



THE STRUGGLES FOR EPISTEMIC FREEDOM AND DECOLONIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE IN AFRICA

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PART 1

UNITS OF ANALYSIS, CONCEPTS & THEORIES

INTRODUCING ISSUES IN DECOLONIZATION/DECOLONIALITY

- ❑ In my most recent book entitled *Epistemic Freedom in Africa: Deprovincialization and Decolonization* (Routledge, July 2018) I posited six broad imperatives that invite us to define and explain decolonization/decoloniality in the twenty-first century:
- ❑ The first is the re-emerging idea that the empire especially the British Empire was benevolent resulting in attempts by some scholars to draw a 'balance sheet' of the impact of colonialism particularly its benefits.
- ❑ The second being that there is a strong belief in some circles that decolonization struggles were a twentieth century phenomenon and they delivered liberation of the colonized people, so the harking back to the sins and evils of colonialism is nothing but an attempt to compensate for African failures to govern themselves.
- ❑ The third is that there is a strong tendency especially among those who are beneficiaries of the current status quo to caricature rather than seek to make sense of the struggles for decolonization as nothing but being stuck in the past.
- ❑ The fourth is that there is indeed visible resurgence and insurgence of decolonization/decoloniality provoking an urgent need clarification of concepts and theories as well as exploration of its practical applications particular in institutions of higher education and in wider society.
- ❑ The fifth is that it seems that the current decolonization struggles are mainly pivoted on epistemological questions, thus making universities legitimate sites of struggles and this has generated a need to explain what decolonization means for the institutions of higher education, knowledge, curriculum, pedagogy, institutional cultures, and funding of universities.
- ❑ The sixth is whether decolonization/decoloniality is the most appropriate vehicle to carry us into a better future free from racism, domination and inequalities.

UNITS OF ANALYSIS (KNOWLEDGE, POWER & BEING)

Knowledge: Epistemology frames ontology. It focuses on politics of knowledge formation, what type of knowledges enable and legitimise ***racism, epistemicides, linguicides, culturecides, and alienations?***

Power: speaks to how the current/modern 'global political' was constructed, constituted, configured, reproduces itself, and how it works: '***will to power, paradigm of difference/ paradigm of war/naturalization of violence/genocides/ethnic cleansing/world without others/racism/xenophobia.***

Being: speaks to complex reinventions of being human, processes of subjection and subject formation: social classification of human species in accordance with invented differential ontological densities and racial hierarchization of human species: This is what is known as ***coloniality of being.***

DEFINING EPISTEMIC FREEDOM

Systemic/epistemic crisis

Cognitive injustice: refusal to recognise the diverse ways through which different people make sense of the world and their lives (diverse ways of knowing)

Global economy of knowledge: (i) centre is Europe & North America, (ii) uneven intellectual division of labour,

(iii) Africa: *hunting and gathering of raw data*, (iv) Euro-America: *processing and formulation of theory*, (v) African scholars: *native informants and consumers of processed theory*, (vi) intellectual/academic dependence: compelled to publish in journal based in Europe and North America (promotion & status).

Epistemic freedom (intellectual sovereignty in production and reproduction of knowledge): Right to think, write, theorise, communicate and interpret the world from where we are located and this set afoot new humanism and ecologies of knowledges.

Epistemic freedom: recognition of different ways of knowing by which people across the world provide meaning to their lives and make sense of the world

FRAMING DECOLONIZATION/DECOLONIALITY

- ❑ Perhaps the ideal starting point is to try and clarify key terms that are commonly used in the debates on decolonization/decoloniality
- ❑ **Colonization**: Episodic school: the event of conquest and rule over a conquered territory and a people, which was according to Jacob Ade Ajayi a 'mere episode in African history.'
- ❑ **Colonialism**: Epic school: transhistoric power structure of colonial domination that survives dismantlement of administrative colonialism. **Frantz Fanon**: colonialism works on the 'past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it.' **Peter Eke**: 'colonialism' is a 'social movement of epochal dimensions whose enduring significance is beyond the life-span of the colonial situation.' **Ali A Mazrui**: 'a revolution of epic proportions' : 'What Africa knows about itself, what different parts of Africa know about each other, have been profoundly influenced by the West.'
- ❑ **Coloniality**: refers to logic, culture, and structure of the modern world-system (colonialism and its replications).
- ❑ **Decolonization**: dismantlement of direct colonial administration and achievement of independence (shift of political power from colonial white ruling elite to black native elite: the struggle is that of elites who use peasants & workers as foot soldiers to gain state power).
- ❑ **Decoloniality**: new resurgent and insurgent movements confronting coloniality in the domains of power, being, and knowledge.

FRAMING THE DECOLONIZATION/DECOLONIALITY

- **Modernity**: constituted by coloniality as its underside and resting on 'rupture & difference': pushing other people out of time and invention of the 'Other' as Europe & North America propelled themselves into the centre of the world. Quijano & Wallerstein (1992): *'The Americas were not incorporated into an already existing capitalist world-economy. There could not have been a capitalist world-economy without the Americas.'*
- **Empire**: Sampe Terreblanche (2014): *'We cannot understand the challenges of our time without understanding the ways in which 500 years of Western empire building, often with the complicity of the elites of the Restern World, have shaped our world into the deeply unequal and gratuitously unjust place that it is today.'*
- **The physical empire**: conquers and administers the conquered people: seek ye the political kingdom (Kwame Nkrumah): political decolonization
- **The non-territorial commercial empire**: remotely controls the world capitalist economy and has monopoly of weapons of mass destruction: neo-colonialism (Kwame Nkrumah) & global coloniality (Anibal Quijano): struggles for New International Economic Order (NIEO): economic decolonization
- **The metaphysical empire**: invasion of the mental universe of the colonized and removal of the hard disk of previous African memory and knowledge and insertion of software of European memory and knowledge (Ngugi wa Thiong'o): colonization of the mind: epistemicides, linguicides, culturecides, alienation and cultural imperialism: epistemological decolonization

THE DECOLONIAL TURN

- ❑ There cannot be a '**decolonial turn**' without a '**colonial turn**': which underpinned a particular conceptions of time, being human, power, what it meant to be civilized, and in the process enabling and authorising colonialism and imperialism.
- ❑ At first the '**decolonial turn**' refuses to consider colonialism as secondary analysis of modernity (colonialism is a fundamental problem).
- ❑ **As put by Maldonado-Torres (2017):** 'The decolonial turn consists of the shift from acceptance of inferiority and the conditions of slavery to the assumption of the position of a questioner.'
- ❑ **Re-humanization**: creation of new forms of life—full humanity—the reinvention of the colonized as a people with agency as craftsmen and craftswomen
- ❑ **Rejection of mimicry & subversion of the law of repetition**: being in charge of one's destiny and creator of one's future
- ❑ **Negation of colonial time**: against theft of history and claiming history—relocating one's self into human history
- ❑ **Setting afoot new humanity**: *'For Europe, for ourselves, and for humanity, comrades, we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man.'*

THE DECOLONIAL TURN

- ❑ Under the 'decolonial turn' decolonization is an unfinished project of liberation.
- ❑ Under the 'decolonial turn' decolonization is articulated as involving challenging the Eurocentric conceptions of being human.
- ❑ Under the 'decolonial turn' a 'third humanist revolution' is set afoot that restores the ontological density of the colonized people.
- ❑ What is targeted under the 'decolonial turn' is the 'colonial line' (onto-Manichean-line) which not only distinguishes the 'human' from the 'divine' and the 'human' from the 'animal' but then enables the social classification and racial hierarchization of 'humans' in accordance with invented differential ontological densities, giving rise to notions of 'complete humans' and 'sub-humans.'
- ❑ Finally, under the 'decolonial turn' decolonization is articulated as a much more profound activity and process of gaining independence but a much more deeper creator of conditions of possibility to set afoot a new thinking, new logic, and new humanity.

PART 2

TRAJECTORIES OF AFRICAN DECOLONIZATION

AFRICAN SUBJECTIVITY & CONSCIOUSNESS

1. **Outcasts of the world**: expelled from the world of fellow humans
2. **Natives**: primitive & governed by custom & tradition
3. **Invention of 'transcultural elites'**: exiled from their communities, dislocated and suffering from deep alienation: the crisis of leadership in decolonization
4. **Liminality (3rd Space of enunciation)**: African elites caught between two worlds—one world undergoing destruction and the other ring-fenced by race (seduction): in a limbo.
5. **Racial melancholia**: ego is shattered as assimilation is not possible—feeling betrayed—suffering from double-consciousness: William EB DuBois: 'two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideas in one dark body.'
6. **Two extremes**: radical assimilation/radical dependence vs. radical difference/radical alterity in search of personhood.
7. **Invention of modern subjects**: they breath coloniality & being missionaries of coloniality

INTELLECTUAL INTERVENTIONS & LITERATURE

1. How colonialism and imperialism maintained its grip over Africa after the achievement of the political kingdom. Kwame Nkrumah's book entitled Neo-Colonialism the Last Stage of Imperialism (1965) introduced the concept of 'neo-colonialism' which spoke to how African states were independent in theory and 'has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty' and 'In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside.' See also Samir Amin, Neocolonialism in West Africa (1973).

2. How Europe underdeveloped Africa. Of course in this area, Walter Rodney's book entitled How Europe Underdeveloped Africa (1972) topped the list but I also delved into the expansive archive of Samir Amin particularly his books entitled, Accumulation on a World Scale: A Critique of the Theory of Underdevelopment (1974); Imperialism and Unequal Development (1977); Delinking: Towards a Polycentric World (1985).

3. How Europe invaded the mental universe of Africa/colonized the minds of Africans. Here the list is long: Frantz Fanon's Black Skins, White Masks (1952); The Wretched of the Earth (1968); Albert Memmi, The Colonizer and the Colonized (1974); Albert Memmi, Decolonization and the Colonized (2004); Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Decolonizing the Mind (1986); Chinweizu, Decolonizing the Mind (1987); and Yirga Gelaw Woldeyes, Native Colonialism: Education and the Economy of Violence Against Traditions in Ethiopia (2017).

4. How the 'colonial library,' colonial order of knowledge, and colonial paradigm of difference invented Africa and produced a particular idea of Africa. Topping the list is V. Y. Mudimbe's books entitled The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge (1988) and The Idea of Africa (1994). See also Claude Ake, Social Science as Imperialism: The Theory of Political Development (1979).

INTELLECTUAL INTERVENTIONS AND LITERATURE

1. ***How Europe ruled or governed Africa and its implications for postcolonial Africa.*** On top of the list is Mahmood Mamdani's *Citizens and Subjects: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (1996) and his slim volume entitled *Define and Rule: Native as Political Identity* (2013).
2. ***How postcolonial Africa ruled or governed itself.*** Of course in this area, Achille Mbembe widely cited book *On the Postcolony* (2001) topped the list.
3. ***How Africa has to grapple with its African, Islamic, and Western cultures and intervention.*** Beginning with Edward Wilmot Blyden's *Christianity, Islam and the Negro* (1888); Kwame Nkrumah, *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for De-Colonization and Development With Particular Reference to the African Revolution* (1964) and Ali A. Mazrui, *The Africans: A Triple Heritage* (1986) where the question of hybridity is emerging as part of Africanity.

IDEOLOGICAL PRODUCTIONS/CREATIONS

Negritude: uniqueness of African personality & its recovery

Garveyism: black consciousness and self-improvement

Pan-Africanism: rootlessness & unity of black people

Nationalism: self-determination, deracialization, Africanization, catching-up, indigenization, and nativism

African humanism: recovery and restoration of human dignity

African Socialism: anti-capitalist exploitation

Black Consciousness Movement: inferiority & self-definition

African Renaissance: rebirth of Africa & African solutions to African problems

DECOLONIZING UNIVERSITIES INITIATIVES

- ❑ **The struggle for universities:** Edward Wilmot Blyden, Casley Hayford and others agitated for an 'African university' from as early as the 1860s: indigenous university promoting African personality & African nationality rather than destroying it.
- ❑ **Challenges of creating an African university** (Julius Nyerere 1963): *'There are two possible dangers facing a university in a developing nation: the danger of blindly adoring mythical 'international standards' which may cast a shadow on national development objectives, and the danger of forcing our university to look inwards and isolate itself from the world'*
- ❑ **Positionality of the African university** (Ali A. Mazrui (2003): *'A university has to be politically distant from the state; secondly, a university has also to be culturally close to society; and thirdly, a university has to be intellectually linked to wider scholarly and scientific values of the world of learning.'*
- ❑ **Definition of African University:** Association of African Universities (AAU-formed 1967): *'The truly African university must be one that draws its inspiration from its environment, not a transplanted tree, but growing from a seed that is planted and natured in the African soil.'* It has to shed-off being an ivory tower and be active in eradicating poverty on top of producing practical knowledge and producing skilled people and promoting *pan-African unity*.

DECOLONIZING UNIVERSITIES INITIATIVES

- 1) **The Nairobi Memo (1968-1969)**: abolition of English Department: 'Why can't Africa be at the centre so that we can view other cultures in relationship to it?'
- 2) **Ibadan School of History**: countering imperial/colonial historiography and centering Africa in human history/oral methodology/Africanization of curriculum.
- 3) **Dar es salaam School of History**: class analysis (political economy), writing history from below, interdisciplinarity and counter-hegemonic histories.
- 4) **Dakar School of History**: Cheikh Anta Diop and Egypt as an African civilization/countering colonial racist historiography/calling for African Renaissance
- 5) **The Council for the Development of Social Science in Africa (CODESRIA) (1973)**: independent intellectual space to pursue research, political economy approaches and Africa-focused research

PART 3

CRISIS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

RISE OF AFRICAN AUTHORITARIANISM & DECLINING ECONOMIES

- ❑ Rising political authoritarianism: one-party-state and military dictatorships
- ❑ Declining academic freedom: state vs. academics
- ❑ **Cold War coloniality**: Either left-leaning or right-leaning: pre-occupation with ideological correctness
- ❑ The decline of African economies meant lack of funding for higher education by the end of the 1970s.
- ❑ Brain drain: migrations of academics to Europe and North America

NEOLIBERALISM & CORPORATIZATION

- ❑ Neo-liberalism, Washington Consensus & Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs): marginalization of Africa in global affairs, renewal of dependency, and closure of policy space, and attack on African national projects.
- ❑ Role of academics and their stature diminished in society.
- ❑ Academia lost its attraction as a profession
- ❑ Academic work was abandoned as the remaining academics concentrated on survival (consultancy and sycophancy).
- ❑ World Bank came up with the idea of importance of secondary education over higher education.

NEOLIBERALISM & CORPORATIZATION

- ❑ **Death of public university**: starved of funding—death of public service
- ❑ Idea of self-funding universities—entrepreneurial universities—massification of education.
- ❑ Invasion of universities by ‘business models’ and turning of universities into ‘capitalist enterprises.’ profit-making
- ❑ ‘Proletarianisation’ of professors: casualization and heavy workloads.
- ❑ Rise of antipathy towards critical thinking and ideas that do not bring profits.

NEOLIBERALISM & CORPORATIZATION

- ❑ Rise of 'academic managerial class' using corporate practices to govern universities.
- ❑ University became a 'marketplace' where knowledge and certificate became commodities.
- ❑ Evaluation of scholarship: quantification model and endless reports.
- ❑ Certificates, diplomas and degrees sought after without any concern for knowledge itself (pass examinations, then throw away the books & seek remunerative occupations)
- ❑ Student approached as customers.
- ❑ Obsession with internationalization at the expense of indigenization.

PRESENT TRIPLE CRISIS OF THE UNIVERSITY

Crisis of hegemony:

Functions of the university (high culture, elitism, universal knowledge, excellence vs. relevance, social justice, empowerment) (academic vs. intellectual).

Failure to handle contradictory functions.

Not the only site of production of knowledge (internet & digital world).

Crisis of legitimacy:

Complicity of the university: racism, patriarchy, sexism, colonialism, capitalism, genocides, epistemicides, linguicides, culturecides, and alienation

Recognition of diverse knowledge systems

Accessibility & relevance (values, knowledge & skills)

Institutional crisis:

Autonomy/ivory tower: social embeddedness and social responsibility

Academic freedom (rights) vs. epistemic freedom (justice)

Academic democracy: right to participate in university governance

PART 4:

RESURGENCE AND INSURGENCE OF DECOLONIZATION

RHODES MUST FALL MOVEMENTS

- ❑ **Ignited by students:** opposed to both coloniality & corporatization
- ❑ **Ideological resources:** Fanonian decolonization and Black consciousness.
- ❑ **Shifting:** from *political* to *economic (material)* & *epistemological* (discursive).
- ❑ **Decolonial turn:** Accept that all human beings were and are born into valid and legitimate knowledge system.
- ❑ **Epistemic turn:** The definitive entry of the descendants of the dehumanized into the academy
- ❑ **Rectification of epistemic crimes such as:** theft of history; epistemicides, linguicides, culturecides and alienations.
- ❑ **Reclaiming the university:** a public institution free from coloniality of markets.
- ❑ **Re-humanizing the dehumanized:** re-memembering the dismembered.

RHODES MUST FALL MOVEMENTS

Decolonizing the very idea of the university: shifting from a 'university in Africa' to an 'African university.'

Iconography: decommissioning of offensive colonial/apartheid symbols, statues, and names.

Funding of education: access to free, quality and relevant education.

Indigenous languages: use of indigenous African languages in learning, research and teaching.

Institutional cultures: changing of patriarchal, sexist and racist alienating cultures

Knowledge & curriculum: dealing with the problem of Eurocentrism in knowledge and enhancement of relevance of education: rethinking what is taught, who is teaching, how is the teaching done, and what is the value and relevance of what is taught.

Outsourcing of labour: Insourcing of workers as part of re-humanization of casualized labour and dealing with the perennial questions of inequality and poverty.

DECOLONIZING KNOWLEDGE & CURRICULUM

(Re)provincializing Europe (overrepresentation) and (De)provincialising Africa (underrepresentation): moving the centre, shifting geo-and bio-of knowledge, expanding the shoulders of giants.

Reviewing our disciplines: constitutive formation, fitness for purpose, relevance, value for money: avoid 'disciplinary decadence.'

Decolonial critique of dominant knowledge: unmasking what is concealed, avoiding fundamentalism (Eurocentrism to Afrocentrism)

Decolonizing normative foundations of theory (Cartesian & Enlightenment Reason): progress, social evolution, emancipation & development: 'philosophy' and 'idea' of history (Hegelian: *ahistory*, *pre-history* & *History*).

Rethinking thinking itself: recovery of subaltern/other knowledges as part of a drive to break out of epistemic and systemic crisis.

Learning to unlearn in order to re-learn: paradigmatic shift from what was meant for colonization to what is meant for liberation and freedom

Ecologies of knowledges: university/subversity/pluriversity

CONCLUSION

Immanuel Wallerstein:

'I believe that we live in a very exciting era in the world of knowledge, precisely because we are living in a systemic crisis that is forcing us to reopen the basic epistemological questions and look to structural reorganizations of the world of knowledge. It is uncertain whether we shall rise adequately to the intellectual challenge, but it is there for us to address. We engage our responsibility as scientists/scholars in the way in which we address the multiple issues before us at this turning point in our structures of knowledge.'