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Eurocentrism, Coloniality and the Myths of Decolonisation of Africa

Fifty years after the celebration of decolonisation the 'European game' which denied Africans agency continues to prevail. Coloniality remains a reality.

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Decolonially speaking, Euro-North American modernity unfolded in terms of the colonisation of space, time, being and even nature. It announced its presence through the usurping of world history by Europe and North America. It expanded, institutionalised and consolidated itself into a global phenomenon through mercantilism, the slave trade, imperialism, and colonialism. Economically, Euro-North American modernity was carried forward and globalised by capitalism. At the spiritual level, it was propagated through Christianisation. At the epistemological level, Euro-North-American modernity consolidated itself through appropriation and monopolisation of all useful existing knowledges as well as through the displacement, subjugation and silencing of other knowledges that challenged Eurocentrism. To survive until today, modernity evolved and unleashed a very persuasive global programme underpinned by discourses of democracy and human rights as it sought to routinise and naturalise itself as the only natural order of life.

The long-term consequences of all these processes were far-reaching and devastating for Africa. They resulted not only in epistemicides but also in the re-articulation of modern human history in terms of the 'Athens-to-Washington' historiographical narrative as the logical consequence of the usurping of world history (Zeleza 1997; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013a;). Once world history was usurped, the Euro-North American world pushed for the globalisation of Eurocentrism and coloniality. This is why the philosopher of liberation Enrique Dussel categorised the constituent elements of Eurocentrism as including 'Hellenocentrism' which privileges and articulated Greece and Rome as the original centre of human civilisation; 'Westernisation,' which identifies Europe and North America as the centre of the world and the paragons of human progress; and 'coloniality' which underpins Anglo-Saxon claims to being superior human beings ordained by God and history to dominate and exploit other human beings (Dussel 2011). By usurping world history Europeans were able

successfully gain ontological density as the only complete human beings while at the same time doubting the ontological density of all those peoples found outside Europe.

Samir Amin defined Eurocentrism as a modern construct that is constituted by a bundle of Western prejudices with respect to other peoples. Eurocentrism became one of the banal forms of ethnocentrism informed by European mistrust of non-Europeans and a discursive terrain of racism, chauvinism and xenophobia. While Eurocentrism is a deformed ideology, it has been used to confer upon Europeans and North Americans the right to judge and analyse others (Amin 2009: 177-178).

Amin added that Eurocentrism is 'expressed in the most varied of areas: day-to-day relationships between individuals, political formations and opinion, general views concerning society and culture, social science' (Ibid 179). Eurocentrism gave birth to coloniality. Nelson Maldonado-Torres defined coloniality as a global imperial power structure that survived the end of direct administrative colonialism. Coloniality exists through long-standing patterns of power which consistently work to define culture, labour, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. He elaborated that coloniality 'is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and every day' (Maldonado-Torres 2007: 243).

The reality which is often missed by Africans is that the post-1492 modern world system is resistant to decolonisation. The world orders it produced — such as the post-1648 Westphalian order, the post-1945 United Nations normative order and the post-1989/post-Cold War order — have all remained resistant to deimperialisation (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013b). This is why even though Africans launched some of the most protracted and heroic anti-slavery

and anti-colonial struggles, often these struggles became ensnared by the same inventories and grammars fashioned by the immanent logic of modernity, imperiality and coloniality. Ramon Grosfoguel argued that the idea of a decolonised world is one of the most powerful myths of the twentieth century which erroneously assumes that the complex 'heterogeneous and multiple global structures put in place over a period of 450 years' suddenly evaporated 'with the juridical-political decolonisation of the periphery over the past 50 years' (Grosfoguel 2007: 219).

Inevitably, African efforts to make history are constrained by their entrapment in global coloniality. This means Africans are making history

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within a stage set by Euro-American modernity that was not of their making (Marx 1898: 12). Amin (2009: 13) understood modernity to mean that human beings armed with secular thought and science, 'individually and collectively, can and must make their own history.' But the ability of Africans to do so was doubted, as their humanity had been continuously denied to the extent of even being reduced to commodities during the slave trade. The reality is that since 1492, Europe and North America gained a long-lasting victory 'not only through the force of its weapons: it remains so through its ''models'' of growth and development, through the statist and other structures which,

having been created by it, are today adopted everywhere' (Castoriadis 1991: 200).

African loss of ontological density

Today Africans are entrapped within a modern world system that is racially hierarchised, patriarchal, sexist, Christian-centric, Euro-American-centric, hetero-normative, capitalist, and colonial in architecture (Grosfoguel 2011). Denial of the humanity of Africans was based on misreading the African being as lacking souls, rationality, writing, history, civilisation, development, democracy, human rights and ethics (Grosfoguel 2007: 214).

At the institutional political level, as Euro-Americans were busy producing modern nation-states in the wake of the Treaty of Westphalia of 1648 and recognising each other's sovereignty and institutionalisation and 'norming' of a particular modern world order as a juridical political formation, they continued to intensify expansion beyond Europe in violation of other non-European people's dignity and freedom. The most important point is that under the Westphalian order, African people were not considered part of humanity that was expected to enjoy national sovereignty. The Berlin Conference of 1884-5 was the culmination of a long-process of writing African people out of the 'zone of being' into a 'zone of non-being' where they were available not only for enslavement but also for colonisation (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013b).

The Berlin consensus was in fact an agreement among European powers to divide Africa among themselves. While the institutionalisation of the slave trade became the first manifestation of the dark side of modernity, the Berlin Conference of 1884-5 enabled colonialism and laid a firm basis for global coloniality (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 20213a: 45-50). The scramble for and partition of Africa among European powers amounted to an open disregard and disdain for the African people's dignity, rights and freedoms (Mazrui 2010: xi). The Berlin Conference was hosted by the German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck who is credited for unifying Germany. The unifier of

Germany presided over the process of the partition of Africa.

The partition of Africa as noted by Mazrui 'unleashed unprecedented changes in African societies: political, economic, cultural, and psychological' (Mazrui Ibid xi - xii). African people of different ethnic backgrounds were forcibly enclosed into one of the demarcated colonial boundaries of the colonial state. At another level some African people with common ethnic background were randomly fragmented into different colonial states.

The Berlin Conference dramatised and confirmed the fact that Europeans did not consider those people found in Africa to be human beings that deserved to be treated with dignity. The logic that informed the slave trade also informed the partition of Africa. It is a logic of dismissing not only the humanity of African people but of considering them to be a 'present' that was 'absent' in considerations of world affairs. This logic was informed by what J. M. Blaut calls the 'myth of emptiness' which was constituted by four major Eurocentric propositions: that Africa was empty of people; that where people were found they were mobile, nomadic and wanderers without any sense of political sovereignty and territorial claim; that African people had no idea of private property; and finally, that African people lacked rationality (Blaut 1993: 15).

The long-term consequence of the Berlin consensus is that African people found themselves enclosed in territorial boundaries that were decided in Europe. Attempts to exercise their political agency had to be performed within 'iron cages'. But even within the confines of colonial boundaries, African people deployed pan-Africanism and nationalism as they fought to project their agency in contesting the immanent logics of the slave trade, imperialism and colonialism.

Is extra-structural African agency possible?

Transcending the edifice of Euro-North American modernity, particularly its globalised grammars, inventories and rhetoric has proven to be a major challenge for Africans,

breathing, as they do, modernity and coloniality every day. The institutions that were bequeathed by modernity on the world such as the nation-state and the capitalist economic management have somehow been naturalised. Euro-normativity has routinised and naturalised itself. Euro-North American epistemology has been globalised. African minds have been colonised. These imposed realities make it very difficult for Africans to exercise extra-structural agency.

But Africans have not given up the struggle to regain their lost ontological density. For example pan-Africanism emerged as a counter-hegemonic international movement that sought to contest articulation and projection

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of Euro-American power and interest at the expense of black people (Lumumba-Kasongo 1994: 109). Realities of the slave trade, imperialism and colonialism provoked the rise of pan-Africanism in the Diaspora to counter the dominant and hegemonic Euro-American worldview. Euro-American racism produced the idea of black people as a racial category that was exposed to racial abuses (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013c). This is evident from the concerns of the series of Pan-African Congresses that were held between 1900 and 1945. The main point about these Congresses is that they provided black people from the diaspora and continent a space to announce their presence in the Euro-

American dominated modern world.

During the Congresses leading black people consistently demanded an end to racism and the abuse of black people. The Pan-African Congress that was held in 1945 in Manchester in Britain not only brought together pan-Africanists from Africa and the diaspora but also made a bold statement rejecting colonialism. Pan-Africanists made sure that whenever Europeans and Americans met to decide the future of the world excluding black people's views, they organised their own meeting to articulate black people's demands. Three important objectives of pan-Africanism could be identified: pan-Africanism as a protest against Euro-American racism that was ranged against black people in the diaspora and on the African continent; pan-Africanism as a terrain for waging anti-colonial struggles; and pan-Africanism as a dream for African unity (Esedebe 1970).

After the 1945 Pan-African Congress the leading advocate of pan-Africanism became Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana. He convened the All-Africa People's Conference in 1958 in Accra, Ghana. Two issues dominated the conference: the decolonisation of Africa and the unification of African states and peoples into a United States of Africa. The conference became a precursor to the establishment of the Organisation of African Unity in 1963 (Murithi 2009). However, pan-Africanism continues to intersect with African nationalism paradoxically as some Africans continue to be reluctant to sacrifice territorial nationalism for the greater goal of pan-African unity.

African nationalism and the challenge of coloniality

African nationalism has its social base in Africa as well as a derivative genealogy (Chatterjee 1986). It is rooted in African realities of encounters with imperialism and colonialism. But the derivative component is equally important to note. Perhaps a balanced assessment of the character of African nationalism is to depict it as both a derivative discourse as well as a new creation of the African people as they responded to colonialism. It was never insulated from what Benedict

Anderson (1983) termed 'modular' forms made available by Europe and America. At the same time, contextual African historical realities and conditions dictated that producers of nationalism became innovative and creative as its grammar had to appeal to diverse African constituencies (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2009: 23).

But the derivative character of African nationalism partly informed Fanon who actively participated in the anti-colonial liberation struggle in Algeria to warn of the mutating quality of African nationalism into 'ultra-nationalism, to chauvinism, and finally to racism' (Fanon 1968: 125). Kuan-Hsing Chen amplified Fanon's argument when he noted that Third World nationalism became largely shaped by the immanent logic of colonialism, which made it fail to 'escape from reproducing racial and ethnic discrimination; a price to be paid by the coloniser as well as the colonised selves' (Chen 1998: 14).

Coloniality and racism as driving forces of the colonial state enabled colonialism to produce what Mahmood Mamdani (1996) termed 'citizens and subjects.' Mamdani described colonial statecraft as underpinned by the practices of defining and ruling cascading from the fear of the 'Indian disease' where the attempt to introduce direct colonial rule premised on eradication of difference between the coloniser and the colonised provoked active resistance (Mamdani 2013).

But what indicated that African nationalism was more of a product of modernity than revival of African pre-colonial formations was that it embraced modernist inventories and concepts such as universal franchise that cascade from Western bourgeois struggles of the seventeenth century. The horizon of African nationalism was the production of a postcolonial nation-state as part of existing Euro-American nation-states born out of the Westphalian consensus. Africans could be said to have had three options: reproduce pre-colonial formations; embrace existing colonial states; or create a new pan-African political formation. They settled for the embracement of the existing colonial state as the template of the postcolonial state. This led Basil Davidson (1992) to write of 'the black man's burden' and 'the curse of the nation-state.' What was at play was display of colonised imagination and constrained agency.

Myths of decolonisation

The post-1945 United Nations sovereignty replaced the Westphalian sovereignty order that excluded smaller states of Eastern and Central Europe that subsisted under the imperial Romanov, Hapsburg and other empires. Africa was not eligible for enjoyment of sovereignty. It was still enveloped in the paradigm of difference that informed direct colonialism. The other problem that Europe and North America wanted to resolve was that of Adolf Hitler's practice of racism at the centre of Europe, and its consequences. Hitler's cardinal crime was that of importing the paradigm of racial difference that was practiced in the colonies and deployed it in the centre of Europe resulting in what became known as the 'Holocaust'.

It was the practice of racism in Europe rather than its practice in the colonies that provoked Western powers to take such actions as the production of the Atlantic Charter; the Nuremberg Trials; the formation of the United Nations; and the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Hitler's application to white people of colonial procedures and technologies of subjectivation aroused the Western world to the dangers of narrow nationalism and racism as though they had not been practicing it against non-Western peoples for centuries (Du Bois 1947: 230.

The rise of the post-1945 United Nations sovereignty order provided Africans with a platform to critique and exposes the hypocrisy and double-standards of Western colonial powers (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2001). Therefore the struggles for decolonisation proceeded as claims for inclusion of Africans in the post-1945 human rights normative order. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 was closely studied by African freedom fighters and its linguistic inventories were used to put pressure on Europe to decolonise Africa.

When eventually decolonisation was realised from the 1960s onwards, the reality was that postcolonial states were admitted into the lowest echelons of the hierarchised and asymmetrically organised global international system. Consequently, the decolonisation process ushered into the post-1945 modern world order a group of the world's weakest and most artificial states (Clapham 1996). The post-1945 United Nations sovereignty order succeeded in accommodating some of the anti-systemic movements that had arisen in the peripheries of the Euro-American-centric world system. This is why Mamdani depicted decolonisation as a 'preoccupation of two groups that propelled the nationalist movement: the intelligentsia and the political class. They set out to create the nation, the former to give independent states a history and the latter to create a common citizenship as the basis of national sovereignty' (Mamdani 2013: 85).

But African nationalists used modernist inventories that denied Africans not only history but sovereignty and citizenship. Admission to the United Nations was part of the process of realising state sovereignty. The question that has always escaped proper analysis is that even at the United Nations the states are hierarchised with the Euro-American powers monopolising permanent seats and the exercise of veto power.

The second issue that must be raised is that the United Nations is part of the Euro-American-centric world system constituting another world order accommodative of anti-systemic political formations from the Global South and in the process shielding the world system from decolonisation and deimperialisation.

When the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) at its formation in 1963 embraced the principle of inviolability of existing boundaries in the process upholding the Berlin consensus 1884-5, it became clear that the decolonisation struggle was permeated by practice of 'repetition without change' (Fanon 1968: 23-25). Indeed 'pitfalls of national consciousness' and coloniality prevented Africans from abandoning the 'European game.' The crisis of

'repetition without change' is in fact the crisis of agency and imagination.

The Cold War as a site of imperiality and coloniality

The Cold War provided Africans with two ideological options: the capitalist path or socialist path within an un-decolonised modernist-imperial world order. Africans tried to navigate this binary through such initiatives as the Bandung Conference of 1955 that emphasised decolonisation as a central choice for the Global South; the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM); the push for a New International Economic Order (NIEO); the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA); Africa's Priority Programme for Economic Recovery; the African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programme for Socio-Economic Recovery and Transformation (AAF-SAP), the African Charter for Popular Participation for Development; right up to the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD).

These initiatives constituted what Ali Mazrui (1967) termed Pax Africana (African solutions to African problems). The intellectual resource for these initiatives was the dependency theory and the active agent was the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) under the leadership of Adebayo Adedeji.

Adedeji explains that all these initiatives failed because they were 'opposed, undermined and jettisoned by the Bretton Woods institutions and Africans were thus impeded from exercising the basic and fundamental right to make decisions about the future'. He identified what he called 'the operation of the development merchant system (DMS) under which foreign-crafted economic reform policies have been turned into a kind of special goods which are largely and quickly financed by the operators of DMS, regardless of the negative impact of such policies on the African economies and polities'. What emerges clearly here is that what Adedeji describes as DMS carry coloniality which actively works to deny agency to Africans to chart an autonomous path of development (Adedeji 2002).

The Western powers' economic grip on Africa was intensified in the 1970s as they underwent prolonged recession. The Washington Consensus emerged as a Western initiative of managing the economic recession. Western welfarism informed by Keynesianism was replaced by neoliberal principles that privileged market forces in the struggle against inflation.

Coloniality of market forces

The Washington Consensus was constituted by a set of ideas and institutional practices that began to dominate the world economy from the 1970s onwards. The world order brought about by the Washington Consensus became known as

> 66 The two movements – decolonisation and deimperialisation – intersect and interact, though very unevenly. To put it simply, deimperialisation is a more encompassing category and a powerful tool with which we can critically examine the larger historical impact of imperialism. 99

neoliberalism. What was distinctive about neoliberal advance was its anti-statism philosophy which culminated in the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) in Africa. The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank directly intervened in African economies through impositions of what became known as 'conditionalities' that eroded the social base of the postcolonial state and exposed it to attacks by the poor African people (Laakso and Olukoshi 1996). The imposition of SAPs took away the little that was remaining of African people's control over economic policy.

Inevitably, the 1990s have become dominated by new African initiatives to regain the lost policy space. The African

Renaissance together with the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) was meant to be the basis for African drive to own its developmental trajectory in the 21st century. These initiatives emerged within a context of revival of pan-Africanism that witnessed the transformation the OAU to the African Union (AU) in 2002 (Mathews 2007). The other initiative is that of intensifying regional integration as well as South-South solidarity that was laid down by the Bandung Conference of 1955. South-South solidarity is taking the form of such blocs as the Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS). The objective is to speak with one voice at such multilateral platforms as the United Nations where Africa is fighting for a permanent seat, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and others where global governance issues are discussed.

All these initiatives are taking place within a modern global order governed by what David Slater terms 'imperiality of knowledge' (Slater 2004). The role of 'imperiality of knowledge' is that while it concedes to the ideas of difference and limited juridical-political independence, it does not concede to the right of peoples of the Global South and their leaders 'to negotiate their own conditions of discursive control, to practice its difference in the interventionist sense of rebellion and disturbance' (Richard 1995: 211). This means that imperiality of knowledge governing the Western initiatives can only be changed through a radical double move towards decolonisation and deimperialisation.

Towards pluriversalism

Pluriversalism speaks of a world system in which different worlds are accommodated on an equal basis. Such a world cannot exist without the completion of the decolonisation and deimperialisation project. The current world system, its global orders and epistemologies have entered a terminal crisis since the attacks of September 11, 2001 and deepened with the global financial meltdown of 2008. This prompted Slavoj Zizek to declare that liberalism died twice — as a political doctrine and as an economic theory (Zizek 2009). These realities

led such scholars as Patrick Chabal to write about 'the end of conceit' and to declare that 'Western rationality must be rethought'. The end of conceit is understood as taking the form of the 'end of certainty: Western societies are no longer sure how to see themselves' (Chabal 2012).

The West is beginning to feel and grudgingly accept the falsity of claims of being the centre of the world. The forces of China are bringing 'de-westernisation' and the shifting of centre of the world back to Asia as it revives the 'Sinocentric system' (Chen 2010: 5).

Kuan-Hsing Chen is the proponent of the simultaneous processes of decolonisation and deimperialisation as portending a global future of genuine democracy. To him decolonisation did not simply mean modes of anticolonialism that were expressed mainly through the building of a sovereign nation-state, but is also an attempt by the 'previously colonized to reflectively work out a historical relation with the former colonizer, culturally, politically, and economically. This can be a painful process involving the practice of self-critique, self-negation, and self-rediscovery, but the desire to form a less coerced and more reflexive and dignified subjectivity necessitates it' (Chen 2010: 3).

Deimperialisation is a task to be performed by the former colonisers involving a genuine examination of 'the conduct, motives, desires, and consequences of the imperialist history that has formed its own subjectivity. The two movements — decolonisation and deimperialisation — intersect and interact, though very unevenly. To put it simply, deimperialisation is a more encompassing category and a powerful tool with which we can critically examine the larger historical impact of imperialism. There can be no compromises in these exercises, if the world is to move ahead peacefully' (Chen 2010: 4).

The deimperialisation entails abandoning the Eurocentrism and the spirit of imperial domination. It entails abandonment of the Western arrogance which breeds and perpetuates a feeling that Europe and North America have everything to teach non-Europeans and nothing to learn from other people and their civilisations.

Conclusion

Fifty years after the celebration of decolonisation the 'European game' which denied Africans agency continues to prevail. Coloniality remains a reality. This is why this article ends with a call for a simultaneous process of decolonisation and deimperialisation. Deimperialisation is meant to de-structure the racially hierarchised modern world system and re-structure if not re-humanise the existing asymmetrical power relations that facilitate the domination and exploitation of Africa by Euro-North-American industrialised nations. Decolonisation remains a future that Africa must fight for, as it deals with cultural, psychological and epistemological aberrations. Without these processes taking place, the possibility of African people exercising extra-structural agency remains 'pie in the sky'. Deimperialisation entails the acceptance of non-Western people as human beings with an ontological density equivalent to that of European people. In short, both Africans and Europeans have to decolonise their minds if another world predicated on pluriversalism and new humanism is to emerge. ∎

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