

Prophets Facing Sidewise: The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference

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There is no safe place and no single locus of enunciation from where the uni-versal could be articulated for all and forever. Hindu nationalism and Western neo-liberalism are entangled in a long history of the logic of coloniality (domination, oppression, exploitation) hidden under the rhetoric of modernity (salvation, civilization, progress, development, freedom and democracy). There are, however, needs and possibilities for Indians and Western progressive intellectuals working together to undermine and supersede the assumptions that liberal thinkers in the West are better placed to understand what is the common good better than Indian thinkers in post-partition India. Science, in the last analysis, doesn't carry in itself an ethics and politics. Therefore, it is doubtful to argue that science is beyond both, and only concerned with the advancement of the frontier of knowledge and understanding. Science could be (like Christianity, Hinduism, Liberalism or Marxism) both imperial and liberating. Knowledge and understanding, rather than science; gnoseology rather than epistemology, should be thought out as which the horizon toward a dialogical and critical cosmopolitanism (e.g., pluriversality as universal project), could be envisioned beyond East and West, Hindu nationalism and Western (neo) liberalism.

Keywords: Coloniality; Coloniality of knowledge; Border thinking; Abstract universals; Pluriversality as universal project; Critical cosmopolitanism

I.

Professor Meera Nanda's *Prophets Facing Backward: Postmodern Critiques of Science and Hindu Nationalism in India*¹ confronts a problem that, based on the history of India, is common to coloniality, the hidden side of modernity. The problem and the entanglement could be summarized as follows: the post-modern critique of science in Europe and in the United States (from Feyerabend and Kuhn to the gender dimension in science and epistemology raised by Haraway, Harding, and Alcoff, among others)

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coincides with the critique of science, in India, enacted by Hindu nationalism. Therefore, what seems “progressive” within the local history of the “modern West” turns out to be straightforwardly conservative in the “traditional East” or non-West. I am oversimplifying the argument for the need to be brief in this context. However, what I would like to emphasize is the “entanglement” between two (in this case) local histories, that of Euro-America’s and that of India’s modernity/coloniality. The foundation of the Atlantic world economy in the sixteenth century and of what would later become Western hegemony after the eighteenth century, has been grounded in the effective link between modernity and its darker side, coloniality. From the Euro-American perspective (and by that I mean a conceptual structure glued together by a system of beliefs that allowed for the classification, ranking, and knowing of the world) the logic of coloniality is invisible as it is disguised by the lights of modernity’s progressive mission. The rhetoric of modernity is based on a logic that is self-justified and self-satisfying; it is to deliver freedom and progress—salvation—to the rest of the world. But for that to happen someone has to suffer the consequences, and this is how the logic of coloniality has shaped the modern/colonial world.

What happens when you change the gaze and look not from the perspective of empire and the rhetoric of modernity but from the consequences of the logic of coloniality and the pain, suffering, devaluation, and exploitation of human beings? There are indeed many reactions, some critical, other extremist, and still other complacent. The complacent projects of the “native” promoters who want to “go modern” go hand-in-hand, in the structure of the modern/colonial world, with the “native” dissidents who want to “remain natives”. Thus, while coloniality is the hidden logic covered up by the rhetoric of modernity, modernity is presented as the point of arrival of the colonial world, before and after independence. Independence changed the *actors* but not the *script*. This chronological distinction (before and after independence) is irrelevant to the *logic of coloniality* that operates in different manners but doesn’t go away as the constitutive companion of modernity. This is in a nutshell the crucial issue addressed by Nanda by showing the complicities between postmodern critique of science in the West, the Indian Left, and Hindu Nationalism.

If the issues involved in the fact that coloniality is constitutive of modernity are today of worldwide import and affect all spheres of life (from subjectivity to military interventions and building of so-called WMD as a reaction to overpowering WDP (Weapons of Democratic Promotion; from political theory to political economy, from ethics and human rights to free trade of drugs and human organs), Nanda focuses on the question of knowledge and science and its political and ethical implications. And the implications are clear in Nanda’s detailed, scholarly grounded and biographically motivated study.² Which ones are they? These implications are articulated through the book, focusing on the Indian Left and Hindu Nationalism. Here is a paragraph in which Nanda lays out the problematic positions adopted by the Left, through the examination of some of Ashis Nandy’s (and associates’) arguments:

Nandy and associates argued that because the Western philosopher and social critics themselves were rejecting modern science as epistemologically privileged, Indians who went around signing statements of scientific temper were dupes and fools. The gist of the

argument was this: Post-positivist critics, among whom Herbert Marcuse, Paul Feyerabend and Thomas Kuhn came in for special mention, have already “proved” that science does not and cannot confront dogmas, because science *needs* dogmas (e.g., paradigms) in order to do its work [...]. A society like India, on the periphery of the world, needed to protect itself from, rather than cultivate, the hegemony of science.³

There you have it, in a nutshell, the two types of critiques of science: internal to imperial knowledge (Feyerabend, etc.) and from dependency relations (here in the sphere of knowledge) created by the colonial difference. Here the question is then, how to get out of this dilemma.

Nanda’s proposal starts from her conviction that such “cultural relativization of needs is challenged by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum in their capabilities approach to human functioning”⁴. More specifically, Nanda explains,

the *capabilities ethics* is based upon a *critical universalism* that holds a set of basic human capabilities as intrinsically worthwhile for flourishing human life, while admitting that these capabilities may be expressed differently in different cultures and different historical epochs. Amartya Sen holds that “personal interests and welfare are not just matters of perception; *there are objective aspects of these concepts that command attention, even when the corresponding self-perception does not exist*” (Sen). Two levels of human capabilities serve as the objective criteria for judging whether or not any society can be said to be **developing** or **regressing**. The first level sets the ground floor for a life that is suitable for humans as a species distinct from other animals and includes bodily capacities like avoiding hunger and thirst and includes the distinctively human traits like humor and play and the ability to reason and make moral judgments. The next level describes capabilities that make a human life a *good* life. These capabilities include, for instance, the ability to “imagine to think and to reason” and the ability for critical reflection and crucially for women, the ability to “live one’s own life and nobody else’s”. (Nussbaum)⁵

Nanda begins the next paragraph with a disclaimer: “Contrary to Shiva and Mies, Nussbaum and Sen believe that it is both possible and desirable to **move** all *people*, everywhere above the threshold for a good life defined in terms of capabilities”⁶. Here we have the crux of the argument illustrated by the positions of Shiva and Nandy, in India, and Nussbaum and Sen in the United States. Who is in the “right” position to “move” people without the consent of people to be moved? Is the design to move Iraqi people to “democracy” possible and desirable? Geo-historical locations, in the modern/colonial world, go together with an entire subjectivity formation, with knowledge and skin (in Fanon’s sense) within imperial countries as well as in their colonies or ex-colonies. Nanda’s subjective formation, as she explains in the prologue, is shaped while following closely, both intellectually and emotionally, the debates over science in India and later in her life in the United States the postmodern critiques of science.

Upon reflection on both experiences, Nanda sees in Sen and Nussbaum the argument that people should be moved above the threshold of a good life based on the *universality of human capabilities*. With all due respect for Sen and Nussbaum’s well-argued opinion, why should one agree that what *they* believe would indeed be *universally* desirable and accepted by all human beings? Sen and Nussbaum’s definition of human capabilities is clearly grounded in the instrumental concept of reason. Only a

cosmology that operates on the principle of profit, production, and accumulation could make of *human capabilities* a basic universal principle. If you are a Black Afro-Caribbean, and a critical mind like Sen and Nussbaum, you would not begin by making of *human capabilities* a universal principle, or say that humanity is defined, once and for all, by the detachment of men from nature. Certainly, that is very much grounded in European modernity, in political theory as well as in political economy—civilization as detachment from nature, economic production as exploitation of nature, and human beings as “free” entities to decide their lives independent of the political-economic structure and the hegemonic system of values that establishes what constitutes a *good* life. A critical Afro-Caribbean mind (as critical as a white US feminist and an Indian economist who embraced liberal principles in both political theory and political economy), would certainly twist that principle in two directions⁷. The first would be to challenge the idea that *human capabilities* are universal and manifest themselves differently in different traditions, as the multicultural argument reproduced by Nanda would have it. And the second is that the idea of humanity being defined by its detachment from nature doesn’t bode well with the Black population, who themselves have been defined, in the modern/colonial world, by their proximity to nature and their inferior humanity.

The idea that humanity is universally defined by its separation from nature first emerged in seventeenth-century Europe and developed in tandem with the industrial revolution, as the appropriation of lands increased, accompanied by the increasing demand for natural resources. Even when Aristotle conceived human beings as “rational animals” he was not necessarily defining humanity in opposition, or in contradistinction, to nature. The entire Indigenous movement today, in the Americas and in Australasia conceives humanity, as they have always conceived it, on the basis of a different logic: nature *is* life, the energy that generates and maintains life and humanity is not *different and separate from nature* but an integral part of it. Within the scope of this short article, I can only state that these principles are accepted by indigenous men and women alike, as they know, based on their own experience, rationality, and creativity, that they want to live their own lives and not someone else’s (not even Nussbaum’s!). Of course not all white women in the United States and Europe reach the critical point of becoming aware of their rights; and, of course, not all indigenous women are slaves just because they are indigenous and women. Quite the contrary, there are many among them who do not need Nussbaum’s and Sen’s principles of capability to realize what rights and freedoms are. To believe that Nussbaum’s and Sen’s (with all due respect to their work) two basic principles (humans separated from nature and being all equals in their capabilities) are universally valid beyond the cosmology on which they are based, means to accept an imperial view of goodness. And it is only the imperial rationality, hidden under the rhetoric of happiness for all, that justifies Nanda’s support for Nussbaum’s and Sen’s position according to which they “believe that it is both possible and desirable to **move** all *people*, everywhere above the threshold for a good life defined in terms of capabilities”. Once again, who decides what is a good life for whom? Who *moves all people* to goodness?

II.

One of Nanda's strong arguments against Shiva and Nandy, and the Indian Left, is that their argument and critique of Western science played into the hands of Hindu Nationalism and its defense of Vedic Science. I would like to stress that Shiva and Nandy are not supporters of Hindu Nationalism, but that their critique of Western imperialism *runs parallel* to Hindu Nationalists' critique of India's Westernization. One among many examples from Nandy:

The literature of the ultra-Hindu nationalist group, for instance, is replete with exhortations to improve the Hindus socially, morally, and psychologically. This improvement is invariably defined according to the values thrown up by the experience of the "Hindu defeat" in the hands of the non-Hindus: hard discipline, masculinity, impulse control, power, and nationalism geared to *realpolitick*. *Even when the authoritarian Indian takes a revivalist position, thereby trying to return to the uterine warmth of an idealized past and an idealized motherland, what he projects into the past and into the concept of the nation are nothing other than conventional Western middle-class values.*⁸

As for Vandana Shiva one could say that even if some of Nanda's criticisms are justified, Shiva cannot be reduced to her position in "eco-feminism". In other works such as *The Monoculture of the Mind* (1992) and *Stolen Harvest: The Hijacking of the Global Food Supply* (2000), Shiva has been consistently denouncing and revealing—based on the particular experience of neo-liberalism in India—the rhetoric of modernity under which the logic of coloniality continues to increase the numbers of the "wretched of the earth", as Frantz Fanon had it. Now let's assume that *in spite of* that (and not *because of*), some of Nandy's and Shiva's arguments could play into the hands of Hindu Nationalist arguments. If we choose that line of argumentation, it would be easy to show that some of Nussbaum's and Sen's arguments as well play right into the hands of Neo-liberal agendas.

What do I mean by Neo-Liberalism? Briefly, the ideas that the market should be the point of reference for the organization of society and in order to value human capabilities trade unions should be eliminated and citizens' vitality and social lives diminished to fit their function solely as human resources and labor providers. These are some of the principles of Neo-liberal civilizing ideals. They presuppose precisely the *universality of human capabilities*. More specifically, some of the basic Neo-liberal principles (that we can compare with those of Hindu Nationalism) are based on the *rhetoric of modernity*, which, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, mainly consisted of conversion as salvation. Since the nineteenth century, salvation has been articulated ostensibly to benefit civilization and, increasingly, to further progress. Thus, according to the Neo-liberal creed, sustained economic growth is the best way to insure human progress. The question is: why should we assume that "progress", defined as such, is necessary for human happiness and the good life? The market in Neo-liberal global designs has to be free and function without interference from the State in order to insure that *economic globalization be beneficial to everyone*. Accordingly, governments should mainly function to provide the infrastructure to advance the rule of law with respect to property rights and contracts. In other words, and in the words that Nanda derives from Nussbaum and Sen, "it is both possible and desirable to **move** all *people*, everywhere above the threshold for a good life defined in terms of capabilities". Today it is Neo-

liberalism that is the main agent moving people in and out of the service of globalization. Instead of “moving all people everywhere above the threshold for a good life”, which is the *rhetoric of modernity actualized by Neo-liberal principles*, what we have, as Vandana Shiva argued⁹, are increasing war, increasing marginalization and poverty, increasing genocides in Africa, a return to totalitarian regimes forced by the brutal entry of Neo-liberal religion of the market in Russia, and the increasing violence of the *clash of civilizations* announced by Samuel Huntington (1995). Thus, the question raised by Nanda is relevant and not only for India. It is a question valid for the entire world as there is an increasing *complicity* (forced or voluntary) between Neo-liberal agents in Europe and the United States and local supporters and defenders of Neo-liberalism in the rest of the world. On the other hand, there are increasing mixed reactions and oppositions to the universal creed that progress lifts poverty and that war is necessary to generate freedom around the world. These “moves” move in two directions. On the one hand, religious fundamentalisms react to the impositions of market fundamentalism, and imperial State terrorism enacts the movement of people supported by the laws of the State (itself backed up by military forces). On the other hand, progressive intellectuals like Shiva, Nandy, Nussbaum, and Sen, as well as various social movements increasing in number—albeit with different agendas—can coordinate compatible moves and make “possible and desirable” production of other, alternative, fruitful dialogues. This should be possible once the pretense of a *universal truth* that is right and good for everyone, gives way to conception of *pluri-versal* needs and interests, political projects, and ethical commitment to creating a world in which many worlds could co-exist, rather than toward one world in which many worlds would sub-sist.

Of course I have not been implying that Nussbaum and Sen are Neo-liberals; neither am I suggesting that Shiva and Nandy are Hindu Nationalists. Rather, what I am saying is that Nussbaum and Sen, on the one hand, and Shiva and Nandy on the other, may have *complementary* agendas between them as progressive intellectuals in different locales of the geo-political distribution of intellectual labor. All of them can be criticized on the grounds that their positions support either the universal totalitarian beliefs that ground Neo-liberal agendas or the nativist totalitarian beliefs that hold up Hindu Nationalist agendas. Thus, what I am trying to argue is that while Shiva and Nandy are helpful in critiquing Neo-liberal principles under the feet of Nussbaum and Sen, Nussbaum and Sen are also helpful in that they can be used for critiquing the Hindu Nationalist principles under the feet of Shiva and Nandy. A pluri-topical critique is of the essence if one wants to move away from the cage created by modern epistemology and the naturalization of invented dichotomies which have resulted in opposing fundamentalisms: the global fundamentalism of the market (i.e. Neo-liberal civilization) and the emergence of variegated religious fundamentalisms (Christian, Islamic, Hindu). Geo-historical locations and bio-graphical experiences are not taken here as multicultural manifestations of some universal principle but, on the contrary, as the geo-historical distribution of knowledge that the logic of coloniality enacted and naturalized. Colonization is a process that to be operative and effective needs to create the colonial difference in the domain of knowledge and in the domain of being: “I am not

thinking, therefore I do not exist” is a formula of imperial designs instilled among the dominated population through universities, media, and all other forms of communication.

If a dialogue between multiple projects that are moving toward another globalization can take place in order to change the coloniality of knowledge and of being (something that scholars, intellectuals, activists, media people can do), it would be under the assumption that many people around the world (for example, Shiva and Nanda in India, Shariati in Iran, Yasinne in Morocco, Dussel in Argentina, Haraway and Hardy, Sen and Nussbaum in the United States, etc.) are questioning science and Neo-liberalism in light of their complicity with imperial global designs. Science cannot be measured and evaluated by the conceptual structure of scientific theories; nor by equating them with sacred beliefs (which was Feyerabend’s and Kuhn’s ground-breaking contribution), but by looking at the complicity between scientific research that ignores colonization, exploitation, and devaluation of life, both human and non-human (which is one of Shiva’s contributions). In all these cases, the common ground is the critique of modernity from the perspective of coloniality, a relentless critique of all forms of colonization of knowledge and being, including science since science became a colonizing tool that helps and furthers accumulation of capital at the expense of human lives, rather than being an apparatus that contests it. Can we really call it “progress” when five human beings’ jobs are eliminated because there is now one machine that can do it all, and the society provides no job replacements for those who lost their means of subsistence? To claim universality for particular ideas as Nanda does using Nussbaum and Sen, means to fall back into the assumption that there are certain abstract universals (liberal, Christian, Marxist, Muslim) that are better than others. And such claims, regardless of who makes them and from what geo-historical and bio-graphical location, have always been the seed of a totalitarian destiny¹⁰.

Let’s remember the two basic principles that Nanda derives from Sen and Nussbaum to judge whether a society is *regressing* or *progressing*:

Two levels of human capabilities serve as the objective criteria for judging whether or not any society can be said to be *developing* or *regressing*. The first level sets the ground floor for a life that is suitable for humans as a species distinct from other animals and includes bodily capacities like avoiding hunger and thirst and includes the distinctively human traits like humor and play and the ability to reason and make moral judgments. The next level describes capabilities that make a human life a *good* life. These capabilities include, for instance, the ability to “imagine, to think and to reason” and the ability for critical reflection and crucially for women, the ability to “live one’s own life and nobody else’s”.¹¹

First of all, what constitutes a *good* life and whether a society is *developing* or *regressing* are not only particular points of view, based on the criteria that humans distinguish themselves from nature but, above all, are also particular statements that do not pause to evaluate that their own particularity is being assumed as universal. If, at this point in history, one assumes criteria such as the one Nanda derives from Nussbaum and Sen as universal, one is indeed *regressing* in the sense that it is assumed there is only one set of criteria that names the universal and establishes what is progress, what is stagnation, and what is a good life.

Some of Nanda's criticisms of Shiva and Mies on eco-feminism are well taken. In the case of Shiva, it would be necessary to distinguish from the rest, her sometimes excessive linking of earth and womanhood from where she derives many of her conclusions. However, there are other criticisms that deserve more scrutiny because they reveal some of Nanda's assumptions that are not only different but mainly contrary to Shiva's. For example, Nanda takes on Shiva's assumption that "subsistence economies were the 'original affluent societies'", in the sense that subsistence economies took care of "basic vital needs of their members". The problem is, for Nanda, that Shiva defines the nature of basic needs and the level at which they could be satisfied, by "cultural norms alone":

By so relativizing needs, Shiva is able to gloss over some grim facts behind her much-celebrated "affluence" of non-Western agricultural systems. The fact [is], for example, that subsistence economies did not (and still do not) supply all the nutritional needs of all their members at level that is biologically adequate for maintaining basic capabilities.¹²

Nanda counters such "cultural relativization of needs" with the challenges she finds in Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum in their "capabilities approach to human functioning". The "capabilities approach" is based on a tree-diagram that derives and spreads cultural differences from a uni-versal principle. Thus,

The capabilities ethics is based upon a "*critical universalism*" that holds a set of basic human capabilities as *intrinsically* worthwhile for a flourishing human life, while admitting that these capabilities may be expressed differently in different cultures and different historical epochs.¹³

The logic of "critical universalism" is the logic that needs and sustains "multiculturalism". That is, multiculturalism is accepted as a matter of fact, on the assumption that there are *some universal principles* from which *cultural differences* emerge in various geographical locations and historical epochs. But, really, who can say, beyond God [any God] or any group of human beings who pretends to take the place of God in a secular form, what "universal principles" are? My own position starts from the premises of an ethics based on *critical cosmopolitanism*,¹⁴ and critical cosmopolitanism begins with the recognition of the "epistemic colonial difference" against which Shiva and Nandy have been struggling and continue to do so; while for Sen and Nussbaum the epistemic colonial difference is out of their sight; that is precisely what "critical universalism" means, blindness to the colonial difference and, consequently, the possibility of conceiving of critical cosmopolitanism to erase the colonial epistemic difference. But what does the epistemic colonial difference mean? It means that since the sixteenth century until today, all knowledges that have not been cast in some of the modern European imperial languages (Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese, in the first wave of colonial expansion; French, English, and German in the second wave, since the eighteenth century), grounded in Greek and Latin, were not and are not sustainable knowledges. Therefore, even if one recognizes that sometimes Shiva or Nandy run the risk of supporting dubious nationalist positions, one shall not fail to recognize that they are struggling in the violent epistemic borders created by the colonial epistemic difference, that is, what makes the essential difference in the modern/colonial world and what *moves* the system—the hegemonic concept of knowledge (e.g., political theory, political economy, expertise in

agriculture and deforestation, in pharmaceutical products, etc.). On the other hand, Sen's and Nussbaum's blindness to the colonial epistemic difference (of which "critical universalism" is but a consequence) puts them at risk of supporting fundamentalist positions in power, today, under the name of Neo-liberal philosophy and civilization for which "critical universalism" is far from being a challenge and even less a threat.

The question is that there is a geopolitical space of knowledge that Professor Nanda overlooks in her re-setting of the dichotomy "modernity vs. nativism". That being said, I take her outstanding contribution to be the links she establishes between postmodern and feminist critiques of science, in the United States (Haraway, Harding, etc.) and the matching of this critique with those enacted by Hindu nationalists. However, in between, there is the colonial epistemic difference that is overlooked. Or, if you do not want to reify it, let's say that in my vocabulary that colonial difference(s) and colonial differential(s) are instances of the same phenomenon that organizes the modern/colonial world. If modernity is left alone, without its constitutive dark side, *coloniality*, then there is no other alternative that conceives society and history in the linear time of *progress*. That is why, for Nanda, the "prophets are looking backward" in which "back" (which is spatial) has the temporal connotations that "primitive" has, for example, acquired in the eighteenth century. If we bring coloniality into the picture and underline the *simultaneity* of histories around the world, then "modernity" and "nativism" are opposed contents of the *same* logic: the *logic of coloniality*.

III.

There are two levels in Nanda's argument that I have been playing out in my previous comments. One is the specific argument that relates post-modern critiques of science in the West to the Indian Left and to Hindu Nationalism. The other is the more general and more global, which links science and technology—willingly or not—to imperial global designs. A case in point is Norbert Wiener, unquestionable leading figure in the emergence of the New Science for his contribution to "cybernetics" (the control of and communication in animals and machines). Two years after the publication of his seminal work, Wiener published a follow-up, *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society* (1950) in which he denounced the use of science for the control, domination, and exploitation of human life rather than for improvement of it. Very familiar, indeed, nowadays—although Wiener is not exactly a familiar name in the circuits of *CNN*, the *New York Times*, *Newsweek*, *Atlantic Monthly*, or *CBS*. And the reason is that the defenders of the "marvels of science" (and not interested in talking about marginalization, exploitation, domination, colonization, dispensability of human life—in war or in pharmaceutical business) who recognized Wiener as a mathematical genius while shutting him down as a critical thinker of capitalist society. One example of Wiener's defamation was the profile of him that his enemies were able to transform into an effective cliché. The defamation had him as a great mathematician but a little bit eccentric. When Wiener used to talk about society and the ethical responsibility of the scientific community—a topic that was beyond his "area of expertise" he could not be taken seriously¹⁵. Which shows that the scientist could go one of two ways: either unconsciously

support the dominant system (which for five hundred years has been capitalism accompanied by a rhetoric of salvation, Christian as well as secular) or knowingly remain silent regarding the growing injustice, exploitation, colonization, etc., that the products of science are being used for. Sure, scientific advances in medicine save human lives, as one counterargument goes. Sure, but for each human life saved in the high-income brackets, hundreds if not thousands of lives are lost in the growing margins of capitalist economies and 90% percent of the planet's population is living in inhuman conditions. In summary, with all the advances of science, there is a silence about the "totality" of the system—the visible successful rhetoric of modernity and the invisible exploitative and inhuman logic of coloniality, which is essential to insure the "success"—that is, "growing progress and increasing poverty", to use the formula of US political economist, Henry George. In what follows I would like to push forward this general aspect implied in Nanda's critique, beyond the particular case she examines in India and its entanglement with the West (basically, since the eighteenth century, England and in the shadows, Germany, France, and the United States).

As I suggested before, the problem today is not Hindu Nationalism against Christian and (Neo) Liberal fundamentalisms (and we could add Islamic), but how to imagine and practice critical theories, and how to engage in and advance ethical, epistemic, political, and economic projects that will help us "move" (together and not by some abstract design) to the terrain of critical cosmopolitanism and dialogical ethics. In this regard, Shiva and Nandy, on the one hand, and Sen and Nussbaum, on the other, should not be seen—or confronted—as mutual "enemies". One should not use one pair to chastise the other, but rather they should be seen as complementing each other in a pluri-versal global cause in which neither Sen and Nussbaum nor Shiva and Nandy have the last word on how to establish a universal solution or to judge and plan the future of the world. If they did, critical universalism would be but a different form of fundamentalism, since there is only one (uni) way, the *only* way. Sen's and Nussbaum's positions are as regional and provincial as Shiva's and Nandy's. The difference is that the former are piggybacking on the Western pretense of universality (in this particular case, the liberal version of it) while the latter are struggling with the violence of imperial designs exported to India and all over the world. In other words, there are local histories that have the privilege to invent and export global (imperial) designs, and there are local histories that have to live with them. Sen and Nussbaum are located in the first space; Shiva and Nandy in the second.

What are the ways out? Well, that will be and already is a collective enterprise in the making. I would like to propose *epistemic delinking* as the first step of a global move toward *pluri-versality as a universal project*—and this is where critical theory and decolonization will prevail over the results of sciences. The example of Norbert Wiener should remind us that the scientist's ethical and political concerns should have priority over his or her scientific contributions. But as Wiener's adversaries demonstrate, those who use science unethically at the expense of the *goodness* of society in general, will keep on fighting to retain their privileges in England, India, the United States, Indonesia, etc. The question goes beyond Universalism vs. Nativism. The question is to work toward *epistemic delinking*, that is, toward fracturing the naturalization of the two

domains in which the system functions: on the one hand, the dominant rhetoric of modernity and alleged “universal” values and principles that reflect the perspective and the interests of those who, consciously or not, pronounce what “universal” values and principles are (which are culturally relative—principles and values, of democracy, of freedom, of science and technology), and, on the other hand, the opposing forces, which in the name of tradition (e.g. Vedic science) remains within the *same logic* of the system. Hence, neither Hindu Nationalism nor Islamic Fundamentalism nor, for that matter, Communism, are about *delinking*, and for different reasons that are relevant to my argument. Communism (and in spite of Marx’s valuable critical analysis of the structure of industrial capitalism in the nineteenth century, in Europe) belongs to the same logic as Liberalism and Christianity. The fact that both Liberalism and Communism rejected Christianity should not make us forget that the rejection was in content and not in claiming the *universality of different values* (secular liberal and secular socialist/communist). Now, Hindu Nationalism and Islamic Fundamentalism interestingly enough are responses from different “religions”, that is, non-Western Christian (Protestant and Catholic in all its variants, which means that Orthodox Christianity is considered non-Western, as Samuel Huntington clearly reminded all of us several years ago). However, although Hinduism and Islamism are religions that do not respond to the same logic as Christianity, Hindu Nationalism and Islamic Fundamentalism nevertheless have fallen into the “Western trap” and have responded within the rules of the game imposed by the West; that is, looking to defend and impose “their own abstract universals”. They all oppose one another at the level of the *rhetoric of modernity* (e.g., the claim made by those left out of alternative modernities, peripheral modernities, subaltern modernities, etc.), as if *modernity* were an already established model or an unavoidable destination to attain. To fall into the trap of the rhetoric of modernity is to finally believe that you *either have to have modernity, you have to be modern or you fall out of history*. And Western science is one of the measuring sticks and desirable goals. Science, in other words, is not only a necessity and a wonderful space for human creativity, but above all is a commodity desired by those who feel left out of or left behind by “modernity”. And, by the same token, science is perceived by others as one of the power tools of the logic of coloniality.¹⁶

Thus “Western civilization, science, knowledge, etc.”, has two sides, one visible and the other invisible. The visible side is the achievements and the public statements reporting the results and triumphs of science. The invisible side is the constant war against other forms of knowledge produced in languages other than the six imperial ones and grounded in memories and knowledges alien to the West. And with knowledge goes political economy and ethics. “Western civilization, knowledge, science” is both a set of principles, beliefs, categories of thought, argumentative logics, etc., that *produces* knowledge and understanding, and a set of rhetorical arguments used to justify progress, civilization, improvement of human life, *that erases and denies* other forms of knowledges and understanding and that *dispenses* with other human lives that become “the rest”. Shiva and Nandy have been operating at the crux of the production and the erasure and denial of knowledge in India through the colonial period and the process of nation-state building after 1947. Nussbaum and Sen are far removed from that struggle, from

the violence of building a nation with the wounds of colonial legacies. Their struggle is within the oppressive aspects of Liberalism and within the Western tradition.

The first step for delinking would be, then, to recognize the regional positions (i.e. historical, sociological, institutional, race- and gender-based) in which both Shiva and Nandy, on one hand, and Sen and Nussbaum, on the other, are thinking and arguing. To accomplish the first step it would be necessary *to shift the geography and the biography of reason*, and to operate on the principle that knowledge is geo- and bio-politically constituted. That is, geo-politics of knowledges derives from local experiences (as science derives from local experiences of Western capitalist countries) in which the geo-historical aspect accounts for the tension, negotiation, and violence in all the terrains touched by Western colonial expansion; while the bio-political accounts for the experiences, needs, angers, interests, and critical acumen of the “scientist” or critical intellectual who feels in her or his body the colonial matrix of power and translates it into conceptual analysis and arguments toward the decolonization of knowledge (that is, one of the fundamental components of the colonial matrix of power). Feminist epistemology countering the patriarchal foundation of knowledge goes hand-in-hand with “the color of reason” as Nigerian philosopher Emmanuelle Chuckwudi Eze labelled the racist underpinning of Immanuel Kant’s universalism.¹⁷

Consequently, instead of assuming that knowledge and reason derive from the dictates of God, the sovereignty of the Ego (knowing subject) or the pure rationality of Organization, as the New Sciences have it, in which the organization of knowledge and the knowledge of organization setting a new stage in which “organization and complexity” takes over Newton’s “law of nature” and establishes a new epistemic model, geo and bio-political locations assume the local histories (marked by the epistemic colonial difference) of the knowing subject, local histories that have been denied by the defenders of the universality of Western science and philosophy. Today, instead, both in Europe and the United States, the epistemic colonial difference is no longer “down there” but “up here”; a reality that makes more visible the universal blindness of Nanda’s critique and her endorsement of Nussbaum’ and Sen’s “critical universalism”.

In the previous paragraph I outlined the conditions for epistemic delinking. How to move forward, to the next step. Once again, this is a collective enterprise but, fortunately, it is not necessary to invent the steps because some are already in place and they continue to grow all around the world. Let me give you some examples. Nandy’s and Shiva’s work have at least two faces, one that Nanda sees at risk of supporting Hindu Nationalism and the other moving toward epistemic delinking; that is, in opening up spaces of knowledge that are not caught in the four visible meta-narratives of European modernity: Christianity in its Catholic and Protestant versions; Secular Conservatism (linked to Christianity), Liberalism, and Socialism/Marxism and their corresponding “neo” versions—the latter two being explicitly against Christianity.

Sen and Nussbaum are located within the variegated versions of Liberal meta-narratives, and their valuable critique is crucial within those limits. It would be naïve to believe that their critiques *have to be* revealing and illuminating for progressive Indians and Muslim intellectuals and activists. One could say that Sen would be as relevant to Nandy or to Mohammed Al-Jabri as Nandy and Al-Jabri would be to Sen; examples

could be found also for the case of Nussbaum. Shiva and Nandy emerge from their experiences and locations at the crossroads (or epistemic border) between the colonial matrix of power operating in India since late eighteenth century and the silenced memories and categories of knowledge that the colonial matrix of power (by British officers and intellectuals as well as by the complicit Indian elite) attempted to erase. However, as Ranahit Guha would say, “There was one Indian battle that Britain never won. It was a battle for the appropriation of Indian past. It began with the East India Company’s accession to *diwani* in 1765”.¹⁸

People are proud of declaring themselves Christians, Liberals or Socialists/Marxists. No one, or just a few (with reluctance or sometimes lightly), would declare themselves proud of being imperialists/colonialists. But of course, colonialists have been and are Christians, Conservatives, Liberals, and Socialists/Marxists, which, of course, doesn’t mean that every Christian, Liberal, Socialist/Marxist is a colonialist. What it means is that, in the last analysis, Christianity, Secular Conservatism, Liberalism and Socialism/Marxism (as well as Islamism or Hinduism), are not a warranty of anything and, therefore, liberating projects could emerge from any of them (one within Liberalism is illustrated by Nussbaum and Sen); but totalitarian and fundamentalist projects can also emerge from the same ideologies, as history tells us. History has plenty of examples of Christian, Liberal, and Marxist totalitarianism, as well of course of totalitarian regimes grounded in Islamic ideas (which doesn’t mean, once again, that Islamism and fundamentalism are one and the same). By the same token, Hindu Nationalism doesn’t mean that fundamentalism is the only road you can go if you declare yourself a Hindu.

If colonialism is the invisible companion of any of the modern meta-narratives (if coloniality goes together with modernity), there is still a whole and entire world beyond the totalizing effect of the four modern meta-narratives and their ideological and invisible companion. And that enormous epistemic space that imperial/colonial expansion silenced and continues to silence or ignore—justified in the rhetoric of democracy, freedom, modernization, development and what have you—the space of repressed epistemologies which, today, offers to individuals and communities whose subjectivity has been formed in the borders and in the tension of the epistemic colonial difference, the distinctive possibility of delinking. The fact that Hindu Nationalism made its case by rejecting Western and promoting Vedic science doesn’t mean that this is the only way to argue from a Hindu position: the domain of knowledge that could be generated by re-investing Vedic epistemic principles, doesn’t have to be justified in terms of the rules of the game imposed by the West, and doesn’t have to fall into the trap of having to affirm that there is a Vedic science preferable to Western science. The challenge, and the threat, is first to argue from Vedic epistemological perspective, that the concept of science articulated in European modernity is fine and good, but that its universal claim does not correspond to the law of the cosmos! Furthermore, if you reject Newtonian physics and replace it by the non-teleological view of chaos theory and “the new sciences”, still, the view of the cosmos that emerges from it is far from corresponding one to one with the cosmos itself. It is a view built on a “tradition”, the modern-European tradition that began with Copernicus’s breakthrough and followed by Galileo. Vedic and Islamic knowledges—as well as Indigenous knowledges in the Americas and

Australasia—are today in the process of being reinvested all around the world. But of course, none of these knowledges, and none of the original languages in which these knowledges are embedded, can survive by themselves. Re-investing Vedic or Indigenous knowledges, today, means to do it in dialogue (sometimes friendly, sometimes confrontational) with Western categories of thought (remember: grounded in Greek or Latin languages and translated into the three modern languages of “serious knowledge”—French, German, and English). Re-investing means also to change the perspective (to change it and not to invert it). Changing but not inverting perspectives brings as a consequence *border epistemology*, an epistemology of the border from the perspective of what has been denied and the possibility of conceptual delinking. Border epistemology is a powerful one for the simple reason that it is based, on the one hand, on the critical examination of non-Western languages and *traditions* and, on the other, on the critical examination of Western languages and *traditions*. *Border epistemology presupposes a double critique* (of Shiva and Nussbaum, for example, as well as Nandy and Sen), a double critique that can transcend the *modern/colonial structure* and contribute to move all toward a *trans-modern world*. At that point, “critical cosmopolitanism” can only be predicated on pluri-versality (and not on uni-versality). Pluri-versality as a universal project would help in uncoupling the concepts and structures of scientific discourses from the unintended consequences of scientific discoveries at the service of escalating wars (like the war against terrorism) and escalating genocides because, for example, making a profit with pharmaceutical products is more important, for those who control it, than saving human lives.

The last comment I would like to make—derived from the previous paragraphs—is that because science, old and new, has always stopped short when it comes to examining domination, oppression, subordination, exploitation, etc., critical theory now becomes the unavoidable road to follow for those who are not ready yet to surrender to the imperial consequences of the myth of sciences and of scientific practices. Critical theory has been associated with Karl Marx’s unveiling of the logic of capital, although as always, “critical takes” (if not theory in the contemporary sense of the expression) on the initial moments of Western expansion and the foundation of capitalism as we know it today, can be found in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. At that point, Indigenous people from the Americas and African slaves did not have the “conceptual tools” available to Marx after one hundred years of political economy (e.g., Adam Smith) grounded on the colonial experience of the Spanish empires and the British Caribbean plantations, before moving to India. Be as it may, Marx and then Max Horkheimer are two anchors when it comes to critical theory. For Enrique Dussel (one of the founders of Philosophy of Liberation, in Latin America), the critical contribution of Marx consisted in taking the principles and the logic of modern social sciences and using them to unveil and reveal the hidden logic of capital, that is, the *logic of exploitation* hidden under the *rhetoric of progress*.¹⁹ Horkheimer, following the same path, called *traditional* all theory that operates on the basic assumptions of the empirical sciences; *traditional* are theories that give a new sense to factual information beyond their descriptive nature. Critical theory, instead, explores and reveals the hidden principles and domineering and exploitative consequences of knowledge (Horkheimer,

1937). Today, as the examples from India deployed in Nanda's well-informed study show, critical theory cannot remain within the confines of the industrial exploitation of the proletariat in Europe, which were the experiences upon which Marx and Horkheimer (sensitive to domination and control due to their Jewish social upbringing) based their critical theory. Critical theory, today, is and will be a *decolonizing enterprise* (decolonization of knowledge), even in the cases of industrial exploitation in the colonies, in the ex-third world or in today's emerging economies and countries whose populations are living with one dollar a day. Racism goes hand-in-hand with the exploitation, both in the ex-colonies and increasingly in Europe and the United States due to the massive immigration from the ex-third world.

In this context, the scenario presented to us by Professor Nanda changes its configuration. The question is not only that postmodern critique of science, in the West, and leftist critique of sciences in India (in Africa, the Middle East, or Latin America), can help the cause of non-Western fundamentalisms; the fact is that humanistic ideals based on liberal premises in the West can also play into the hand of neo-liberal political and economic theory. That is, they could play into the hands of Western fundamentalisms advanced in the name of freedom and democracy. Briefly, there is no safe place within *abstract uni-versals of European modernity or its counterpart, Hindu Nationalism or Islamic fundamentalism*. The way out is conceptual delinking, the relentless practice of double critique, of critical theory as epistemic decolonization and of border epistemology to avoid the trap of fundamentalisms in reverse. The road toward the future is about learning to conceive and enact critical cosmopolitan practices, decolonizing knowledge, and thinking beyond the rules of modern thought. *Pluri-versality* as a universal project shall not be thought out as a *new abstract universal* but as a *connector*, a place of encounter and exchange of liberating and decolonizing practices, where it would make sense to fight for the idea that an other world is possible; and that world will be conceived as a world in which many worlds can co-exist (as the Zapatistas would have it). Ruled out will be both any attempt to appropriate *pluri-versality* in order to convert it to a commodity and any temptation to build a powerful army around to eliminate all of those who hate *pluri-versality* and want to destroy it! *Pluri-versality* as a universal project is being conceived as a global dialogue and action to eliminate all vestiges of totalitarian thinking, the logic of coloniality, the dispensability of human lives and the concentration of money and meaning in fewer and fewer hands. In that world, Nussbaum and Sen, on the one hand, and Shiva and Nandy, on the other, should be able to work together against Western and Eastern totalitarian projects and fundamental beliefs.

Notes

- [1] Meera Nanda, *Prophets Facing Backward: Postmodern Critiques of Science and Hindu Nationalism in India* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003).
- [2] "Biographically motivated" is here a positive observation and not a critique. The position I am taking in my commentary argues in favor of the bio-graphical inscription in the production of knowledge, which has been suppressed by modern Ego-politics of knowledge behind modern and European concept of "scientific knowledge"; the absence of the bio-graphic gave scientific knowledge the magic touch of universality.

- [3] Ashis Nandy, quoted in Nanda, *Prophets Facing Backward*, p. 211.
- [4] Nanda, *Prophets Facing Backward*, p. 231.
- [5] *Ibid.*, bolds mine, italics Nanda's.
- [6] *Ibid.*, bolds mine, italics Nanda's.
- [7] See for instance, Lewis Gordon, "Fanon and Development: A Philosophical Look" in *Africa Development/Development Afrique*, XXIX, 1, 2004, 65–88; and "African American Philosophy, Race and the Geography of reason" in *Not only the Masters tools: African American Studies in Theory and Practice*. Lewis Gordon, ed. Boulder: CO Paradigm Publisher, 2005, forthcoming.
- [8] "Adorno in India. Revisiting the Psychology of Fascism" in *Exiled at Home* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 104–5, italics mine.
- [9] See Vandana Shiva, "Globalization and Its Fall Out", <http://www.zmag.org/sustainers/content/2003-04/02shiva.cfm>
- [10] Richard Robbins, *Global Problems and the Culture of Capitalism* (Allyn and Bacon, 1999); see also Susan George, "A brief history of neoliberalism", <http://www.globalexchange.org/campaigns/econ101/neoliberalism.html>
- [11] Nanda, *Prophets Facing Backward*, p. 231. Italics mine, last sentence quotation from Nussbaum.
- [12] *Ibid.*
- [13] *Ibid.*
- [14] "The many faces of cosmopolis: Border thinking and critical cosmopolitanism", *Public Culture* 12.3, 2000.
- [15] Steve Heims, John Von Neuman, and Norbert Wiener, *From Mathematics to the Technologies of Life and Death* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1980).
- [16] Distinguished Mexican sociologist Pablo González Casanova, has recently published a detailed and critical analysis of the imperial dimensions and uses of the New Sciences and the need to activate critical analysis and decolonizing projects in the Humanities to unveil the dangers hidden under the marvelous achievements of the New Sciences. *Las Nuevas Ciencias y las Humanidades. De la Academia a la Política* (Barcelona: Anthropos, 2004).
- [17] Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, "The color of reason: The idea of "race" in Kant's anthropology", in Chukwudi Eze, ed., *Postcolonial African Philosophy: A Critical Reader* (London: Blackwell, 1997), pp. 103–40.
- [18] Ranajit Guha, *Dominance Without Hegemony*, quoted in Walter D. Mignolo, "Coloniality of Power and Subalternity", in Ileana Rodriguez, ed., *The Latin American Subaltern Studies Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), pp. 424–45.
- [19] Enrique Dussel, "El programa científico de investigaci' on de Karl Marx" in *Hacia una filosofía política crítica* (Sevilla: Palimpsesto, 2001), pp. 279–303.

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