CENTRE AND PERIPHERIES: REFLECTION ON NEW POWER, HIERARCHIES AND NORMS

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the concept of centre and periphery through the time frame of the past two millennia. It also looks at these two concepts through the lenses of various theoretical frameworks like the postcolonial theory, poststructuralist theory, and the post nationalism phase. An attempt is made to identify New Power, Hierarchies and Norms in the changing order of things through the two millennia.

INTRODUCTION

The discussion of the idea of centre-periphery can begin at a dangerously high level of generality, right from the perspective of Political Science (Rokkan, 1969; Szalai, et al, 2016) to Sociology (Pierre Bourdieu, 2005) besides Linguistics, Critical Theory, and our very own Postcolonial Studies. Although a year before Edward Said rocked the world with his famous book *Orientalism*, Nigel Mackenzie, of the University of Oslo, published a paper titled 'Centre and periphery: the marriage of two minds,' where he formulated a critique of the available theories of that time, for example Galtung's, Rokkan's, etc. He quotes Galtung and says "the centre is more centrally located in the interaction network than the periphery" (1971). In Rokkan's approach the centre is assumed to be the axis of political control to

subordinate the people on the other side, and it is these provinces that resist the control are what we call the periphery.

In post-colonial theory and / or post-colonial discourse the concept of Centre and Periphery is one of the most contentious ideas, and yet it is one of the key issues, at investigating the complex implications of colonisation. The centre / periphery paradigm was, later on, mostly investigated along with Immanuel Wallerstein's concept of world-systems, from his 'Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century' (1974) to the *The World is Out of Joint: World-Historical Interpretations of Continuing Polarizations* (2015). His *Modern World Systems-1* "locates the centre of gravity of historical agency in north-western Europe" (Kaps and Komlosy, 2013).

Among the anti-colonial writers in the second half of the twentieth century there was a colonial or Eurocentric approach to what was central or peripheral, and since long it has been challenged, for example by Ngugi in *Moving the Centre*, where he argues to detach the concept of a centre from the west, and rather accept a "plurality of centres all over the world" (1993). Although his approach is Afrocentric it helps to reverse the centre/periphery binary. But at the same time it shouldn't be forgotten that a colonising empire would only be possible because of stability in hierarchies that made possible a geography of differences, something Kipling is wrongly quoted for in 'The Ballad of East and West' because the first line says "OH, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet," but at the same time the third and fourth line affirm "But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth, / When two strong men stand face to face, tho' they come from the ends of the earth!" This consolidates the idea that a colonising empire was only possible because of some sort of frailty or imagined frailty, which could be exploited for the birth of the periphery, something that echoes Wallerstein who divides world-economies into 'core-states' and 'peripheral areas' instead of peripheral states for which he says, "I do not say peripheral *states* because one characteristic of a peripheral area is that the indigenous state is weak, ranging from its nonexistence (that is, a colonial situation) to one with a low degree of autonomy (that is, a neo-colonial situation)" (1974).

The imperial Europe laid at the centre in the noble man's cartography, and savages were left on the periphery or in the 'heart(s) of darkness.'It should also be remembered that attempts at examining the centre/margin/periphery issue rather subverts the cause,and continual attempts at consolidating traditional facets of the periphery, the very concept that centre and periphery are fixed and essentialist is challenged through globalisation (Appadurai, 1996). We should rather examine if the idea of centre and periphery is still useful, and we find that contemporary scholars of postcolonial studies tend to underscore the remarkable intimacies between centres and peripheries, although there are spaces for imbalance of power, which we seek to address. As Said mentioned:

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For surely it is one of the unhappiest characteristics of the age to have produced more refugees, migrants, displaced persons, and exiles than ever before in history, most of them as an accompaniment to and, ironically enough, as afterthoughts of great post-colonial and imperial conflicts. (Said, 1994).

Background

In the discussion of the repercussions of centre/periphery binary on the pretext of development in recent times it is of emergent value to study the significance of global hierarchies arising from the imbalance of power and skewed proliferation of wealth among the states in 'centre.' In the name of development powers in the centre tried and were successful in regulating economic activity to perpetuate the existence of peripheries and to delay the efforts of dismantling colonial control and hegemony. Despite globalisation and neoliberalism neo-colonialism thrived due to lack of inclusionary politics, and "the early modern empires were reproduced as composite social orders: structured sets of relations which resist attempts to distinguish between "power and plenty"" (Rosenberg, 1994). Of these 'modern empires' British hegemony ushered in "a quite new form of world economy, in which British manufacturers possessed overwhelming preponderance amid generalized international free trade" (Anderson, 1992). In time an organised dynamic of colonial racism made it almost next to impossible the inclusion of peripheral areas as well as recognition of citizenship rights in spirit (Cooper, 1996). No doubt a huge amount of $13 billion was transferred by the US between 1948 and 1952 under the Marshall Plan to subvert the Communist expansion and to secure Europe against any multilateral trade. It was seen to that any discourse on development should, at least, conceal the nexus between power and inequality.

Most poststructuralist critics like Foucault and Derrida were ethnocentric in their refusal to dissolve the boundaries between Europe or the cultural centre, and the colonised periphery. For this, *Orientalism*, as I see, was an attempt to stretch both the historical as well as geographical terrain for a poststructuralist understanding of the emergence of the 'West' as the centre of civilisation and the colonial orient as the periphery. Yet it is possible, and I would rather stay on this course, to appreciate Said's *Orientalism* without entirely rejecting Marxist epistemology, especially when Spivak gives the "possibility of suggesting to the worker that the worker produces capital because the worker, the container of labour power, is the source of value" (Spivak, 1990). And therefore it is "possible to suggest to the so called 'Third World' that it *produces* the wealth and the possibility of the cultural self-representation of the 'First World'" (Spivak, 96).

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Edward Said pointed out the inherent inadequacy of Marxist theory in this regard and reminded us that Marx's vision was limited to Europe, and that he knew nothing of the nations beyond Europe. It is well known that Marx defended the rise and spread of capitalism in Europe for being a precondition for a social revolution, and in this way, he identified it as a grand historical project, which ensued in globalisation of capitalism and capitalist way of production. In recent efforts, to rebuild the links between a sort of Marxist metropolis and anti-colonialism, post-colonialism has surfaced as a project towards investigation of the effects of the colonial past. Though it presents considerable challenges to urban Marxist philosophy the notion of colonisation provides an extensive critique of dialectic humanist traditions. Said cited Marx's writings from 1853 about the British rule in India where he said that England had to play double role of both destroying Asiatic Society and laying the foundations for a Western Society, and Said claimed that this perspective of Marxist thought was flawed because it assumes the orient as a theoretical abstraction rather than understanding it as nations of suffering individuals. Even Fanon claims that such socialism was more of a European adventure.

As long as major capitalist economies, especially the U.S., continue successfully to thrive with blatant contradictions, dependency is bound to perpetuate and proliferate in underdeveloped economies.

Postnationalism and 'Post-national Formations'

It was Said who said that nativism "is not the only alternative. There is the possibility of a more generous and pluralistic vision of the world" (Said, 1993). So, as a result it becomes, at times, urgent to imagine a new world order at the periphery, a sort of novel social consciousness that grows beyond the precarious identities of national boundaries, a sort of trans-territorial existence "based upon human rights – the rights of persons as persons, rather than persons as citizens of nation-states" (Berezin, 2007). It seems to facilitate the rise of post-nationalism. Most critics (from Bhabha to Stuart Hall) more or less agree that post-nationalism can offer a rational reading of the colonial misadventure, and it is feasibly a better tool to deal with the limitations of anti-colonial nationalism, which oscillates between repression and retaliation, at max, without considering the ambivalent forces at work. This may augment the possibilities of a refined reading of colonial past, which may furnish postcolonial sensibilities that could admit a sort of inter-civilisational tryst of cultures against institutionalised coercion. Fanon says in *The Wretched of the Earth* that "The human condition, plans for mankind and collaboration between men in those tasks which increase the sum total of humanity are new problems, which demand true inventions" (Fanon, 2007).

With the focus shifting away from the nation-states to a non-state configuration towards a new era of progressivism where sovereignties and states are not only

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"*unexceptional* accidents of history" they are rather "*regrettable* accidents of history, accidents that are now either in decline or deserving of being in decline" (Wickham, 2021).

This also had its antithesis in what we realised as neo-colonialism. To address this, McKenzie's (1977) theory of centre and periphery seems to offer some solution. He investigated "why for instance European nations should exploit other nations and should tramp around the world to do so" (p. 57). He cites 'conflict of space' as a reason which forced "Romans to occupy Gaul and Britain and which forced the Americans to occupy Vietnam." In an interesting book by Alexander Barder (2015), which examines the blunders committed by centres like the U.S. to tackle terrorism allegedly emanating from the peripheries like Afghanistan and Iraq, there is a remarkable study of hierarchical violence through illegitimate invasions of the two in 2001 and 2003 respectively. The book has argued that "imperial and colonial contexts function as a laboratory in which techniques of violence, population control and economic principles are developed which are subsequently introduced into the domestic society of the imperial state. The text challenges the widely taken for granted notion that the diffusion of norms and techniques is a one-way street from the imperial metropole to the dependent or weak periphery" (Barder, 2015). This is a genuine attempt to critique some preconceived notions on international relations by questioning the imperial management of the economies on the periphery where surveillance techniques and transnational imposition of violence as well as "Proliferating state crime, eroding censure and extending neo-colonialism" are of key concern (McCulloch and Pickering, 2005).

Earlier the systematic division of the world-economy, which involved organisation of hierarchies on the basis of higher level of skillsneeded in these centres controlling the peripheries, came with further challenges. Since a capitalist world-economy flourishes on human capital, there rose a demand for skilled and unskilled workers. This leads us to the need for a critical analysis of organizational dimensions of diaspora so that there is a clearer perception of chaordic structures, and what mobilises them. Diasporas tend to be autonomous and contemporary diasporas are more heterogeneous than ever. Yet they do struggle for full rights and to be integrated into the centre.

Another facet of diaspora is the concept of exile. Those in transition are "culturally contaminated," and belong to the realm of exile, "caught in a historical limbo between home and the world" (Gandhi, 2019). We have undoubtedly moved from a politically charged idea of diaspora and exile, to be reminded of the pain and suffering it implied when indian indentured labours braved dangerous voyages to Trinidad, Fiji, etc. in the 19th century, to the contemporary movement of young scientists and other professionals to the West. It depends on how the erstwhile periphery is conceived and consumed.The discourse on diaspora and exile in post-nationalist thought calls for a critical examination of ideological contexts where migrancy is a priviledged paradigm of postcolonial trope of the metropole.

With multiple subjectivities, identity politics and cultural displacements, borders, diaspora and exile, once detached from their historicity, become more of an "embellishment of a universal narrative" (Krishnaswamy, 1995). The ideas of border, diaspora, and exile inform the perception of an individual and shape shared identities among different cultures representing a home away from home. To understand this shared suffering we need to dissociate the idea of diaspora from the experiences of a particular people and arrive at a universal appellation, which rather represents a nonnormative community. Although the diasporic voice is both cultural and national it is devoid of a nation, "caught in a limbo between home and the world" (Gandhi, 2019).

We also saw a steady growth in scholarship on globalisation, making borders and boundaries superfluous, or at least unsustainable. There has been a considerable increase in mobility of both people and information, with the advent of better connectivity. In the recent decades a new era of marked fluidity between borders along with migrant literature has emerged as one of the many aspects of postcolonial discourse. Migrant literature has also served to gradually diminish the belief in the ill effects of the colonial periphery on the metropolitan centre, as if the colonies on the margin were contagious (Ashcroft, 2009; Greenblatt et al, 2009). Mary Louise Pratt's 1992 study, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, has had far reaching effects where Pratt suggested, while advancing Hall's and Bhabha's ideas, that the understanding of the metropolitan was flawed especially when seen only through colonial idioms. Her call for a less violent term for the colonial encounter established the hybridity of the 'contact,' an interstitial area well-probed by Bhabha. There is no doubt that the colonial encounter left lingering effects of violent energies, and that anticolonial nationalism, like that in British Raj, helped mitigate the oppressive regimes, the decolonising project led to post-national solidarities as well, something that could vitiate the permanence of the centre/periphery paradigm. Post-nationalism came with "the possibility of a more generous and pluralistic vision of the world" (Said, 1993). Though Harish Trivedi remarks, "it may be useful to look at the whole phenomenon as a transaction . . . as an interactive, dialogic, two-way process rather than a simple active-passive one; as a process involving complex negotiation and exchange" (Trivedi, 1995), there was a major lack of integration of the sensibilities of marginalised voices especially in anti-colonial discourse. There is still a great need to create counterhegemonic spaces for intellectual voices so that there emerges a critique of the stubborn incapacity of Eurocentric powers to lend ears to subaltern sensibility. This was given a boost when Spivak questioned the inquiry rooted in western epistemologies of patriarchy and class struggle beside heterosexism and racism. This subordination of the subaltern was always suspect and thus it was important to recognise the need to promote fluidity in intellectual exchange among decolonised peoples. Spivak's Marxist-deconstructive work was successful in destroying the debilitating effect of colonial discourse on the colonised subaltern.

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However, we who have a lived experience of being embedded in a peripheral life can only perceive different centres as locations of domination imposing their aesthetics and values largely understood as cultural imperialism. The road to new power, obviating Hierarchies and Norms, is through better perception of the implicit symbolic violence of the centre on the periphery. A sense of dignity can be attained by building upon our cultural capital instead of being a cynical witness of the better world.

The centre/periphery binary, if begun with the oppressor/oppressed paradigm, can only seek emancipation from the chains of a reified historical consciousness in the consolidation of a new social force. With the beginning of this social change, "The examination of our colonial consciousness and our eventual liberation from its control must be attended by the evolution and dissemination of a. counter-consciousness" (Constantino, 2000).

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