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Introduction

Narendran Kumarakulasingam*

Departures and openings

This special issue of *Contexto Internacional*, titled *Decolonial Temporalities: Plural Pasts, Irreducible Presents, and Open Futures*, engages the colonial question through the prism of time. Approaching the colonial as a temporal encounter, the contributions curated below explore the myriad ways in which the politics of universal time shaped and underwrote colonial domination. They also show, through textual, ethnographic, and poetic means, that colonial temporality was never entirely successful in displacing other ways of relating to time. Together, they highlight the importance of the critique of time for decolonial thinking, and question whether it is possible to engage questions of 'land and bread' without enquiring into the politics of time. As such this special issue draws on and seeks to expand on existing critiques that conceive of colonial domination as more than the juridical-political control of one people by another.

The point of departure for this special issue is Ashis Nandy's (2009) insight that the rise of historical consciousness transformed modern colonialism from being an endeavor oriented solely towards plunder and wealth into one defined by the civilising mission. Key to this transformation was the internalisation of an outlook based on belief in the 'absolute superiority of the human over the nonhuman and the subhuman, the masculine over the feminine, the adult over the child, the historical over the ahistorical, and the modern over the non-modern or progressive over the traditional or the savage' (Nandy 2009: x), which enabled the creation of a shared culture (patterning of relations) between coloniser and colonised that survives beyond the demise of formal empires.

Colonial conceptions of time, marked by a varying mix of secular, linear, and progressive elements distorted the past, forcing colonised intellectuals to not only ask 'who am I?' but also to reconstruct their selfhood through identification with the coloniser (Alfred 2005; Césaire 2000). As Fanon observes, 'Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverse logic, it turns its attention to the past of the colonised people, and distorts it, disfigures and destroys it' (2004: 149). A key aspect of the perverse logic noted by Fanon is the principle of anachronism. Anachronism consigns contemporaneous but non-European 'practices, humans, institutions and stone-inscriptions [and] documents to being … relic[s] of another time or place' (Chakrabarty 2000: 238). Anachronism's order-

* University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban–KZN; South Africa; narenkum@gmail.com.

ing of the past is legitimated by the logic of Europe's own provincial development that it (grandly) calls Reason. When the plural pasts of non-European others are re-arranged/reconfigured/ordered on this principle, what results is a temporal and spatial hierarchy that centers Europe, peripheralises others, and destroys those refusing conceptual tribute to this center (Inayatullah and Blaney 2004; Seth 2010). Europe educates those natives who wish to see the light of this new world. Brutes willfully blind to this new world suffer extermination (Lindqvist 1997).

While the interventions of Chakrabarty and Nandy highlight the importance of anachronism, it must be emphasised that this principle incorporated, built on, and deepened extant practices of colonial difference which had hitherto turned more on space rather than on time. With the conquest of the Americas, the idea of 'the barbarian' began to be deployed by the conquistador to refer to those inhabiting inferior spaces. Anticipating the idea of the 'primitive', the barbarian too was defined by lack of government, of the proper religion, of language, and so on. The thinking of barbarism in such a way was constitutive in that it provided the exterior that was the condition of possibility for thinking 'Man' (Mignolo 2010: 324-329), a figure that from then on could and would be conceived against and through a skepticism of the humanity of conquered peoples (Maldonado-Torres 2010). If the conquest of the Americas – through the fusing of the capitalist expropriation of labour with the deployment of race as a mode of differentiation – inaugurated a matrix of power that consigned and continues to consign the majority of the peoples of the world to subhuman status (Quijano 2000), the rise of historical consciousness enabled this matrix of power to be disguised as the path towards progress and salvation for all.

As the past becomes a discrete object, thinkable only in terms of a single, homogenous and secular time, the present and the future are eviscerated of multiplicity. For if colonial modernity compels the colonised to obsessively ask, 'Who are we?' (Fanon 2008), it also insists, in direct and insidious ways, that the only legitimate reply/correct answer to that question is: 'We are and can only be copies of our colonial masters. We can, and must, on pain of worthlessness, become Europe' (Muppidi 2012). It compels epistemically blind non-Europeans to make sense of their present in terms of 'incomplete transitions' and accept their fate as one of 'catching up.'

To understand the colonial in terms of temporality is to acknowledge that decolonisation cannot begin and end with juridical-political independence. This is the message that one finds in the conclusion of *The Wretched of the Earth*. A dying Fanon likely able to see Algerian independence on the horizon, feels compelled to issue his last, and perhaps most important, communique to comrades. He warns, 'The European game is finally over, we must look for something else. We can do anything today provided we do not ape Europe, provided we are obsessed with catching up with Europe' (Fanon 2004: 236). While Fanon brings to the fore the question of time in relation to anti-colonial liberation, and warns that self-determination would necessarily involve the creation of new temporalities, it is also true that his writings were unable to grasp that colonial temporality was never completely successful in perverting the relationship of the colonised to their past.

Consider the following anecdote from the Zapatista struggle (Couch 2001: 249). The story in question has to do with the constant friction and derision that the Zapatistas had

to endure during their negotiations with the Mexican government. The government negotiators put forth a proposal, and then insist on a quick response. The Zapatistas, however, reply that a response will take some time as they need to consult with their communities: 'We as Indians, have rhythms, forms of understanding, of deciding, of reaching agreements.' The government negotiators answer by making fun of the Zapatistas. 'We don't understand why you say that because we see you have Japanese watches, so how do you say you are wearing indigenous watches, that's from Japan.' To which the Zapatistas say, 'You haven't learned. You understand us backwards. We use time, not the clock.'

To not accept time as a succession of quantifiable instances is to be considered as backwards. The cognition of the Zapatista encompasses that of the modern state, and points to a different temporality. The Zapatista, while well-aware of the temporality that one is required to inhabit in order to be thought of as contemporaneous, inhabits a different one – one that is embedded in one's specific ways of life rather than abstracted from it. It is from such a time/place that the Zapatista declares, 'We are your contemporaries.'

The Zapatista provocation brings to mind another anecdote – this one told by Kamau Brathwaite to Nathaniel Mackey. Asked to speak about how he conceived of 'tidalectics,' Brathwaite recounts encountering an image whilst staying in a house on the North Coast of Jamaica:

> The yard where we staying… This is a ole yard, okay? and this old woman is sweeping, sweeping the sand of her yard away from her house… She's going on like this every morning, sweeping this sand of all things! – away from … sand from sand… and I say Now what's she doing? What's this labour involve with? Why's she labouring in this way? All this way? All this time? Because I get the understandin(g) that she somehow believes that if she don't do this, the household – that 'poverty-stricken' household of which she's part of – probably head of – would have somehow collapse (Brathwaite 1999: 30).

Clueing into the fact that he is witnessing a ritual integral to the existence of nanna, Brathwaite stays with the image until one morning, seeing her body silhouetted against the early morning light, he realises that her feet, 'which all along I thought were walking on the sand… were really… walking on the water. [S]he was travelling across that middle passage, constantly coming from where she had come from – in her case Africa – to this spot in North Coast Jamaica where she now lives' (Brathwaite 1999: 32).

This revelation effects a shift in Brathwaite's consciousness. He begins to decipher the meaning of the Caribbean. It is no longer an imprisoned as a poverty-stricken, touristic paradise within developmentalist time, but tidalectical – like the ocean that nanna's walking on – 'coming from one continent/continuum, touching another, and receding ('reading') from the island(s) into the perhaps creative chaos of the future…' (Brathwaite 1999: 34). The Caribbean transforms into a trans-temporal and worldly being, one whose time goes well beyond Columbus and stretches afar into the 'familiar forests and deserts and

valleys of Sri Lanka, South-East Asia, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, the Australasias, [and] the Americas' (Brathwaite 1999: 40).

Inspired by the openings provided by 'time not clock' and 'tidalectics', the contributions in this issue explore both how the politics of time sustains colonial power/difference as well as the ways in which such a politics is defied, deflected, and appropriated by intellectuals, political leaders, poets, social movements, and even ordinary people in different geo-historical settings. They do so by engaging with one or more of the following questions:

- How have indigenous, decolonial and postcolonial knowledges, voices, and practices contended with, and, disrupted the imposition of linear progressive time?
- What kinds of temporalities have been invoked in the creative responses by subjugated peoples in their pursuit of survival and freedom? How do decolonial and postcolonial visions of liberation and freedom invoke time?
- What kinds of social relations, sensibilities, and subjectivities are materialised in decolonial and postcolonial temporalities?
- How do recalcitrant temporalities provide imaginative resources for arriving at richer understandings of the political (broadly conceived) than those offered by Western knowledge sciences?

The organization of the issue

The first three papers in this issue explore the responses of intellectuals and political leaders. Aparna Devare juxtaposes the efforts of the 19th century Marathi social reformer and intellectual Jyotiba Phule, to that of the 'father' of historicism, Giambattista Vico. Through this juxtaposition, Devare draws out the creative ways in which colonised intellectuals utilised historicism as a valuable resource for the task of social criticism. Fascinatingly, Phule rationalised myths in order to expose the power relations sustained by these myths, but then created new myths of his own for the future. His efforts objectify the past but do not subscribe to a teleological understanding of time. Devare does not view this as an incomplete transition to historicism, but rather sees this as an indirect testimony to the existence of multiple notions of time in Phule's society.

Yet not all efforts to challenge historicism were successful or desirable. Hitomi Koyama's paper deals with the philosopher Kiyoshi Miki's efforts at using culture to imagine a Japanese-led global order in East Asia in response to the inferiorisation produced by civilizational history. Her work shows how the countering of historicism with culture, leads not to a pluralisation of historical development, but rather to the emergence of non-Western coloniality. Probing this inadequate response, Koyama suggests the need to broaden the critique of historicism such that both progressive and anti-progressive conceptions of history can be interrogated.

Like Kiyoshi Miki, Leopold Senghor also turns to the concept of culture to make first what was last. In Senghor's imaginative reconception of culture, Shiera el-Malik sees a larger 'untimely' project – one geared towards reminding both the colonised and the

coloniser that decolonisation was about more than the winning of political independence and national self-determination in the form of nation-states. Through a series of nuanced and astute moves, Senghor, very much in the vein of Phule, reaches across the colonial divide to borrow from and creatively deploy ideas and practices of the Other to invigorate the Self. Speaking in the aftermath of political independence in Africa, Senghor, el-Malik points out, was tunneling a crevice in history that sought to keep the more radical aspects of the Negritude moment alive in a time when decolonisation could easily be thought to have been achieved. Senghor is labouring to keep alive a more expansive and radical understanding of decolonisation at a moment when the meanings of decolonisation were being truncated. Unlike with Miki, what we have in Senghor's speech is an understanding of culture that transcends the particularity-universal framework and instead posits a new form of particularity that is open to multiplicity as well as borrowing from the Other.

If Senghor is engaged in the work of keeping the past alive such that new futures could be thought of in a time yet to come, the next three contributions provide glimpses of how the past inhabits bodies, words, and worlds in the present. What Khadija El Alaoui stirringly refers to as the wisdom of stubbornness is but the past that inhabits our bodies. This past keeps coming up in a variety of expressions and forms – the cry of poets, the mm-hmms of students – and interrupts the well-meaning efforts of pedagogues to culture 'Arabs', 'the Middle East', and 'Muslims' into the ladder of time. The coloniser forgets but the colonised do not forget. In the singing of poets and the sighing of students, the involuntary gazing at the colonial wound becomes a re-membering of solidarity with other oppressed peoples and a reclaiming of the ability to dream of new futures.

Narendran Kumarakulasingam and Mvuselelo Ngcoya's and João Urt's papers engage with what might be termed 'indigenous' assertions of Self. Encountering the life and farming practices of Gogo Qho, Kumarakulasingam and Ngcoya discern in her cultivation of indigenous vegetables a sense of indigeneity articulated not in terms of historical occupancy of territory, but rather through conversation with ancestors and nature. Against the linear homogenous temporality of indigenism, Gogo Qho's attempt to wean herself from the agro-industrial food system discloses a non-secular world where divisions between the past and the present and the spiritual and the secular do not hold.

Yet keeping indigenous worlds alive is not easy, as we see from Urt's forays into the struggle of the Kaiowa and Guarani peoples. These peoples' efforts at self-determination against ongoing epistemicide and massive homicide expose the absurdity of the belief in certain quarters that the state and the international order are a *sine qua non* for the attainment of the good life. In the Guarani and Kaiowa struggle for land and bread against the state elites, farmers, ranchers, and bureaucrats who seek to eliminate or impoverish them, we find not just a struggle for survival but a different conception of the political. Tekoha, Urt points out, is a space informed by a trans-temporal notion of time, whose successful materialisation is contingent not only on law but integrally on successful prayer. Self-determination here acquires a different valence – one that ties social organisation, political autonomy, and freedom of movement to spiritual bonds with the gods and the ethical principles integral to being Guarani.

The final two papers bring the reader back more squarely into the realm of the knowledge sciences. Ángela Iranzo Dosdad's paper emerges from her search for the culture of time that underpins the category of the post-secular. Her reading unearths the hidden time of the post-secular. This turns out to be none other than civilisational time, which works by assimilating difference into the Colonial Self. Once the temporal dimension of the post-secular is surfaced, it is impossible to see it as being in the service of thinking a more pluralistic Europe. Instead, what we are confronted with once again is the long arc of colonial violence. In the last substantive contribution, Manu Samnotra's reflections bring us back to Dipesh Chakrabarty's project of 'provincialising Europe' – one of the inspirations for this special issue. Vexed by the entanglement of technological/developmentalist thinking in the politics of the post-colonial, Samnotra's project is animated by the need to de-hyphenate the post-colonial. Arguing that Chakrabarty's reliance on Heidegger hamstrings such a task, Samnotra turns to Hannah Arendt for inspiration. Arendt's thinking around a post-subjectivist experience of politics that breaks with received historiographies, he suggests, needs to be pursued as a vital complement to Chakrabarty's efforts.

The issue concludes with a set of reflections penned by Anna Agathangelou. The refusal to submit to colonial fatalism (Agathangelou and Killian 2011), writ large across the ensuing pages, is an invitation to connect with and learn from multiple practices, solidarities and sensibilities that have kept alive the promise of a human future. It is our hope that encountering these alternative worlds will help expand disciplinary imaginations and enliven scholarly worlds. Somewhere, nanna is brooming the sand.

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About the author

Narendran Kumarakulasingam is an honorary research fellow at the School of Built Environment and Development Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, and a visiting scholar with the Centre for Refugee Studies, York University, Toronto. He is currently working on a manuscript exploring how distinctions between savage and civilised violence are drawn in international politics. Most recently, he has published in the *Journal of Narrative Politics* and *Journal of Agrarian Change* (co-authored with Mvuselelo Ngcoya), and has a forthcoming chapter in Quỳnh N. Phạm and Robbie Shilliam (eds) *Meanings of Bandung: Postcolonial Orders and Decolonial Visions* (Rowman & Littlefield Press, 2017). His research interests include critical international relations, postcolonial theory, indigenous food and South Asian politics.

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