the Cartesian subject which is shot through with such plenitude to be both a necessary and sufficient cause for all forms social experience, all forms of historical consciousness, historical processes and change, Althusser (1970) supplants it with structure. The metonymic effect of the Althusserian (1970) structure is an ideological subject which is fully determined and enclosed in its imaginary form of existence. This fully sutured ideological subject cannot then account for social relations, for it has no play/agency left within it to render historical experience possible. The result is that history morphs into a process without subject.

But if history, as critics correctly point out, is punctuated by moments of rapture, break and contingency, how then do we account for these – in a sense for historical change which is devoid of the subject? In the two essays; *'On Reproduction'* and *'Elements for a Theory of Transition'*, which appear in **Reading Capital**, Balibar (1970) provides the most explicit answer. Or shall we say he is unequivocal in his defence of a structuralist notion of history – process without subject. In Therborn (1980) we read a similar avowal of history as a 'de-centred dialectical process without a subject' (1980: 104). Without mentioning them Therborn (1980) denounces post-structuralist for their 'idealist and subjectivist' conceptions of political change (1980: 115). But we must not misconstrue his argument to be an affirmation of a structurally determined process of historical change *a la* Balibar (1970). Instead he returns us to the notion of the conjuncture first

broached by Lenin – again without explicitly referring to the concept. In his reckoning to account for historical change we must look to the conditions prevailing at that particular moment:

“[I]nstead of looking for the Subject of revolutionary class consciousness, we must try to understand the actual processes of ideological mobilization. Ideological mobilisation may be said to involve setting a common agenda for a mass of people – that is to say, summing up the dominant aspect or aspects of the crisis, identifying the crucial target, the essence of evil, and defining what is possible...Such mobilisation develops through a breach in the regime’s matrix of affirmations and sanctions...” (Therborn; 1980: 116).

To return to the two essays by Balibar (1970) the argument summarily stated is that, it is movement within structure itself which throws up forms of historical subjectivity necessary for the process of change. Social and historical transformation is thus contingent upon movement or clash of structures. According to Balibar (1970):

“the ‘production of the social relations’ is far rather a production of things and individuals *by the social relations*, a production in which the individuals are determined so as to produce and the things so as to be produced in a specific form by the social relations. That is, it is a determination of the functions of the social process of production, a process without a subject” (1970: 271).

Balibar (1970) leaves us in no doubt about the determinate character of structure over social relations, individuals and history. These are all inexorably determined by structure. But the aura of his claim is much larger. Historical change it emerges itself occurs within the ambit of structure or rather the nature of change is itself anticipated if not pre-determined within structure. There is therefore a different kind of determination that is being posited whose full implication is that historical change, i.e., from one historical moment to another, from one mode of production to the next, can never amount to a radical break or complete rapture. Because historical change is a

variable of structure, because it is always immanent, structure always determines its unfolding. Let us read Balibar (1970) as he makes the point;

“[F]irst, all social production is a re-production... All social production is subject to structural social relations. The ‘transition’ from one mode of production to another can therefore never appear in our understanding as an irrational hiatus between two ‘periods’...The transition cannot be a moment of destruction, however brief. It is itself a movement subject to a structure which has to be discovered” (1970: 273)

If we began, as Balibar (1970) implores us, to think that historical change cannot be a moment of destruction, however brief, we run head on with the notion of social antagonisms broached by Laclau and Mouffe (1985) and embraced by Žižek (1990). The theoretical innovation of **Hegemony and Socialist Strategy** according to Žižek (1990) is its conceptualisation of the social as being always dogged by an irreconcilable negativity whose correlate is the ever present possibility of dislocation of the discursively structured totality when meaning fails, when existing identities can no longer be harnessed on to the pre-constituted or pre-existing order of interests. When there is failure of meaning (or collapse of hegemony) ‘the construction and contingent resolution of antagonistic relations’ says Howarth and Stavrakakis (2000) ‘precludes the possibility of necessary and determining logics operating in history and society’ (2000: 10). Hence the productivity of the concept of social antagonism is that it allows the socio-symbolic field to be ‘conceived as structured around a certain traumatic impossibility, around a certain fissure which cannot be symbolised’ (Žižek; 1990: 249). It would seem that it is precisely this possibility of a limit point in society where meaning is contested and cannot be stabilised, where symbolisation fails which Balibar (1970) refutes. The scope of the thesis does not allow us pursue further what otherwise promises to be an intellectually productive clash. So we shall leave it at this point and let other pens dwell on it.

What is pertinent is the claim by Balibar (1970) that historical change or transformation of structure is itself determined by some movement within structure. To liberate history from the essentialism of structure or to evacuate space for a subject that remains an effect of structure but is able to act on the structure we must begin from the distance between the subject of enunciation or subject of the signifier and subject of the enounced or subject of the signified. The principal feature of the subject of enunciation is that it remains forever non-identical with itself, it has no positive identity. It is fleeting it vanishes as soon as it appears. It only actualises itself in the subject of the statement/signified. In the openness of the moment of the decision a disjunction may occur between the subject of the signifier and the subject of the signified. When lack enters structure it becomes possible for the subject of the signifier to refuse the symbolisation held up to it in the subject of the signified. Other forms of subjectivity or identity remain logically possible and open to it. By implication its subjective economy exceeds that of the identity into which ideology calls it. It can no longer find support in existing ideological identifications. This is the subject of deviation that refuses the effect of structure, in the process showing its capability for agency. It now becomes the locus of the decision about a new identity – what it wants to be. This floating signifier *qua* empty subject whilst lacking full identity has enough identity to engage in an act of articulation leading to its own transformation (Hudson; 2006: 302).

What has become the subject of the decision free to constitute itself into a new identity because of undecidability of structure does so, according to Laclau (2000), circumscribed by constitutive attachments/limits. These are the most sedimented practices or patterns of social self-identification which the subject is not at liberty to cast aside at will (Laclau; 2000). They delimit the horizon of possibility: what is available for the subject to choose as it seeks to re-symbolise itself. Though it may appear that these limits serve to constrain the subject, actually they make the act of re-identification

itself possible and necessary. Without these socio-symbolic co-ordinates which ensure that subjects remains within the symbolic the subject claims Laclau (2000) now absolutely free would have no motivation to take any determinate decision whatsoever.

At this point Laclau (2000) parts ways with Zizek (1999) (for a fuller discussion of their differences see Hudson; 2006). The point of contention simply being that for Zizek (1999) the disruptive effects of social antagonisms must lead to the complete effacement of the symbolic frame. Only under these circumstances can the subject emerge. As an empty signifier it must be totally unhinged, it must appear as a pure void free to determine outside of any discursive limits its new identity. Only once these conditions have been met, could we in Zizek's (1999) terms talk intelligibly of transformation or its potentiality being actualised in the subject. For Laclau (2000) such a subject absolutely free or symbolically dead will have no reason/motivation to act within the social, to reconstitute both itself and a new symbolic order. What Zizek's (1999) scheme leads to is either the 'collapse of the very possibility of the subject *per se*' or re-emergence of the now discarded transcendental subject (Hudson; 2006: 308).

### **Therborn on the Althusserian/Structuralist Subject**

We end off our consideration of responses invited by Althusser's (1970) theory of ideological subjection by entering a few comments on Therborn's (1980) critique of it. Unlike Laclau (2000) and Zizek (1999) his endeavour we said earlier is not driven by desire to transcend Althusserian Marxism. The intent in **The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology** is to adumbrate within the frame of Althusserian Marxism more expansive and reflexive notions of ideology, ideological subject and ideological subjectification. At the outset Therborn (1980) enlarges the field of ideology beyond materially determined class ideologies to encompass non-class ideologies to which he confers a level of autonomy. According to him these non-class ideologies are not just an

epiphenomena of material interests/ideologies. In this plural ideological universe class ideologies have no primacy over non-class ideologies, they all coexist perhaps contend with the same force and materiality. Class ideologies in the same way as non-class ideologies call human beings into consciousness/subjectivity.

It goes without saying then that in such a heterogeneous ideological universe where both class and non-class ideologies interpellate individuals a multiplicity of subjectivities, both class and non-class are bound exist. The ideological universe of any social formation or mode of production claims Therborn (1980) is 'never reducible to class ideologies. Even in most class-polarised and class-conscious societies, the other fundamental forms of human subjectivity coexist with class subjectivities' (1980: 26). A parallel to Therborn's (1980) irreducible multidimensionality of ideological subjectivities is Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) argument for the dispersal of subject-positions, whose implication is that a class-subject can at the same time be an ethnic-subject, a citizen-subject, a cultural-subject, a subject of Umkhosi womhlanga, etc. At the close of the first chapter we saw that it is political discourse of a modernist kind, the discourse of citizenship to be precise, which demands of individuals that where they belong to several collectivities a hierarchy among them be established with one overarching identity assuming logical priority over others.

Having freed non-class subjectivities from the determinism of class/material interests Therborn's (1980) intervention re-centres the concept of overdetermination in the process reformulating the encounter between non-class ideologies/subjectivities which now possess 'a historicity and a materiality that are intrinsically not those of the mode of production', and class ideologies/subjectivities (1980: 39). It has equally been a point of Foucault's (1982) work to reassign the ratio between different processes of subjection and forces of production. Principally his object has been to show that

mechanisms of subjection do not constitute the 'terminal' of the mechanisms of exploitation and domination. While he concedes that different forms of subjection cannot be made sense of 'outside of their relation to the mechanisms of exploitation', he like, Therborn (1980) is adamant that the latter are not fully determinant over the former but exists among them complex and circular relations (Foucault; 1982: 213).

This logic is elaborated further in Therborn (1980) as he shows contrary to Althusser (1970) the variety of non-class forms of individuality/consciousness, i.e. ethnicity, religion, culture, not to be determined but 'bound up and affected by different modes of class existence' and class ideologies (1980: 38). Importantly the relationship between these different forms of individuality, class and non-class, shifts from that of 'simple one-directional determination' for which Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 99) criticise Althusser (1970). Instead we find articulated within non-class, class ideologies/subjectivities and vice versa. This is how Therborn (1980) makes the point about non-class ideologies being always overdetermined by class ideologies:

"...non-class ideologies are always linked with classes, and all ideologies are inscribed in an overall system of social power...In this sense, the structure of the ideological system, its class and non-class elements alike, is overdetermined by the constellation of class forces" (1980: 39).

We should not misconstrue Therborn's (1980) words even though his overall structure of representation is liable to be read as proceeding from the primacy of class. Elsewhere in the book he writes: '[T]he concrete forms of existential, historical inclusive and historical-positional ideologies other than the economic are not directly determined by the mode of production, but changes in the former are overdetermined by the latter' (1980: 42).

This manner of representation is liable to be interpreted a symptomatic of the anxiety of a Marxist theoretician eager to clutch on to the foundational Marxian principle of the primacy of class but whose own analysis brings into sharp focus the disruptive implications of the concept of overdetermination. A more appropriate reading however points to the non-necessity of stating the reverse proposition since it is entailed within Therborn's (1980) initial formulation. Overdetermination we know can never be unidirectional. The presence of one form of historical individuality/ideology/subjectivity in another inevitably implies the reverse. Logically then, and this I read to be the implication of Therborn's (1980) entire thought structure, just as non-class ideologies/subjectivities are always overdetermined by class ideologies/subjectivities, the latter are similarly always overdetermined by the former.

To open up the possibility for contradiction as well as historical change precluded by Althusser's (1970) notion of a subject fully sutured by structure, Therborn (1980) foregrounds what he calls the 'dialectical character of ideology' (1980: vii). Ideology as he explains does not only subject people to a particular order. Ideology does not only teach people to submit or to be good subjects but it also empowers them to become conscious agents in the acts of constitution, dissolution, and/or reconstitution of social order. Ideology also teaches people to refuse their interpellation – to be bad subjects. What Therborn (1980) refers to as the dialectical character of ideology is entailed in the two opposite senses of the word subject entailed in the two following expressions: 'the subject of king X (or of the social order Y) and the subjects of history'. In the former sense it refers to people subjugated to a particular social order whilst in the latter it refers to those who actively and consciously participate in the making of history (1980: 16-17). Therborn then introduces the notion of 'subjection-qualification' in place of the Althusserian scheme of subjection-guarantee in order to capture fully the meaning of ideological symbolisation. Under subjection-qualification subjects are not only qualified

to be rule following but are qualified also for the 'role of possible agents of social change' (1980: 17). At this material point the subject returns as an agent of history putting paid to the conception of history as a process without a subject *a la* Balibar (1970).

Relatedly, Therborn (1980) takes issue with Althusser's (1970) failure to go beyond abstractly defining class-subjects as supports that are antagonistically positioned within relations of production. Because he functions at the level of abstraction without locating his exposition within a concrete or particular social formation he is unable to pursue this train of thought to a point where he has to explain 'how classes are constituted as struggling forces, resisting exploitation or actively engaged in it' (Therborn; 1980: 9). While concerned with the mechanisms for the reproduction of particular relations of production he is blinded to the element of resistance and/or struggle by exploited class-subjects/classes. Only at two moments: when Althusser (1970) claims that the relations of production are in the ultimate relations of exploitation and when he claims that ideologies always express class interest does he come within view of (class) struggle. If relations of production are ultimately relations of exploitation the object of inquiry then must shift beyond the role of ideology in the reproduction of the conditions of production to focus also on the role of ideology in the emergence of the class of the exploited resisting the exploitative relations of production. Unfortunately Althusser (1970) abandons this trend of thought mid-way.

Earlier we noted that Therborn (1980) stretches the field of ideology to encompass non-class ideologies. We must now add that he actually goes further. In his bid to enlarge the field he confronts the derision shown for phenomenological knowledge or everyday lived experience by Althusser (1970). Having defined ideology generally as the condition

under which human beings make sense of their being, in a world they constitute in differing ways he then states explicitly that:

“...the conception of ideology employed here deliberately includes both everyday notions and ‘experience’ and elaborate intellectual doctrines, both the ‘consciousness’ of social actors and the institutionalized thought-systems and discourses of a given society” (1980: 2).

What Therborn (1980) does is to save lived experience from its disavowal by rationalist epistemology. He challenges in a sense the monopoly of scientific knowledge over the expansive field of gnosis and impels us to view ideologies not as ‘bodies of thought or structures of discourse *per se*, but as manifestations of a particular being-in-the-world of conscious actors, of human subjects’ (1980: 2). For a study whose concerns are to deconstruct the conceptualisation of non-European modes of habiting the world as a form of unreason as well as legitimate the multiplicity of ways in which the world can be rendered comprehensible, Therborn’s (1980) affirmation of non-scientific forms of cognition is certainly appealing. It helps to evacuate a much needed discursive space where as he contends room exists for ‘the (re)production of non-scientific experience and learning’ (1980: 8).

### **The Subject and Subjectivity in Foucault’s System of Thought**

In this last section we turn to consider Foucault’s genealogy of the modern subject. Foucault’s (1977, 1978) preoccupation in all his works is to map the genealogy of the modern Occident. It is more apposite then to think of him as a modern theorist of the Western subject. Rather than proffer a theory of how individuals are constituted into subjects his abiding objective is to map through different historical moments processes which have been key within Western cultural societies –‘our civilisation’, ‘our modernity’, ‘our part of the world’ he says – in both the objectification and subjectification of human individuals. ‘My objective’ writes Foucault (1982) in *Subject*

*and Power*, 'has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects' (1982: 208). It is this commitment to the genealogical project, the project of recording the history of a subject that is always already within a historical situation, that leads Foucault (1982) rather erroneously to critique Descartes (1997) for sponsoring a universal and unhistorical subject – an 'I' that for 'Descartes is everyone, anywhere at any moment' (1982: 216). We have attended to the fact that rather than Descartes (1997) it is the collective modern European conscious eager to universalise a narrative that constitute history into a universal unfolding of reason which sponsors the fantasy of a universal Cartesian subject.

In his essay, *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*, Foucault (1971) lays out what genealogy is. Here we learn that genealogy disavows the spirit of underlying essences and laws. Since things have no fixed essences, since there is no true nature of things, since there are no underlying laws that propel history, and since history is not a continuous unfolding, the task of interpretation is not to bring to the surface hidden meanings. Its task rather is to record the history of interpretations. The preoccupation of genealogy with subjects that are always already within a historical situation motivates or is in turn motivated by Foucault's rejection of a transcendental subject. Subjects claims Foucault (1977) are not substantive entities that pre-exist and then enter the domain of history ready for their roles – ready for combat he says. The ontology of the subject is social, perhaps historical albeit in a specific sense. Foucault (1980) explains the point well in his essay *Truth and Power*, 'one has to dispense with the constituent subject, get rid of the subject itself, that's to say, to arrive at an analysis which can account for the constitution of the subject within a historical framework' (1980: 117). As such subjects occupy no privileged position, they are not the primary motive for an emergence, neither are they harbingers of first origins but are themselves thrown up by history as its object-effects. It is therefore the task of genealogy to trace then through various historical moments the

emergence of the modern subject. This task Foucault (1977, 1978) carries forth in two of his texts: **The History of Sexuality-Volume I**, and **Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison**. The notes which follow are taken copiously from these two texts.

Foucault's (1977, 1978) engagement with history of the modern subject proceeds along two distinct tracts which cross at certain moments and separate at others. The concern it seems in **Discipline and Punish** is with the genealogy of objectifying trends whilst in **The History of Sexuality**, the focus is on subjectifying practices. Objectifying practices are simply those models embodied within specific technologies which working primarily on the body, render the human individual available for manipulation as an 'object'. Subjectifying practices on the other hand are those models or mechanisms which target primarily the consciousness of individuals inciting them to speech, no longer as mute and docile bodies, but as speaking subjects. Foucault's interpreters, Dreyfus and Rabinow (1982) particularly, emphasise that the distinction of Foucault's work into that concerned with objectifying and the other with subjectifying practices is only heuristic. In the ultimate Foucault's (1977, 1978) work must be read as an inquiry into those practices or technologies implicated in the constitution of the modern individual as both object and subject.

For Foucault, we have made the point, the subject, knowable man, is not a transcendent but a historical achievement. It cannot be accounted for outside of a historical period. The history of the subject of which it is the task of genealogy to map is marked by two contrasting but complimentary procedures: those of objectification and those of subjectification. To account for that segment in the history of the modern subject in which technologies of objectification predominate, Foucault (1977) focuses on the micro-physics of punitive power over a long *duree*'. Over this long period we see the body become both the target and object of different technologies of punitive power

and/or logics of punitive reason. First in the medieval period when the sovereign or monarchical form of power is the most prevalent it is the body of the condemned man set up against both the body and vengeance of the king in the public spectacle that is the principal target of penal repression. Secondly, with the penal reform movement of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century urging the humanisation of sentences there emerges a different economy of punishment. At this moment it is no longer the body of the condemned man that punishment must take hold of but a juridical subject, (perhaps his/her soul), who by an act of commission has disqualified himself/herself as a citizen but must be reclaimed not just for his/her benefit but for that of the whole social body established through contract.

To re-qualify the juridical subject penal power works not on the body but the soul. It works no longer to re-establish the power of the sovereign but to punish. With the decline of the public spectacle punishment essentially loosens its hold over the body. The body of the juridical subject is no longer called upon to bear the atrocious power of the sovereign but now assumes a new role as a medium, an intermediary, a carrier of signs and representations. Through the signs it emits it serves as an exemplar to the rest who observe its exertion in public works. Thirdly, when discipline enters, in the classical period, the economy of the body, the figure of punishment ceases to be the juridical subject: it is now the disciplinary individual. This is the moment of the penitentiary – birth of the prison, birth of normalising judgement. At this point the body enters completely different relations of power whose purpose are neither to expiate it nor to re-qualify it but to discipline it – manipulate it in order to improve it, make it docile but utilisable.

One feature of disciplinary punishment is its dense economy of the body or political anatomy of detail. It pays uninterrupted attention to the most minute of details:

movements, gestures, behaviour, aptitude, attitude, etc. In this mechanics of power there is an increased investment on the body as it gets analysed, broken down, and reconstituted in order that it may function efficiently and productively. The significance of the above three technologies of punishment is that they all in different ways work towards the objectification of those who are made subjects. Below we enquire briefly into each of the three modalities according to which the power to punish is exercised. In Dreyfus and Rabinow (1982) we read of these modalities or technologies of penal power as 'figures of punishment'; viz. tortured man, juridical subject and disciplinary individual (1982: 144).

In the middle Ages when the sovereign reigns over the territory as his personal domain, torture is the most paradigmatic form of punishment. Because the law is held to emanate directly from the will of the sovereign any criminal infraction is considered to be an affront on the body and power of the sovereign. It thus became imperative for the sovereign in order to restore the integrity of his power to seize upon the body of the condemned man and inscribe on it the mark of his power. In this calculus, particularly the public spectacle, the purpose is not to reconcile, to restore the equilibrium but to demonstrate for all to see the triumphant power of the sovereign, to make the tortured body of the condemned man speak the truth of the crime. In the whole penal procedure of the time the body of the condemned man functions as the main orthopaedic support. When the sovereign punishes through the ritual of public torture a crucial element in this is the re-affirmation of his political and personal power. Public torture has a 'juridico-political function'. It is 'a ceremonial by which a momentarily injured sovereign is reconstituted' (1977: 48).

The power of the sovereign temporarily dislodged through the commission of crime must be rehabilitated and reactivated once more. Such was the burden of the public

execution – of torture as punishment. Ironically rather than secure the power of the sovereign, the repeated spectacle of execution proved to be the real limit of punishment. Foucault (1977) explains: ‘a body effaced, reduced to dust and thrown to the winds, a body destroyed piece by piece by the infinite power of the sovereign constituted not only the ideal, but the real limit of punishment’ (1977: 50). Such a body completely mutilated can no longer beyond the scene of the execution bear the evidence of sovereign power. For it (sovereign power) to become visible again it first must be violated. In short the limits of the sovereign mechanics of penal power are inscribed in its predilection for the spectacular, theatrical therefore discontinuous and fleeting manifestation. The decline of punishment as spectacle and rise of the more discreet, more humane technology of punitive power is largely on the account of the penal reform movement.

By the eighteenth century, according to Foucault (1977), the reckless and gay display of violence in the ritual of torture and the vengeful character of royal justice had begun to revolt the political and moral sensibilities of Europe. Legal theorists turned the juridical theory of right against the excessive power of the sovereign. The penal reform movement finds ferment in this era of European discontent. Fervently it campaigns for a more humane economy of punitive power. Its expenditure they protest should be transparent to the weight of the crime. Its profit should not be revenge but the soul of a juridical subject reclaimed for society. Europe at this moment discovers for itself, but not for the non-Western people it continues to enslave, sexually violate and colonise, the inviolability of the principle of humanity. Even in the case of the worst criminal, European criminal, its humanity could never be in doubt. Under no circumstances could the sanctity of the principle of humanity be trumped upon. This recent discovery of the humanity of the European would now constitute the frontier, the limit point of the power to punish. (Criminal) Man for the reason of his humanity became ‘not that which

must be reached in order to alter him, but that which must be left intact in order to respect him' (Foucault; 1977: 74). For this to materialise there had to be a disassociation of the right to punish from the personal power of the sovereign.

The object of the penal reform movement was to restructure the economy of the power to punish so as to render it less costly, more regular, continuous, effective and constant. This new reasoning intersects with a whole host of other changes wrought by the emergent capitalist social form. Human life acquires a new value as labour power. A new register of illegalities, which separates illegalities of rights from illegalities of property, surfaces. Association between the capitalist societal ethic and the logic of the penal reform movement becomes even more pronounced in the appeal by the latter to the spirit of contract. In the contract based discourse of the reformers the criminal becomes a juridical citizen who by his act of criminality has violated the social pact. In violating the contract he has offended not the person of the sovereign but the entire social body. We see here the right to punish move from being the personal right of the sovereign to being a collective societal prerogative. Two significant developments need be underlined here: the criminal now appears endowed with humanity and thus must be treated in accord with all the norms of human deference. Secondly, as a member of a contract society the criminal is now a citizen – a productive calculative agent in the new capitalist order.

In part because of these two developments the economy of punishment is inflected with a new rationale. We may call this rationale the rationale of society. Working on the presumption that in society people seek to maximise advantage and reduce inconvenience, punishment now aims at preventing the future occurrence of crime. Actually punishment must render the returns from crime less worthy when measured against the inconveniences attendant to it. It now avoids the body but makes use of

representation – the idea of pain or as Foucault (1977) puts it ‘the ‘pain’ of the idea of ‘pain’ is what should mark the effectiveness of punishment not the actual sensation of pain. In the soft fibres of the brain the idea of pain must trump the desire/motivation to commit crime. Punishment must aim not just at the criminal but the whole of society. It should simultaneously work towards the individualisation of sentences, adaptation of sentences to the social character of each criminal. There is a notable crossing here between the individuation of sentences and the nascent conception of society not as an indistinguishable mass but constellation particular definable individualities. Care is now taken in the individuation of sentences to assess a whole complex of bio-social factors, behavioural past, attitude and the general nature of the criminal.

Even with the markedly Cartesian shift from the body as the point of application of penalties to the soul/mind what is at play in this era still is a process of objectification. According to Foucault (1977) there is an objectification of the criminal, the *homo criminalis* as ‘outside the law, as natural man’ (1977: 102). Secondly there is an objectification of the mind as ‘a surface of inscription for power, with semiology as its tool; the submission of bodies through the control of ideas’ (1977: 102). The fact of the mind now being the target demands that the art of punishing rests on a new support ‘a whole technology of representation’ (Foucault; 1977: 104). This representation at one level opposes the disadvantages of crimes to its allure. It establishes in the mind a causal relation between crime and the pain of punishment. In all of this it speaks directly to the soul of the criminal whose virtuous sensibilities weakened by the commission of crime must be reinvigorated.

But beyond the criminal the representation of the pain of the penalty which outweighs the benefit of crime is directed at those with a potential for future criminality. The criminal then must as widely and as effectively as possible serve as a medium, a carrier

of signs, avail and circulate an example, a lesson. Rather than decimate the body of the criminal at the scaffold the reformers reasoned that public works would best serve the purpose of punishment. The benefit in public works is that in the course of serving his/her punishment the criminal reactivates the law, s/he establishes the link between the crime and punishment - becomes a decipherable code. 'The publicity of punishment' writes Foucault (1977) 'must open up a book to be read' (1977: 111). Here the convict serves as a source of moral instruction to all who observe his exertions in his public duties.

Convinced of the effectivity of the model of the punitive city where the criminal is reconstituted as a juridical subject whilst at the same time s/he serves as a source of instruction reformers began to criticise penal imprisonment. In their view it maintains criminals in idleness. It is costly. It serves as an incubator for nefarious ideas and future acts of criminality. Its uniformity renders it incapable of establishing a relation between a specific act of crime and punishment. The prison however survives the onslaught. With it comes 'a quite different materiality, a quite different physics of power, a quite different way of investing men's bodies' (Foucault; 1977: 116). The mechanics of penal imprisonment rhyme well with the increased need for productive bodies adapted to the regime of capitalist economic life. In prison convicts learn to labour, rediscover the sanctity of private property, etc. The prison eventually becomes a place to discipline bodies. Over an extended period of time it assumes complete responsibility for the body, it teaches it discipline, it teaches it skill, in it its habits are transformed, its life is regulated through a strict time-table, the soul/mind is re-engineered, and a new regime of behaviour is taught to it. In a word prison trains behaviour (Foucault; 1977).

All of this of course calls for a detailed knowledge of the individual as a manipulable object - docile body. With the birth of the prison there is a significant shift both in the

operation and target of punishment. The target or point of application of penal power is the body, its proclivities, gestures, movements, and the soul in so far as it is the seat of habits. Rather than work on the basis of representations prison 'must rest on a studied manipulation of the individual' (Foucault; 1977: 128). Under the sovereign the figure of punishment was the tortured body of the condemned, in the schemes designed by the penal reform movement it is the juridical subject, with the birth of the prison it is the (obedient/disciplined) disciplinary individual. Each of these technologies we have made the point is characterised by a distinct logic and deploys a unique set of instruments.

In the case of disciplinary punishment the object/target is the individual. In fact according to Foucault (1977) discipline 'makes individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise' (1977: 170). The pairing of discipline and the prison, notwithstanding, discipline, does not connote an institution. It is rather a form of power, a complex interplay of instruments, methods, procedures and levels of its exercise. The prison has use for it as much as the school, the factory, the hospital, etc. All disciplinary institutions share one mandate: to render the body more obedient and useful. This they do through a calculated manipulation of its elements, by exercising its movements, and training its habits.

Discipline in fact holds the body to be an object which can be trained, a transformable object whose capabilities can be improved. It breaks the body down then reconstitutes it, fit for the functions it is to perform. Once it enters the disciplinary machinery the body emerges at the other end as a support (trager). Discipline ensures this in part through the meticulous allocation of bodies/elements to spaces and spaces to bodies/elements. To grasp what is meant here we only have to imagine the division and allocation of space in a factory. Every individual worker has his/her own place and each

place its individual worker. Thus a worker ceases in a disciplinary space to be a substantive being with flesh and blood, becomes a functionary or a substitutable element in the production process. As a consequence notes Foucault (1977); 'in discipline, the elements are interchangeable, since each is defined by the place it occupies in a series, and by the gap that separates it from the others' (1977:145).

Hierarchical observation, normalising judgement and the examination are basically the three principal instruments discipline deploys for its functioning. Hierarchical observation is essentially a mechanism which uses observation in order to bring the effects of power into operation. To simplify it is control through observation. The logic at work in this apparatus is a simple one. Individual subjects who live constantly under surveillance even when not being watched effect unto themselves, unto their own bodies, unto their conduct, certain operations meant to bring them into accord with the disciplinary dictates of power. They transform their own character, composure, attitude and outlook without any external coercion or guidance. Architecture that allows for continuous uninterrupted observation has, Foucault (1977) tells us, been the key problematic of this disciplinary technique.

Schools, prisons, factory houses, army barracks, all disciplinary institutions have built into their architecture two complimentary functionalities: one, to hide the supervising authority/power, two render visible those who are inside. In the process architecture does not simply make individuals visible, it and this is more crucial, disciplines individuals, it transforms them. 'Stones can make people docile and knowable' writes Foucault (1977: 172). Again we see surveillance built into the structure of disciplinary institutions lend itself to the economic imperatives of the emergent capitalist social form. It becomes integral to organisation of the entire production process; from monitoring workers, movement of raw materials, output, etc.

On the other hand what normalising judgement does is to colonise a whole field which had remained beyond the reach of law. It speaks not in the language of law but that of what we today would call public morality and/or public duty. It establishes according to Foucault (1977) an 'infra-penalty' or 'micro-penalty' which enables it to punish misdemeanours through normalising judgement. Unlike law it is for instance able to punish by judging; lateness, lack of enthusiasm, impoliteness, negligence, insolence, etc. Normalising judgement serves as a compliment to the limited functionality of law which operates only on the basis of the permissible–prohibition dichotomy. Instead normalising judgement distributes behaviour/character in a continuum marked at one end by positive on the other negative commentary. This Foucault (1977) refers to as penal accountancy (1977: 180). What this penal accountancy enables disciplinary power to do is calculate moral quantities in order to fix the norm.

This is where we propose to read Foucault (1977) from the position of coloniality. What in the discourse on citizenship constitutes the **norm**, it is all of those features embodied in the figure of the citizen-subject which emanate in the West at the historical moment of the disciplines – when the 'normal took over from the ancestral' Foucault (1977: 193). These norms of good citizenship neither constitute nor approximate a universal. Their claim to universality is simply a result of the fact that at the end of the classical age normalisation attaches itself to power. Colonialism exploits this power, normalising power, to full effect judging us colonial people as licentious, sensuous, indolent, deceitful, and our cultures as backward, barbaric, etc. Difference we have made the point is deviation from the norm. Foucault (1977) is therefore correct when he says 'the power of normalisation imposes homogeneity' because it is this point of homogeneity from which deviation is calculated, it is this point of sameness which makes it possible 'to measure gaps, to determine...differences' (1977: 184). For us colonial people the

calculation of difference was real including determining the sizes of our craniums, vaginas, buttocks, structure of indentation, etc.<sup>13</sup>

In examination the two techniques of observation and normalising judgement come together, Foucault (1977) tells us. Once examined subjects can be categorised and/or classified. In examination subjects are presented as objects to the observing power which then enters into the record a whole host of details about them. As such examination builds up a whole (individual) archive. It is this archive, mass of (colonial) documents that captures and fixes (colonial people as different) individuals. The importance of examination is that it constitutes the individual as 'effect and object of power' as well as 'effect and object of knowledge' (Foucault; 1977: 192). It leads to the

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<sup>13</sup> Lord Hailey in his work **An African Survey** reports on two important studies which bear witness to the fact that for us Africans the measuring of our skulls and whatever else was real. Both studies prove beyond doubt the centrality of taking measurements in the production of African difference. We read each of these studies as reported on by Hailey (1945) for their efficacy in producing colonial African difference. Of concern in the first study is the measurement of African skulls, so their sizes it would seem, may bear the truth of African difference. The obsession at the time widely generalised within colonial disciplinary knowledges with measuring in this instance African skulls (at other times we know it is African vaginas, buttocks, etc) comes forth vividly in the following summation by Hailey (1945): "A comparison of the measurements of some 600 skulls from different parts of Africa, published by other anthropometricians, with those of 120 skulls from the Teita region of Kenya, was made in 1931 by Miss Elizabeth Kitson. This leads to the conclusion that no sharp distinction can be drawn between the races of western, eastern, and southern Africa; skulls found in the Gabon resemble those of East and South Africa more closely than those of the Congo. The Teita skulls are more nearly related to those of the Ngoni and Hottentots than to those of their neighbours in Tanganyika, while the latter, in certain features, resemble the Galla and Somali and the pre-dynastic skulls from Egypt." In the following reportage we encounter the colonial/Western tendency to deploy mental capability, lack thereof to be precise, as a sign of African difference. Accordingly reports Hailey (1945): "The possibility of finding a means of measuring the comparative mental capacity of Africans has lately formed the subject of some public discussion as the result of certain proposals for inquiry put forward by Dr. H. L. Gordon of Nairobi. In an examination of 3 444 Kenya natives Dr. Gordon found 'consistent inferiority in brain capacity as estimated by head measurements and in certain physical and psychological attributes' as well as in performance in intelligence tests. He found that the average increase in volume of the African brain between the ages of 10 and 20 is 8.5 c.c. as against 17.7 c.c. for the European, while the average adult capacity of African and European brains is 1.316 c.c. and 1.481 c.c. respectively. Complimentary research by Dr. F. W. Vint, of the Government Medical Research Laboratory, Kenya, showed further similar contrasts. While not claiming that his observations have been sufficient to form the basis of any far-reaching conclusions, Dr. Gordon considers that they establish the existence of a state of 'backwardness' in the tribes with which he has dealt. He has devised a term-*bradyphysis*-to denote the condition of the Kenya tribes which describes as 'a non-progressive state showing deficiencies of social, moral, intellectual, and material self-development'. He assumes that *bradyphysis* is an abnormal state..." (Hailey;1945:35-37).

objectification of those who are subjected. This examination does by presenting the individual as a 'describable case, analysable object' (1977: 190).

In a short but important work; **The History of Sexuality - Vol. I**. Foucault (1978) shifts attention away from procedures of objectification which constitute one element in the genealogy of the modern soul towards the mechanics of practices of subjectification of those who are made objects. These practices of subjectification are locatable at the junction of two axes joined in the middle by the technology of sex: on the one axis are the disciplines concerned with the body on the other regulations concerned with the physical vigour of the species (population). As noted sex is what connects the two - 'sex was' writes Foucault (1978), 'a means of access both to the life of the body and the life of the species' (1978: 146). To explicate this Foucault (1978) returns us to the period prior to the Victorian age.

This is the age when sex has neither reason nor need to hide itself. A measure of openness defines the nature of sexual relations, it is a time when 'knowing children hung about amid the laughter of adults: it was a period when bodies "made a display of themselves"' (1978:3). With the advent of Victorian bourgeois life this gay display of flesh meets its end. Sex acquires a new significance. Sex for pleasure is supplanted by a utilitarian attitude towards it, sex for procreation. Once it takes on the serious function of reproduction it also swears itself to secrecy. With all its might the emergent bourgeois society works to push sex out of the public domain, wishes it forgotten, wills it to non-existence, in a word represses it. It is all these developments that lend veracity to what Foucault (1978) calls the 'repressive hypothesis.'

While the repressive hypothesis - the belief that the seventeenth century censors sex, brings down a curtain over its open display – is widely held, Foucault (1978) disputes it.

Even when lent further credibility by the Weberian Protestant ethic of capitalism the repressive hypothesis fails to persuade Foucault (1978). Rather than repression a different process was at play according to Foucault (1978), the 'putting into discourse of sex' (1978: 12). It is this process of channelling sex into discourse which the repressive hypothesis fails to grasp. Therefore what the seventeenth century is witness to according to Foucault (1978) is not the silencing of sex. Instead sex enters a new economy of discourse. The object then is to enquire into who as from this moment is authorised to speak of it, from what position and viewpoint, what are the institutions which set the rules for speaking about it, who are the custodians of the resultant truth of sex. Equally pertinent to probe is the new modality of power which accompanies the incitement of sex into speech, for once discourse is able to control sex at the level of ideas, it then is able to permeate into those hidden regions of life that pertain to it, i.e. desire, pleasure, sensation, etc. What begins to emerge here is a field dominated by an alliance of discourse and power. Located at the centre of this field is a speaking subject, a subject who must speak about secretes of his/her desires, passions, fantasies etc.

Adamant that the seventeenth century opens up to an age of repression, adherents of the repressive hypothesis point to the tendency apparent at the time to expurgate from free speech any reference to sex. Working against this view; **The History of Sexuality, Vol. I** is an invitation to think differently about what actually happens. While there may have evolved new and stricter rules of enunciation: who had the right to speak about sex, where and with whom, at the level of discourses a radically different process was unfolding – an efflorescence of discourses pertaining to sex tacitly supported by power eager to hear it spoken about (Foucault; 1978: 18). Interestingly the bourgeois first applies to itself the subjectifying practices entailed in the deployment of sexuality extending only later to labouring classes the concern for their sexuality urged on by economic exigencies. Techniques of objectification on the other hand were being

vigorously applied on the bodies of the poor and toiling classes. Objectifying practices for the poor working classes and subjectification for the ruling classes!!

To return to the emergent discourses we find that in them sex is no longer directly named while ferreted out from the most hidden of the soul's regions. By these processes, i.e., incitement to talk to oneself and tell others about one's desires, sex gradually is transformed into discourse. In fact what happens is that sex enters an expansive economy of discourses. Everything that pertains to sex must pass through the 'endless mill of speech' (1978: 21). For a time the institution which leads the transformation of desire into discourse is the Christian pastoral until the secularisation and rationalisation of the whole process at the beginning of the eighteenth century. At this moment there erupts into the scene methods of political, economic, and technical incitement to talk about sex. Once the discourse of sex shifts from the moral to the rational terrain sex ceases to be something upon which one simply pronounces judgement. It now is a matter for management, 'it had to be taken charge of by analytical discourses' both for individual and collective wellbeing (Foucault; 1978: 24).

At the level of collective wellbeing the concern is with populations. Coincidentally, Europe begins in the eighteenth century to think of countries as constituted not by a mass of people but by populations. Once this new category – population - becomes the concern, states begin to think in terms of the balance between economic and population growth, population distribution, longevity, patterns of illnesses, fertility, etc. In a manner that may to us centuries later seem odd sex sits at the centre of the economic and political problem of population. As Foucault (1978) explains 'it was necessary to analyse the birth-rate, the age of marriage, the legitimate and illegitimate births, the precocity and frequency of sexual relations,...the impact of contraceptive practices' (1978: 25-26). The fostering of the life of populations means that each

individual has to be responsible in the deployment of his/her sex hence the will of authorities to keep a tab on it. To manage it properly authority had to observe it, analyse it, intervene to guide it, conceive of moral and ideological campaigns for the fostering of good conduct. 'Between the state and the individual' according to Foucault (1978) 'sex became an issue, and a public issue no less, a whole web of discourses, special knowledges, analyses, and injunctions settled upon it' (1978: 26).

Pedagogical institutions/expert authorities were indeed central not only in the proliferation of discourses on sex but also in guiding it in the era of population. They intervene to prescribe what could be said, how it could be said, what was to be elided and how was it to be elided. The hope is that once authorities take charge of it at the level of ideas its practise could also be controlled. In this expert mediated discourse the subject, be it a child, adolescent or adult, and this is important to note, figures not just as a mute unconscious object. Instead with the help of others (experts) subjects are inserted into a web of discourses which at times address them, incite them to speak, or impose a certain body of knowledge over them.

Medicine and psychiatry feature prominently in the list of pedagogical institutions which lead the movement towards the pluralisation of discourses on sex. The ritual of confession, which is a precursor to the practice of medical examination and other clinical methods of examining and listening, plays a crucial role in the constitution of the speaking subject. As an incitation to speak the truth not of moral failure but of bodies and life processes the ritual of confession is inscribed, writes Foucault (1978) 'at the heart of the procedures of individualisation' (1978: 59). Now we must end our consideration of modern theories of the subject. Perhaps not before we note that in the ritual of confession the subject of enunciation is at the same time the subject of the enounced.

## **Chapter III**

### **The Modern Social Imaginary and the Burden of Colonial Difference**

#### **Introduction**

This essay, a third in the series of six, sees a return to political philosophy via the concept of the modern social imaginary theorised by Charles Taylor (2002). The essay seeks to demonstrate that nationalism and citizenship which are two key components of the modern social imaginary have and continue to play a central role in the perpetuation of cultural Europeanisation in the non-European world. Contrary to popular thinking that nationalism and citizenship have in the colonial world served as guarantors for liberation and freedom the essay argues that it is precisely these concepts that have been responsible in the non-European world for securing colonial difference. Three sections make up the essay. The first section surfaces the historicist normative ethic of the two concepts of nationalism and citizenship in order to destabilise the accepted positive valuation the two concepts have earned in the colonial world. Drawing its material from Taylor (2002) the second section enters a brief exposition of the modern social imaginary. While the third section builds on Taylor's (2002) elaboration of the modern social imaginary it goes further by substituting the public sphere and democratic self-rule for nationalism and citizenship as the two key moral orders of the modern social imaginary. When read from the position of non-European colonial societies what does the career of the two moral orders of the modern social imaginary, i.e. nationalism and citizenship tell us about coloniality of knowledge and its interface with colonial difference?

#### **Problematizing the non-Western Career of Nationalism and Citizenship**

The object in this section can best be formulated into the three following propositions. One: nationalism and citizenship belong to the western social imaginary. They speak to

the natural unfolding of European history not that of Africa or the world. It is historicism that has led modernist thought to think of nationalism and citizenship as universal categories, with an uninterrupted, continuous and/or unified history, emerging like the Hegelian Idea in one part of the world, the West, and spreading outwardly to the rest of the world. The claim entered in modernist thought on behalf of the two concepts, nationalism and citizenship, to each being a unified abstract essence has not been without consequence for the history and reality of the non-European/colonial world.

Written in a historicist framework, histories of these societies become local/minor versions of a universal historical unfolding of the two abstract concepts but do not alter their original interiority or essence. In a manner typical of an original simple or self-relating negativity each of the two concepts; nationalism and citizenship, when made to labour in the colonial world, does not undergo any serious transformation but simply develops within the parameters of its own logic by virtue of its own negativity tending towards the restoration of its original unity. What is therefore transformed is not the meaning of the Idea, the two concepts, but the reality and histories of colonial societies, which become mere moments in the universal unfolding of the Idea. Forced to fit within the framework of the original essence, represented in this instance by nationalism and citizenship, histories and realities of the colonial world even in their difference do not exist in and of themselves, do not have an independent character, never manifest anything but are mere self-manifestations of the original essence which persists in all its manifestations even as alienations, distortions, or variations.

Historicism has rightly so been subjected to a number of stringent criticisms. Foucault (1971, 1980) for example in a number of works particularly, **The Order of Things** and **Power/Knowledge**, relies on the concept of discontinuity to debunk historicism particularly the historicist understanding of knowledge and its development. Histories of

a number of disciplinary knowledges destabilise, he claims, the idea of a 'calm, continuist schema of development' (1980: 112). With evidence from the history of medicine, he demonstrates that the historical development of many disciplinary knowledges is interrupted by sudden disjunctions, sudden take-offs, all of which belie the notion of historical continuity attributed to them. What we should read these transformations to signify, in his view, is something far more significant than just the process of self-renewal, self-critique and/or self-elaboration. In his estimate what is at issue 'is the question of what governs statements, and the way in which they govern each other so as to constitute a set of propositions which are scientifically acceptable...' (1980: 112). Simply what we should read here is a dynamic of power; an internal regime of power which furnishes the rules for the formulation and circulation of scientific statements.

In an interview thematically titled, *Truth and Power*, Foucault (1980) admits that at the time of **The Order of Things** he lacked the concept of a 'discursive regime' with which to capture the 'effects of power peculiar to the play of statements' (1980: 113). The concept of a discursive regime useful as it is in foregrounding the centrality of power in the production of scientific knowledge, however, does very little to rescue Foucault's critique of historicism from its limit – its indifference towards coloniality of modern power. If knowledge indeed does not exist outside of power or does not speak truth to power but is itself already power perhaps it does then become imperative to interrogate the nature of power itself. While Foucault (1971, 1980) does well to analyse the dialectic of power and knowledge, how knowledge attaches to power and power to knowledge, for us in the colonial world his analysis of power does not go far enough for it pays no attention to its coloniality. Without examining the coloniality of power he is in turn unable to account for the coloniality of knowledge itself. Foucault (1971) may abhor

historicism but the utility of his critique is severely cut short by his tendency as it were to write an internalist history/critique of the modern European structure of power.

For those of us on this side of the colonial line, Chakrabarty (2001) offers a far more productive critique of historicism. In this schema historicism is shown to be integral to the elaboration of the political in the non-western or colonial world. Historicism as such is what urges us in our quest to understand any phenomenon to first locate it in its historical origins then trace its historical unfolding over a period of time through various stages of firmament/development as one – in its historical unity. Here the analogy of a Hegelian Spirit proves to be a valuable explanatory resource. The Hegelian Spirit we now know in its culmination originating in one part of the world at a particular historical time and extending to other parts of the world maintains its original unity. Temporary fragmentations, alienations or transformations it may go through in its various moments of self-elaboration are themselves part of its original unity. Here is how Chakrabarty (2001) in a deceptively simple but evocative manner defines historicism; ‘it is the idea that to understand anything it has to be seen both as a unity and in its historical development’ (2001: 6). Chakrabarty’s (2001) critique of historicism it seems to me shares the same outlook with that of Walter Benjamin (1968) in the essay *Theses on the Philosophy of History*. Benjamin (1968) claims amongst other things that; ‘[H]istoricism rightly culminates in universal history’. This of course is not meant as a celebration of universal history or productivity of historicism because as Benjamin (1968) argues universal history rest on dubitable intellectual ground. ‘Universal history’ he writes ‘has no theoretical armature. Its method is additive; it musters a mass of data to fill the homogenous empty time’ (1968: 262).

In the colonial world the sensibility towards universal history whose method is to muster a mass of data in order to fill the homogenous empty time sponsors ‘a first in

Europe, then elsewhere structure of global historical time' that is historicist (Chakrabarty; 2001: 7). It is not theoretical innovation but historicism that has made nationalism and citizenship, appear not only universal but as phenomena that have become universal over time by originating in Europe and then spreading to the rest of the world. For evidence of this first in Europe and then elsewhere historicist thinking we only need to read Kedourie (1993) in his claim that; '[N]ationalism is a doctrine invented in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century' (1993: 1). Invented in Europe, this doctrine then spreads to the rest of the non-Western world where 'it is neither something indigenous to these areas nor an irresistible tendency of the human spirit everywhere, but rather an importation from Europe' (1970: 2). The European origins of both the nation and nationalism are confirmed by Hroch (1996) in his claim that the 'nation is not of course, an eternal category, but was the product of a long and complicated process of historical development in Europe' (1996: 79). Unfortunately, the career of nationalist thought in Africa lends credibility to the historicist tendency. Nationalism in Africa has bought wholesale into the logic of the 'Idea'.

The study of citizenship has not fared any better in resisting historicism. One of the interesting studies of citizenship is work by Peter Riesenberg (1992) named **Citizenship in the Western Tradition: Plato to Rousseau**. Its preoccupation is to write a continuist history of citizenship from the time of Solon to that of Rousseau. Riesenberg (1992) of course does not extend this continuous history to the non-western world but confines it to Western Europe. What remains pertinent though is the idea that to make sense of citizenship it must be located in a long continuous historical trajectory from its ancient Greek origins through to post-revolutionary France. 'One premise of this book' writes Riesenberg (1992) 'is that there have been two citizenships...The first lasted from the time of the Greek city-state until the French Revolution; the second has been in existence since then' (1992: xviii). To turn this into a global history of the concept

(citizenship) one need only add that it has since been exported to the rest of the non-European world. Hardly any university trained historian today does not know that history which pretends to be global must have at its background the figure/idea of Europe as a silent referent, as the original habitus of modern temporality (Chakrabarty; 2001). Following Benjamin (1968) perhaps we should also ask; ‘...with whom the adherents of historicism actually empathize’? And together with him answer: ‘...with the victor’ (1968: 256).

Now we can proceed to the second proposition in which is summed the content of these reflections. At the time when nationalism completes its voyage from Europe to the colonial world (read Africa) its moral, cultural, ideological, philosophical and epistemological parameters have already been worked out. As such nationalist thought in the colonial world does not constitute an original/autonomous discourse (the same can be said of citizenship). It essentially is a call to re-enact *in toto* the same societal transformation(s), minus the internal contestations, modernising Europe underwent in the post-Enlightenment era. With its script already written, its bounds set, nationalism inevitably denies to the colonial world autonomy of thought – it is as Chatterjee (1986) argues a derivative discourse. Through nationalist thought Europe basically holds up its modern civilisational culture whose precepts include progress, rational secular consciousness, individuality, etc, as the mirror in looking at non-Western societies see their future image. By the late 1950s this image of the modern European civilisational culture which had become nationalism’s sublime object of desire is in the literature on nation-building in the New States reformulated into the model of the modern (see Emerson; 1960, Almond; 1960, Huntington; 1968, Hodgkin; 1964, Sathyamurthy; 1983). The model of the modern is basically an exhortation to Africa to replicate what modern (read European) history had demonstrated to be possible. Nationalism in the colonial

world therefore amounts to nothing more than a struggle to successfully replicate the archetypical model of the modern nation-state.

As Chatterjee (1986, 1993) observes with such acuity because the work of imagining has already been done, nationalism in the colonial world does not have a theoretical existence. To understand colonial nationalism we are impelled, by those who subscribe to historicist thinking, to first unearth the history and meaning of the concept as it emerges in Europe. Armed with that history and meaning of the concept, all that is left to do is ascertain the extent to which empirical evidence points towards conformity or deviation of particular non-Western societies from the universally replicable Western model. In effect theoretical categories have already been worked out for us from the theoretically knowable history of European nationalism. By implication only Western nationalism is theoretically knowable, African nationalism can only be apprehended empirically.

To illustrate let us read the first pages of Kedourie's (1993) important book, **Nationalism**. Its importance within the field hardly needs justification. Mainly concerned with the intellectual rather than political history of nationalism the book went through four editions. In the introduction to the fourth edition published in 1993, Kedourie reflects for the benefit of his reader on his extended and involved intellectual engagement with the subject, the institutional sites where this has been carried out, and the epistemological turns his thinking has taken. Here is how he captures one particular moment in the evolution of his thoughts:

"[I]n 1953 when I started to think about the subject, as well as in 1960 when the book was published, I looked upon what I was doing as an attempt at historical explanation – and historical explanation is by definition concerned with the past. It is true that there were then active nationalist movements in the

world, for instance the Algerian rebellion against French rule, but their existence did not pose new intellectual problems or invalidate the picture of nationalist politics as I presented it” (1993: xiii).

By the time Kedourie (1993) writes these lines he had long traded his obscurity to become a leading authority in the field of nationalism. When he claims that there were in 1960 active nationalist movements in the world exemplified by the Algerian struggle for liberation he is correct. To that point we must add though that many such movements had been in existence since the beginning of the century and no less a significant number had won independence for their respective peoples. Despite all of these developments, Kedourie (1993) with assured conviction concludes, they could be no source in the study of nationalism of new theoretical pathways – did not pose new intellectual problems. In their organisational form, ideological orientation, modes of struggle these nationalist movements did not destabilise the pre-existing theoretical framework of nationalism as had been worked out from the European material. Did he speak for the entire field or from its margins?

Rather than bargain over the question what I want to do is attend to a fairly recent attempt to downplay the modernist non-autonomous character of nationalist thought in the colonial world. Chipkin’s (2007) study, **Do South Africans Exist? Nationalism, Democracy and the Identity of ‘The People’** does well to highlight an often overlooked fact in the study of nationalism that in its long chequered career nationalism in the colonial world is pre-occupied not just with resisting colonialism. It displays an equal concern for the nature of the post-colonial society it was to preside over. If nationalist thought did not as Gellner (1983) suggest have to think about the model and logic of society it was trying to build because that was given to it objectively and furthermore if that model is the western derived model of the modern, Chipkin (2007) is decidedly wrong in his contention against Chatterjee (1993) that ‘the fact that *nationalism*

(something) originates somewhere tells us virtually nothing about how it is appropriated, developed, elaborated and transformed' (2007: 45 italics added).

Given that nationalism in Africa like modernist thought whose discursive framework it adopts assumes the inevitability of the model of the modern, reasons within the rationalist modernist framework of thought whose representational structure declares non-European modes of being as irrational, does not repudiate the narrative of transition, all of which support the conclusion that nationalism seeks basically to remake the colonial world in the image of Europe, Chipkin's (2007) argument skirts around the issue most key: the issue of material, discursive, and textual life of colonial cultures/modes of being against the backdrop of nationalism's real modernising impulse. His argument, I suspect, can only be sustained in the hermitically closed world of postmodern appropriations and adaptations where the materiality of life becomes readable from the coherence of the code.

The third proposition volunteered is that modern citizenship does not represent an empty universal statutory category, but emerges within a specific culture context as its functional normative identity. And that culture context is modern European industrialism. Citizenship as we know it today is the hallmark of modernity. In fact, according to, Barbalet (1988) 'modern democratic citizenship has a history which parallels the growth of Western capitalism' (1988: 32). To make all of this a little clearer, let us recall that Europe in the classical period is witness to a whole spectre of societal changes, whether one thinks of these changes as rationalisation and bureaucratisation of society, ascendance of the modern capitalist logic, or birth of a new form of governmentality. If we follow briefly the last characterisation of what happens in the classical age we find amongst other things the disciplining of multitudes into population realised in part through registration by the state, no longer by the church, of all

fundamental aspects of human life – birth, marriage and death. There is a further distinction though drawn around this time between people as datum and people as political subjects. People as datum or simply populations connote an empirical, enumerable and describable mass that is often a target of administrative policy interventions. Of interest to us is the second category, of people as political subjects or people as citizens. Unlike the first this category of people as citizens we are told carries an ethical connotation - it is equally a set of norms with which to govern relations, relations among people and between people and the state.

If we leave Foucault (1991) at this point and turn to Althusser (1970) we discover that every social formation has as its reflex a corresponding form(s) of historical individuality, specific to it and necessary for its reproduction. Quite expectedly modernity as a social form springs into existence a variant of human subjectivity which is its functional correlate. And this, the study claims, is citizenship. Citizenship as an ethical/normative category becomes comprehensible therefore once it is folded back into the frame of modern capitalist social formation which it serves as its support. At the time of Solon because of the ever present need to defend the polis from external aggression the citizen-soldier emerges as the most virtuous form of human subjectivity (Riesenberg; 1992). In the modern period because of the demands thrown up by the internal dynamics of the modern industrial culture it is the citizen-subject which embodies the most appropriate value forms of human subjectivity. These as is now well known include; deployment of reason in public life, an objective relation to the world, belief in the secular idea of historical progress, a singular form of being, pre-emption of all other layers of human sociality other than those lived within the political, and a whole host of other ideas about man, morals, society and the public sphere.

The ethnocentric limits of modern citizenship reveal themselves immediately this normative category encounters in the colonial world forms of historical difference its theoretical language is unable to decipher. Because they are incomprehensible to its lexicon, antithetical to the normativity of rationality, citizenship and its order of knowledge declares these non-Western forms of sociality which obey the agency of spiritual and ancestral beings as premodern, pre-political, pre-capitalist, etc. Essentially citizenship excludes those for whom life may be other than a self-interested rationally calculated choice. Whether citizenship remains a useful category with which to order both in thought and practice the lives of colonial people is a question that we must continue to pose particularly as colonial people.

### **On the Modern Social Imaginary: Insights from Taylor**

This section proceeds from but goes beyond Taylor's (2002) perceptive analysis of what he refers to as modern social imaginaries in an article of the same title. Generally, Taylor's oeuvre (1985, 2002), can plausibly be read as an effort within European thought to instantiate or perhaps legitimate a reading of non-European modes of being apart from the universalising European code of modern liberal rationalism. He has of course been a key interlocutor in the debate within Western political philosophy pitting on one side defenders of communitarianism against converts of liberal individualism. His arguments in support of communitarianism have often been summoned in defence of the integrity of non-European/colonial cultures. Similarly the will to liberate colonial cultures from modernist rational interpretation(s) animates the six essays comprising the first section of, **Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers Vol. 2**. Here Taylor (1985) zeroes in on the ethnocentric limits of the modern sciences of man. Rationalism and empiricism constitute he argues the bane of western social science. Consequently when confronted with the reality of societies whose social form and knowledge systems do not obey the logic of modern socio-economic categories and

epistemic assumptions western social sciences run aground. At the end of the six essays rationalism and empiricism's claim to universality is left hanging precariously on a thin thread. Turning to the article, *Modern Social Imaginaries* Taylor (2002) continues in a different context to engage with the question of historical difference against the backdrop of modernity's universalising claims. He formulates the concern into a question; should modernity be thought of in the singular or plural? In his words:

"[I]s there a single phenomenon here, or do we need to speak of *multiple* modernities, the plural reflecting the fact that non-Western cultures have modernised in their own ways and cannot be properly understood if we try to grasp them in a general theory that was originally designed with the Western case in mind?" (2002: 91).

To be sure, at the time when Taylor (2002) pens these lines the Subaltern school had for more than three decades been pleading the case for non-European/colonial cultures, arguing for the pluralisation of modernity. What distinguishes his argument from these earlier efforts is the route he follows to arrive at the plurality of modernities. Taylor (2002) begins by recognising that to each form of modernity attaches a peculiar substantive sense-giving social imaginary. In this wise a social imaginary emerges is that feature which gives to particular modernities an exclusive form. Or what amounts to the same thing it distinguishes one form of modernity from the other. The particularity for instance of Western modernity can be revealed through an inquiry into the content of the social imaginary imbedded within it. What bears asking at this point is what does he take the notion of a social imaginary to connote? We should as we proceed remain conscious that when Taylor (2002) talks about the modern social imaginary he is specific - he is referring to the European modern social imaginary.

Were we to begin by what it is not, a social imaginary does not equate a theory or set of ideas held by a select few. Rather it is an understanding that is a common societal

possession; it is that which enables the practices of a society. Theoretical schemes do of course tend to evolve and eventually permeate the consciousness of the whole of society. At that point they serve to enable or authorise certain set of practices as well as bar from the field of possibility a whole host of other activities. That certain practices in society become conceivable while others remain foreclosed is a function of the social imaginary. It regulates, as it were, both the thought and the unthought. Although social imaginaries govern how society determines what is of value and how to allocate value thereby showing close affinity with theoretical knowledge, i.e., Parsonian structural-functionalism or Parsonian theory of societal equilibrium, conceptual discipline requires that the two be kept distinct. In its scope and functioning the social imaginary is much broader and far more consequential than a theoretical scheme. While the latter may also serve as a guide to societal practices it can be jettisoned at will by individuals.

Unlike a disengaged theoretical frame a social imaginary immerses the whole of society in a common ethic. Built within it is an obligatory character, as such it exercises a much deeper hold over societal consciousness. Its power is not that of a scientifically derived truth. It functions through moral suasion, sets the overall societal imperative, supplies the necessary cultural capital with which to order social interactions, encourages certain forms of being as appropriate and dissuades people from others through a combination of moral expectation and sanction. According to Taylor (2002) it delimits ways in which people in society 'imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations' (2002: 106). There is reason to think of it as a symbolic framework through which people experience their social reality. Better still we can think of it as a societal norm. However both concepts fail to cover fully its expansive meaning.

What does carry a comparative meaning to Taylor's (2002) notion of a social imaginary is what Husserl (1931) in the, **The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology**, refers to as the life-world or habitual background. One of the lessons phenomenology teaches is that unencumbered thought of the Cartesian mould is a fantasy. Consciousness is always consciousness of something and what makes consciousness possible at all is the subjects' location within a meaning giving background. This meaning giving habitual background is not an empirical milieu or immediate background for particular concepts or/and practices that is the stuff of theory. Rather it is better understood as a latent guide; 'largely unstructured and inarticulate understanding of our whole situation', which makes visible and comprehensible particular features of our world (Taylor; 2002: 107).

It is habituated knowledge people draw on unconsciously to give meaning and direction in the conduct of their everyday lives. Because of its unlimited canvass – remember as a repertoire of collective practices it must have an answer for every possible societal question – the habitual background cannot be reduced into an explicit doctrine. Following from the above we can plausibly claim that the phenomenological notion of a habitual meaning giving background equates Taylor's (2002) social imaginary. A social imaginary writes Taylor (2002) supposes 'a wider grasp of our whole predicament, how we stand in relation to one another, how we got where we are, how we relate to other groups'. Following from this he concludes; '[T]his wider grasp has no clear limits' (2002: 107). Its fragments though are possible to theorise and apprehend.

As that which basically holds society together a social imaginary is equally accessible and shared by all as opposed to the exclusivity of theory – we have made the point. For evidence Taylor (2002) steers us towards the everyday lives of ordinary people who in order to imagine their surroundings do not resort to the exclusionary theoretical

language but use the repertoire supplied by taken-for-granted stories, legends, images, etc. Particularly, important is the fact that many of these taken-for-granted stories long predate the time of theorising. From all what we have said we can surmise that the social imaginary is identifiable through the following features: its is a common understanding, legitimates societal practises, makes possible a certain way of conceiving the world, permeates the consciousness of the whole of society, sets the norm for common practices, disciplines behaviour and expectations. From the definition we are offered by Taylor (2002) a social imaginary is basically what sustains society – it is social glue:

“[I]t incorporates a sense of the normal expectations that we have of one another, the kind of common understanding which enables us to carry out the collective practices that make up our social life. This incorporates some sense of how we all fit together in carrying out the common practice. This understanding is both factual and “normative”; that is we have a sense of how things usually go, but this is interwoven with an idea of how they ought to go...” (2002: 106).

### **Nationalism and Citizenship as Moral Orders of the Modern Social Imaginary**

Each social imaginary in turn rests on a moral order, explains Taylor (2002). Identifiable with the (pre) modern social imaginary for instance is a particular moral order. Within Taylor’s (2002) scheme the notion of a moral order serves an important function. It is the mutations or changeover within the moral order we are made to understand which precipitates the transition from one social imaginary to the next. Building on this understanding of mutations within the moral order Taylor (2002) plots to the present from the pre-modern period the history of the modern (European) social imaginary. In this historicisation we see how at particular historical moments certain moral orders tend to predominate. In his consideration for instance of the moral orders which prevails in the pre-modern period, Taylor (2002) focuses on two. One is the ‘idea of the *law* of a people, a law that has existed “time out of mind,” and which in a sense defines

a group as a people'. The other is the notion of a 'hierarchy in society that expresses and corresponds to a hierarchy in the cosmos' (Taylor; 2002: 94). Taylor (2002) claims that it is precisely these two moral orders that get worked over, taken over and/or displaced in the transition to political modernity. Little effort here is required to realise that Taylor's (2002) historicisation harkens back to the European medieval period when the Great Chain of Being accounts for the state of things up until it is supplanted by the post-Enlightenment view of the world.

To make sense of the modern social imaginary Taylor (2002) evokes ideas of two theorists of natural rights, i.e. Grotius and Locke. In his view these two theorists have been active in developing features central to the modern moral order. The two theorists observably proceed neither from God's will/design/purpose nor from law existent since time out of mind. The object for them is to surface the nature of constitutive members of society: human beings as rational, sociable agents who collaborate for their mutual benefit. The nature of human beings as rational sociable agents support what in this scheme turns out to be the most pre-eminent feature of the modern moral order; consciousness of society as economy. Taylor (2002) notes;

"[A]nd so perhaps the first big shift wrought by this new idea of *moral* order, both in theory, and in social imaginary, consist in our coming to see society as an "economy", an interlocking set of activities of production, exchange, and consumption, which forms a system with its own laws and dynamic. Instead of being merely the management, by those in authority, of the resources we collectively need, in household or state, the economic now defines a way in which we are linked together, a sphere of coexistence that could in principle suffice to itself..." (2002: 105 italics added).

Alongside turning the reason of economy into reason of society we encounter two other moral orders of the modern social imaginary (political modernity). Modern social theory lists individualism as one other key feature of the modern moral order. Taylor (2002)

tampers the enthusiasm for individualism as a primary moral principle of the modern social imaginary. Or shall we say he implores us to think differently about the coming of modern individualism in relation to older forms of communal solidarity. The narrative of transition from older forms of complementarity to political modernity is premised on a supposed triumphant march of individualism at the expense of community (Taylor; 2002: 99). Contrary to this thinking the coming of modern individualism does not stand in a causal relation with the dissolution of community. Rather we must Taylor (2002) persuades us see the ascendance of modern individualism as contemporaneous with the development of a new understanding of society/sociality. Modern individualism therefore does not signify loss, loss of traditional modes of communal solidarity but birth of a new corresponding form of sociality. When writing the narrative of political modernity we should therefore neuter the primacy of the atomistic individual with the new concept of society.

An observation is necessary here so we may not overreach Taylor's (2002) argument. When he argued that the rise modern individualism rather than liquidate society is coterminous with the emergence of a new conception of society he did not revolutionarise thought. He is quite on point: alongside modern individualism develops a conception of society commensurate with it. Both the concepts of man and society are as we have come to know mere modern contrivances - they develop in tandem within post-Enlightenment thought. What is called for other than merely projecting with tacit approval the new concept of society is to try understand it in relation to modern individualism out of which, together with, perhaps against which it comes into being. In that way we may come to a realisation that there is in fact an asymmetry between the notion of society Taylor (2002) brandishes and modern individualism. To be sure, Man (modern individual) since the coming of modernity has assumed primacy over society. The latter is now merely a place where individuals meet to satiate their enlightened

selfish interests (see Mannheim; 1940, Giddens; 1984). That said let us allow him the point that modern individualism does not pass at the head of the pack as one other key aspect of the modern moral order.

In Taylor's (2002) view it is the efflorescence of the public sphere, and practices and outlook of democratic self-rule that are the key moral orders of the modern social imaginary. In what follows I do not rehearse Taylor's (2002) discussion of the public sphere and practices of democratic self-rule. What I want to do instead is suggest a different possibility in thinking the modern social imaginary by holding nationalism and citizenship as its key moral orders.<sup>14</sup> Any critical reading of the history of political modernity must surely reveal the centrality of nationalism and citizenship in the processes leading to the constitution of both the political and the social. In part it is that which warrants our consideration of them as key moral orders of the modern social imaginary.

In the year 1983, appears two important works on nationalism, one penned by Ernest Gellner named **Nations and Nationalism** the other by Benedict Anderson titled **Imagined Communities**. Both texts consider the essence of the modern European social imaginary synonymous with that of the capitalist social imaginary. For both these texts modern Europe shares with capitalism the same moral order(s). It is perhaps pertinent to note that except for just one point of disagreement over the work of invention within nationalism – more precisely over whether invention connotes fabrication and falsity (Gellner; 1983) or imagining and creation (Anderson; 1983) – both these studies subscribe with equal verve to the paradigmatic version of the concept: nationalism.

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<sup>14</sup> Here I am not attributing any order of importance between on the one hand the public sphere and practices of democratic self-rule and on the other nationalism and citizenship. I do suspect that depending on the turn of the argument several other features may quite correctly so be considered key in the emergence and life of the modern moral order.

Its birth dated as the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Western Europe is its original home. In its programmatic form it demands that the nation be imagined in relation to the state. Everywhere, it displaces pre-existing modes of comprehending the world and substitutes them with objective scientific consciousness. Because of historicism that underlay its epistemic order it unites the history of the world within the same framework of a universally unfolding historical time. Under its gaze the world is rendered singular and transparent in the process becomes knowable through a standardised code. It disputes the historicity of scientific categories and methods themselves. Its meta-narrative is worked out from the epistemological material supplied by the history of industrialising Europe. It legitimates the idea of Europe as that part of the world which by the eighteenth century was ahead of all the others on the path of progress. Its major achievement is the universalisation of the nation-state as the most superior/desired form of community.<sup>15</sup> When conceptualising this paradigmatic version of nationalism the two studies locate it within a series of transformations identifiable with the coming of modern industrialism (Gellner; 1983), what Anderson (1983) creatively calls print-capitalism. To illustrate let us consider first Gellner's (1983) socio-historical analysis of the concept.

For Gellner (1983) the history of nationalism is essentially a story of progress wherein societies, with Europe at the forefront, move in their historical development through successive epochs the more recent epoch representing an improvement on the earlier one. Armed with this secular idea of historical progress he claims that 'mankind has passed through three fundamental stages in its history: the pre-agrarian, the agrarian,

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<sup>15</sup> Chatterjee (1986) provides us with an excellent summation of this paradigmatic version of nationalism. In his words: "[T]he normal is the classical, the orthodox, the pure type. This type of nationalism shares the same material and intellectual premises with the European Enlightenment, with industry and the idea of progress, and with modern democracy. Together they constitute a historical unity, defined by a fair degree of clarity in both geographical and chronological terms. This gives the liberal-rationalist his paradigmatic form in which nationalism goes hand-in-hand with reason, liberty and progress" (1986: 3).

and the industrial' (Gellner; 1983: 5). Of course he is mistaken: he abstracts this universal time from the parochial history of Europe and forces it into the reality of the rest of other societies. It is Europe not mankind whose history has gone through the three successive historical epochs. He is not alone though. Marx also reasons in such ethnocentric terms (see Amin; 1980).

With the schematisation of world history into three time periods in hand, Gellner (1983) locates the development of nationalism at the time of the transition from agrarian to industrial society. His analysis of the transition from the agrarian to industrial period confirms Taylor's (2002) thesis that from the medieval period onwards Europe is on an irrevocable path to become an economic society. He cites for evidence Locke's assertion in the **Two Treatises of Civil Government**; 'We ought to be Industrious and Rational' (cited in Taylor; 2002: 97). Gellner (1983) is more pointed in the way he makes the claim: 'Mankind is irreversibly committed to industrial society, and therefore to a society whose productive system is based on cumulative science and technology' (1983: 39). That the aspiration towards economic rationalism is not inscribed in the natural order of things but a parochial European sensibility is now fairly incontrovertible. Here nonetheless is how Gellner (1983) maps the transition from the agrarian to industrial age.

Agrarian societies being face-to-face localised communities are characterised by a rudimentary division of labour. This feature, rudimentary division of labour, is not congenial to the development of a universalised high culture. A small class of administrators, clerics, etc. monopolises both power and access to literacy. Within the social structure of agrarian society are contained two important developments which serve as a springboard for the age of industrialism. One is the idea of the state. Both the state and the idea of the state are of course crucial because as Gellner (1983) posits;

'[T]he existence of politically centralized units, and of a moral-political climate in which such centralized units are taken for granted and are treated as normative, is a necessary though by no means a sufficient condition of nationalism' (1983: 4). Implied here is that it is the state which creates the discursive conditions for nationalist imagination. The other catalytic feature is the existence within agrarian society of a written script and culture of literacy. Previously monopolised by a minority elite strata their generalisation leads to cultural homogenisation of society.

Gellner (1983) interestingly begins his treatment of the transition to the industrial period by sounding a warning. We read a similar warning from Timothy Mitchell (2000) which is that a representation or copy can never become an original. So unique and complex was the process of industrialisation such that any subsequent attempt to replicate the model can never attain the status of an original or cannot, as he says, be considered as an 'event of the same kind as the original industrialisation, simply in virtue of the fact that all the others were imitative' (1983: 19). We should not to the subtlety of the argument lose its unsettling implications. To begin with the process of elaborating political modernity (modern industrial society) in the non-Western world must then like all other representations, be a self-negating process bound never to attain its goal for it must remain an approximation of the thing itself. Similarly, if the logic of nationalism is objectively determined by sociological conditions ensconced within modern industrialism its failure in the non-European world is perhaps already inscribed in the fact that the latter can never reproduce the conditions under which the original event erupts onto the scene.

That said let us follow Gellner (1983) as he enlightens us on Europe's transition to the age of nationalism. A number of features set the modern industrial society apart from the preceding age. From Weber (1992), Gellner (1983) retrieves the concept of

rationality, the rational spirit as one important perhaps distinguishing feature of an industrial society. Consistency, the like treatment of like cases and efficiency, selection of the best available means are two key elements Weber's notion of rationality presupposes. However, the rational ethic is in fact pregnant with an even larger possibility, a universal order of knowledge. It delivers to the modern industrial society a standard code, a common measure of fallibilism, the same rules of causation, and the same attitude towards the world as present-at-hand. Let us patiently read Gellner (1983) as he makes the point:

“What underlies the two elements of the rational spirit of which Weber was clearly aware is something deeper...: namely a common measure of fact, a universal currency, so to speak for the general characterisation of things...By the common or single conceptual currency I mean that all facts are located within a single continuous logical space, that statements reporting them can be conjoined and generally related to each other, and so that in principle one single language describes the world and is internally unitary; or on the negative side, that there are no special, privileged, insulated facts or realms, ...living in insulated independent logical spaces of their own” (1983: 21).

This new epistemic order of the modern industrial society banishes historical difference - the world can only be understood as one. Essentially it reduces the whole world into one single referent intelligible from one particular philosophical locus through a single code. In sum there is from this epoch henceforth one privileged mode of accessing the world and one universal way of talking about the world. We see from this moment a coming together of power and reason.

Linked to the said change in society's mode of cognition is change in the process of economic production. Society emboldened by the new conception of the world as knowable and accessible in its entirety begins simultaneously to think that contained within it are boundless possibilities for economic exploration and development. As it

were belief in perpetual growth cognitive and economic growth becomes the central kernel of the new society's vision. Because in its orientation this new society of perpetual growth, as Gellner (1983) calls it, is geared towards perpetual productivity it relies unlike the simple agrarian society on a far more complex and cumulatively changing division of labour. In it occupants of work stations become mutually substitutable, earn rather than inherit their positions, and new market based distinctions emerge. In a word this is a highly mobile meritocratic society. Its characteristic features, it is thought are antithetical to and must prevail over the agrarian norm. Votaries of the new society be believed there is within it an equalisation of opportunities, increased convergence in life-styles and closer social distance among people on account of muted economic inequality.

Mass school education plays a more than crucial role in this highly mobile society with its complex division of labour. Its standardised pedagogic content produces a skilled labour cohort that is easy to re-tool for new challenges. This Gellner (1983) calls education proper in contra-distinction to the apprentice and intra-community based nature of agrarian training. At another level modern education facilitates the generalisation of a common idiom needed for formal and precise communication. The reason, as Gellner (1983) puts it, the need for a formal and factual language becomes in the industrial period more pronounced is because; '[W]ork, in the main is no longer the manipulation of things, but of meanings' (1983: 32-33). While all of the above may be an all too familiar social history of Europe the point of recounting it in detail is to demonstrate how deeply implicated nationalism is within this particular and local history. It seems nigh impossible to conceptualise nationalism outside of eighteen century Western European history, particularly, its transition to capitalist modernity.

At this point we have come to the crux of Gellner's (1983) thesis. There are two parts to his argument. The first consist of the claim that nationalism does not have the character of subjective antiquity often claimed for it but its roots lie specifically in 'the distinctive structural requirements of industrial society.' It is he continues 'the fruit neither of ideological aberration, nor of emotional excess.' Nationalism is, to think in methodological terms, a dependent variable. It must be understood as an effect or 'external manifestation of a deep adjustment in the relationship between polity and culture which is quite unavoidable' (1983: 35). Throughout, Gellner (1983) consistently underlines the inevitability of nationalism. For him it is an effect thrown up by the exigencies of modern industrialism. To grasp fully the meaning of nationalism we need to buttress our understanding of modern industrialism of which it is a logical culmination. It is in addition to all we have said an engendering of a pervasive high culture – high culture meaning a standardised literacy and education based system of communication. Where this school-transmitted as opposed to folk-transmitted high culture prevails society attains an unprecedentedly high level of cultural homogeneity. Moreover this culture which is a common possession is what ensures the reproduction of society– a particular version of it. We learn from Gellner (1983) that in the ultimate this secular unified literate high culture socialises members of society primarily as homo economicus. It 'manufactures viable and usable human beings' he writes (Gellner; 1983: 38). At other times these viable and usable human beings are known to him as the 'Organisational Man' and/or 'Industrial Man'.

Gellner (1983) states the second dimension of his overall thesis with such benign simplicity that hides at first its fundamental even if disturbing import. According to him the age of transition to industrialism is also an age of nationalism. At the surface of things he seems here to affirm a claim somewhat already established which is that nationalism is basically an effect of the modern industrial social organisation. However

when read from the perspective of the colonial world the claim holds several unsettling implications. To consider just one: because capitalist modernity is *a sine qua non* for nationalism the implication is that in embracing nationalism the colonial world invariably acquiesce to the logic and ethic of capitalist modernity. The implication is that in adopting nationalism the colonial world agrees to be modern. We have encountered the same observation in the following familiar terms: nationalism is an inherently bourgeois/modernist project.

By the way Gellner (1983) is not alone in asserting historical connectedness between the age of nationalism and the age of industrialism. Drawing a similar connection, Anderson (1983) substitutes the age of industrialism for eighteenth century Europe; ‘...in Western Europe the eighteenth century marks...the dawn of the age of nationalism...’ (1983: 19). To return to Gellner (1983) his concern is to secure the determinacy of industrialism over nationalism. He argues that it is not nationalism which imposes cultural homogeneity over society but the objective material conditions of industrialism which ‘appear on the surface in the form of nationalism’ (Gellner; 1983: 39). As capital penetrates society it transforms stagnant and marginal cultures thereby integrate the whole population into a common civilisation. The whole spectrum of developments classed together under nationalism signify nothing but superstructural changes flowing logically from the base - industrial capitalism. Nationalism in other words is basically an attempt to actualise in political terms the ideals of modern industrialism – it is the political ideology of industrial capitalism.

Since nationalism is a decidedly modern phenomenon, an effect of modern industrialism, it cannot then be an awakening of a primordial sentiment. At the least it may draw from the fund of pre-existing/pre-nationalist cultures in the process transform them in accord with the objectively imposed need for homogeneity. There is

nothing natural or immutable about nationalism - its reality is not inscribed in nature. It owes its being to modern sociological process of industrialism. It is the capitalist social conditions which call it into existence. All of this finds elegant expression in Gellner's (1983) often cited definition of the concept;

"...nationalism is, essentially, the general imposition of a high culture on society, where previously low cultures had taken up the lives of the majority, and in some cases of the totality, of the population. It means that generalised diffusion of a school-mediated, academy supervised idiom, codified for the requirements of reasonably precise bureaucratic and technological communication. It is the establishment of an anonymous, impersonal society, with mutually substitutable atomized individuals, held together above all by a shared culture of this kind, in place of a previous complex structure of local groups, sustained by folk cultures reproduced locally and idiosyncratically by the micro-groups themselves. This is what really happens" (1983: 57).

In so far as this describes the process of societal change unfolding in modernising Europe indeed it is what really happens. So as long as nationalism remains within its original habitus, Europe, it remains the story of a pure type. In the modernist telling of the story of nationalism, as we read it in Gellner (1983), European nationalism constitutes a major flow, its course interrupted along the way by minor flows, at times considered distortionary or out-rightly bad (Plamenatz; 1973, Kedourie; 1970). Towards the end of his text Gellner (1983) writes into this classical, mainstream and normal story of nationalism, minor flows constituted by non-European nationalisms. These flows are not merely minor, furthermore they become meaningful only when read in terms of the rules of the larger meta-narrative worked out from the history of post-Enlightenment Europe. It bears stating that in history writing what constitutes a major and a minor story is a function not of statistical advantage but of social construction. Certain histories, in this instance histories of colonial nationalisms, will remain minor histories in the sense that their very incorporation into the historical narrative of nationalism

relegates them into pasts of lesser importance in relation to the major modern narrative of Western nationalism (Chakrabarty; 2001). At work generally in such historical narratives is a representational strategy which ensures for the history of Europe a pre-eminence to which non-Western histories will always be subordinated, made to appear inferior and/or marginal. We have learned from Gellner (1983) enough resources, I suspect, to support the claim made earlier that nationalism is a key moral order of the modern (European) social imaginary. This is a good point then at which to leave Gellner (1983) and read Anderson (1983) who in a somewhat similar fashion points to processes related to print capitalism for the origins of nationalism. From histories of Europe and the Latin American Occident he fashions three major narratives of nationalism. He concludes his study by holding these up as modular examples from which nationalists in the colonial world are at liberty to choose. By implication nationalism in the colonial world cannot but be an alien non-autonomous discourse. Its burden is to replicate what the modern histories of Europe and Latin America had demonstrated to be possible. With regards to nationalism in Africa, Gellner (1983) concludes that it displays very little originality;

“...many of the nationalisms of sub-Saharan Africa are interesting in that they exemplify the opposite extreme: they often neither perpetuate nor invent a local high culture nor do they elevate an erstwhile folk culture into a new, politically sanctioned literate culture as European nationalisms had often done. Instead, they persist in using an *alien*, European high culture” (1983: 81).

Though Anderson’s (1983) analysis of nationalism is located deep within the Marxist perspective, he insists on the relative autonomy from materialist processes of the work of nationalist imagining – of ideologically creating the nation. Contrary to the dominant trend within Marxist studies of the National Question he accords serious importance to cultural and other subjective processes of imagining. Thus the nation in his view is not delimited by a set of objective criteria which can be empirically ascertained. Nationalism

he argues does not appear on the surface of history as an automatic reflex of other more fundamental processes of industrial capitalism. This of course is not to deny the role capitalism, print-capitalism plays in the emergence and growth of nationalism.

The nation proposes Anderson (1983) in his now famous definition is 'an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign' (1983: 15). Right from the moment when Anderson (1983) defines the nation his analysis, as it were, conforms to the paradigmatic model we encountered earlier. The nation, he claims, is not a face-to-face but anonymous mass political community whose members will never encounter each other or know each other but do live in communion/solidarity. Like Gellner (1983) he avers that the nation can only be imagined in relation to the state. More precisely the nation must be imagined as a state, as sovereign. It does not take much imagination to realise that the claim has no epistemological basis - the nation we do know can also be imagined as a pre-political, sacral community, cultural and/or symbolic (id) entity - its only basis is the history of eighteenth century Europe when Europe thought that every socio-cultural unit, a nation must be a civic political unit, a state and a state a nation. Only Europe and not the world legitimately lays claim to a historiographical consciousness that is of the nation-state. This goes to prove Benjamin's (1968) critique of the method of universal knowledge. When we enquire for instance into what has made the nation-state model universal we find that it is not intellectual rigour but its association with power. What we are in the ultimate left with is a particular European historical experience masquerading as universal knowledge.

While nationalism may be a thoroughgoing modern political invention it must be understood against the backdrop of three large cultural systems which precede it, for herein lay its cultural roots (Anderson; 1983). More appropriately it is in the loosening of

their hold over human consciousness and eventual dissolution that we must look for the early stirrings of nationalist imagination. These are the scriptural religious community, hierarchically organised dynastic society and lastly a certain conception/apprehension of time. It is these three cultural systems whose fundamental transformation and ultimate dissolution made it possible to think the nation. Holding sacral communities together is a sacred language. As we observed in Gellner's (1983) agrarian society here too a tiny strata of society monopolises the sacred language and its written script. For a number of reasons all having to do with the emergence of print-capitalism, sacred languages by the sixteenth century could no longer hold the centre, the religious community was falling apart. At around the late medieval period another process of disintegration afflicts the dynastic realm which had for a considerable period of time been so pervasive to be thought by most as the only imaginable political system. The authority of centralised monarchies which held large at times diverse populations was transcendently justified. By the seventeenth century this could no longer hold people's imagination. Reason had called this order of authority to question.

Underlying both religious and dynastic communities, according to Anderson (1983), is a certain conception of time. Time in these communities is marked by the formulaic sequence of prefiguring and fulfilment. We first learnt of this conception of time from Benjamin (1968) as Messianic time. In place of the above conception of simultaneity-along-time (Messianic time) comes in the modern period the notion of a 'homogenous empty time' in which simultaneity is transverse, cross-time marked by the clock and the calendar. The notion of an empty homogenous time which receives its original treatment we noted earlier in Benjamin's (1968) work **Illuminations** is what makes it possible to imagine the nation as one, as a community existing at the same time and threading along the same path of history. In short it is what begets the whole idea of simultaneity of the nation through time. The novel and the newspaper two of the

earliest forms of representing the nation best demonstrate how the Benjaminian notion of an empty homogenous time enables a simultaneous imagining of the nation. The capabilities of the novel and the newspaper as modes of representing the nation are greatly enhanced by the commoditisation (massification) of print (the above notes are taken copiously from Anderson; 1983: 29-40).

It is the dissolution of the above certainties 'first in Western Europe, later elsewhere' (as though the social world of non-Western societies were similarly organised) due to economic transformation which accounts for the emergence of nationalism we learn from Anderson (1983: 40). More than passable similarities are observable here between Gellner's (1983) agrarian society and Anderson's (1983) medieval society and their transcendence by the modern capitalist society. At the least we can conclude that they both work with the same material, conceptualising differently aspects of what is otherwise the same historical referent. For instance both analyses when explaining the eruption of nationalist consciousness assign a primary role to economic processes: industrial capitalism for Gellner (1983) and print-capitalism in the case of Anderson (1983).

The difference is that for Anderson (1983) print-capitalism is not determinate. It intervenes by lending crucial but previously unavailable resources, i.e. the possibility of cheap printed material to Protestantism/Reformation, print status to vernacular languages, avenues for mass circulation, etc. The end results are: the creation of a large reading public inclusive of previously marginalised sections of the population, displacement of Latin by vernacular languages as the language of scripture and power, and lastly the reality of human linguistic diversity wherein people become conscious of their linguistic group affinities. Such awareness of linguistic in-group membership serves as both an objective and subjective boundary separating those who belong and those

considered to be outside. 'These fellow readers...' proclaims Anderson (1983) 'formed, in their secular, particular, visible invisibility, the embryo of the nationally-imagined community' (1983: 47). What sows the seeds of a new political community which supersedes earlier forms is a combination of capitalism, print technology and the reality of human linguistic diversity.

Historically, emerges according to Anderson (1983), three distinct types of nationalism; i.e. linguistic nationalism, creole nationalism and official nationalism. In the linguistic model national print-languages are of crucial importance. Of the many implications of linguistic nationalism is the sudden discovery that language constitutes a group of speakers who by virtue of their we-ness are entitled to an autonomous territorial space they can exclusively call their own. Official nationalism represents an effort to placate popular nationalist agitations by aligning boundaries of the empire with those of the linguistic nation. Russification best exemplify the process of naturalising the empire, 'of stretching the short, tight, skin of the nation over the gigantic body of the empire' (Anderson; 1983: 82). Official nationalism simplified means the imposition of linguistic and cultural homogeneity through state fiat over a mosaic of linguistic heterogeneity. It seems also to have been a strategy to pre-empt popular nationalist agitations on the part of power-groups threatened with exclusion in the emergent nationalist sentiment. Official nationalism, itself initially a composite of fragments borrowed from other histories, soon becomes a model available for reproduction elsewhere.

Creole nationalism on the other hand is triggered by the crystallisation of distinction between European settlers in Latin America and their metropolitan counter-parts secondly by the clash between metropolitan and settler economic interests, and lastly the transmutation of administrative units into distinctive homelands. The Creole population had access to European Enlightenment ideas which they employed with

much effectivity in criticising the *anciens regimes*. The most important conclusion Anderson (1983) draws from the analysis of the three models is that they all became modulated and available for copying by third world nationalism, colonial nationalism as he usefully calls it. We alluded to the fact that nationalism in the colonial world is essentially a work of mimicry. For the task of thinking has already been done for us ours is to replicate the models drawn from various histories of the Occident. Expressing his discomfort, Chatterjee (1993) asks; 'If nationalisms in the rest of the world have to choose their imagined community from certain "modular" forms already made available to them by Europe and the Americas, what do they have left to imagine?' (1993: 5). At present this does not tell us much. In order for Chatterjee's (1993) critique to make sense we have to read it against Anderson's (1983) characterisation of colonial nationalism.

In a manner typical of Area Studies of which Anderson (1983) was a prominent member, he sets up an asymmetry between the politics of non-Western states and those of the old world. In this modernisation leaning field new states of the colonial world constitute a residual category—they lack in their own right the capability for originality and meaning. Because they represent the not yet of the modern West their politics remain unintelligible unless when considered against the frame of meaning provided by the original analytical categories all of which derive of course from histories of the Occident. 'The new states of the post-World War II period', boldly claims Anderson (1983), 'have their own character, which nonetheless is incomprehensible except in terms of the succession of models we have been considering' (1983: 104). What is meant here is that the three models above set the parameters or provide the prism for nationalism in the colonial world. Hence in this part of the world nationalism does not constitute an autonomous discourse. The object for the study of nationalism in the colonial world is simply to ascertain the extent to which nationalist processes mirror those in the West.

But the malaise goes even deeper. Sathyamurthy (1983) in a study named; **Nationalism in the Contemporary World: Political and Sociological Perspectives** posits that;

“[B]ecause of the nineteenth-century provenance of the term itself, problems of Afro-Asian nationalism are invariably discussed in terms of changes that would be needed in order that a nation might materialise which would be a homologue of a normal stable European nation. In other words, the main preoccupation of the analyst becomes one of looking at political processes taking place in a given country from an external vantage point and concentrating on an overview of what can be conveniently seen from without. The task of viewing the political process from within (i.e. in the light of indigenous values) and in its true complexity...is seldom undertaken by the social scientist” (1983: 2).

For nationalism in the colonial world the burden is to choose from the three existing models to which nationalists ‘had access, inside the classroom and outside’ (Anderson; 1983: 128). Therefore not much work of creative imagining is expected of non-Western nationalists since all of nationalism’s theoretical possibilities have been fully worked out. Both the spirit of the concept and values of the idea have been settled. Indeed as Mongia (1996) observes nationalism in Africa ‘relied on the narrative of modernity as progress and accepted the ‘universal’ value of Enlightenment notions...nationalism posited the modern nation-state as the new ideal’ (1996: 5). Against this backdrop Chatterjee’s (1993) protest against epistemic colonialism now seems justified. Of this epistemic closure and its consequences he writes;

“History, it would seem, has decreed that we in the postcolonial world shall only be perpetual consumers of modernity. Europe and the Americas, the only true subjects of history, have thought out on our behalf not only the script of colonial enlightenment and exploitation, but also that of our anticolonial resistance and postcolonial misery. Even our imagination must remain forever colonized” (1993: 5).

We shall leave our discussion of nationalism at this point hoping the material above does enough to secure its position at the centre of the modern social imaginary. The

moral of the discussion above simply stated is that at the background of the concept of nationalism is a certain idea of the West. The meaning of the concept of nationalism is inextricably tied to a specific history and culture-context of the West such that its exportation to other parts of the world leads to the negation of their historical difference. Part of the reason is because nationalism ascribes an underlying structural unity to historical process and time, it insists, if you will on a homogenising narrative of history.

That said we may now turn to consider citizenship as the second moral order of the modern social imaginary. Citizenship as we know it today is the hallmark of modernity (Ekeh; 1972, Barbalet; 1988). Like nationalism it emerges parallel to an economic rationality we today call capitalism. Through Foucault (1977) we understand that its development has also been linked to the elaboration of the modern disciplinary regime of power whose ultimate is the production of normalised self-disciplining individuals. A melange of administrative apparatuses of classification and surveillance together with a corresponding set of disciplining knowledges is what ensures the normalisation of individuals into modern subjects (Brubaker; 1992). Made more sharply the point is that the modern regime of power requires for its reproduction normalised self-disciplining subjects.

It is against this backdrop that we must understand the disciplining in the classical period of wandering multitudes into modern subjects whose lives in their entirety become subject to state regulation and surveillance. The production of viable and usable individuals entails amongst other things; regulation of life through contract, official registration of birth and death, certification of marriage union and its dissolution, medicalisation of life, naturalisation of monogamous family life, registration of all aspects of social and personal life, rationalisation and bureaucratisation, and lastly

constitution of the modern individual into a rational and legal subject who lives in the public sphere guided by reason (Comaroff; 2001). Foucault (1977), we alluded to the fact, acknowledges the cultural specificity and historical boundedness of processes leading to the birth of the modern subject. It is at the intersection of historical and cultural processes unravelling in Europe of the classical period that the figure of the modern subject is born. To be sure, Foucault (1977) does not claim universality for this subject. The modern subject he is unambiguous when making the point is culture specific – it is a product of the culture and history of the Occident.

The point I want to pursue though is different. It is that present in the in figure of the citizen are all the characteristic features of the modern subject. The claim simply stated is that the normalised individual of modern disciplinary power is the present day citizen-subject. As such the citizen is the true subject of capitalist modernity. What Foucault's (1977, 1978) otherwise useful genealogy of modern individuality cannot help us understand is the moment when this spacio-temporally locatable development (of modern historical individuality) becomes universal. This occurs I want to suggest at the moment of capital. The reason the category of the citizen-subject, hitherto a provincial form of subjectivity, becomes universal is because it travels the world on the back of capital. Quite logically the universality of modern subjectivity – citizenship that is - is interchangeable with the universality of capital. Hidden from view by modernist discourse of course is the fact that since the era of capital it is the values and outlook of the Occident which have become the values and outlook of the citizen-subject.

The modern subject whose public life is lived in citizenship, notes Chakrabarty (2001) after Habermas (1989) is supposed to have a 'private self' which in fact is a deferred 'public self' because it is 'always already oriented to an audience [Publikum]' (2001: 35). All of this Habermas (1989) makes clear in his path-breaking study; **The Structural**

### **Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society.**

In the book Habermas (1989) establishes beyond contest the fact that the public sphere is not value free. In reality certain values pervade it. Since Habermas [1940](1989) the myth of a value-free public sphere wherein the unfettered reign of reason establishes the norm (reconciles contradictory interests as others are wont to argue) has lost its appeal. Once deconstructed the illusion of a value-free public sphere clears the way for Habermas (1989) to foreground values which are dominant within it. In line with values Habermas (1989) find hegemonic within the public sphere he concludes that it is a bourgeois public sphere. Political theory teaches that citizenship is lived in the public sphere. If Habermas (1989) is correct in his claim that the public sphere, where citizenship is lived, is sutured with bourgeois values, we are a short step from establishing that citizenship is a bourgeois identity. Its normative content is synonymous with bourgeois values. The point this enables us to make is that the content and meaning of citizenship necessarily exceeds legal/statutory provisions.

More than being a mere mechanism of individuation, separating members from non-members of the polity, citizenship is a normative identity, a moral category. Sedimented within it are certain values, expectations, and ethical requirements the subject-as-citizen ought to abide by. Nowhere better than in the, **Social Contract** is the issue of normative values which accompany the induction of man into civic citizenship given extant consideration. Admission into civic citizenship according to Rousseau (1955) entails the transformation of man into a moral person. 'The passage from the state of nature to the civil state' he writes, 'produces a very remarkable change in man...' The significance of this change lies in the moral qualities man ought to exhibit once s/he enters the civil state. Rousseau (1955) continues to detail these qualities thus;

“...by substituting justice for instinct in his conduct, and giving his actions the morality they had formerly lacked. Then only, when the voice of duty takes the place of physical impulses and right of appetite, does man, who so far had considered only himself, find that he is forced to act on different principles, and to consult his reason before listening to his inclinations” (1955: 15-16)

Political theory continues in the present to be concerned with moral qualities of citizens. Introducing a collection of essays titled; **Citizenship in Diverse Societies**, Kymlicka and Norman (2000) report that after a focus in the 70s and 80s on the ‘basic structure’ of society it is now ‘widely accepted that political theorists must also pay attention to the qualities and dispositions of citizens...’(2000: 6). What does it mean then to live as a citizen? What are the moral values and ethical standards citizens ought to live by? Rousseau (1955) has given us part of the answer: justice he says must substitute for instinct; duty for physical impulse and most importantly reason must take priority for guiding human agency in place of inclination. To answer from the present, citizenship prescribes that modern individuals ought to be purposive, rational, governed by a complex of calculable interests, employ secular reason to rationalise their interests, embrace a rational-secular consciousness, privilege the analytical over the lived, in the ultimate subscribe to the post-Enlightenment framework of perceiving the world.

William Galston’s (1991) often cited fourfold portfolio of citizenship virtues exudes the same modernist sensibility. Basically he confirms the bourgeois character of citizenship values. He prescribes the following set of virtues considered by many others (Kymlicka and Norman; 2000) to be core citizenship values; (i) general virtues which is courage, law abidingness (ii) social virtues which entails self-autonomy, open-mindedness (iii) economic virtues encompassing a work ethic, capability to delay self-gratification, adaptability to economic and technological change and (iv) political virtues which is amongst other things willingness to demand only what can be paid for, willingness to engage in public discourse (Galston; 1991: 221-224). Surely this does lend credence to

the claim that to be a citizen is to be modern? In the colonial world (read Africa) however, where the everyday lives of people are attended by the wisdom of traditions, agency of ancestral spirits, supernatural beings, etc., citizenship like nationalism appears on the horizon as both a modernising and normalising discourse.

Evidence abound to support the assertion that embedded within citizenship is a normalising discourse of rational progress and civility. Citizenship the literature suggests has in alliance with modern historical consciousness authored the view that there is only one way in which the world can be known and inhabited (Chakrabarty; 2001, Ekeh; 1972, Bendix; 1964). Together they speak of this modern way of habiting the world as prior to all other modes of being. And so it is that to be a citizen is not just to be modern. Modern citizenship is a way being- in-the-world which must assume primacy over all other modes of being. The modern discourse of rights lends its weights to the claim.

To amplify we re-read that important work by Reinhardt Bendix (1964) titled, **Nation-Building and Citizenship**. In it he distinguishes between functional representation principle and plebiscitarian principle of citizenship. Under the functional representation principle the relationship between the individual and the state is mediated by the group to which s/he belongs. In fact it is his/her membership of the group which assures him/her of citizenship. Contrary to this principle where the citizen is represented by those who lead the group in the plebiscitarian principle an unmediated one-to-one relationship between the citizen and the state is valorised. For Bendix (1964) in order to fully integrate the state with society “all powers intervening between the individual and the state must be destroyed...so that all citizens, as individuals possess equal rights before the sovereign...” (1964: 90-91). This is necessary because in order for the individual to fully enjoy the rights of citizenship, to become a full citizen, there should be

no intermediary between him/her and the state. Underlying this assertion is the ontological assumption that rights of citizenship pertain exclusively to individuals.

The point of contention is not so much the distinction between the two principles of citizenship. It is the individualising impulse of modern citizenship, its legitimation of only individuated trajectories of interaction – expressed above in the will to privilege plebiscitarian over functional representation principle. Add to that the view implicit in Bendix (1964) that individualised citizenship as a mode of habiting the world must take precedence over and/or override all other narratives of the self and community. More emphatically citizenship as a mode of being considers the human as ontologically singular. To establish the inadequacy of state-directed forms of sociality and to prove that citizenship does not exhaust the multiple layers of selfhood, I want to read against this category non-Western modes of being-in-the-world whose logic is incongruous with the reason of the political, that the language of citizenship is unable to represent except to condescendingly label as parochial, traditional, pre-political and/or pre-modern.

Umkhosi womhlanga remains our abiding example. The occasion of Umkhosi womhlanga does well to highlight the tension between modern political forms of life and non-Western modes-of-being particularly those which resist modern disciplinary power, i.e. those which allow the metaphysical and the supernatural a direct hand in the affairs of the world. Does this not mark the limit of Western political categories, citizenship specifically, to represent adequately various layers of sociality which find expression in non-Western practices of worlding the world, lived all at once without contradiction and without the need to establish a hierarchy among them? Chatterjee (1998) raises the same quandary but differently. He agonises over the challenge confronting those who labour to make sense of non-Western life-worlds. In an address delivered apropos as the, 'State of the Discipline Lecture', at the 1997, World Congress

of the International Political Science Association, he compellingly states the challenge thus:

“That is the task which, I think, faces the non-Western political theorist: to find an adequate conceptual language to describe the non-Western career of the modern state not as a distortion or lack, which is what inevitably happens in a modernisation narrative, but as the history of different modernities shaped by practices and institutions that the universalist claims of Western political theory have failed to encompass” (1998: 279)

Exclusion from political imagination of the manifold layers of selfhood by the narrative of citizenship is linked to the inability of the larger discourse of political modernity to talk approvingly of any form of collectivity other than the nation. In a world dominated by political discourse of a modernist kind the nation is the only tolerable form of community. The state being its sole representative - only the state can claim to speak legitimately on behalf of the nation. Membership in this political community that is the nation takes only one form – citizenship. Where citizens do have the privilege of belonging to several other collectivities particularly those that tend for their validation to look away from the political the modern regime of power, together with its enabling discourse of modernity, demands that these ‘collectivities have a fixed, determinate form, and, if there be several to which an individual can belong, that there be priority among them...’(Chatterjee; 1993:222). Every modern political constitution imposes a hierarchy of loyalties.

More recent perspectives on national cohesion however prove that sub-state loyalties need not be submerged or supplanted by an overarching state identity in order for the state to be integrated. Why it becomes crucial once these other forms of sociality are forced onto the grid of political modernity to rank them is a puzzle Western thought is yet to resolve. Notwithstanding, the discourse of citizenship continues to preclude the

possibility of belonging without contradiction to multiple collectivities and activating all at once several of these collective belongings. To claim for instance within the framework of post-Enlightenment thought to be a citizen, a subject of Umkhosi womhlanga, a Zulu believer in ancestral appeasement and intercession, and to be able to activate these identities all at once is undoubtedly to turn oneself into an anthropological oddity. At other times this anthropological oddity has been known through different appellations as the 'Anthropological Man', 'Tribal Man', etc.

More than any other discipline it is social anthropology that has popularised the notion of an anthropological/tribal man. The epithet is a metaphor for the sociological condition of a pre-modern/traditional African. Soon the metaphor would find favour from the late 1950s onwards among area specialists studying the new states of the post-WWII era in Africa. As a tribute to its theoretical inventiveness and explanatory purchase the, **Journal of Asian and African Studies** publishes in the year 1970 a special issue under the theme: "The Passing of Tribal Man". Of concern to most articles in the issue is the question whether Africans for whom tribalism represents a natural state had sufficiently internalised the modern political, economic and social processes to qualify as modern. As the process of societal change triggered by Occidental contact unfolds the African would pass over from being tribal to being modern or so it was thought.

This concern with the inevitable disintegration of traditional structures, given renewed expression by the special issue, is symptomatic of a larger intellectual development which had occurred much earlier within Area Studies. In the late 1950s, owing to the intellectual efforts of members of the Committee on Comparative Politics of the Social Science Research Council in America, emerges out of Area Studies a discourse on citizenship peculiar to the non-European world centred on the distinction between primordial and civic identities. The route to this new discourse of citizenship sees the

careers of the two distinct concepts; nationalism and citizenship collapse into a 'single portfolio term nation-building' (Sathyamurthy; 1983: 4). Practitioners in the field use nation-building and national integration interchangeably (Sklar; 1967, Zolberg; 1967, Weiner; 1965). Within this tradition of scholarship the study of citizenship becomes an inquiry into processes and institutions that would be necessary in order for the modern nation to emerge out of the debris of a disintegrating traditional past (Emerson; 1960, Shils; 1962, Almond and Coleman; 1960, Pye; 1963, Huntington; 1968, Lerner; 1958, Binder; 1964).

Put forth as the baseline requirement by most of these studies on nation-building is the need for the nation, thought of as a civic community, to emerge as the only loci of loyalty and citizenship identity formation. Ekeh (1972) for example characteristically points to the failure to transfer loyalty hence citizenship from local primordial centres to the national civic order as the cause of what he terms the dilemma of nationhood in Nigeria. Referring to the situation he writes; '[T]here was hardly any legal or social process that necessitated the nation to emerge as the symbolic focus of rights and duties (*citizenship*). Primordial centres were at least more important...' (1972: 82 italics added). This conclusion stems of cause from the assumption that as society becomes more modern – supposedly more integrated – primordial identities and centres of loyalty will give way to civic identities and a civic form of politics.

According to the modernisation leaning nation-building scholarship primordial identities are a sign of rudeness, primitivity and lack. These identities are indicative of the low level of development at which non-Western societies exist – 'a more exact phrasing of the nature of the problem involved here is that, considered as societies, the new states are abnormally susceptible to serious disaffection based on primordial attachments' (Geertz; 1975: 259). It is precisely this susceptibility which is taken as a sign of failure of

citizenship in non-Western societies. As an antidote students of nation-building prescribe the entrenchment of civic politics and transcendence of primordial by civic identities. Only then, when primordial sentiments have become muted and civic ties more salient, can citizenship be said to have taken root in the new states. To turn once more to Geertz (1975) only then will the 'integrative revolution' be said to have succeeded.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Toward a De-colonial Turn in South African Studies**

#### **The De-colonial Imperative in the Context of South African Studies**

The extensive body of literature which comprises South African studies spans well over half a century and traverses several disciplines from economics, public administration, sociology, politics, and history to social anthropology. Disciplinary nuances which set these different studies apart, notwithstanding, they largely fit into two broad theoretical orientations: liberal modernist (i.e. O'Dowd; 1978, Horwitz; 1967, Lipton; 1986) and modernist Marxism (i.e. Kaplan; 1980, Wolpe; 1988). Many, of course, do essay views which refuse easy categorisation or are eclectic. All of these studies nonetheless do converge at certain points in their analysis. Virtually all of them write the history of apartheid from the dominant Western rationalist framework of epistemology. They all silence subaltern knowledges and consider the lived experience of the black colonised as being outside science. Once considered unknowable it becomes possible then to treat the black colonised as sub-human. Coloniality of knowledge we now know is what begets colonial difference. In order to instantiate a shift in the writing of apartheid and dismantle the economy of this body of thought the essay turns to the notion of a de-colonial turn theorised by Mignolo (2000), Maldonado-Torres (2007, 2008) and Quijano (2007).

The notion of a de-colonial turn connotes a shift in the locus of knowledge production. It is a theoretical attitude which instead of privileging the subject-centred Western rationality legitimates other non-European geo-cultural locations and marginal subjectivities as places of enunciation, as spaces of thinking. According to Maldonado-Torres (2007) a leading theoretician of the idea, the de-colonial turn, 'is about making visible the invisible and about analyzing the mechanisms that produce such invisibility or

distorted visibility...’ (2007: 262). As deployed in this essay or in the context of South African studies it enables us pose the following question: what does apartheid look like when thought through and theorised from the positionality of those considered non-people? The present essay is precisely an attempt to destabilise the accepted view of apartheid within South African studies by rendering visible and audible the views of the black colonised. The chapter is basically made up of one main section following this introduction. In it we read critically the institutionalised body of thought called South African Studies from the perspective of coloniality. The concept of coloniality as used here refers to ‘long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labour, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production...’ (Maldonado-Torres; 2007: 243). These patterns continue to endure long after formal colonial rule ended

In prosecuting the task at hand the essay proceeds guided by the following epistemological imperatives: The first imperative is to highlight the interpretive transformation which occurs when coloniality is employed as the theoretical handle with which to disentangle the nature of social, economic, historical and everyday relations in South Africa. The second imperative is to expand the economy of power in the social scientific analysis of colonial South Africa by going beyond the state and state centred processes. Here we ask how apartheid worked at the level of lived reality and ongoing everyday subjugation. To respond we have then to direct the discovery of colonial reality via those who had lived it directly and thought it with the least possible deformation. The goal is to create space for the possibility of thinking anew the history of apartheid in a manner reflective of the anguish of the colonised. Perhaps we should think of this as a call for phenomenological studies of apartheid whose focus is the existential manifestation of coloniality.

The third imperative is to work against the grain by seeking not the admission into social scientific analysis viewpoints considered representative of the previously excluded black colonised. This is out of recognition that we may change the objects of research within South African studies but in that case what will remain unchanged is the inherited view of consciousness. The aim is not to apply already existing social scientific categories and methods on the black colonial archive in order then to add the results to the existing body of knowledge. Rather the intent is to turn South African studies into an object of critique so we can unravel first its rules and structure of signification; secondly examine critically the very process through which the power to determine who within it has the authority to select the domain of objects which should constitute its subject matter is apportioned.

The fourth imperative is to premise our reading of South African studies on a refusal of assent to a coterie of assumptions, premises and abstract categories sedimented within the field. In essence this essay reads South African studies out of joint with itself, in a manner that destabilises or distorts its own rules of signification, systems of validation and valuation. Rather than lend veracity to its assumptions the essay subjects them to an unsympathetic critique in order to establish whether their claim to validity is epistemological or simply reflective of the power of its purveyors to make us think about our reality through questions thrown up by their own dilemmas. Therefore the path we propose to follow does not lead to a counter-discourse or immanent critique of South African studies which leaves the underlying structure of meaning making intact. It must lead to its exterior.

The essay ends in the last section by referring briefly to post-statist perspectives of colonialism.

### **Reading South African Studies from the Position of Coloniality**

For those whose bodies presumably carry all the marks of inferiority South African studies disconcert. And it does so in many ways. To exceptionalise the South African colonial experience and normalise its representation as if it bore no semblance with processes in the rest of other African colonies lists amongst its major achievements. Related to the above is the cultivated indifference of South African studies to African studies. Drawn to the present this inculcated indifference manifests in the manner in which South African studies remains oblivious to the need to rethink and renew its theoretical and conceptual categories in order to enable the return of the South African colonial experience and politics generally to the broader canvas of African colonialism and African Studies. Hardly does one for instance encounter within South African studies works that seek to compare South Africa with countries to the north of Limpopo river (except of course when examples of corruption, conflict, or democratic failure come tumbling from the north to illustrate, one gets a sense, where postcolonial South Africa is necessarily headed – this I refer to as adverse inclusion). South Africa being a latecomer to the comity of independent African states has as a consequence not benefited from comparative insights to be gained from such works. Worse still African studies and Africa focused pedagogy generally are yet to make their way into the curriculum of most universities within the mainstream academy.

An example will help render the argument more transparent. To make sense of 1994, the year of independence, social scientific analysis in South Africa turns away from comparative cases of decolonisation. In fact where it does not out-rightly dispute the possibility of such comparison it holds the basis for such comparison contemptible. Instead it reads South African independence as locatable within Huntington's (1991) 'Third Wave'. The view permeates several works in what we have come to know as the

South African democratisation literature, but it is Glaser (2001) who must take credit for stating it with limpidity. According to him;

“[W]hat was noteworthy about South Africa, relative to Europe’s African colonies, was that the dismantling of the old order was largely internally initiated and steered. This reflected in part the difference that South Africa had already decolonised long before handing power to the indigenous majority...The enfranchisement of the South African black majority had more in common with the extension of the vote to the middle and working classes in Britain than to processes of decolonisation...In these latter respects if not in terms of timescale, South Africa’s political change paralleled developments unfolding more or less simultaneously in the Soviet Union and East-Central Europe” (2001: 201).

To avoid confusion the indigenous black majority referred to above was deprived not just the right to vote, right to self-determination but more fundamentally the right to being. They were non-human. The white colonial state related to them as colonial subjects, that is, as non-beings. In the collective white colonial unconscious they were less than human (Hudson; 2012). It was correct to colonise them, that is to exploit and subjugate them, because colonial domination represented a moment of learning for them – it taught them amongst other things the dignity of labour. Attending to the refusal to compare South Africa’s decolonisation to that of other African colonies are a number of signifying practices. One is the silencing of the views and voices of the colonised black majority. Secondly, the displacement out of the schema of representation of the existential reality or lived experience of the colonised black majority within South African social scientific analysis. For instance what did the colonised majority both in the practical and discursive conduct of the struggle consider itself to be struggling for? Another question not asked in South African studies is what in

the imaginary conscious of the black colonised does 1994 signify?<sup>16</sup> The African National Congress's March 1987, discussion document titled, *Apartheid South Africa: Colonialism of a Special Type*, can be no good measure. It does nonetheless give us an idea. In the document the African National Congress (ANC) is unequivocal in its declaration that the South African struggle is an anti-colonialist national liberation struggle centred on the demand for national self-determination/national sovereignty.

Accounts which bill the overly economistic focus of South African studies for the tendency to exceptionalise the South African colonial experience are correct (Mamdani; 1996). However they fall short. Exclusive focus on the mechanics of the market, the need for constant supply of cheap labour for example to the total exclusion of the lived experience of the colonised black majority is itself symptomatic of a larger malaise within South African studies. Therefore when Mamdani (1996) charges South African studies for exceptionalising the country's colonial experience he is correct. But there is something more fundamental that needs to be exposed, challenged and denounced.

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<sup>16</sup> To what extent is the conceptualisation of South Africa's decolonisation process as democratisation explained by the need within the minority white settler community displaced from power to fashion a discourse that would expunge from discursive view the example of other decolonisation processes and hence exclude from the field of possibilities the range of radical changes considered a *sine qua non* for independence is a question deserving of critical scholarly attention. Discourses we know create reality. No empirical world/reality exists outside of discourse. The point becomes even more pertinent when considered against what Foucault (1970) calls the discursive rules of a discourse. It is precisely these discursive rules or practices which are responsible for authorising what is considered to be a legitimate perspective and fixing the bounds of the acceptable, or the norm such that to think and act outside of them is to be beyond reason. Discursive rules therefore are intricately linked to the exercise of power, they see to the reproduction of the social system through forms of selection, exclusion and domination. In a different but related sense Mamdani (1998) has exposed the deployment of discourses in moments of political contestation. In his inaugural lecture titled, 'When does a Settler become a Native?' delivered at the University of Cape Town, Mamdani (1998) records how in Uganda and South Africa during constitutional review processes the affluent sections of the historically dominant groups construct a discourse around the regime of individual property rights in order to defend/preserve privilege. More recently a similar point has been made by Howarth and Stavrakakis (2000) who convince us that discourses are always implicated in the in the exercise of power 'as their constitution involves the exclusion of certain possibilities and a consequent structuring of the relations between different social agents' (2000: 4). What all of the above points us to is the simple but fundamental fact that discourses constrain the identification of possibilities, they apply closure on a range possibilities. It is my argument, rehearsed for emphasis, that the characterisation of the moment of independence in South Africa in 1994 mainly by the white scholarly community as a democratic transition achieves the intended goal of setting 1994 apart from what 1960 represent in the history of the continent.

The extreme level of abstraction at which South African studies function, masks its moral depravity and the complicity of that body of thought in the dehumanisation of the black colonised. Safely nestled behind abstract categories is troubling moral indifference to the existential reality of the colonised black majority. To examine the experience of subordination as well as unmask colonial conditions of existence we have learnt requires an existential phenomenological approach (Fanon; 1952, Memmi; 1965, Manganyi; 1973, Maldonado-Torres; 2007). Phenomenological studies of colonialism sum the existential condition of the colonised variously as that of, ontological nullity, denial of co-humanness, ontological difference and/or alterity (Maldonado-Torres; 2008, Quijano; 2007, Fanon; 1952). What all this mean is that the black colonised exists as less than human, as entities to whom moral considerations and norms of human difference do not apply. The injunction was offered us more than a century ago by Hegel.

In 1985, Merle Lipton publishes a book titled, **Capitalism and Apartheid: South Africa, 1910 – 84**, which went on to become a key text within South African studies. In the book we read a spirited attempt to absolve commercial capital, a code term for English liberals, of any ideological and political investment in apartheid. Its major contention shared by several other liberal scholars is that apartheid was antithetical to the rational logic and interests of the market, industrial and commercial capital particularly. In fact these scholars were convinced that the dynamising power of the market will eventually prevail over the backward apartheid state. Irrationality of apartheid and rationality of the market established, Lipton (1985) thinks herself adequately grounded to defend capital for its failure to openly and more assertively oppose colonialism. This is the defence entered for the indifference of English capital towards apartheid;

[T]he argument that failure to stop the Nationalists from implementing apartheid labour policies demonstrates that manufacturing must have wanted these policies, is based on a mistaken assessment of both the interests and power of manufacturing capital, and an over-simple view of how politics works. It overlooks the importance of fear...and the effects of failure in demoralising and discouraging people from trying to achieve what they want; and conversely, the importance of success in persuading them to acquiesce in policies they do not like (1985: 300).

It certainly would be beneficial to detail at length these labour policies and their implications for the black colonised: who could not withdraw their labour without criminalising themselves; had to earn an uncivilised wage because their humanity was in doubt; who once unable to minister to the labour and sexual needs of capital were repatriated out of the core areas of the economy. This is what capital agreed to for the sake of success – profit perhaps. It may have as Lipton (1985) argues been prudent for capital to avoid demoralisation. What unsettles the mind though are the modernist sensibilities that permit in the face of dehumanising black colonial experience for pragmatism and expediency to trump ethical concerns. Perhaps we are here subtly being impelled to heed the lesson in the Melian dialogue that in politics morality and justice are for the weak to ponder.

In a historical study of slavery in South Africa named, **Children of Bondage: A Social History of the Slave Society at the Cape of Good Hope, 1652 - 1838**, Shell (1994) tells us of a possibility of retaining moral anxiety as one writes about despicable historical occurrences, in his case slavery in the Cape. His study offers valuable lessons to practitioners within the field of South African Studies about the place of subjective, moral and ethical considerations in the modern sciences of man. But I want to read something else from this work. Earlier we spoke of a dehumanising existential condition we claimed was the reality of the black colonised. Lipton (1985) defends capital's supposedly strategic indifference to it. In the quotation below Shell (1994) summarises

the black existential condition for us or what in the long term view apartheid meant for blacks – social death – he says borrowing the term from Orlando Patterson’s (1982) study, **Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study**. We read patiently as Shell (1994) enlightens us on the existential condition of the black colonise in South Africa;

“My interpretations are fashioned, in part, by having lived in South Africa for the first twenty-five years of the apartheid era. As an undergraduate I was struck by the similarities between the system of apartheid and the slave society of the past. The interpretation was denied by historians, including revisionists, but I am not sure that my early intuition was wrong after all. There are compelling legal and demographic similarities. Violence and coercion undergirded both systems. Cape slaves and twentieth-century black South African workers were both denied a broad and suspiciously similar range of basic human rights. They could not move freely. They could not own land. Under both apartheid and slavery, workers were carefully selected by age and sex and were bought in from outside the core area of the economy. Both groups were natively alienated, that is, their condition at birth limited their future rights, neither could have an independent family life. The systematic natal alienation of black men and the informal incorporation of black women in the white domestic arena are profoundly similar in both societies...Both slaves and modern workers in South Africa were, in Orlando Patterson’s striking phrase “socially dead”” (1994: xix – xx).

Contention about the antipathy between apartheid and English liberal values is bound up with yet another debate within South African studies - the origins of legally institutionalised racism in twentieth century South Africa. Even as we inquire into this debate it will help to remain conscious that nowhere is colonialism not a racial project. The dispute nonetheless is whether the late colonial state and its pronounced racial order are a progeny of the Dutch-Afrikaner frontier or are symptomatic of European colonial rule generally. The divide in this debate sees English liberal scholars off-load English colonial and moral deformities on to the picture of backward Afrikaans speaking farmers in the interior far removed from the ideals of European Enlightenment. Racial relations that would become the key defining feature of the late colonial state, goes the

argument, are first forged in the interior as Afrikaners moving away from the Cape in protest of liberal English values, encounter natives, who without the English fetters they racially dominate and enslave at will. Pitted on the opposing side are radical scholars who refuse the English the benefit of walking erect and immaculate, free from their colonial deformities by returning the gaze to English colonial institutions, i.e. missionaries, merchant capital, etc, establishing their complicity in adumbrating elements of the apartheid racial order.

What is presented above is surely a caricature of an undoubtedly more nuanced debate. Its subtlety, notwithstanding, apartheid in South African studies is generally held to be an Afrikaner nationalist project, undergirded by exclusive sectional interests, desires and motivations of a parochial people. The dominance of the view that the late colonial state (apartheid) is essentially an Afrikaner project enables English liberals thin out affinal ties between the English and colonial racial oppression in South Africa. Without explicitly stating it many other studies proceed in their analysis as though the Afrikaner credentials of apartheid are a given (see for example Posel; 1987). For the colonised black majority the debate obfuscates, it is far removed from their experiential reality. We do not have phenomenological descriptions of the experience of being colonial which suggest that English spaces, i.e. English domestic homes and English dominated sectors of the economy, were places of racial equality where the black colonised regained the integrity of their humanity to lose it again once they strayed into the Afrikaner world.

My interest really is what phenomenological representations of apartheid as experienced by the colonised black majority would reveal. Only such phenomenological studies will help enlighten us on what it is like to be a black colonial subject in South Africa. What we do know though is that the English language itself serves as an

important colonial instrument, the master code in the colonial epistemic violence. Through it natives are coaxed into cultural alienation. As de Kock puts it, 'it was the ultimate fount of civilised life from which lowly 'Kafirs' were benignly invited to drink' (1996: 3). The politics of English as an instrument of cultural Europeanisation is what I think we are invited to think through. If Anglicisation of the black colonised is a cultural policy, a policy of cultural imperialism then de Kock's (1996) illuminating study, **Civilising Barbarians: Missionary Narrative and African Textual Response in Nineteenth-Century South Africa**, deserves to be read for it reveals how colonial missionaries aided by English language work to colonise consciousness. Once colonial semiotics have been deconstructed we may then following de Kock (1996) '...disabuse many English-speaking South Africans of their liberal innocence' (1996: 4).

Interestingly, the view that apartheid was a peculiarly Afrikaner phenomenon extends its reach to the colonised black majority. For many black colonised who internalised (and many of us did) the view, the Afrikaner persona proved to be an adequate explanation for violent racial domination. In his autobiography, **Freedom for my People**, which the anthropologist Monica Wilson edited and added a memoir to, Z. K. Matthews (1981), reports that there was in their world orders of knowledge (this is how he calls them) about the makgoa meaning in Tswana 'the light skinned'. Owing to the explanatory purchase of one such order of knowledge they in their symbolic world drew a distinction between the makgoa who were maburu (the Boer) and those who were manyesemane (the English). In this distinction the liburu is a really cruel man, the lenyesemane a kinder white man. As years wore on this symbolic world did encounter the real as meaning failed or reached its limit. Matthews (1981) for instance realises with time that the much despised, Superintendent Bird, who wielded force and terror in the location with his early morning pass raids was an Englishman. At first they were in

his community inclined to repress this fact thus restore meaning to their symbolic world by saying he was a lenyese mane acting like a liburu.

For a time the symbolic held but the real of course Lacan tells us is that which always comes back to the same place, it is the limit of all symbolisation. So the symbolic would soon encounter yet again the real. Meaning indeed gradually reached its limit as in 1884 when Major Warren and his troops came under orders from Cecil Rhodes. Their legacy is the institution of lekgetho (taxation) which drove people against their will to enlist themselves as slave labour. So fundamental is the change wreaked along by this institution that it came to mark a new sociological time. From that moment onwards time was measured by the terms 'before lekgetho' and 'after lekgetho' (Matthews; 1981: 5). It was not lost to the colonised natives that Major Warren and his overlord Cecil John Rhodes were manyesemane. What seem finally to eviscerate the distinction between the righteous manyesemane and the callous maburu is Matthews' (1981) father's working conditions in the mines of the manyesemane in Kimberly. In his recollection of his father's working conditions we see the real finally puncture the symbolic. He writes;

"...my father, at the time I was born, was serving a term in a Kimberly mine, which meant that he remained within the compound for at least six months, never emerging until his term was over. Once a month he could come to the gate to see relatives, but at a distance across a fence, as in a prison" (1981: 7-8).

The compound that swallowed Z.K. Matthews' father was a precursor to the latter day mine hostels. The law that forbade his father from emerging from the compound for six months resurfaced under different apartheid migrant labour regulations. The law that meant his father had to live a wife-less life for six months had its second coming under apartheid. The institution of lekgetho would again with the same exactitude drive

people under apartheid into poverty and destitution thereby becoming available as cheap labour. And the pass laws Superintendent Bird enforced with such rapacity returned with the same torment under apartheid. By the time these and other apartheid racial laws are enforced by the Afrikaner nationalists the question whether they were of English origin or were traceable to the Afrikaner frontier had for the black colonised become superfluous. They had seen and lived under these racialising laws under the manyesemane who in their new symbolic world were no longer different from maburu. But the intellectual agenda of South African studies has never been informed by the concerns and sensibilities of the colonised black majority.

South African studies, essentially, is white colonial South Africa perceived through the white racial optic. Maybe we should clarify this further. We do know that it is well possible to perceive and write the history of the same historical events and the same historical transformations from either the perspective of protest or from inside the interstices of privilege, domination and power. Products of such distinct endeavours: one written from the standpoint of power and the other from the position of protest, while referring to the same society and developments will not consist of the same elements. Their underlining values will similarly be different.

Anyone with pedestrian understanding of the history of the eastern frontier will undoubtedly encounter the haggling over the origins of apartheid racial order as rather banal. On the balance of historical evidence the tendency in the literature to portray apartheid as an exclusively Afrikaner invention cannot be sustained. Many of the apartheid racial policies were first conceived and systematically applied in the eastern frontier. Therefore when President P.W. Botha in an interview with the former South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) journalist Cliff Saunders cedes to the English the intellectual property rights for apartheid policies he was not equivocating.

Determined to pin responsibility for apartheid on the Afrikaner nationalist mast, Saunders probes President Botha why black people were forced to eat in separate restaurants, subjected to job reservation and denied the vote. President Botha with a measure of correctness claims that it was not the National Party (NP) which first conceived petty apartheid: '[T]hat very policy started in Lord Milner's time and in the time of the British governors of the Eastern Province and Natal. So it's a very, very old policy that existed. We didn't invite [initiate] it' (excerpts from the interview were published in the Sunday Times of March 19, 2006). It certainly was an opportune moment for President P.W. Botha to correct the public record, in the process, re-apportion some of the scorn shouldered for decades exclusively by Afrikaners for despicable apartheid policies. And he did. But he erred in one respect. The English ancestry of the apartheid racial order antedates Lord Milner by several decades. For evidence let us turn to the late history of the eastern frontier.

And we begin from Sir Harry Smith who was no ordinary English colonial administrator *cum* warlord. His exceptional service to the Empire including exploits in India earned him knighthood and not least an honorary doctorate from the esteemed Cambridge University. Surely such accolades are reserved only for those who best exemplify the values of Empire. When the Colonial Office appoints him to the Cape it is partly on account of his demonstrated ability to advance the interests of the Empire. Uppermost in his responsibilities when he assumes Governorship of the Cape in December 1847 is to reverse the defeats suffered by the British in the frontier in the course of Impi ye Zembe (War of the Axe). In that regard he did not fail the Empire. For those at the receiving end of his policies however the story has to be different. History records that the Governorship of Sir Harry Smith is remembered for what in the literature is referred to as scorched earth policy or tactics.

AmaXhosa had devised a war tactic of decamping from their villages into the nearby forests and mountain bushes and then ambushing British soldiers en route out of the village. In less obscure terms than what the scorched earth policy highly favoured under Sir Harry Smith and his successor Sir George Cathcart means is that British troops adopted as their own counter tactic slashing and burning the maize and sorghum fields, confiscating and killing the livestock belonging to the indigenous population and more deplorably killing indiscriminately the womenfolk found working in the fields. All of these were aimed at systematically pushing the indigenous black population into mass starvation, ultimately mass death.

Moreover the two esteemed representatives of the British Empire, Sir Harry Smith and Sir George Cathcart, sanctioned the abhorrent habit among British soldiers of beheading colonial natives so that their heads may be shipped up River Thames back to Britain as souvenirs. But we should not allow sentiment to overwhelm reason. In that way we shall recognise that this absurdity was a generalised feature of British colonial rule and deeply ingrained in the British colonial conscious. We find evidence of it throughout the British colonies. To prove that indeed this was not a marginal tendency of some misanthropic lowly ranked colonial officials in the far off eastern frontier of South Africa lets follow briefly Kitchener and Major Gordon's exploits in Sudan. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of September 1890, Kitchener still savouring the British defeat of the Mahdiyya at Omdurman, he orders that the body of the Mahdi (the leader of the Mahdiyya movement) be exhumed and thrown into the Nile River. Major W.S. Gordon who supervises the mission having decapitated the body decides to offer as a present to Kitchener the Mahdi's skull so the victorious general may "mount it on a stand and use it as an inkpot" (Neillands; 1996: 215-216). The act does not offend but delights Kitchener's enlightened British sensibilities. When this happens we must recall the year is 1890, only a decade away from the twentieth century. Kitchener's distinction in the

colonial service upholding British values earned him knighthood. Both Kitchener and Major Gordon were senior representatives of the British Empire and its Enlightenment values.

The natives remember Sir Harry Smith in addition for his obsession with cementing symbolically his/British lordship over them. To accomplish that supposedly noble goal, he employed several measures. One being his (in-)famous declaration - 'I am your Paramount Chief and the Kaffirs are my dogs' – pre-empting by almost a century the 1927 Native Administrative Act. A corollary is his habit of organising a mass spectacle where amaXhosa kings and ordinary folks alike are coerced to lick his boots and shout 'Inkosi Inkulu' – the Great Chief (Peires; 1989, Malherbe; 1971, [www.sahistory.org.za](http://www.sahistory.org.za)). What I want to redeem from these acts is not their brutality. In fact my interest is less in the acts themselves, inhuman and despicable as they are. What authorised them or made all of these possible, is what holds our attention captive. Simply what were the ideas within English colonial thought which rendered natives fit for such treatment and what was the life of these ideas, post the Union in 1910?

To further blur the line between the English and Afrikaner frontier in terms of racial attitudes, let us consider the enslavement of natives in the Cape colony as late as the 1860's in the aftermath of Isihelegu sika Nongqawuse (the cattle killing) of 1856-57. Sir George Grey – the supposed benefactor of the natives - is Governor at the time. Isihelegu sika Nongqawuse of 1856-57 had devastatingly robbed amaXhosa of their means of livelihood. So desperate is their condition that one on all considerations would expect it to invoke compassion and piety in any human sensibility. For Governor Grey the representative of British sensibilities and government this situation is however no

moment for the human spirit to triumph.<sup>17</sup> Rather than accord the starving human population humanitarian assistance he sees their desperation as an opportunity to satiate the labour needs of the Colony. Showing fellowship with those who considered any possible humanitarian assistance as a short step towards encouraging native idleness, Governor Grey, introduces to the Cape parliament a number of laws all meant to make the already dying natives even more vulnerable. The Kaffir Pass Act, prohibited amaXhosa from seeking on their own employment opportunities in the Colony. This they had to do via independent agents who basically were slave traders located back in British Kaffraria. Under apartheid it was not independent agents but labour bureaus which served the same purpose – procured rural migrant labour on behalf of capital. Another law was the Kaffir Employment Act which provided for the registration of contract between the employer and amaXhosa. At expiry of the contract any isiXhosa speaking person had fourteen (14) days to find a new contract or leave the Colony. So

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<sup>17</sup> It will be beneficial to make explicit the condition of ama Xhosa in the aftermath of Isihelegu sika Nongqawuse. Jeff Peires (1989) the historian of Isihelegu sika Nongqawuse provides the most graphic description of the situation of a dying people forced to submit to colonial slave labour. Here is how he describes the situation: “[A]s early as November 1856, there were several homesteads which were completely dependent on what they could gather from the veld. By April 1857, large numbers of people – the whole population of kraals - [could] be seen in the open country, digging for roots...Parents snatched the bread their children had begged, and deserted children they could no longer feed. Mothers whose breasts had long dried up were forced to choose between their children, usually taking the food from those liable to die and giving it to the older and stronger children who might still conceivably survive. On other occasions whole families sat down to die as one, and for years afterwards pathetic little clusters of skeletons might be found under the shadow of a single tree, the parents and their children dead together... Dying wives watched helplessly while the family dogs ate corpses of their husbands... Other believers perished by fire when the grass dwellings in which they had been abandoned caught alight. Some had dug such great pits to ensure a massive bounty of the new corn that when they got down into them to see if any corn had appeared, they were unable to get up again and died just so. In other cases, the empty pits were used as graves for the mass burial of the dead. But most bodies were left unburied in the places where death had overtaken them, there to be picked at by vultures and gnawed at by dogs. Death was not always the result of starvation, pure and simple...The efforts of the hungry to eat strange roots and berries in the absence of more usual foods often resulted in dysentery or diarrhea, and the starving often died helplessly immobilized in pools of their own vomit and faeces”. Of those who survived this is how colonial records cited by Peires (1989) describe their condition; “[T]hose who survived were so emaciated that they resembled ‘apes rather than human beings’ while the children looked more like monkeys or bats. Many had lost their voices, and could make only indistinct sounds in their throats like the chirping of birds. Mentally and emotionally, they seemed ‘stupid from want and indifferent as to their fate’, moving more by instinct than by conscious will” (1989:262-266). It is precisely in these grim conditions that Governor Grey saw an opportune moment to enlist ama Xhosa as labourers in the colonial economy. As to how a human being could fail to be moved into empathy by such destitution of fellow beings is a question that cannot be fully attended to within this thesis.

the much hated apartheid pass laws do have a longer English history. For the Colonial Fingoes who were legitimate residents of the Colony they had to carry so-called 'certificates of citizenship' in order that they might not be mistaken for wandering Kaffirs (Peires; 1989: 271). These were Section 10 permit holders under apartheid. The commonalities between many of these and apartheid laws is too glaring to warrant any further amplification.

What does deserve foregrounding is the fact that all these laws made slavery a reality yet again in the Cape Colony as late as the 1860s. Governor Sir George Grey and British enlightenment sensibilities alike were not moved. The demand for cheap labour in the Cape Colony sees independent agents, slave traders basically, set up dealerships which collected starving amaXhosa from their homes and selling them to farmers for between 1 and 5 pounds a head. Peires (1989) reports that James Hart, Jr. the most successful of the independent traders on one occasion left the following order with Commissioner Maclean stationed in King Williamstown;

"I require as many as can be procured without limit to number – all of them in the first plan to be registered to me. One thing is much required and that is some thirty (30) young boys and girls for the residents in the town of Graff Reinet...I should be glad to get the boys and girls separately registered to avoid further disputes; I mean separate from their parents" (quoted in Peires; 1989: 272)

Hart, Jr.s' slave trading activities earned Governor Grey's tacit approval because 'they tended to disperse the Xhosa in the interior of the Colony' (cited in Peires; 1989: 272). If enslavement of the black colonised continued in the interior where the Boers escaping from British civilised rule had settled it did in the same measure continue to be the norm in the British eastern frontier evidence suggest. I will let it be decided by others whether the claim that apartheid is essentially of Afrikaner ancestry survives scrutiny.

Moral indifference to the indignity of colonised black life within South African studies has never been a marginal tendency. So prevalent has it been such that it today goes unnoticed. Where these studies do not adopt an attitude of benign neglect, or fashion a discourse which *ab initio* precludes from consideration the existential reality of the colonised they simply edit out of their schema of representation perspectives, concerns and experiences of colonised blacks. Basically nothing in South African studies mirrors the existential reality of the black colonised. South African studies, essentially is colonialism theorised, critiqued and represented from within itself. Its major *coup de grace* as it were is to render the obscene normal. It will help to illustrate.

Near consensus exists within South African studies that colonial South Africa post 1910, was a democracy. Liberal modernists and modernist Marxists alike acquiesce to the view. As such the colonial South African state has been variously described as a racially exclusive bourgeois democracy (Kaplan; 1980), racialised democracy, Herrenvolk democracy (for a near exhaustive review of these different theorisations see, Glaser; 2001), or simply an unqualified democracy (Butler; 1998). Unmistakable within this literature is the conviction with which different scholars extol the noble democratic virtues of the colonial South African state – alas colonialism could be democratic. In the second chapter of the book, **Rethinking the Rise and Fall of Apartheid**, Guelke examines the contending claims as to whether South Africa prior to 1994 is a totalitarian or colonial state. In the course of the assessment, Guelke finds the democratic content of the colonial state impressive enough to declare that; '[T]he enormous latitude the Westminster model accorded to the executive meant that the most far-reaching restrictions on the lives of the population could be imposed by fully constitutional means' (Guelke; 2005: 23). Colonial rule in South Africa was constitutional, if Guelke (2005) be believed. But he is no exception. He speaks from within a long established tradition of thought in South African studies.

Glaser's (2001) book **Politics and Society in South Africa** is an invaluable compass with which to navigate the expansive terrain of South African studies. The volume of literature it reviews is breath-taking. In part because its views proceed from an extent review of literature its conclusions reflect virtually all the existing viewpoints on key themes within South African studies. After surveying various perspectives of the South African state from 1910-1989, Glaser (2001), referencing Wolpe (1988), a modernist Marxist, finds the democratic repertoire of the colonial South African state laudable enough to write approvingly in his assessment that;

“[I]n power after 1948 nationalists preserved white parliamentary democracy and a quasi-independent judiciary...Though parliamentary control of the executive, never impressive, weakened over time, this was attributable (in part) to the longevity of Nationalist electoral dominance..., and was anyway not dramatically out of line with trends in many other liberal democracies...Even if this was a ‘Herrenvolk’ democracy, its field of operation could not be entirely contained within white society. Blacks found sympathetic voices in parliament, the press and white pressure groups. They in principle enjoyed the protection of the law and a range of political and civil liberties that, though periodically subject to massive attack, offered spaces for black protest” (2001: 86-87).

What Glaser (2001) however omits to tell us is that all of this took place within the context of illiberal domination, colonialism that is. Be that as it may protest, indeed blacks did. What is difficult to concede though is the extent to which the purported law, range of political and civil liberties did provide them with protection even in principle. Where these obtained, i.e. civil liberties, spaces of protests, they were an exception which proved the rule – of absolute colonial repression. It would seem from the legion of oppressive laws passed from 1949 onwards that as the black colonised created for themselves spaces of protests the law always effectively responded by shutting them close.

Available historical evidence suggests that between 1949 and 1961, when the legal framework of apartheid is laid out, it is the law itself which leads the bludgeon against the black colonised. This it does in part by improving the techniques of social and political management to an extent that by the close of the decade being black on its own is near enough to secure one's conviction. It is in this decade that the law literally closes all avenues or spaces for black protest. It is in this decade that the law criminalises black political organisations – strips blacks of the right of association. It is in this decade that the law literally exiles indigenous Africans or renders them foreign in their own land with the passage of the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act of 1959, given further impetus by the provisions of the Bantu Homelands Citizenship Act of 1970. The law declared every black person a citizen of the homeland area to which he/she was associated by birth, domicile, or cultural affiliation, irrespective of whether the territorial area in question was known to him/her. For the first time in their adult years millions of black South Africans found themselves forcibly moved to places they were not even remotely acquainted with.

The law was silent on the 21<sup>st</sup> of March 1960, when the colonial police shot and killed 61 colonised blacks in what is known as the Sharpeville massacre. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of June 1976 in Soweto, when the guns of the colonial police brutally cut short the lives of hundreds of fleeing unarmed black children at their tender age the law fell silent. The law was yet again silent when the colonial police detained Bantu Biko, kept him naked in his cell and subjected him to a twenty two hour long interrogation. Already tortured, severely beaten and his brain fatally damaged his supposed civil liberties did not deter the colonial police from driving him in that state, naked at the back of a police van from Port Elizabeth to Pretoria. The law could not even in principle protect him as the inquest into Bantu Biko's death found no one responsible. So was the condition of the colonised black majority under the 'Herrenvolk' democracy. So out of joint is South African studies

with the lived historical experience of the black colonised that one cannot help but in a typical Benjaminian (1968) foreboding recall that “[T]o articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it the way it really was” (1968: 255).

Theories and perspective which characterise the South African state prior to 1994, as a white democracy are naive. But, and this is crucial, it is self-serving naivety whose traction is to enable these studies remain blind to the ontology of colonialism as an inter-subjective space where black and white subjects mutually constitute each other. Simply, these studies distort deliberately the nature of relations between white colonisers and colonised Africans. One need not be a structuralist to understand that any social formation or society is constituted by different elements which stand in a relation of interdependence. None of these elements is able on its own to give meaning to itself. For each to gain meaning it first must be inserted into a series of other elements that confer to it and to which it confers meaning. Existence of democracy therefore among white, self-determining subjects explains and is explained by its absence among black colonised subjects. Thus to make their point those who theorise apartheid South Africa as a democracy of whatever form abstract white socio-political reality out of the totality of the colonial situation, implying, erroneously that it could be made sense off in isolation from black socio-political reality.

White democracy to make sense must first be returned to its differential relation with black colonial domination. In a sense the presence of democracy within the minority white colonial society can only be explained by/through its absence among colonised black South Africans. Since the advent of psychoanalysis we know that the constitution of the other is at once the constitution of the self. The reality which prevails in the colonial situation is such that the world of the white coloniser is overdetermined by that of the black colonised. However of these two worlds which overdetermine each other

one, the white world, signifies the fullness of identity. It is the locus of the subject that is the cause of itself, self-determining subject inclined to mastery over itself. The black world on the other hand is empty, it signifies lack. It is a world or category of negation without any essence, or autonomy. To comprehend themselves those who inhabit the black world must turn to the white world. What does a black man want asks Fanon (1952) repeatedly and the answer again and again he discovers; 'to be white'.

It may have been in 1963 when Modisane (1963) first makes the point but its poise in present day South Africa is not diminished. Describing the South African society, he writes; '[T]he public image of South Africa is white, and white is the standard of civilisation; what is not white is black,...and the African searching for acceptance surrounds himself with the symbol and the values of white civilisation' (1963:59). Since the post-structuralist turn we now know that the constitution of the other is at once the constitution of the self. However from the vantage of the collective white colonial (un)conscious meaning continues to flow uninterrupted without concern or regard for the black colonised. When put under the lens of colonial thought the white world emerges as self-contained, as possessed of an essence - it gives meaning to itself outside of the black world. For this reason alone it becomes possible to characterise colonial South Africa as a democracy to the utter disregard for the reality of the colonised black majority. It is not an idle question to ask whether white modernist sensibilities which underlie South African studies would today countenance a democratic South Africa which excludes the European minority, even if it includes the non-European black majority.

When measuring the democratic credentials of any society democratic theory places a premium on the qualities and attitudes of citizens. A rather unique feature of the discourse on the South African colonial state is the democratic norm and/or ethic which

informs the notion of democracy as it emerges within these studies. The discourse of democracy especially among liberal democrats is more often couched in a moral rhetoric claiming for democracy moral superiority. It is a claim borne out by a long philosophical tradition. Kantian liberalism to which modern liberals are heirs, we shall do well to recall, gives to modern thought the notion of a transcendental subject which is ontologically prior, to which rights inhere naturally. It is partly for the same reason that we now consider rights inviolable, non-derivable and a moral possession. Clearly, within South African studies the ontological priority and inviolability of the rights of white South Africans does not prefigure the ontological priority and inviolability of the rights of the black majority. What renders this duality possible? To decry racism will not advance thought.

In this regard South African studies betray its affinity with modernist European thought. It is post-Enlightenment European thought, we must recall, which through a modernist discourse of progress marks certain categories of people or populations both for cultural and biological reasons as destined for infra-human existence. Didn't J. S. Mill writing in 1859, in his famous essay, *Considerations on Representative Government*, declare non-European societies which are culturally and racially different not to be in a sufficiently advanced state to be fitted for representative government? In fact he goes further to declare colonial people barbarous and semi-barbarous. Because norms of human difference and morality do not apply to this category of people (barbarous and semi-barbarous people) Mill [1859](1960) thinks colonial government (colonial government for Mill is the rule of the advanced over the less advanced) justified in imposing authoritarian rule over them as a period of learning. Essentially Mill (1960) convinces us of the virtue or historical necessity of colonial rule, colonial learning if you will (Mehta; 1997).

The disaggregation within European thought of certain populations in whose bodies are inscribed marks of inferiority, who for this reason become legitimate objects of colonial domination is what Maldonado-Torres (1998) sum as the 'death ethic of war'. By this he means the suspension of what usually goes by ethics not only in war, but in civilisation. This suspension of ethics or 'naturalisation of war' allows the production of premature death to become normative, at least for well-selected categories in society. Ordinary life itself in such circumstances becomes perverse – it becomes a selective suspension or reversal of ethics. However this suspension is not a universally applicable condition. It is premised on ideas of natural difference that render some subjects or populations not only dispensable but excessive and necessarily *eliminable*. The death ethic of war is what basically governs relations between those who appear to be naturally selected to prosper, the white colonisers, and those who appear either culturally or racially decrepit, the black colonised (discussion above on the death ethic of war is drawn from Maldonado-Torres; 1998: xii).

The longevity of apartheid in our view is in part explained by its success in continually reproducing the death ethic of war at the same time as it elaborates practices of racialisation all aimed ultimately at denying to Africans co-humanness. In his autobiography, **Blame me on History**, Modisane (1963) exemplify with his own life-history what the late colonial state through the death ethic, discourses and practices of difference and racialisation achieves. It engenders within the black colonial conscious the futility of life. Modisane (1963) knows from first hand experience what this futility of life means. Explaining it he writes:

"I had developed a sense of frigid indecisiveness, a purposelessness of existence in which nothing was of importance adequate in content to invoke myself with. I felt little, if any, enthusiasm, refused to respond beyond the sterility of today. There was a presence of doom about me, my mind was impotent with obsessions of death-my own death...Nothing in my life seemed to have any meaning, all around me

there was the futility and the apathy, the dying of the children, the empty gestures of the life reflected in the seemingly meaningless destruction of that life..." (1963: 114-117).

Camus (1955) philosopher of the absurd refers to the feeling of meaninglessness or futility of life as the absurdity of human existence. Sartre (1963) calls this condition nausea in a novel of the same title. In a sense this is what Frankl (1965) describes as existential vacuum – loss of power to give meaning to things and to life. Such feeling of existential vacuum or absurdity of human existence define, I want to suggest the everyday existential condition of the black colonised in South Africa. In between the pages of **Tell Freedom**, Peter Abrahams (1954) announces that nausea/existential absurdity of black life under apartheid is what drove him to leave South Africa. He is not ambivalent about its origins. Like Manganyi (1973) he is convinced that 'it was the white man who had systematically created the specific form of the black man's existential absurdity' (1973: 47). To his dismay he discovers that all the things he desired or wanted to do were reserved for Europeans. Even the many encounters he had had with his many white friends were not enough to restore to him what he longed for – his humanity (he says manhood). The banality of black life was total, reproduced structurally under the sign; 'Reserved for Europeans Only':

Because of that sign I had been born into the filth and squalor of the slums and had spent nearly all my childhood and youth there; because of it a whole generation, many generations, had been born, had grown up and died amid the filth and squalor of the slums. I had the marks of rickets on my body; but I was only one of many, not unique. I had had to go to work before I went to school. Many had never gone to school. Free compulsory education was 'Reserved for Europeans only' (Abrahams; 1954: 223).

Exile life helped Bloke Modisane escape the futility of black life in colonial South Africa. Peter Abrahams walked with his dreams to the dock and the ship sailed with him and his dreams to where his dreams would flourish. It was the misfortune of many to remain,

and to exist for the rest of their lives under conditions of existential absurdity. In his philosophical essay **The Myth of Sisyphus** Camus (1955) actually proposes to investigate as he says ‘the exact degree to which suicide is a solution to the absurd’ (1955: 5). Unfortunately the scope of this work does not permit us the privilege of following Camus (1955) down this line of enquiry. It would otherwise be interesting to try, understand with him, how the black colonised responded to their condition of existential absurdity. Does the absurd dictate death as Camus (1955) poses the question?

If indifference toward the experiential reality of black life is a generalised feature of South African studies, ideological dishonesty is its central kernel. One instance when this openly manifests itself is when South African studies vehemently denies or conceal the colonial character of the South African society. To illustrate let us read closely Kaplan’s (1980) materialist analysis of colonial South Africa.<sup>18</sup> In an article titled, *The Origins of the South African State*, Kaplan (1980) begins his analysis by noting that, ‘[T]he outstanding characteristic of the South African polity is the total exclusion of the large majority of the *black* population from decision-making processes’ (1980: 85, italics added). This exclusion, however, is explained away as an inevitability of the mechanics of the market - how the transition to capitalist social relations was effected. The principal reason, Kaplan (1980) volunteers, for the exclusion of the black majority from the racialised democratic system is neither colonialism nor racial prejudice. For him it is the differential alienation and integration into capitalist social relations of different racial categories. As he explains, ‘[T]he enfranchisement of the white wage earners was

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<sup>18</sup> This is not to suggest that liberal modernists do not also volunteer an analysis which denies the colonial situation in South Africa. Rather than focus on establishing the colonial credentials of the state they focus on the dynamising potential of the market (Horwitz; 1967, O’Dowd; 1978). Because racial domination privileges ascriptive or particularistic identities like race, gender, ethnicity, etc, in the allocation of resources and ordering of society generally, it hinders the optimal functioning of the market which is rational, self-regulating and all-knowing. Confident of transformative power of capital liberal modernists declare that the rationalising imperatives of the market will, in the long run, prevail over racial domination. At which point will emerge a more democratic order.

ultimately rendered necessary by the nature of the separation from ownership of the means of production and their class struggle – *not their race*' (1980: 91, italics added). Taking his materialist analysis to its logical conclusion, Kaplan (1980) explains the disenfranchisement of the black majority to be a function of its incomplete proletarianisation rather than racial prejudice or colonialism. This is how he articulates his position;

“[U]nlike white wage earners, Blacks were only partially proletarianized. In specific, they retained some access to land and, frequently, instruments of production. In contradistinction to the White dominated classes, the isolation experienced by Blacks was principally an effect of the economic structures, namely, their partial separation from ownership and control of the means of production” (Kaplan; 1980: 91).

There are a number of unsettling elisions in the above analysis; complete effacing of racial and colonial questions being the most apparent. Kaplan (1980) basically empties both colonialism and racial prejudice of any explanatory value. By implication Kaplan (1980) suggests that the apartheid colonial class structure was a function of the market not impacted upon by the colonial racial order. Volunteering a piercing critique of studies which fail to realise the intersectionality of race and class, Wolpe (1988) offers a model analysis which explains the relationship between the two as contingent.<sup>19</sup> Braided into his model of a contingent relationship, however, is a crippling tendency to compartmentalise social experience.

To eschew the parochialism of South African studies, I have elected not to find an internal critique but read back to Wolpe (1988), a more interesting critique of

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<sup>19</sup> In the introduction of his book, Wolpe (1988) poses the paralysis of perspective which afflicts South African studies thus; “[C]onventionally, accounts of South African society have been based on theoretical positions which are either race or class reductionist in the sense that explanations of the social order are assumed to be explicable by either of these phenomena operating in isolation from one another...The thrust of this section of the book will be to argue that race and class and the capitalist economy and the system of white domination stand in a contingent relationship to one another” (1988: 2).

intersectionality by an Indian sociologist, Himani Bannerji (2005) in an article titled; *Building from Marx: Reflections on Class and Race*. The notion of intersectionality correctly recognises that race, class and gender often simultaneously structure the reality of many subjects. The coming together of these creates ‘a moment of social experience’. Bannerji’s (2005) intervention is to steer our attention to the fact that this social experience is not lived or experienced intersectionally – race, class and gender are ‘felt or perceived as being all together and all at once’ (2005: 144).

How then do we render in thought this simultaneity in experience of race, class and gender without compartmentalising it? To transcend this impasse we must return to Marx’s notion of the concrete. In her exposition of the ‘concrete social form’, Bannerji (2005) suggests it be seen in contradistinction to a fact or an ‘object’. Rather it should be seen as ‘fluid, dynamic, meaningful formation created by living subjects in actual lived time and space, yet with particular discernable features that implicate it in other social formations and render it specific’ (2005:150).

From this understanding of the concrete, Bannerji (2005) leads us to an insightful explication of the concepts of race and capital (read class), which shows how, within the internal structure of each, other categories are implicated. Of race she writes: “[F]rom this perspective, then, “race” is a connotative cluster of social relations, implicated in others coded as “economic” and “social”, that is, class and gender” (2005: 150). Let us once more read Bannerji on the concept of class;

“[C]apital is obviously a social practice, not just a theoretical abstraction. As such, its reproductive and realisation processes are rooted in civil society, in its cultural\social ground. The exploitation of labour is not simply an arithmetic ratio of labour to technology in the terrain of means of production. Social and cultural factors, for example of gender and “race”, enter into it and with their implied norms and forms

organise the social space that comprehends capitalism as a mode of production...Therefore “class”, when seen concretely, relies upon and exceeds what we call economy” (2005:153).

Relating the work of Bannerji (2005) to South African studies exposes the limited theoretical purchase of constructs such as racial capitalism very much in vogue within the left which harp on the intersection between race and capital (class). More significantly it resolves a long standing challenge of how to understand the interface between race and class and how that lived reality could creatively be represented seamlessly in thought. However what does remain unattended to or begs attention, is the colonial question – was South Africa prior to 1994 a colonial society or not. In a discourse-theoretic analysis of the democratic movement’s revolutionary theory titled, *The Freedom Charter and the Theory of National Democratic Revolution*, the early Hudson (1986) in a different context raises the colonial question. However in keeping with the dominant view within South African studies of denying the colonial character of the South African society prior to 1994, he writes; ‘[A]s South Africa is not obviously a colonial society the burden of demonstration must be with those who claim that it is’ (1986: 26). While the present study can be read as a response to the challenge as formulated by the young Hudson (1986), by the colonial question we are referring to something larger than just the colonial credentials of the apartheid South African state – coloniality *a la* Maldonado-Torres (2007).

Thinking colonialism and the colonial question through is a task that can be undertaken from different vantage points. For that reason its meaning and significance varies depending on the standpoint from which it is theorised. For those who theorise colonialism from a strictly disciplinary location, its legacies are simply a matter for historical detail, but hold no personal import. Those of us for whom colonialism and colonial legacies are inscribed on our bodies, entrenched in our personal history,

identities, emotions and sensibilities, those for whom colonial legacies are real, that is they hurt, we are more likely to theorise the apartheid past in terms of coloniality. To theorise apartheid from the perspective of people considered non-people or people who inhabit colonised subjectivities requires in part bridging the distance between the knower and the known made possible by the method of phenomenological reduction. This Husserlian mode of reduction which teaches that consciousness, unlike in Descartes, is not an ego which confronts reality or objects but is always laden with content (intentionality) finds its productive application in Fanonian understanding of colonialism.

The limit of South African studies is that it is yet to instantiate a shift in the locus of enunciation and theorise apartheid from the perspective of those considered culturally decrepit. The ontology of apartheid is yet to be written from the position of those considered ontologically different. Because sources of doing intellectual work within South African studies are drawn from the circuits of modern rationality it automatically allocates subaltern people and their knowledges into the empty space of thinking. Beyond labouring to establish the colonial credentials of apartheid the present study is motivated by the desire to clear the ground for a new form of subaltern reason that makes possible writing the pathology of apartheid from the consciousness of those considered pathological. In a poem titled *Memory* the Cape based Rustum Kozain gestures poetically towards what the concerns would be if apartheid were thought from the perspective of the colonised. The poem also sign-posts a new philosophical locus for the theorising of apartheid. In the second segment of the poem he writes;

It's no more done  
that men should cry thus in public  
or anyone

should talk of hurt  
unfixed by chemicals  
or by money to buy things.

But here it is:

That cut below the heart,  
the one that never heals  
the one we won't admit

for fear of seeming weak  
but also  
to guard its privacy,

the hurt we wish forgotten,  
that hurt lasts  
and lasts as long

as a word like 'slave' survives.

Look at us,  
Still hurt  
here

or into a scatter of lone rituals  
buying up redemption  
in malls across the world.

A public hurt, Apartheid hurt us  
somewhere outside history  
beyond statistics

or the careful prose of glossed reports;

hurt us  
beyond the weal of reparations,  
  
a pittance from some pig-fat,  
over-lording bureaucrat  
or the cheap spectacles of sport and reconciliation.

It hurt us where it only multiplies  
I now declare  
In the private heart

because our hurt is still our sin  
and wished forgotten  
like a date of battle  
or some other minor detail

ill-chosen,  
a part of speech  
beyond our parsing.

And so we carry on, hurting.

For those of us who carry on hurting because apartheid hurt us the imperative to write anew the history of apartheid weighs heavy. Surely apartheid must appear different when written or analysed from the perspective of colonialism and ontological difference. To re-write the history of apartheid from the positionality of those considered non-people, for those whose history constitute an oppressed past means necessarily transgressing the bounds of history as a formal discipline. It means amongst other things having audacity to breach disciplinary normativity and writing into the historical record the anguish of the colonised – the hurt if you wish. Confronted by the

inability of history as a formal discipline to capture the experience of being Creole, Bernabe, Chamoiseau and Confiant (1993) in their work titled **In Praise of Creoleness**, underline the need for an alternative method of doing history in such contexts – this they call updating memory. Like these Creole chroniclers of the experience of being Creole, to update memory about the reality of being black in South Africa, we may have to turn to other forms of knowing and knowledge disavowed by institutional norms of objective social scientific disciplinary truth. This we must do because:

“...our history (or our histories) is not totally accessible to historians. Their methodology restricts them to the sole of colonial chronicle. Our chronicle is behind the dates, behind known facts: *we are Words behind writing*. Only poetic knowledge, fictional knowledge, literary knowledge, in short artistic knowledge can discover us, understand us, and bring us, evanescent, back to the resuscitation of consciousness” (1993: 99).

However unlike the Creole chroniclers of Creoleness we need not limit our discursive field to artistic knowledge. We must though following their example appreciate the neglect that is the condition of subaltern histories which lie hidden beneath the debris of formal historical details and/or mass of objective social scientific facts. The anguish of the colonised best exemplifies what slips through the strictures of empiricist rational science and formal history writing. To discern what in the South African context it means to be words behind writing, to inhabit that history that lies hidden behind dates and facts let us read the following lines from Ellen Kuzwayo (1985) who in her autobiography **Call Me Woman**, laments loudly what it means to be black and colonised: ‘As I have said, it is not easy to live and bring up children in a community robbed of its traditional moral code and values...You need to experience the problem to understand its magnitude and seriousness’ (1985: 24). Because words fail, only those who have an experience of it can appreciate and reveal what the full implication of this reality of being colonised actually is. Decades ago Fanon (1952) argued that the lesson

the black colonised subjects can teach white European colonisers is the experience of having been colonised – what it means to be colonised. Coincidentally it is a descendant of Caribbean plantation slaves, Bob Marley, who sings ‘He who feels it knows it better’.

In Modisane’s (1963) description of what the destruction of Sophiatown under forced removals meant we see objective history fail to penetrate or uncover fully the meaning of the experience. Perhaps it is not only that words fail but also that those who do not have a direct and historical experience of forced removals cannot relate to or grasp fully its implications and meaning. This is how Modisane (1963) describes a sense of loss he felt with the destruction of Sophiatown: ‘something in me died, a piece of me died, with the dying of Sophiatown’ (1963: 5). Historical facts and statistics cannot capture that which died in Modisane (1963) and many other victims of forced removals with the dying of Sophiatown, District Six, Umkhumbane, etc. What we read from Kuzwayo (1985) and Modisane (1963) are the politics and poetics of loss whose meaning runs deeper than the empirically describable destruction of civilian and cultural life. Of significance is the emotional investment with which their historical narration of loss is articulated. In the poetics of this articulation there is an unmistakable engagement with loss that is not material, loss that is centrally of sentiments. To discover therefore the reality of being black in colonial South Africa we must with our metaphoric bare hands pick our way through the flotsam and jetsam to the exterior of formal historiography and objective rationalist empirical science.

Writing alternative histories of colonial South Africa and updating memory on and about being black dictates in addition shifting the ratio between on the one hand the concern with an abstract and rational will to tell the truth about apartheid and on the other ethical/moral and political concerns with the structure of domination and human emancipation (Mignolo; 2000). For such studies the de-colonial turn proposed here

suggest itself. Its strength is that it begins from the recognition that colonial subjugation everywhere entails far more than just political domination of colonised people. Integral to it are several other disciplinary technologies of power including the elaboration of a planetary epistemological standard according to which certain forms of knowing and certain forms knowledge are pushed to the exterior of epistemology (Mudimbe; 1988). A similar observation is made perhaps more forcefully by Quijano (1992) thus;

[A]t the same time that the colonial domination was asserting itself, a cultural complex under the name of rationality was being put in place and established as the universal paradigm of knowledge and of hierarchical relations between the 'rational humanity' and the rest' (cited in Mignolo;2000:59).

What the de-colonial turn enables is an abrogation of this universal paradigm and a different epistemology which begins from the concerns of those to whom recognition as humans is withheld by rationality. Its effect is to undo the dehumanising practices that are perpetuated under the cloak of rationality by making visible marginalised subaltern knowledges, eliding the silences of history and listening to those declared non-beings. As mentioned earlier the purpose of writing the history of apartheid from the perspective of the colonised is to show that there are certain phenomena which cannot be explained except by bringing to the fore the experience of being colonial. For those of us committed to re-writing the history of apartheid it means asking questions about the role of colonialism in the constitution of colonial subjects of difference. This willingness to take many perspectives particularly the perspectives of those whose very existence is questioned and produced as dispensable is what Maldonado-Torres (2008) calls the de-colonial attitude.

Fanon (1952) offers us an invaluable lesson in de-colonial reduction. His conclusion is that the colonial situation is an anti-ethical world *par excellence* (Maldonado-Torres; 2008). In it humanity reaches its limit, a condition where humanity produces its obverse,

the inhuman. The lesson I want to draw from Fanonian de-colonial reduction is one that first gains currency in Heidegger's (1962) discussion of death in Division II of **Being and Time**. Heidegger's (1962) main concern in the book is the question of 'being' – what it means to be. The shift therefore in Division II to a concern with death does not signal an abandonment of the primary question of 'being'. Rather the goal is to show how death itself is integral in any attempt to expose the ontological basis of human existence. Death provides a unique entry point to the question of what it means to be. What it means then to be is one's awareness of death. Being able to anticipate the certainty of ceasing to be or of not to be is what according to Heidegger (1962) enables us appreciate what it means to be. Purposeful life, Heidegger (1962) says authentic existence, is thus contingent on being able to anticipate one's death because death as Gelven (1970) points out is 'that perspective from which one sees the whole or totality of human existence' (1970: 145).

We must emphasise that it is not the moment of death itself or the actuality of dying that enables us appreciate what it means to be but rather what the impending death can mean to one in the fullness of one's life. Simply, since as human beings we are one day going to die, what it means to be is influenced by our awareness of the certainty of ceasing at a future time to be. Since the being of Dasein actualises its existence at the moment when it anticipates its death, failure to anticipate death leads to what Heidegger (1962) calls inauthentic existence.

Fanon (1952, 1954) applies within the colonial situation the Heideggerian analysis of what it means to be that which one day will cease to be. For the colonised subjects, however, to anticipate one's death is precluded from the range of possibilities because of the dispensability of black life. Integral to the colonial project, we shall do well to recall, is the production of colonial lives as lives fit only to die. For the colonised all

things inhuman including death they encounter as part of their ordinary everyday life. Violence and death within the colonial situation ceases to be extraordinary, it is definitive of ordinary lives of the black colonised. The obscene/abnormal in the colonial situation we noted earlier defines the normal – the everyday. In black locations death ceases to confound as soon as one comes into consciousness. As a black child in colonial South Africa, one for instance, grows up accustomed to the ritual of mass funerals every weekend. Often these funerals are heavily guarded by the same colonial police responsible for the spectre of necessary killing and dying of the culturally decrepit. It is equally known to everyone that many on their way from the mass funeral would surely fall to the guns of the colonial police and so the cycle continues *ad nauseam*. Reminiscing about his childhood years, Modisane (1986) narrates the story of romance between black life and death thus;

“As a young boy growing up in Sophiatown without playgrounds we improvised our own games, the games of the children of the streets; our repertoire included games like dodging traffic...During riots we would be in Main Road stoning cars driven by whites...We were part of the riot programme, stoning the police and being shot at, and hit like everyone else. I learned early in life to play games with death, to realise its physical presence in my life, to establish rapport with it. The children of Sophiatown died in the streets, being run over by the Putco busses and the speeding taxis and shot during riots” (1986: 18).

It is not the bleakness of black life that we must read from the above. Surely the black colonised under apartheid lived dark perilous lives, lived on edge of death. They died in large numbers from colonial violence, violent crimes they encountered as part of their ordinary everyday life. The moral rather is that for the black colonised they could not inquire into what it means to be since such an inquiry demands being able to anticipate one's death or awareness of what it means not to be. If we depart from Heidegger's (1962) analysis the conclusion can only be that they lived inauthentic life. The value for us in the de-colonial reduction that Fanon (1952) initiates and Maldonado-Torres (2008)

takes forward through the concept of the de-colonial turn is that it makes it possible to lay bare the threads of the interpretive transformation that occurs when coloniality is introduced as an axis of reflection in the analysis and evaluation of apartheid. There are compelling reasons why we must attend with attention to the coloniality of both apartheid and South African studies. Decidedly important for us, the black colonised, is the chilling fact that coloniality of knowledge amounts to the coloniality of our being. For decolonisation to have any meaning, it means, we first have to decolonise knowledge.

Perspectives and scholarly works that begin from colonialism in their reflection on the reality of apartheid exist. Developed mainly by the national liberation movement, dubbed colonialism of a special type (CST), patronised by left leaning students of South African Studies, this perspective unambiguously declares apartheid South Africa to be a colony, albeit with certain special features. What differentiates apartheid South Africa from other colonies is that there is no spatial separation between the colonising power which is the white minority, and the colonised black majority. The exceptionality of the case is made even moreso by the fact that the white minority is in 1910 by an Act of the British parliament granted national sovereignty. The resultant social formation sees 'White South Africa' that is sovereign with all the features of an advanced capitalist formation ruling over the colonially subjugated 'Non-White South Africa' that bears all the marks of a colony. The latter is subjected to extreme national oppression, poverty and exploitation. In a word Non-white South Africa is a colony of white South Africa hence the appellation internal colonialism used interchangeably with that of CST.

The notion internal colonialism places an accent on the decolonisation of South Africa in 1910, even though it poses as a counter-balance the denial to African people of their right to national self-determination. For African people denied the right to self-

determination the struggle must of necessity be an anti-colonial national liberation struggle. So far this perspective recognises, unlike Kaplan (1980), that the political structure of domination ensures the subordination to the superior white racial category of the inferior dominated black population. However, eager to maintain its Marxian credentials the perspective begins to disaggregate the white population into classes assigning different positions to different classes in relation to apartheid. At this point, it begins to falter. Arguing for instance that apartheid was not in the long term interest of the white working class population. Systematic indoctrination with the creed of white superiority leads to the white worker failing to appreciate that like the non-white worker at his/her side he/she is subjected to the same exploitation by the white capitalist class and must in defence of common class interests struggle with him/her against capital. Votaries of internal colonialism are blinded to the fact that the white worker knew well that irrespective of his/her location in the relations of production he/she remains superior to the black colonised irrespective of their location in the relations of production. These theorist fail to appreciate that the white worker's racial superiority is not materially determined neither is its genesis locatable within the apartheid ideological state apparatuses. Its genealogy extends to European Enlightenment processes and thought.

Disaggregation within CST between national and class oppression prepares the ground for a two staged, 'National Democratic Revolution' (NDR). This is to be waged first against the racial state and then against capital. In this scheme the first objective is to institute a national democratic state, what communists called the minimalist programme. The second stage which is seized with socialising the means of production, is known to communists as the maximalist programme (for a critical discussion of the two stage revolution theory see Hudson; 1986). Useful for mobilising different racial groups into the struggle against apartheid the limits of CST as a tool of analysis are more

than obvious (for the theory of internal colonialism/CST see; Wolpe; 1988, Hudson; 1986, Slovo; 1976, Everatt; 1992; ANC; 1987, SACP; 1962). To begin with the 1987 ANC discussion document titled; *Apartheid South Africa: Colonialism of a Special Type*, at different moments explicitly states that like the people of Namibia, Angola, Mozambique, etc, the people of South Africa are colonised people. However it abandons this comparative line of inquiry half-way through. The overly economic focus characteristic of South African studies creeps in. In the process the perspective is denied the requisite conceptual resources with which to compare South Africa with other colonies of settlement. Eager to exceptionalise the South African colonial situation advocates of CST emphasise the advanced capitalist features of the white South African state. These features enable the South African state to, they point out, extend its imperialist tentacles to the neighbouring states.

Were advocates of the CST not blinkered by their obsession with rooting in South Africa the modernist Marxist mode of analysis and availed themselves of perspectives emerging from other African colonial formations they certainly would have found the distinction drawn between colonies of settlement and colonies of domination conceptually rewarding. More tellingly they would have found nothing special with South Africa, it being like, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Angola, and Namibia for instance a colony of settlement. Colonies of domination are those the colonialists were content to dominate politically while colonies of settlement are those they moreover settled in permanently in large numbers. The former gained their independence early in the post WWII period mostly through colonially staged conferences. The latter were late in gaining independence beginning from 1975, and were mostly liberated through violent armed national struggles. To probe this distinction once more, settler colonies post-liberation unlike colonies of domination are beset by serious problems of land and

economic redistribution over and above a colonially begotten political culture that is tolerant towards violence.

Advocates of CST inexplicably impose upon themselves the burden of writing the history of apartheid from the perspective of the colonial state emphasising the level of development of its forces of production. In the process they fail to appreciate that for the colonised black majority their encounter with apartheid occurs mostly outside of the market and its effects are mostly non-material. Memmi (1965) is among the first African scholars to note that colonialism has other elements other than economic motivations. Because adherents of this perspective accede to the claim within South African Studies that at the Union in 1910, South Africa becomes independent they fail to appreciate the coloniality of thought itself. Analysed from the perspective of the colonised indigenous black majority the claim that South Africa becomes independent in 1910 has all the trappings of a victor's history.

In the history of modern thought the notion of self-determination, according to its leading theorist, Alfred Cobban (1969), prescribes that each nation has a right to constitute an independent state and determine its own government. The right to self-determination is a right of nations or people. Only they could legitimately decide either to attach themselves to one state or another or constitute an independent state by themselves. Since the modern period initiative in state-making has shifted from the government (Divine Rulers) to the people, the will of the people more specifically (Cobban; 1969: 39-40). A similar view finds expression a century earlier in Mill's (1960) famous essay, *Considerations on Representative Government*, penned in 1859. In it Mill (1960) gives consideration to conditions propitious for nations to govern themselves. Simply his concern is the right of nations to self-determination. By his reflections he is led to the view that (only) nations must decide for themselves under what government

they choose to live. With an obvious moral undertone he extols the virtues of self-rule and proclaims self-rule as the highest form of government;

[W]here the sentiment of nationality exists in any force, there is *a prima facie* case for uniting all the members of the nationality under the same government, and a government to themselves apart. This is merely saying that the question of government ought to be decided by the governed. One hardly knows what any division of the human race should be free to do if not to determine with which of the various collective bodies of human beings they choose to associate themselves” (1960: 361).

Were Mill to be confronted with the situation of the black colonised in South Africa in 1910, his most likely retort would be to say they had not attained the level of consciousness/development which fits them for self-government. Before they could be allowed the right to determine the kind of government to live governed by it is necessary for them go through a period of (colonial) learning. Perhaps less racially tainted is the theorisation of sovereignty by the social contract theorist Jean Jacques Rousseau, in Chapter I Book II of the **Social Contract**. In it he contends that, '[S]overeignty being nothing less than the exercise of the general will, can never be alienated, and that the Sovereign, who is no less than a collective being, cannot be represented except by himself: the power indeed may be transmitted, but not the will' (1955:20). If our reading of Rousseau (1955) is correct, it is difficult to conceive by what right Britain could consider itself an embodiment of the will of the people of South Africa and confer unto a colonising white minority settler population the right to sovereignty if the general will alone can direct the state. My hunch is that because the history of South Africa is written from the victor's perspective it is shot through with the same political realism that enabled Athenians announce with such equanimity to the weaker Melians that: 'right is only in question between equals in power, while the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must...of men we know, that by a necessary law of their nature they rule wherever they can' ([www.classics.mit.edu](http://www.classics.mit.edu)).

For an analysis which recognises that the apartheid expenditure was not only economic, but crucially, depended on the rhetoric of modernity and locates apartheid South Africa within the larger canvass of other comparable British colonies we must turn to Simson (1973). In an article titled, *Fascism in South Africa*, he presents us with a rare instance in which the coloniality of the apartheid state is not fleetingly acknowledged, but its nuances are elaborately engaged with.<sup>20</sup> Simson (1973), from the outset, makes it obvious that racism is a reflex of colonialism – everywhere in the world the colonial project is also a racial project. Simply, what makes colonialism possible is racism. In his words; ‘[T]he subjugation of foreign peoples proceeds by force, leading the dominant nation to believe that it owes its victory to its special racial qualities’ (1973: 426-427). Unlike Kaplan (1981), who sees the class structure in colonial South Africa as emerging autonomously, Simson (1973) denies the possibility of a pure class structure in any colonial situation because;

“[T]he colonial structure, through which the imperialist metropolis exploits its colonies, shapes the class structure of the colonial society. This means that colonial class structure, which is determined principally by people’s place in the production process, is generally constrained by racial division imposed by the colonial structure” (1973: 427).

For us what recommends Simson’s (1973) study most is its historicisation of indirect rule as an answer to the ‘Native Question.’ Anticipating Mamdani (1996), by more than two decades, Simson (1973) holds that ‘Direct White Rule’ meant rule of the colonised

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<sup>20</sup> It is more than a passable coincidence that though a large part of Simson’s (1973) article is devoted to establishing the colonial character of the South African society and state, focusing among other things on: historicising the transition from direct to indirect rule, explaining how class formation was impacted upon by the colonial imperative, how race is an inherent ideology of colonialism and how apartheid was actually not an Afrikaner but generic British form of rule - long before Mamdani made the same point – this aspect of it has received virtually no attention from students of South African studies. Reasons for this cannot be stated with certitude but one can surmise that this convenient neglect or silencing is in sync with the refusal within South African studies to acknowledge the colonial character of apartheid South Africa.

natives by white government officials who, in seeking to civilise these savage natives, supplant their cultural and religious practices and institutions of rule with standard modern western practices and institutions. The double imperative of ensuring the continued supply of cheap labour to the mining industry on the one hand and minimising revolt against colonial rule on the other would soon blunt the cutting edge of the policy of direct rule. The answer is a policy shift to indirect rule which entails establishing parallel institutions for whites and blacks, thus giving birth to institutional segregation. This is the system of colonial rule Sir Theophilus Shepstone pioneers in Natal. It is instituted in the Cape through the Glen Grey Act of 1894. The British had begun experimenting with it in India after the 1857 Sepoy mutiny. Lord Lugard perfects it in Nigeria in 1914, after a few experiments in Uganda and Kenya. General Smuts (by then a renowned international statesman – whatever earned him the accolade) recommends that it be generalised throughout South Africa when he is accorded the honour of delivering the Rhodes Memorial Lectures at Oxford in 1929. The Nationalist Party (NP) takes up this call and labels the system ‘apartheid’. It implements it with such rapacity after taking over power in 1948 (Hailey; 1945, Simson; 1973, Mamdani; 1996). What puts Simson (1973) a shade ahead of his fellow Marxist co-travellers is that he strips the South African colonial system of its exceptionalism and restores it to the generic category of African colonies ruled through indirect rule.

Denied to Simson (1973), the honour of (de-exceptionalising) Africanising the South African colonial experience is accorded to Mamdani’s (1996) all important work, **Citizen and Subject**. At the end of this work, apartheid South Africa emerges devoid of any pretence towards exceptionalism. Apartheid South Africa is shown to have followed to the letter, a model of rule known as indirect rule or decentralised despotism. Its principal feature is the distinction it draws, in law, between citizens and subjects. To make good of the claim in Enlightenment thought that natives are different, indirect rule

denies that the latter could constitute a homogenous racial category much like Europeans. Instead, subjects belonged to ethnicities earlier referred to as tribes. To make sense of this ethnicised world of natives one need first apprehend the racialised world of citizens governed in accordance with the principles of common/civil law. The racialised world of citizens, however, does not prefigure a racialised world of colonised natives. Its counterpoint is a horizontally fragmented world of self-governing and self-contained ethnic federations. Unlike citizens who enjoy rights of association, appeal, administrative justice, etc., subjects are ruled through customary law, each group endowed with a version peculiar to it, enforced by the Native Authority. The powers of law making, adjudication and enforcement are all fused in the Native Administration. Land declared a customary/communal possession soon becomes a principal determinant of who is indigenous to a particular Native Authority or ethnic locality. As a result, previously fuzzy and permeable group boundaries become fixed and determinate. The above captures, concisely, Mamdani's (1996) exposition of the nature of the late colonial or indirect rule state as it existed throughout colonial Africa

### **Toward a Post-statist Understanding of Colonialism**

To return once more to Mamdani's (1996) indirect rule centred analysis we see the myth of South African exceptionalism loses its soporific effect. His work as it were completes the return, begun by Simson (1973) of the South African colonial experience to a basket of other comparable British colonies. Equally valuable in **Citizen and Subject** is the effort to expose the economy of power within the late colonial state. More precisely the study renders transparent the mechanics by which the late colonial state first manufactures difference and then instrumentalises it in order to enable power. Difference, i.e. cultural, epistemological, etc, let us recall, is what legitimates the exclusion of colonial Africans from civic governance and renders them fit only for tribalised customary rule. However, it is exactly at the point where it concerns itself with

the nature of colonial power that Mamdani's (1996) important study reaches its limits. The problem with his otherwise illuminating analysis is that it unifies or gathers power within the formal institutional parameters of the colonial state. Because it holds power to be a monolith, exercised exclusively by the colonial state and its appendages, it tells of colonial encounters as political histories or biographies of colonial states and their leading *dramatis personae* acting out their will on hapless natives. In this narrative, exclusive focus is on the power of the colonial state to inscribe its will on the body politic. We must despite this limitation in the conceptualisation of colonial power permit ourselves the liberty of focusing within Mamdani's (1996) analysis equally on what is said as well as what remains un-thought. Nietzsche (1990) a century ago counsels us with typical sagacity that: "it is permissible to see in what has hitherto been written a symptom of what has hitherto been kept silent" (1990:53).

To give expression to that which remains muted in Mamdani's (1996) analysis we turn to the new emergent perspectives on colonial power. The benefit in these perspectives according to Comaroff (2001) is that they display;

"a growing concern with the contingent, constructed, cultural dimensions of colonialism: a concern with the making of imperial subjects by means of objects, via the manufacture of desire and the commodification of need; with the reconstruction of non-European 'others', after Foucault, through dispersed disciplinary regimes; with colonies as 'laboratories of modernity'; with the agency of the colonised and its impact on Europe and Europeans" (2001: 37-38).

From the long index of concerns that make up the agenda of the more recent studies of colonialism we focus narrowly on the interpretative transformation effected on the understanding of colonial power on account of Foucault's insights. To lay the contours of this interpretive transformation bare, we follow selectively, Foucault (1978, 1980) as he maps the historical transition from Medieval to classical form of society or what he

calls the 'society of normalisation'. This transition from Medieval to classical society is also a transition from one model of power to another: from juridical sovereignty to disciplinary power (1980: 107). In Medieval societies as Foucault (1991) explains in his essay; *'Governmentality'* power tends to reside or to be centralised in the figure of the sovereign. In the hands of the sovereign power is absolute. None of this power escapes his body. Because the sovereign is the law itself those who disobey its injunctions offended his person.

From the 16<sup>th</sup> century, we learn, there is a re-organisation of power, its dispersion within society as a public right. By the time of the classical society the concern of power is no longer the sustenance of the sovereign and his rule over the territory but the right disposition of things, i.e. man and their relation with wealth, customs, etc. This signals a new reason of state, or a new 'art of government' to use Foucault's (1991) formulation. It is within the context of this new reason of state that emerges a new model/mechanism of power – power of the disciplines. Once disciplinary power moves to the centre of society no sooner does the body (no longer the territory/land) emerge as both its object and target. The intent is to 'grow its skills...make it more obedient as it becomes more useful' (Foucault; 1977: 137-138). Unlike the juridical society modern society depends not on naked coercion but instrumentalises more subtle mechanics of power. Importantly this subtle form of power that analyses the body, breaks it down, and reassembles it for its functioning calls forth an attendant corpus of knowledge. Crucial to note is that power in order to function effectively must put into circulation an order of knowledge. 'There can be no possible exercise of power' Foucault (1980) suggests 'without a certain economy of discourses of truth' (1980: 93). Just as this body of knowledge enables power it is itself authorised by it. Knowledge and power are always bound up with each other. In fact not only do power and knowledge imply one another 'there is no power relation' insist Foucault (1977) 'without the correlative

constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations' (1977:27).

To ask then: what discourses of truth does colonial power spur into circulation in order to reproduce itself or to produce colonial subjects of difference is to formulate into a question the lesson Foucault's (1977) analysis holds for us. The question becomes even more relevant if we hold the subject, the 'knowable man' to be an object-effect of practices of signification (Foucault; 1977: 305). Mamdani (1996) attends to the question in his study of how colonial power secretes and deploys difference in order to rule but his answer falls short. Mamdani (1996), as it were, pegs the constitution of colonial subjectivities at the junction of two legal knowledge-power complexes; one civic the other customary. This is because in his reading of the colonial archive he privileges only those discourses emanating from the circuit of legal/official reason. What earns his attention is the form of colonial discourse couched in the language of law, be it civic or customary. It is this limit in his reading of the colonial archive that must be transcended in order that we may surface other (non-legal and non-official) disciplinary knowledges, knowledge-power complexes responsible for and/or implicated in the constitution of Africans into colonial subjects/subjects of difference.

One of the important developments out the transition from juridical to disciplinary society is that power in the latter ceases to be an exclusive preserve of the sovereign - it is widely distributed in society, both in persons and institutions. These pluri-centres of disciplinary power or manifold relations of power speak not the discourse of law but that of the norm - the discourse of normalisation. 'The discourse of discipline', writes Foucault (1980) 'has nothing in common with that of law, rule, or sovereign will'. He continues '[T]he code they come to define is not that of law but that of normalisation' (1980: 106). If we consider difference to be the distance from the norm any discourse of

the norm must invariably have as its underbelly the discourse of difference. The point we seek to make is best formulated into a question: would it not repay any study to inquire as to what were the other different non-legal disciplinary discourses of difference circulating within the colonial milieu? To bring these aground will entail reading the colonial archive not just for official/legal discourses of difference but also for non-legal/non-official disciplinary discourses of difference - discourses sponsored by merchants of salvation, colonial explorers, colonial anthropologists, in a word discourses of non-commissioned agents of Empire.

Closely linked to the above is yet another lesson Foucault's analysis of power holds for us. The morale of the lesson, simply stated, is that the state does not suture the space of power. The practice of power within the colonial space exceeds the domain of formal colonial state organisation. Power is not like in the medieval form of society localised in one central location, its logic and mechanics are not only those of the sovereign-subject model. To fully account for the nature and extent of power expended in the transformation of concrete Africans into colonial subjects of difference we need, the study argues, to look beyond the formal legal domain of colonial power relations. The object is to surface what Foucault (1980) refers to as the 'polymorphous techniques of subjugation', which the citizen-subject binary in Mamdani (1996) cannot account for because it remains trapped in the monolithic conception of power emanating as law from one singular source - colonial state/ institutions (Foucault; 1980: 96). In order to reach to these techniques of subjugation we must following Foucault (1980) look for power at its extremities, at the extreme points of its exercise, where it becomes capillary, where it is always less legal in character. Dispersed into the most remote regions, power circulates not as legal prescripts but through a range of disciplinary technologies, including those of the self, which hide its repressive character (Foucault; 1980). This is how Foucault (1980) delivers the lesson in **Power/Knowledge**:

“[I] do not want to say that the State isn’t important; what I want to say is that relations of power, and hence the analysis that must be made of them, necessarily extend beyond the limits of the State. In two senses: first of all because the State, for all the omnipotence of its apparatuses, is far from being able to occupy the whole field of actual power relations, and further because the State can only operate on the basis of other, already existing power relations” (1980: 122).

To end off this Foucauldian reading of colonial power whose major import is that we must think of power differently as a complex form of organisation in which we are all involved let us turn to the example furnished us by the lives of early Christian converts. Hailed into colonial subjectivity by colonial ideology, these converts immediately become active in the propagation of both the Judeo-Christian ethic and the larger narrative of modernity. Themselves, objects of colonial power, effects of colonial signifying practices, and effects of colonial disciplinary processes of subjection these figures become important purveyors of that power. ‘The individual as an effect of power’, explains Foucault (1980), to the extent that it is the effect of that power is at the same time ‘the element of its articulation’ (1980: 98). The point then is to understand colonial power not as something that neatly divides between those who are endowed with it, who exercise it, and those who lack it, who submit to it. Rather than think of it as something sedimented in state institutions, which have exclusive monopoly over it, it is more profitable to conceive of it as something which permeates the entire social body.

Because power circulates in a net-like organisation people in society ‘are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation’ (Foucault; 1980: 98). Colonial subjects cannot therefore be understood in the singular as victims. What the present study benefits from this analysis of power is that it can focus on those discrete spaces often cultural where micro-forms of engagement between the

colonisers and the colonised were enacted. Herein were rare moments where the colonised could reclaim their sense of agency and exercise power, some form of power. By so doing we do not seek to occlude the violence of colonial encounters, to privilege the agonistic over the antagonistic, read sign systems in place of historical, experiential accounts, etc. In a word we do not seek to de-politicise colonialism neither to conceal the asymmetry of colonial power relations.

Let us summarise the lessons learnt and their implications into two propositions: firstly colonial power wherever it is exercised through various disciplinary technologies spurs into existence, circulates and is in turn sustained by a number of attendant discourses and/or systems of knowledge. Secondly, to unearth the complex of logics which govern the constitution of colonial subjectivities, we must, unlike Mamdani (1996) look not only to law but to a whole host of other discourses of truth and disciplinary knowledges.

## **Chapter V**

### **Colonial Difference, Postcolonial Difference and the Promise of Phenomenology**

#### **Introduction**

So far the study has presented the concept of difference as if its meaning were settled, as if its discourse flows uninterrupted in a unidirectional path from its originary source, Europe towards its intended terminal the non-European world. In the present essay the concept of difference is therefore subjected to critical scrutiny in order to foreground its different dimensions. The essay is an attempt basically to problematise the settled understanding of the concept. First it looks at colonial difference and asks: what are the internal contradictions which sub-tend the idea? Following on that it examines postcolonial conceptions of difference, how difference has been theorised in postcolonial thought. The intent is to ascertain the efficacy of postcolonial theories of difference in liberating those non-European modes of being which are constituted otherwise than modern from the oppressive hold of modern rationalist valuations. In the last section the essay transcends the crippling limits of postcolonial notions of difference and redeems from phenomenology, Heidegger (1962) in particular, invaluable resources with which it becomes possible to represent non-rational modes of being-in-the-world in a non-manipulative and non-oppressive manner.

#### **On Colonial Difference**

“In the same way that Europe carried a variety of techniques and inventions to the people included in its network of domination...it also introduced to them its equipment of concepts, precepts, and idiosyncrasy which referred at the same time to Europe itself and to the colonial people. The colonial people, deprived of their riches and of the fruit of their labor under colonial regimes, suffered, furthermore, the degradation of assuming as their proper image the image that was no more than the reflection of the European vision of the world, which considered colonial people racially inferior because they were black, Amerindians, or “mestizos.” Even the brighter social strata of non-European people got

used to seeing themselves and their communities as an inhumanity whose destiny was to occupy a subaltern position because of the sheer fact that theirs was inferior to the European population” (Ribeiro; 1968, cited in Mignolo; 2000: 13)

“Nobody should ever have had any right to tell anybody else that he/she should not be aware of himself/herself as being” (Manganyi; 1973: 20).

My reason for beginning the discussion on colonial difference with the two quotations is to render conspicuous a shared predicament that is the fate of all non-European/ colonial people. Fanon [1961](2004) in **The Wretched of the Earth** reminds us that under German occupation the French remained human beings. And similarly under French occupation the Germans remained human beings (2004: 182). In the colonies a different logic however obtains. Within the colonial milieu the relation between the coloniser and the colonised is a relation between humans and non-humans. Here only the coloniser retains his/her humanity. For the colonised the very indignity of being colonial brings into question their being as human. While colonialism rests on an *a priori* legitimation in the Enlightenment bequeathed discourse of non-Western difference it musters a battery of collusive concepts and knowledge practices in order to produce a veritable discourse of its own with which to herd the colonised into a zone of alterity, a zone of non-being. For the colonised this means inhabiting a new textually inscribed identity of ontological nullity. The effectivity of this discourse is to produce the colonised as entities fit for domination, cultural, political, social and economic domination - in fact that is its *raison d'être*.

Colonialism everywhere succeeds once it has transformed the colonised into subhumans. It is not coincidental that we find in virtually all colonies ‘with unanimous approval from Liberia to Loas via the Maghreb’ a common imago of the colonised – a ‘mythical portrait of the colonised’ as Albert Memmi (1965) calls it (1965: 79). It is

precisely the power to appropriate, normalise and pass judgement over – actually establish - the colonised as lazy, licentious, libidinous, intellectually under-developed, thieving, sensuous, adulterous, incapable of culture, sly, in a word less than human, which both Darcy Ribeiro a Brazilian ‘anthropologist’ and Chabani Manganyi a South African black clinical psychologist protest with equal vehemence. This is the predicament that is the burden of all colonial people – being discursively constructed as different, more pointedly as less than human. Once dehumanised in this way the colonised cannot stand as the alter ego of the white coloniser. After such degradation s/he becomes an object, a mere thing, an Other of the European superego.

However, it has now been recognised by most that the colonial project is bedevilled by an inherent contradiction (Comaroff; 2001, Chatterjee; 1993). Foremost on the colonial agenda, supported by the universality claimed for the modern regime of power is the desire to make of savages normalised, self-disciplining individuated modern selves – human-beings-as-citizens. The paradox though is that the burden of colonial reason is to produce the truth of colonial difference. Together colonial reason and the colonial state are charged with the production and reproduction of the colonised as different. We must then contrary to Mamdani (1996) think of the colonial state as having always been geared toward the production of difference. The concern with difference is not a pre-occupation of the late colonial state as he suggests. We find the colonial empire everywhere caught in a ‘doubling’, a contradiction argues Comaroff (2001). Colonial reason and colonial regimes according to Comaroff (2001):

“..at the very same time as they spoke of transforming colonised peoples into civilised – i.e. ‘modern’ – free, right-bearing citizens, they dealt in heterogeneity by naturalising ethnic difference and essentialising racial inequality...This is the base contradiction of colonialism. Its teleology pointed one way (toward secular modern *citizenship* and, eventually, nationhood), its reality another (toward a racinated world of ethnic subjection) (2001: 46).

Here is the nature of the split in the logic of colonial rule: on the one hand colonial regimes are defined by the will to civilise savage colonials, inculcate in them the protestant love for work, teach them the virtue of monogamous family life, make them profess the superior virtues of private property, individuate them, name them, register their birth and death, pin them to an address, hide their nakedness, in short turn them into right bearing modern human subjects, subjects-as-citizens. The obverse of this project however, necessitates the production and reproduction of the very same colonial subjects as savage, heathen, irredeemably tribal, exotic, indolent, racially inferior, culturally decrepit, in fact as incapable of civility, of being human, of internalising a modern comportment. This duality culminates ultimately in the impossibility of completing within the framework of universal knowledge the project of universalising the modern regime of power without transcending both the conditions of colonial rule and coloniality of reason (Chatterjee; 1993).

What we see here is the colonial state in alliance with colonial reason labour in a context defined by such centrifugal pulls, i.e. the promise of sameness and the truth of colonial difference. In order to produce the truth of difference colonial reason rallies behind itself a multiplicity of signs. At other times it is the black colonised's aversion to ethics, morals and lack of aesthetic values, *a la* Fanon (2004), which are called upon to signify, speak and/or bear the truth of difference:

“[T]he “native” is declared impervious to ethics, representing not only the absence of values but also the negation of values. He is, dare we say it, the enemy of values. In other words, absolute evil. A corrosive element, destroying everything within his reach, a corrupting element, distorting everything which involves aesthetics, or morals, an agent of malevolent powers, an unconscious and incurable instrument of blind forces” (2004: 6).

Contra to the general but erroneous tendency to reduce colonial difference to one explanatory variable, race, Fanon (2004) with the above representation pluralises the markers of colonial difference. It is no longer race alone which bears the burden of signifying colonial difference. Fanon (2004) as it were, broadens the conceptual economy of the field within which colonial subjects are made by urging consideration of issues of morality, aesthetics, etc. Fanon (2004) unfortunately does not pursue the possibility of a much more nuanced analysis of how colonialism makes colonial subjects/subjects of difference envisaged within the structure of his own thought. Like Memmi (1965) he lapses into essentialising race as the sole determinant marker of difference. All other signs become reducible to it. No space is provided in his scheme for consideration of issues of hygiene, landscape, etc. all of which we know are key factors of production in the discourse employed to manufacture subjects of colonial difference.

Rather Fanon (2004) claims that; '[L]ooking at the immediacies of the colonial context, it is clear that what divided this world is first and foremost what species, what race one belongs to' (2004: 5). Chatterjee (1993) who at first notes correctly that 'the difference could be marked by many signs, and varying with the context, one could displace another as the most practicable application of the rule' turns round to declare that 'of all these signs, race was perhaps the most obvious mark of colonial difference' (1993: 20). Both views are undoubtedly correct - race was and remains one of the key factors in the production of difference. What they miss though is the fact that the making of colonial subjects from the onset entails far more than racialisation and/or ethnicisation. Understanding fully the process of discursively producing Africans as subjects of difference demands, I suggest, allowing the articulation of other signs of colonial difference, i.e., hygiene, landscape, etc. all of which sit at the centre of colonial symbolisation.

From Said (1978) and Mudimbe's (1988) analysis in **Orientalism** and **The Invention of Africa** of how the Orient and the African are discursively produced are contained invaluable resources with which to read the mechanics of the discourse of colonial difference. The benefit in decoding the discourse of colonial difference via the directions marked out by Said (1978) and Mudimbe (1988) is that race labours as an equal alongside other signs in producing the truth of difference. From Said (1978) and Mudimbe (1988), I want to foreground practices of signification present in any discourse employed in the actualisation of constitutive otherness of an essentialist kind. We made earlier the point that subjects are not empirical entities they do not exist in flesh and blood. As such the African that is the subject of colonial difference is not a transcendental being or 'an inert fact of nature' but a product of discourse, an idea locatable in time and in a tradition of thought (Said; 1978: 4).

The discourse responsible for the re-making of the African into a subject of colonial difference, into an Other is at once responsible for Europe's self-definition and self-understanding. This because the constitution of the Other is at once the constitution of the self. However, this should not blur the differential nature of relations between the European conscious self that alone is responsible for producing the discourse of colonial difference and the non-autonomous, non-participating subject of colonial difference which lacks agency. In this process of symbolisation it is the Western consciousness that has authority to make statements, to pass judgement, actually to create and maintain the African that is the subject of difference. All of this happens without any resistance from the colonial subject of difference because it is incapable of representing itself. The Other is always the subject of the enounced never an active subject of enunciation or active agent of articulation. As Bhabha (2004) aptly explains;

“The Other is cited, quoted, framed illuminated,...The Other loses its power to signify, to negate, to initiate its historic desire, to establish its own institutional and oppositional discourse. However impeccably the content of an ‘other’ culture may be known, however anti-ethnocentrically it is represented, it is its location as the closure of grand theories, the demand that, in analytic terms, it be always the good object of knowledge, the docile body of difference...” (2004: 46)

We must then understand the discourse of colonial difference not as a neutral archive waiting for interested minds but as an active system of domination, it produces and secures relations of domination by putting the Western conscious self in a position of power and superiority over the African. It is a means to control and to manipulate the African. The discourse of colonial difference, to stretch Said’s (1978) formulation, is a standard epistemological grid for filtering through the African into Western consciousness. To the European the African is only knowable only through the discourse of difference.

To highlight the mechanics and productivity of the discourse of colonial difference it will help to observe it at work. By the time, The Right Hon. Sir Frederick Douglas Lugard publishes in 1929, **The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa**, he had served in various capacities within colonial administration. Colonial historiography of the continent remembers him for ‘creating’ through the 1914 amalgamation of Southern and Northern Protectorates the modern colonial state of Nigeria of which he became the first Governor-General. It is he again who pioneers in Northern Nigeria the colonial system Indirect Rule. As well as being a colonial administrator, Lugard is a purveyor of comforting myths, a key participant in the production of knowledge of Otherness. In the passage below Lugard (1929) brings all the familiar practices of colonial signification to bear as he describes at length the African, his/her manners, character traits, cultural mien, etc. He writes;

“Before discussing the methods by which the controlling Power can promote the material development of the tropics and the welfare of the inhabitants, it will be of interest to consider what manner of people they are...In character and temperament the typical African of this race-type is a happy, thriftless, excitable person, lacking in self-control, discipline, and foresight, naturally courageous, and naturally courteous and polite, full of personal vanity, with little sense of veracity, fond of music and “loving weapons as an oriental loves jewellery.” His thoughts are concentrated on the events and feelings of the moment, and he suffers little from apprehension for the future, or grief for the past. “His mind,” says Sir C. Eliot, “is far nearer to the animal world than that of the European or Asiatic, and exhibits something of the animal’s placidity and want of desire to rise beyond the state he has reached,” – in proof of which he cites the lack of decency in the disposal of the dead, the state of complete nudity common to one or other, or to both sexes among so many tribes...Through the ages the African has evolved no organised religious creed, and though some tribes appear to believe in a deity, the religious sense seldom rises above pantheistic animism, and seems more often to take the form of a vague dread of the supernatural...Belief in the power of the witch and wizard, and of the Juju-priest and witch-doctor, in charms and fetish, and in the ability of individuals to assume at will the form of wild beasts, are also common among many tribes...The African negro is not naturally cruel, though his own insensibility to pain, and his disregard for life – whether his own or another’s – cause him to appear callous to suffering. He sacrifices life freely under the influence of superstition, or in the lust and excitement of battle, or for ceremonial display...He is by no means lacking in industry, and will work hard with a less incentive than most races. He has the courage of the fighting animal – an instinct rather than a moral virtue...In brief, the virtues and the defects of this race-type are those of attractive children...Such in brief are the peoples for whose welfare we are responsible in British tropical Africa. They have a fascination of their own, for we are dealing with the child races of the world, and learning at first hand the habits and customs of primitive man...” (Lugard; 1929: 64-72).

In his book **The Invention of Africa** Mudimbe (1988) underlines the fact that it is this knowledge of Otherness that is responsible for ‘inventing and conquering the continent, and naming its “primitivity” or “disorder,” as well as the subsequent means of its exploitation and methods for its “regeneration”’ (Mudimbe; 1988: 20). Of course the African Lugard (1929) so elaborately describes is not an empirical fact but a mythical invention, an idea produced entirely within enlightened European

consciousness/European imagination. That is why Hegel could successfully create the same illusory image of Africa and the African without ever venturing outside of Germany. While the portrait of an African that emerges from the above description may indeed be illusory of concern is not how closely it approximates reality but the power such an idea wields: to what extent it succeeds in its endeavour to invent the continent and its people, reconstruct the continent for the European mind, fit the continent and its peoples for colonial domination, and ultimately supply the manifesto for their incorporation into humanity.

In more familiar terms the concern is what actions it legitimates/enables, what desires it manufactures, in a word what it renders possible and precludes from the realm of possibility. The illusory image of the African may earlier have been produced for the excitement of the explorer's curiosity and that of his/her European readers but by the time Lugard (1929) comments on it, it had acquired the status of a scientific truth and was now firmly in the service of power. As an epistemological arm of power it had become the basis for the (colonial) reformation of the native's mind, soul, persona and even physical terrain. We see yet again the metaphor of childhood surface to legitimate Europe's tutelage over Africans, a people unable to stand on their own yet – 'such are the peoples for whose welfare we are responsible' (Lugard; 1929).

For another example of the productivity of the European discourse of difference we read from Lord Hailey's (1945) encyclopaedic study, **An African Survey** a concern with the native's attitude toward hygiene (or perhaps lack thereof). The importance of the passage below is that it attests to the centrality of hygiene in the process of manufacturing African difference. Hailey (1945) deploys hygiene as a key sign to symbolise colonial difference. It becomes possible it would seem to define the African by his/her lack of (ideas pertaining to) hygiene. The everyday world of the native is the

world of filth and dirt where the 'wearing of unhygienic and dirty clothing is usual, food is prepared in dirty vessels...' Let us listen patiently to Lord Hailey's (1945) evocation;

"[V]illage sanitation does not exist in many areas...Opinions with regard to the incidence of the more typical African diseases may vary, but it is clear that in many rural areas the mortality from malaria is high and that sources of malaria infection exist in most villages; that intermittent fevers are prevalent; that helminthic diseases are almost universal, the filthy state of the villages being conducive to their spread; and that few village children are free from sores, and many adults are under-nourished and have little stamina. An examination of a typical Central African village would show that the sick, especially old persons and children, are neglected or unwisely treated, the elements of hygiene are lacking, the wearing of unhygienic and dirty clothing is usual, food is prepared in dirty vessels, flies swarm on garbage thrown near the village, and huts are often unswept and infested with parasites" (1945: 1205-1206).

We shall content ourselves with the above cursory remarks knowing fully that more need be said about the position of the above representations within the larger discourse of colonial difference. What bears stating though is that the production of knowledge of Otherness is everywhere attended by the following operations. And these operations are readable from the above passages. One is the tendency to allow or give permission to the dominant European culture consciousness the right to be ignorant of the fact that it is being privileged. This we have come to know as dissimulation. Second is legitimation. It entails constructing a chain of reasoning to rationalise or project a certain set of social rules as normal and universally valid. Lastly, reification, a strategy of denying history as if a certain state of affairs, including scientific knowledge exist(ed) outside of history or time (Thompson; 1997, Mudimbe; 1988).

### **On Postcolonial Difference**

The relationship between postcolonial theory/postcolonial thought and poststructuralism/postmodernity has at times been embracingly while at other times

hesitantly acknowledged (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin; 2002, Parry; 2004). The ambivalence notwithstanding, postcolonial studies in its development, has benefited enormously from a set of critical paradigms first developed within poststructuralist theory. One leading postcolonial theorist, Spivak has for example recommended leveraging Derrida's deconstruction of the discursive apparatus to Occidental reason since 'his sustained and developing work on the *mechanics* of the constitution of the Other' could be put to 'much greater analytic and interventionist advantage than invocations of the *authenticity* of the other' (cited in Parry; 2004: 68). Importation into the discourse on postcolonial difference of the postmodernist notion of deconstruction has catalysed a move away from the assertion of originary and initial subjectivities whose claim to legitimacy is couched in the language of communal cultures that have a prior existence. Focus is no longer on defending the right of each culture identity to exist as a totalised entity untainted by other cultures. The discursive constitution of the Other within the dominant disciplinary discourses and modernist narratives has earned the most attention within the postcolonial standpoint. Postcolonialism's intervention, as it were, is aimed at reversing, disrupting and dislodging the truth-claims of modernist narratives.

The ascendance of poststructuralism, we shall recall, follows immediately after the linguistic turn within the sciences of man. The implication of which has been an activation of the enunciative act or formations of discourse as a preferred model in postcolonial studies for reading social reality and social practice. This movement from the material to the textual enables the reading of the reality of colonial experience as exceeding the simple binary structure of opposition between the coloniser and the colonised.<sup>21</sup> New concerns and/or objects of consideration have now emerged,

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<sup>21</sup> In a chapter suggestively titled '*The Commitment to Theory*' Bhabha (2004) justifies the shift from the material to the textual in manner typical with postcolonial theory. The standard argument is that discourse is not epiphenomenal but is suffused with its own materiality, its own power to create reality. Discourse (representation)

including questions to do with the discursive relegation, estrangement and institutional subordination of marginalised cultures and epistemologies, effected through, the modern apparatus of value-coding and normative categories of valuation. Thus when thought through from postcolonial positionality the challenge of difference resolves into a claim to the 'right to signify from the periphery of authorized power' (Bhabha; 2004: 3). Shifting the position of enunciation from modern Europe to a non-European philosophical locus is contingent upon, and this has been one of the significant contributions of postcolonial theory to the discourse on difference, a successful dismantling, displacement, and/or fragmentation of the grand narratives of post-Enlightenment rationalism.

Homi Bhabha (2004) another prominent postcolonial thinker whose texts have somewhat become canonical, provides a vantage point from which to appreciate the meaning of difference as it is forged within the workshops of postcolonial theory. Cultural difference as it concerns postcolonial thinkers must be kept distinct from cultural diversity, because cultural difference has a much more extended genealogy. It begins at the very moment when the discourses of civility and progress were defining the symbols of modern signification. Where cultures, as systems of signification, encounter each other begins the problem of difference. It is at this border that meanings and values are imposed on other cultures, signs misread and misappropriated. The colonial missionary who misread the Igbo cultural system of worship best exemplify how in the signifiatory boundary of cultures symbols are made to signify the truth of difference by assuming an imposed meaning. 'The concept of cultural difference', writes Bhabha (2004), 'focuses on the problem of the ambivalence of cultural authority: the

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does not simply report the empirical world. It organises and avails it in a manner determinative of action. Advancing the same argument Bhabha (2004) writes; "What is to be done?' must acknowledge the force of writing, its metaphoricity and its rhetorical discourse, as a productive matrix which defines the 'social' and makes it available as an objective of and for action. Textuality is not simply a second-order ideological expression or a verbal symptom of a pre-given political subject" (2004: 34).

attempt to dominate in the name of a cultural supremacy which is itself produced only in the moment of differentiation' (2004: 50-51). Cultural difference brings into view the question of authority: who for example has the authority to pronounce which cultures must live/survive and which cultures must die? In fact a prior question is on what basis is that authority allocated? These questions become even more urgent as the tradition-modern continuum loses its poise within postcolonial discourse on difference out of recognition that the dichotomy itself is a product of modern reason – produced in the moment of differentiation of cultures when difference as the distance separating savagery from civilisation is calculated.

Cultural diversity on the other hand has its roots in a fairly recent concern within liberal theory with the life of heterogeneous societies. As a consequence cultural diversity treats culture as an epistemological object, an object of empirical knowledge as opposed to viewing it as a complete system of signification, a form of authoritative address, active, 'knowledgeable, authoritative, adequate to the construction of systems of cultural identification' (Bhabha; 2004: 50). At best what cultural diversity leads to is the recognition of cultures, pre-given cultural contents and customs under the tag multiculturalism. It elides the key questions of the right to and place of cultural signification. Within cultural diversity 'the need to think the limit of culture as a problem of the enunciation of cultural difference is disavowed' (Bhabha; 2004: 50). The moment and place of enunciation are crucial because in these the authority of culture as knowledge of referential truth is at issue.

The intent within postcolonial considerations of difference is not to situate the life-worlds of European and non-European societies in an antagonistic opposition. The object is not to set up a confrontation but rather to restore to non-Western cultures the right to signify, the right to represent themselves without the Western sign weighing

oppressively on them as a silent referent. Postcolonialism, attempts as it were, to write the historical difference of non-European people in a non-repressive way by shifting the locus of theoretical enunciation from Europe and proclaiming the legitimacy of non-European cultural worlds as places of signification, as philosophical locations. In this way non-European cultures and epistemologies cease to be objects, things to be studied and described. Postcolonial thought destabilises the established modern ratio between geohistorical location and knowledge production – it strives to shift the grounds of knowledge (Mignolo; 2000). When Chakrabarty (2001) claims that the non-Western historian is destined to know the West as the home of modernity, he is restating a claim at the centre of the modern imaginary according to which Europe is the only location of or site for knowledge production. Bhabha (2004) summarises eloquently in the following passage the essence of the discussion above;

“[T]he analytic of cultural difference intervenes to transform the scenario of articulation – not simply to disclose the rationale of political discrimination. It changes the position of enunciation and the relations of address within it; not only what is said but where it is said; not simply the logic of articulation but the topos of enunciation. The aim of cultural difference is to rearticulate the sum of knowledge from the perspective of the signifying position of the minority that resist totalization – the repetition that will not return as the same, the minus-in-origin that results in political and discursive strategies where adding to does not add up but serves to disturb the calculation of power and knowledge, producing other spaces of subaltern signification” (2004: 232).

Traces of the same sensibility or desire to shift the locus of enunciation and the relations of address within it are discernible in Foucault’s (1980) efforts to invest subjugated knowledges with authority to signify denied to them. In the first of the *Two Lectures*, published in **Power/Knowledge** Foucault (1980) speaks of an oppositional struggle which destabilises the hierarchisation of knowledges in modern sciences. This oppositional project calls for the activation of what Foucault, quoting Deleuze, refers to

as 'minor knowledges', which are at variance with the political and refuse the objectifying schema of modern rational knowledge. These subjugated knowledges, subaltern knowledges as I want to think of them, contest the modern scientific valuation of knowledges. By refusing the modern objective standard of scientificity these knowledges reclaim their right to signify and displace Europe as the only legitimate place of enunciation.

It is crucial to state that the enunciation and re-valuation of difference within postcolonial thought is never meant as a celebration of already authenticated cultural identities, pre-existing and/or pristine cultures. The goal of postcolonial theory is to turn marginal often non-Western cultures and their epistemologies into legitimate spaces of signification. However this does not translate into writing a philosophical anthropology of self-contained and pre-existing cultural identities unsullied by the intertextuality of their historical locations. In the lines below Bhabha (2004) registers how his project of writing postcolonial difference separates from essentialisation of culture;

"I do not mean, in any sense, to glorify margins and peripheries. However, I do want to make graphic what it means to survive, to produce, to labour and to create, within a world-system whose major economic impulses and cultural investments are pointed in a direction away from you, your country or your people. Such neglect can be a deeply negating experience, oppressive and exclusionary, and it spurs you to resist the polarities of power and prejudice..." (2004: xi).

Within the bounds of postcolonial thought difference is not contingent upon successful excavation of originary cultures or timeless traditions. Instead it is 'resourced by the power of tradition to be reinscribed through the conditions of contingency and contradictoriness that attend upon the lives of those who are 'in the minority'' (Bhabha; 2004: 3). Epistemological concerns that animate projects of authenticity seized with writing narratives of originary and initial subjectivities are distinct from those of

postcolonial theory. For the latter difference is not discoverable in pre-given cultural worlds, it is neither a function of absolute cultural traditions. Instead it is produced at the very moment of cultural differentiation, in those processes thrown up by the borderline encounter between different cultures.

It is precisely in this borderline encounter of cultures that cultural difference according to Bhabha (2004) is produced. In fact his main thesis in **The Location of Culture** is that difference is produced not by a restaging of past traditions but emerges in the 'in-between' space of cultures. In these in-between spaces notions of selfhood, of being, of peoplehood and cultural identity are fashioned through complex and ongoing processes of negotiation. The interstices (or in-between) are spaces of exchange between or among different cultures as a result engagements which occur here could be consensual or conflictual. Bhabha (2004) deploys Renee Green's explanation of her use of the architecture of the museum in her exhibition in order to amplify the productivity of the interstitial, the in-between:

"[I] used architecture literally as a reference, using the attic, the boiler room, and the stairwell to make associations between certain binary divisions such as higher and lower and heaven and hell. The stairwell became a liminal space, a pathway between the upper and lower areas, each of which was annotated with plaques referring to blackness and whiteness (cited in Bhabha; 2004: 5)

What the stairwell illustrates as a liminal, in-between space is the impossibility of each culture settling into its discrete occluded zone. The stairwell is a connective tissue which ensures that there is continuous, conflictual and productive encounter between different cultures - it is the meeting place of cultures. In facilitating easy passage of cultural traffic the stairwell; 'opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy' (Bhabha; 2004: 5). To sum the in-between, the interstitial, is the place where difference happens, it is the

place where hybrid or syncretic forms of life/culture which do not have a prior existence are produced.

Postcolonialism especially in its treatment of postcolonial difference has opened itself up to very telling criticisms (for these see; Dirlik; 1994, Shohat; 1992, Ahmad; 1996, Parry; 2004, McClintock; 1992, Mignolo; 2000). As we leverage from it useful conceptual resources we must therefore remain conscious of its limitations. To an extent that postcolonial thought advances the struggle to legitimate alternative loci of enunciation and helps fragment the dominant modernist narratives it remains useful. It does, nonetheless, reach its limit point on a number of fronts. Critics to begin with point out that the term postcolonial has itself become a universal concept, a meta-category, a master empty signifier which houses the entire diversity of particulars. It is now the house where all difference dwell. Its globalising gesture lumps together diverse local, temporal, historical and cultural experiences of difference under a single master narrative - postcolonial difference. Postcolonial difference itself becomes an undifferentiating grand category within which all narratives and/or versions of non-European difference are made to fit. The situation is made even more complex by the domination of postcolonial thinking by Third World scholars of Indian origin now located in the First World academy. As Shohat (1992) notes, the point has also been made by Mignolo (2000), postcolonial theory has very little theoretical currency in African, Middle Eastern and Latin American intellectual circles. In fact as Mignolo (2000) explains;

“postcoloniality or the postcolonial becomes problematic when applied to either nineteenth- or twentieth-century cultural practices in Latin America...Post-Occidentalism better describes Latin American critical discourse on colonialism” (2000: 94).

So we may not be misconstrued this is certainly not about the politics of origins rather what is at issue are Third World sensibilities, i.e. African, Latin American and Middle Eastern, which have not been brought into play within postcolonial theorising. These have mostly been relegated if not edited out in preference for the experiences of diasporic and/or migrant Third World intellectuals. The reverse of this process is the projection of the experiences of these intellectuals into a global postcolonial condition. For this reason Dirlik (1994) is led, correctly I suspect, to argue that;

“postcolonial, rather than a description of anything, is a discourse that seeks to constitute the world in the self-image of intellectuals who view themselves (or have come to view themselves) as postcolonial intellectuals. That is, to recall my initial statement concerning Third World intellectuals who have arrived in First World academe, postcolonial discourse is an expression not so much of agony over identity, as it often appears, but of newfound power” (1994: 339).

Over-valuation within postcolonial theorising of the notion of hybridity has triggered a whole host of criticisms. Cultural hybridity or syncretism Bhabha (2004) claims creates the possibility for the expression of difference without an imposed hierarchy. Literary origins, from Commonwealth literature to be precise, of postcolonial thought has in part led to an unfortunate incuriosity about enabling socio-economic conditions and constitutive power relations (Parry; 2004). The privileging therefore of hybridity and/or in-between spaces as productive places of cultural identity formation pretends that power does not intervene in the resolution of real material contradictions arising out of cultural encounters. Cultures do not meet in the in-between spaces endowed with the same amount of power and ideological capital. Not to recognise this as postcolonialism does is to silence differential power relations between colonial and metropolitan cultures. To insist on hybridity in order to allow for possibility of multiple identities and subject positions which may be a consequence of migration, exile, or displacement

‘without policing the borders of identity along essentialist and originary lines’ is undoubtedly a welcome move (Shohat; 1992: 108).

What becomes problematic is to insist, as the notion of hybridity does, that those whose cultures have for centuries been mutilated have no right to an effort to confront the impossibility of retrieving, researching and re-living their authentic cultural pasts. If we were to probe different hybridities, as Shohat (1992) demands, it will become obvious that for Europeans hybridity does not entail negation of their originary cultures. For them they enter the zone of hybridity from a privileged cultural position with the integrity of their cultures intact. On the other hand for the colonised the journey to the in-between begins from the place of no culture from a cultural void. Hybridity, viewed from the position of the once colonised we must have audacity to proclaim is nothing but consecration of cultural hegemony of Europe. Ahmad’s (1996) critique of concept of the hybridity best captures what is at fault in it;

“[I]t is also the case, however, that the entire logic of the kind of cultural hybridity that Bhabha celebrates presumes the intermingling of Europe and non-Europe in a context already determined by advanced capital, in the aftermath of colonialism. In this account, non-Europeans hardly ever encounter each other and never without a prior European modulation of the very field of that encounter. Nor do these celebrations of hybridity foreground the unequal relations of cultural power today; rather, intercultural hybridity is presented as a transaction of displaced equals which somehow transcends the profound inequalities engendered by colonialism itself. Into whose culture is one to be hybridised and on whose terms? The wilful relegation of this question to obscurity reveals nevertheless that the underlying logic of this celebratory mode is that of the limitless freedom of a globalised marketplace which pretends that all consumers are equally resourceful and in which all cultures are equally available for consumption, in any combination at that the consumer desires” (Ahmad; 1996: 290).

Postcolonialism, I want to note as a third criticism, cedes too much ground to colonialism, as the principle responsible for the structuration of the temporality and

history of non-Western societies. The result, we made the point earlier, is that all that happened before colonialism becomes its pre-history and what comes after is only understandable as its aftermath (Ahmad; 1996). In postcolonial theorising colonialism supplies a universal historical framework and temporality into which different histories and temporalities of diverse colonial societies are homogenised. As a consequence postcolonialism, like colonialist thought, subscribes to a unified temporality. Or to restate the same point differently it 'downplays multiplicities of location and temporality' (Shohat; 1992: 104). McClintock (1992) aptly puts it when she claims that 'the singularity of the term effects a re-centering of global history around the single rubric of European time. Colonialism returns at the moment of its disappearance' (1992: 86).

### **The Promise of Phenomenology: Notes on Heideggerian Seinsverständnis**

Taking the foregoing into consideration, I argue, following Mignolo (2000), that both postmodern and postcolonial difference should be superseded as critical discourses of the condition of coloniality. For a perspective which does not critique Enlightenment rationality from within – a Eurocentric critique of Eurocentrism – but surfaces the reason of the Other, Mignolo (2000) proposes Post-Occidentalism. I want to suggest a different possibility. As such this section explores the promise phenomenology holds for the task of de-anthropologising, de-objectifying, de-exoticising and perhaps de-sensualising African difference. In doing that we pay close attention to Heidegger's (1962) understanding of being elaborated in his major work **Being and Time**. Heidegger (1962), we made the point, impels us to recognise a world wherein reason is but one among various modes of being. In such a situation where there are numerous ways in which the world can be habited and made sense of (known) non-European places of culture are bound to emerge as legitimate places of signification.

First, let us read Heidegger (1962) as he attacks the Cartesian foundations of modern European rationalist thought. It is our view that only once the subject-centred European epistemology has been deconstructed is there likely to be a pluralisation of centres of thinking. Only then will it be possible to undertake the task of thinking from non-European cultural locations. In positing the *cogito* as the essence of man, Descartes (1997) not only marked the beginning of modern philosophy but also changed the history of ontology. From this moment there emerges an unencumbered modern subject which has an objective access to the world. In its new form of cognising this subject assumes nothing else but itself, stands outside of the world or as Heidegger (1962) notes - it is a 'worldless' subject. It is this self-same subject, consciousness, if you will that becomes responsible for apportioning things into their appropriate places in the empirical world. Kant's (1965) intervention in modern philosophy through the **Critique of Pure Reason** was to elaborate further this process through which modern consciousness orders the empirical world. What separates him from Descartes' (1997) way cognising is that for him the subject accesses to the world via pre-conceived categories which he holds to be a priori. But Kant's (1965) intervention leaves us with the same Cartesian subject, which is empowered to allocate and categorise things in the world. Because Kant (1965) inherits Descartes' (1997) ontological question, he like Descartes (1997) does not attend to the ontology of Being. As a consequence the Kantian subject is like the Cartesian subject a 'worldless' subject, an isolated 'I' that encounters others in the world as objects of its knowledge. So what we get out of Cartesian philosophy which continues in modern thought is a 'worldless' subject that is suffused with modern consciousness.

If Kant's (1965) intervention does not change the course modern philosophy had been set on by Descartes (1997) it is Heidegger (1962) with his fundamental ontology who does. Very early in the text **Being and Time**, Heidegger (1962) claims contrary to

Cartesian philosophy that the essence of man is not cogito or ego but existence, 'being/Sein'. This is how the claim is entered in the first introduction (Heidegger has two introductions to the text) of the text:

"[T]he kind of being towards which Dasein can comport itself in one way or another, and always does comport itself somehow, we call existence. And because we cannot define Dasein's essence by citing a 'what' of the kind that pertains to a subject-matter, and because its essence lies rather in the fact that in each case it has its Being to be, and has it as its own, we have chosen to designate this entity as 'Dasein'...Dasein always understands itself in terms of its existence – in terms of a possibility of itself: to be itself or not itself" (1962: 31-33).

From here we can already sense that Heidegger (1962) wants to shift the foundation of modern thought away from the cogito to existence – hence the claim that the essence of Dasein lies in its existence. If Dasein exist, of course it exists in the world. As such Being-in-the-world constitutes the basic state of Dasein. The upshot here is that the world is what we have to presuppose before anything else. It is not conceivable then that Dasein could at one moment be in the world and at other moments externalise itself from this world. Dasein as that entity whose character is such that its very Being is an issue always exists in the world. In fact it cannot even think itself as being outside of the world occupying an unencumbered Archimedean point because taking up that relationship of distanciation towards the world is itself made possible by the fact of Dasein's Being-in-the-world. That is why Heidegger then claims that Being-in-the-world constitutes the basic state of Dasein. Being-in-the-world is what we have to presuppose even before the 'I' that thinks. It is what knowing, cogitation, must presuppose. As Heidegger claims in Division I, chapter II:

"a *commercium* of the subject with a world does not get created for the first time by knowing, nor does it arise from some way in which the world acts upon a subject. Knowing is a mode of Dasein founded upon Being-in-the-world. Thus Being-in-the-world, as a basic state, must be interpreted before hand" (Heidegger; 1962: 90).

We can then to borrow a concept from Kant (1965) think of Being-in-the-world as a transcendental Ideal. So far what we have been trying to do is dismantle the Cartesian foundations of modern thought by displacing the 'I' that thinks, that because of its consciousness enjoys ontological priority. Reason/knowing to restate a point Heidegger (1962) makes above does not constitute a primary condition or state of being. The whole structure of modern European reason we must recall rests on the 'I', an 'I' that is singular. However what Heidegger (1962) enables us to do is to think not from the world-less 'I' but rather from Dasein, an entity whose basic ontological feature is Being-in-the-world.

Being-in-the-world however should be understood as Being-with (Heidegger; 1962). Being-with is not a constitutive structure of Being-in-the-world but is equiprimordial with it. What this means will become clearer in a moment. We have already established that because Being-in-the-world makes up the basic structure of Dasein, a bare subject without a world never is, nor is it ever possible. And so it is at the end that an isolated 'I' without others cannot be posited. Dasein must always then be presupposed as Being-in-the-world alongside others. This is not hard to comprehend because if man's essence is existence – existence in the world that is, he/she cannot exist as a worldless, isolated corporeal Thing, nor as a spirit which is a synthesis of soul and body. In the world in which Dasein exists are to be found disclosed alongside him/her other Beings whose character is such that their Being is an issue for them. Disclosed alongside in the world as Heidegger (1962) himself says are;

“entities which not only are quite distinct from equipment and Things, but which also – in accordance with their kind of being as Dasein themselves – are in the world in which they are at the same time encountered within-the-world, and are in it by way of Being-in-the-world. These entities are neither present-at-hand nor ready-to-hand; on the contrary, they are like the very Dasein which frees them, discloses them, in that they are there too, and there with it” (1962: 154).

But doesn't such characterisation lead invariably to isolating the 'I' that must seek some way of getting over to the others from its position of an isolated subject? Heidegger anticipates this possibility and precludes it in the following explanation;

"...by Others we do not mean everyone else but me – those over against whom the I stands out. They are rather those from whom, for the most part, one does not distinguish oneself – those among whom one is too. This Being-there-too with them does not have the ontological character of a Being-present-at-hand-along-with them within a world. This 'with' is something of the character of Dasein; the 'too' means a sameness of Being...By reason of this with-like Being-in-the-world, the world is always the one that I share with Others. The world of Dasein is a with-world. Being-in is Being-with Others. Their Being-in-themselves within-the-world is Dasein-with" (1962: 154-155).

Here Heidegger (1962) warns us against holding this Being-with to be the occurrence together of several subjects. And that is because '[T]his Dasein-with of the others is disclosed within-the-world for a Dasein, and so too for those who are Dasein with us, only because Dasein in itself is essentially Being-with' (1962: 160). The implication of Dasein's Being as Being-with is that Dasein's understanding of Being, or Dasein's understanding of itself already implies an understanding of Others. For Heidegger (1962) Being with one another understandingly is not mere acquaintance with others derived from knowledge about and of them. It implies that knowing oneself is grounded in Being-with, in Being with one another understandingly – which is an existential kind of Being. Maybe Europe then can also be in the world with us non-European people understandingly.

One more reading from Heidegger and I shall end my effort to convince you of a possibility of modern reason suffused with a different ethic from the will to dominate the 'Other' given to it by Descartes (1997). We read from Heidegger that;

"[B]eing towards Others is ontologically different from Being towards Things which are present-at-hand. The entity which is 'other' has itself the same kind of being of Being as Dasein. In Being with and

towards Others, there is thus a relationship of Being from Dasein to Dasein. But it might be said that this relationship is already constitutive for one's own Dasein, which, in its own right, has an understanding of Being, and which thus relates itself towards Dasein. The relationship-of-Being which one has towards Others would then become a projection of one's own Being-towards-oneself into something else. The other would be a duplicate of the self" (1962: 162).

I suspect, here we are being impelled by Heidegger (1962) towards a different metaphysics of love – of holding the other to be an expression of the self. Supposing that the above does enough to de-substantialise the claim to truth of a subject-centred European epistemology, I want to end by reading from Heidegger (1962) another possibility. And that is the possibility of recognising reason as but one mode of being-in-the-world existing alongside other multiple layers of selfhood. Heidegger (1962) insist that an inquiry into the meaning of being must begin with attaining an ontological understanding of 'Being', which in return provides the ontic sciences with their own foundations. In this wise ontological knowledge of Dasein always precedes its ontic understanding. Pursuing further the idea, Heidegger (1962) posit that in order to fully comprehend 'Being', which as we know he designates as *Dasein*, we must first understand this 'Being' in its everydayness.<sup>22</sup> And to access Being in its everydayness an ontological method of inquiry suggest itself because it allows us ask questions about what it means to-be-in-a-world.

There is, of course, a plurality of modes of being-in-the-world and ways of apprehending that world. It could in one instance be understood as being ready-at-hand which is when

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<sup>22</sup> Heidegger does emphasise the fact that 'Being' is neither an object nor a static entity. Rather, he considers 'Being' to be an activity 'to be'. As we find out, Being itself is only possible because the Dasein is capable of inquiring about itself. He writes; [L]ooking at something, understanding and conceiving it, choosing access to it – all these ways of behaving are constitutive for our inquiry, and therefore are modes of Being for those particular entities which we, the inquirers, are ourselves. Thus to work out the question of Being adequately, we must make an entity-the-inquirer-transparent in his own being. The very asking of this question is an entity's mode of Being; and as such it gets its essential character from what is inquired about-namely Being. This entity which each of us is himself and which includes inquiring as one of the possibilities of its Being, we shall denote by the term "Dasein" (1962: 26-27).

one does not objectify it but gains knowledge of it ontologically. On the other hand, it could be seen as being present-at-hand and only through the methodology of objective ontic science could it be made sense of. In the context of the present study we must understand the mode of Being-in-the-world, which sees the world as being present-at-hand, as synonymous with modern rational citizenship. There is nothing untoward, Heidegger (1962) avers, with seeing the world as present-at-hand. What he protests is presenting this as though it were the only mode of Being-in-the-world evidence of which can be read in the 'procedure (still customary today) of setting up knowing as a 'relation between subject and object' – a procedure in which there lurks as much 'truth' as vacuity' (Heidegger; 1962: 87). The 'Being of a person', he contends elsewhere in the same text cannot, 'be entirely absorbed in being a subject of rational acts which follow certain laws' (1962: 73).

## Chapter VI

### Transcending the Impasse of Modernity

#### Coda

How does one append a conclusion to a work that has just begun? We have made the point that this is a philosophical essay driven by desire to legitimate the representation of non-European modes of being without the normative order of European epistemology weighing oppressively over that effort. The task of representation itself has not been undertaken within the pages of this thesis. At best then this should be read as a manifesto for such work. So rather than bring what is yet to be undertaken to a conclusion, I want to end these reflections by attending to a serious epistemological challenge which confronts phenomenological studies of the nature proposed here – the possibility of transcending modernity. In other contexts some have questioned the enlightened non-European scholar's eligibility to speak for subaltern knowledges and subaltern pasts. Often, it is asked whether their critique of modernity is not a cruel commentary on their modern consciousness. Yet others, quite rightly so, argue that phenomenological works which attempt to access non-European modes of being find this access mediated by the very colonial archive whose structure of power denies to colonial people their humanity. As an immediate response we must point out that no single meta-historical method of reading the colonial archive exists. Perhaps, for us students of coloniality and non-European life-worlds the answer is a symptomatic reading of the archive, which entails creatively reading back to it its silences, omissions, distortions, negations, concealed or precluded meanings, and the interpretations it fails or refuses to acknowledge. But to offer a credible response to the challenges above first we must give them a theoretical form of existence a little more adequate.

More than any other philosopher, it is Habermas (1980, 1987) who has over several decades consistently deployed his intellectual energy in defence of modernity. It is thus

his ideas, especially his critique of both Derrida and Foucault, which have served as an impetus for the many challenges thrown at forms of thought which refuse the Western philosophical locus (for a summary of his critique of French post-structuralism see Thomas McCarthy's introduction to the **Philosophical Discourse of Modernity**). According to Habermas (1987), there is yet to be an order of knowledge which can be said to lie beyond the bounds of modernity. So modernity has, in effect, not been transcended; it remains the only legitimate universal discourse. Contrary to the postmodernist claim, of having breached the frontiers of modernist thought, Habermas holds postmodernity to be in consonance with what he refers to as the 'normative content of modernity' (Habermas; 1978). To substantiate, he underlines the fact that postmodernity has failed to 'unsettle the institutionalised modern standards of fallibilism' (1987: 337).

The second argument, Habermas (1980) advances in defence of modernity is that it cannot be said to have an end but should rather be understood as an incomplete project, capable of renewal and further elaboration. Contestations, contradictions and tensions within the idea itself are what have propelled it through different paradigmatic stages. These contestations and counter-discourses all together have served to deepen its repertoire. Therefore, they cannot be said to mark its end. What they have done is further modernise modernity or further enlighten Enlightenment. Similarly, Giddens (1990) disputes the argument that developments witnessed in the closing years of the twentieth century heralded the end of modernity and the coming of a postmodern era. In his view;

"...referring to these as post-modernity is a mistake which hampers an accurate understanding of their nature and implication...The disjunctions which have taken place should rather be seen as resulting from the self-clarification of modern thought...We have not yet moved beyond modernity but are living precisely through a phase of its radicalisation" (1990: 51).

From our reading of Habermas (1987) and Giddens (1990) emerges a picture of modernity as an invincible juggernaut or as something which approximate a transcendental signified, to borrow from Derrida's vocabulary. The suggestion is that modernity cannot be transcended - the possibility of escape or freedom from it must be declared an illusion. Were we, for a moment, to understand modernity as an order of knowledge which has for centuries authorised the denial of humanity to non-European peoples, the above views are an invitation to consider anew the possibility of colonial peoples regaining their right to historical difference.

However, for us non-European people the right to historical difference is a *sine qua non* for the right to 'Being'. To restore our 'Being' it is mandatory for us colonial people to first transcend the impasse of modernity. In November 1784, a German periodical *Berlinische Monatschrift* invited Kant to respond to the question: 'What is enlightenment?' It is to his answer that I propose we turn in our bid to strip modernity of the invincibility Habermas (1987) inflects it with. Thus far, we have understood modernity in two senses: first as a historical period marked by a number of empirical features and secondly as an idea or discourse. In Kant's (1996) response we are presented with a novel understanding of modernity.

Kant (1996) defines enlightenment as man's emergence from self-incurred immaturity. This immaturity is self-incurred if its cause is not lack of understanding, but lack of resolution and courage to use it without guidance. And since human beings are responsible for their condition of immaturity only through their own efforts will they escape that condition (1996: 51). The dictum *sapere aude* meaning - think for yourself - according to Kant (1996) captures the essence of enlightenment. Refusal to do so will lead to one remaining under the guardianship of others. The consequences of such are clearly spelt out by Kant (1996);

“[T]he guardians who have kindly taken upon themselves the work of supervision will soon see to it that by far the largest part of mankind should consider the step forward to maturity not only as difficult but also as highly dangerous. Having first infatuated their domesticated animals, and carefully prevented the docile creatures from daring to take a single step without the leading-strings to which they are tied, they next show them the danger which threatens them if they try to walk unaided. Now this danger is not in fact so very great, for they would certainly learn to walk eventually after a few falls. But an example of this kind is intimidating, and usually frightens them off from further attempts” (1996: 52).

The danger indeed appears great when thought of in relation to studies which attempt to de-substantialise the truth claims of the modern ideological sciences. The first charge levelled against them is that they fall short of the established and institutionalised norms of ‘Truth’. Perhaps the lesson from Kant (1996) is that we must reclaim our autonomy of thought from the gatekeepers of modernity and seek to understand the existential reality of non-European peoples without the authority of those who have, since colonial times, appointed themselves our guardians and their epistemic order.

To attend fully to the impasse of modernity or move closer to its outer edges, we follow insights from the French post-structuralist, Michel Foucault (1995) contained in his commentary on Kant’s essay. Expanding on Kant’s idea of the *Aufklärung*, Foucault (1995) claims it is neither ‘a world era to which one belongs, nor an event whose signs are perceived, nor the dawning of an accomplishment’ (1995: 305). He impels us to think of enlightenment as an attitude, a way of relating to the present, to contemporary reality. However this reality or present is not to be celebrated but critiqued, problematised and imagined in ways it has not been. If then we see modernity as a critical attitude which problematises people’s relation to the present we shall, I think, be able to escape the thralldom of modernity. More importantly, we shall also escape what Foucault calls the ‘blackmail of enlightenment’. In the past, we have had as a

consequence of this blackmail to proclaim our position in relation to modernity. However, once we envisage modernity as a critical attitude or a mode of relating to contemporary reality, it becomes futile to declare whether we are for or against modernity. Anticipating this dilemma more than two centuries ago, Kant [1784](1996) wrote: '[I]f it is now asked whether we at present live in an enlightened age, the answer is: No, but we do live in an age of enlightenment' (1996: 55). In their theorisation of modernity, Kant (1996) and Foucault (1995) offer us a point of departure from which to critically engage with the present, a present that is in large measure historically constituted and dominated by Western modernity.

If it be insisted, by votaries of modernity and modernist thought that we owe our selves the comprehension and capability to critically engage with our present reality to modernity, we must have audacity speak back to them in Caliban's voice when addressing Prospero in Act I Scene II of **The Tempest**. Prospero, like defenders of modernist thought, is convinced that enslaving Caliban (read non-European people), availing him the skill of language and civilising him has enabled him to come into self-consciousness or gain human subjectivity. Prospero is piqued by Caliban's contempt (in part evinced by Caliban's attempt to violate Miranda) for this gift of human subjectivity and/or civility. He chides him for it. Caliban on the other hand remonstrates with his master to view this gift of modernity/civility from his perspective. For him, unlike, Miranda and Prospero, language is not a means to knowing oneself - it is the zone of self-negation, of non-being. Self-knowledge is not empowering but a constant reminder of how different he is to or less than Miranda and Prospero who are fully human. Thus, Caliban's only hope for evacuating a space for identity or establishing conditions of possibility for a human identity which modernity denies him is to use what modernity has given him against it. Hence his locution:

*[Y]ou taught me language; and my profit on't  
Is, I know how to curse; the red plague rid you,  
For learning me your language!" (Shakespeare; Act I, Scene II, 366-368)*

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