

# The Entrapment of Africa within the Global Colonial Matrices of Power

## Eurocentrism, Coloniality, and Deimperialization in the Twenty-first Century

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### ABSTRACT

*This article deploys world-systems analysis and the concept of coloniality to examine the experience of the African people within the modern world-system since 1492, a date that figuratively marks the birth of the modern world-system and its shifting international orders. Africa's experience is contextualized within six international orders: the post-1492 order, the Westphalian order that emerged in 1648, the post-1884–1885 Berlin consensus, the post-1945 United Nations normative order, the Cold War epoch that ended in 1989, the current neoliberal dispensation as well as the post 9/11 anti-terrorism and securitization. While Africans have actively contested Euro–North American hegemony throughout these periods, they have not yet succeeded in breaking the strong global technologies of coloniality that continue to prevent the possibilities of African agency. This is why this article ends with a call for deepening the decolonization and deimperialization of the international order in the twenty-first century.*

**Keywords:** African nationalism, coloniality, decolonization, deimperialization, development, Eurocentrism, neoliberalism, pan-Africanism, world-systems analysis

This [...] calls for critical intellectuals in the former and current colonies of the third world to once again deepen and widen decolonization movements, especially in the domains of culture, the psyches, and knowledge production. It further calls for critical intellectuals in countries that were and are imperialist to undertake a deimperialization movement by reexamining their own imperialist histories and the harmful impacts those histories have had on the world. Dialectical interaction between the two

processes is a precondition for reconciliation between the colonizer and the colonized, and only after such reconciliation has been accomplished will it be possible for both groups to move together towards global democracy. (Chen, 2010, p. vii)

## Introduction

Despite the fact that archaeological evidence has confirmed Africa is the cradle of humankind, the continent and its people continue to be entrapped within the existing global matrices of power underpinned by Eurocentrism and coloniality. As defined by Samir Amin, Eurocentrism is a modern construct that consists of a bundle of Western prejudices about other peoples. It is a banal form of ethnocentrism informed by a discursive terrain of racism, chauvinism and xenophobia underpinned by ignorance and mistrust of others that has been used to confer on Europeans the right to judge and analyze others (Amin, 2009, pp. 177–178). While it is difficult to define in precise terms because of the multiplicity of its manifestations, 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 ...” (Amin, 2009, p. 179).

As Amin makes clear in his work on this subject, Eurocentrism gave birth to coloniality. Coloniality is well defined by Nelson Maldonado-Torres as follows:

Coloniality is different from colonialism. Colonialism denotes a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on the power of another nation, which makes such a nation an empire. Coloniality, instead, refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labour, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus coloniality survives colonialism. It 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, p. 243)

Despite the fact that Africans have launched some of the most protracted and heroic anti-slavery and anti-colonial struggles, often these

struggles have been informed by vocabularies and grammars fashioned by the immanent logic of modernity and coloniality that disciplined these struggles into emancipatory and reformist forces rather than revolutionary and anti-systemic movements. Consequently, the celebrated decolonization struggles did not result in a new postcolonial world. This is a point that is well articulated by Ramon Grosfoguel:

One of the most powerful myths of the twentieth century was the notion that the elimination of colonial administrations amounted to the decolonization of the world. This led to the myths of a “postcolonial” world. The heterogeneous and multiple global structures put in place over a period of 450 years did not evaporate with the juridical-political decolonization of the periphery over the past 50 years. We continue to live under the same “colonial power matrix.” With juridical-political decolonization we moved from a period of ‘global colonialism’ to the current period of “global coloniality.” (2007, p. 219)

Maldonado-Torres and Grosfoguel reveal that there is need for more critical ways of understanding colonization and decolonization that open the intellectual canvas towards the analysis of Eurocentrism and coloniality as crucial structuring processes that are actively operative in the modern world system and that inform its shifting international orders. This article is informed by a strong conviction in the continuities of modernist-colonial power structures that shape the current global order in which the African people are confined to the lowest echelons of power. There is a continuing need to push forward the struggle for decolonization while putting pressure on Europe and North America to engage in deimperialization. Only when these two processes are fully implemented and taken to their logical conclusion will another postcolonial world become possible that is informed by genuine global democracy.

In this article the African experience is analyzed within the broader global geopolitics underpinning the modern world-system (Wallerstein, 2004) and its shifting world orders. The first section of this article introduces the contours of what Fanon described as the “European game” that inscribed Eurocentrism and coloniality at the centre of the modern world. The second section articulates the political constitution of the modern world order and ends with an analysis of the essence and impact of the Westphalian order on Africa and African subjectivity. The third section focuses on the Berlin consensus that authorized the scramble and partition of Africa among the European powers. The fourth section

briefly analyzes the role of Pan-Africanism in the African struggles to project their agency and claim their lost ontological density. The fifth section focuses on the immanent logic of colonialism and the grammar of African nationalism. The sixth section analyses the post-1945 United Nations sovereignty order that enabled decolonization, the birth of problematic “postcolonial states” and the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). The seventh section assesses the impact of the Cold War on Africa including how it provoked the Bandung Conference in 1955 and the subsequent struggle for a New International Economic Order (NIEO). The eighth section provides an analysis of the current neoliberal order and its implications for African agency. The final section calls for the decolonization and deimperialization of the modern world-system so that Africa will be able to play a meaningful role in international relations unencumbered by Eurocentrism, coloniality, and enforced subalternity.

### **How Europe Usurped World History and the Rise of Eurocentrism**

Historically speaking, the “European game” involves the usurpation of world history by Europe. The post-1492 period is a tale of how Europe usurped world history and subordinated African history to the Western hegemonic and imperialist historiographical narrative (Depelchin, 2005; Zeleza, 2005). Through the process of usurpation of world history, Europe put itself on a new and high pedestal as the centre of the modern world from which the “world is described, conceptualized and ranked” (Mignolo, 2005, p. 33; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013a). This usurpation of world history involved the colonization of space, time, knowledge, and being (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013b). It is generally understood as “modernity.” The usurpation of world history meant that the whole story of humanity became posited as progressing from the Greek and Roman classical world to Christian-European feudalism, to European capitalism, right up to triumphalism of the United States of America as the sole world superpower. Paul Tiyambe Zeleza (1997) termed this Euro-American narration of human history the “Athens-to-Washington” discourse.

This Euro-American narrative of human history is the constitutive motif of modernity and works together with coloniality which is the “darker side” of modernity (Mignolo, 1995; 2011). Coloniality is a twin of Eurocentrism which Samir Amin (2009) has described as one of the great “ideological deformities” of the modern age. The “dark side” of

modernity consists of the slave trade, imperialism, colonialism, apartheid, neo-colonialism, underdevelopment, and structural adjustment programs (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012). Since the time of the first colonial encounters, Africans have been struggling to make history and shape their destiny unencumbered by the imposition of the imperialist-colonial, Euro-American modernist straitjacket.

Taking into account this global context in which the very “idea of Africa” (Mudimbe, 1994) and the “invention of Africa” (Mudimbe, 1988) emerged within the parameters set by the Euro-American modernist discourse of alterity, then Karl Marx’s observation on how people make history and how the past impacts on the present, remains very instructive. In his treatise entitled *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx wrote that

[m]en make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living. And just as they seem to be occupied with revolutionizing themselves and things, creating something that did not exist before, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in time-honoured disguise and borrowed language. (Marx, 1898, p. 12)

Modernity, according to Amin (2009, p. 13) projects the idea that human beings armed with secular thought and science “individually and collectively, can and must make their own history.” The irony is that the Europeans, who embraced Descartes’ proposition of “cogito ergo sum/I think, therefore, I am,” denied that non-Western people could think and therefore make history. This is why, building on Marx’s thesis, one can argue that African people have indeed made history, but since 1492 they began to do so within an evolving Euro-American modern world-system that denied them a dignified place in human history and rejected their potentiality to make history.

Therefore, to gain a deeper and historically meaningful understanding of Africa’s place, role and struggles in the modern world-system, it is important to begin with a clear articulation of the political, social and economic constitution of the modern world-system and the world orders

this system has enabled. In adopting this approach, I am inspired by Edward Said who argued that:

The central point [...] is that human history is made by human beings, and since the struggle for control over territory is part of that history, so too is the struggle over historical meaning. The task for the critical scholar is not to separate one struggle from the other, but to connect them. (Said, 2003, pp. 331–332)

The emphasis is placed here on the connections between African agency in international politics and the realities of the really existing modern world-system and its shifting orders. A reality that Cornelius Castoriadis captured in these words, “The West has been and remains victorious – and 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, pp. 200–201).

### **The Post-1492 World-system: African Loss of Agency and Ontological Density**

The present world-system is aptly described by Ramon Grosfoguel as a racially hierarchical, patriarchal, sexist, Christian-centric, Euro-American, Western-centric, hetero-normative, capitalist, and colonial power structure (Grosfoguel, 2011). Its birth is traceable to 1492 when it is claimed that Christopher Columbus discovered the “New World.” At this same time Vasco da Gama circumnavigated the southern tip of the African continent. In combination, these events marked the unfolding of European expansion to the Africa, the Americas, Asia, the Caribbean, the Middle East and Oceania.

This period of European expansion inaugurated the birth of the modern world-system and its international order of empires. The Portuguese, Spanish, and Dutch empires as well as the later British and French empires that dominated Africa were underpinned and driven by a different logic than the Roman and Ottoman–Turkish empires that existed prior to 1492. The empires that existed prior to 1492 were driven by the logic of assimilation. The post-1492 empires were driven by the logic of race and racial discrimination (Burbank & Cooper, 2010; Mamdani, 2013, p. 75).

The Western empires that sprang from the post-1492 world-system were based upon what Maldonado-Torres has termed “imperial Manichean misanthropic skepticism” (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 245). Maldonado-Torres claims this skepticism was “not skepticism about the existence of the world or the normative status of logics and mathematics. It is rather about questioning the very humanity of the colonized peoples” (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 245). Within this racially-driven ideology, the African was re-articulated by the Western opinion-makers as a disabled being characterized by deficits. This articulation of non-Western subjectivity and being has been captured well by Grosfoguel: “We went from the sixteenth century characterization of ‘people without writing’ to eighteenth and nineteenth century characterization of ‘people without history,’ to the twentieth century characterization of ‘people without development’ and more recently, to the early twenty-first century of ‘people without democracy’” (Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 214).

This articulation of non-Western people in terms of deficiencies began when Columbus and his men encountered the indigenous peoples of the Americas and began to doubt whether they had souls since he did not understand their spirituality and religion. These imperialist skepticisms resulted in what Bonaventura de Sousa Santos has termed “abyssal thinking,” which is constituted by invisible “abyssal lines” separating humanity into a “zone of being” for whites and a “zone of non-being” for black people (Santos, 2007, pp. 45–53). Thus, since the time of the first colonial encounters, non-Western people have found themselves struggling to regain ontological density and to cross the “abyssal lines” into the “zone of being.” The slave trade became the first negative consequence of what Maldonado-Torres has termed the “Manichean misanthropic skepticism” of colonizing Westerners.

At the institutional level, Euro-American modernity is credited with the production of the modern nation-state. It is traceable to the year 1648 when the Treaty of Westphalia was signed at the end of the Thirty Years War in Europe. The Westphalian Peace Treaty signaled the institutionalization and “norming” of a modern world order as a juridical political formation (Hardt & Negri, 2000). As a result of the Westphalian Peace Treaty, the dominant European states agreed to recognize and respect each other’s territorial sovereignty.

At the same time, they continued to intensify expansion beyond Europe in violation of other non-European people’s sovereignty. The most important point is that under the Westphalian order, African people were not

considered to be part of humanity that was expected to enjoy national sovereignty. The Berlin Conference of 1884–1885 was the culmination of a long process in which the African people were written out of the “zone of being” into a “zone of non-being” where they were available not only for enslavement but also for colonization.

### **The Berlin Consensus of 1884–1885**

The Berlin consensus was an agreement among the European powers to divide Africa among themselves. This consensus was part of the “European game” that emerged figuratively in 1492. While the institutionalization of the slave trade became the first manifestation of this dark side of modernity, the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885 justified colonialism and laid the basis for global coloniality (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013a, pp. 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 sovereignty (Mazrui, 2010, p. xi). The Berlin Conference was hosted by the German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck who is credited with unifying Germany. The unifier of Germany presided over the imperialist partition of Africa. This irony led Ali Mazrui to argue that

[i]t is one of the ironies of the great German leader Otto von Bismarck that he helped to unify Germany in the nineteenth century and initiated the division of Africa soon after. The unification of Germany led to the emergence of one of the most powerful Western countries in the twentieth century. The partition of Africa, on the other hand, resulted in some of the most vulnerable societies in world history. (2010, p. xi)

The Berlin Conference introduced and defined the rules of the partition of Africa among European powers. The use of treaties and concessions bearing the signatures of African kings and chiefs were not intended to acknowledge the consent of African leaders but were meant to prevent conflict among the European powers. This imperialist partition of Africa “unleashed unprecedented changes in African societies: political, economic, cultural, and psychological” (Mazrui, 2010, p. xii). Africans of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds were forcibly enclosed into the demarcated colonial boundaries of each of the European powers, while some African people with a common ethnic and cultural background

were randomly fragmented between different colonial territories. Adekeye Adebajo correctly characterized the essence of the Berlin Conference in the following dramatic manner:

Berlin and its aftermath were akin to armed robbers forcibly breaking into a house and sharing out its possessions while the owners of the house – who had been tied up with thick ropes – were wide awake, but were powerless to prevent the burglary. It would be hard to find examples in world history in which a single meeting had such devastating political, socioeconomic, and cultural consequences for an entire continent (Adebajo, 2010, p. 16).

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

The long-term consequence of the Berlin consensus is that the African people found themselves enclosed in territorial boundaries that were decided in Europe. Their political attempts to exercise their political agency, therefore, had to be performed within the “iron cages” of the colonial boundaries. But even within the confines of their colonial boundaries, the African people deployed Pan-Africanism and African nationalism as means for projecting their agency and contesting the immanent logic of the slave trade, imperialism, and colonialism.

### **Pan-Africanism and the Articulation of African Agency**

Tukumbi Lumumba-Kasongo defined Pan-Africanism as an international phenomenon that sought to contest the articulation and projection of Euro-American power and interest at the expense of black people (Lumumba-Kasongo, 1994, p. 109). Pan-Africanism emerged as a counter worldview to the dominant and hegemonic Euro-American worldview.

It was provoked by the Euro-American racism that enabled and tolerated such inimical processes as the Atlantic slave trade, imperialism, colonialism, apartheid and neocolonialism (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013c). This is evident from the concerns voiced at the series of Pan-African Congresses that were held between 1900 and 1945.

The first Pan-African Congress was organized by a West Indian barrister Henry Sylvester-Williams in 1900. Sylvester-Williams was alarmed by the speed with which the European powers were violently colonizing Africans. Those Africans who were in London during that time were exposed to racist treatment, which was part of the imperialist and colonial mood of the time. The Pan-African Congress was therefore used to make an appeal to the nations of the world “to protect the Africans from depredations of the empire builders” (Padmore, 1972, p. 96). At this inaugural Pan-African Congress, the Pan-Africanists discussed the socio-economic and political conditions of black people in the African diaspora caused by slavery; the question of independent nations governed by black people (Haiti, Liberia, and Ethiopia); the problems of slavery, the scourge of imperialism and colonialism as well as the impact of Christianization on the African people (Adejumobi, 2001, p. 456).

The next Pan-African Congress was organized by William E.B. Du Bois, an African American intellectual and activist who strongly believed that black people in the Americas would only be able to free themselves from racial discrimination and racism if they claimed their African roots and became proud of their blackness. The ill-treatment of African in the Congo Free State of Leopold II and the lack of recognition of Africans who participated in the First World War (1914–1918) provoked Du Bois to organize the Pan-African Congress of 1919 in Paris. Du Bois wanted the European powers to adopt a Charter for Human Rights for Africans as a reward for the sacrifices they endured during the First World War fighting for the Allied Powers (Adejumobi, 2001).

The Pan-African Congresses provided black people of the African diaspora and the continent of Africa with 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 at 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 organized their own meeting to articulate black people's demands. Three important aspects of Pan-Africanism could be identified in these meetings: Pan-Africanism as a protest against Euro-American racism against black people in the diaspora and on the African continent; Pan-Africanism as a space for waging anti-colonial struggles; and Pan-Africanism as a quest for African unity (Esedebe, 1970).

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

### **Colonialism and the Grammar of African Nationalism**

Without necessarily dismissing the "historicity" and social roots of African nationalism and its role in world politics as a new form in which Africans exercise their agency to resist colonialism, it is still also true that it was a "derivative discourse" that was interpellated by colonialism (Chatterjee, 1986). This is why even Fanon who actively participated in the anti-colonial liberation struggle in Algeria, warned of the mutating quality of African nationalism into "ultra-nationalism, to chauvinism, and finally to racism" (Fanon, 1968, p. 125). This is also why Kuan-Hsing Chen has declared that "Shaped by the immanent logic of colonialism, Third World nationalism could not escape from reproducing racial and ethnic discrimination; a price to be paid by the colonizer as well as the colonised selves" (Chen, 1998, p. 14).

Racism was the driving ideology of the colonial state which enabled it to produce what Mahmood Mamdani (1996) termed "citizens" and "subjects" and what Albert Memmi (1957) termed "the colonizer and the colonised." The colonial state reproduced global coloniality. This is why 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 colonizer and the colonized provoked active resistance (Mamdani, 2013).

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 the producers of African nationalism became innovative and creative as its grammar had to appeal to diverse African constituencies. This reality led this author to argue with specific reference to Zimbabwean nationalism that

[n]ationalism was fueled by complex local struggles, histories and socio-logies within the colonial environment that had a basis in the fading pre-colonial past, myths and memories. When talking about nationalism being shaped from “above,” we mean that the local formations and enunciations remained open to continental and global ideologies as they were seen as fitting and advancing the local agendas. It is within this context that nationalism incorporated such external ideologies as Garveyism, Negritude, Marxism, Ethiopianism, Christianity, Pan-Africanism, Leninism, Maoism and liberalism – mixing these with indigenous resources of entitlement to land for instance. (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009, p. 23)

But what indicated that African nationalism was more a product of modernity than a revival of African pre-colonial formations was that it embraced modernist vocabularies and concepts such as universal franchise that come from the Western bourgeois struggles. The goal of African nationalism was the production of a postcolonial nation-state. Africans can 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 boundaries 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 the display of a colonized imagination and constrained agency. As Davidson argued:

We have to be concerned here with the nationalism which produced the nation-states of newly independent Africa after the colonial period: with the nationalism that became nation-statism. This nation-statism looked like

a liberation, and really began as one. But it did not continue as liberation. In practice, it was not a restoration of Africa to Africa's own history, but the onset of a new period of indirect subjection to the history of Europe. The fifty or so states of the colonial partition, each formed and governed as though their peoples possessed no history of their own, became fifty or so nation-states formed and governed on European models, chiefly the models of Britain and France. Liberation thus produced its own denial. Liberation led to alienation. (Davidson, 1992, p. 10).

### **The Postcolonial States in the Post-1945 United Nations Sovereignty System**

The post-1945 United Nations sovereignty order emerged from two world wars (1914–1918) and (1939–1945). It effectively replaced the Westphalian sovereignty order that excluded the smaller states of Eastern and Central Europe that were under the Romanov and Hapsburg empires. Africa was still far from being considered ready for the enjoyment of sovereignty. In the inter-war years (1918–1938) Adolf Hitler of Germany became the leading advocate of Nazi racist ideology, which imported the paradigm of racial difference that was practiced in the European colonies and which the Nazis deployed in Europe resulting in what is known as the “Holocaust” (Cesaire, 1972, p. 36).

It was the practice of racism at the centre of Europe rather than its practice in the colonies that provoked the Western powers to take such actions as the creation of the Atlantic Charter; the Nuremberg Trials; the formation of the United Nations; and the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Hitler's major crime was that of applying coloniality and racism, which was designed for those people in the “zone of non-being” to people in Europe who were in the “zone of being.” This development was captured by Aime Cesaire who wrote that

Nazism before it was inflicted on them, they absolved it, shut their eyes to it, legitimized it, because, until then, it had been applied only to non-European peoples; that they have cultivated that Nazism, that they are responsible for it, and that before engulfing the whole edifice of Western Christian civilization in its redden waters, it oozes, seeps, and trickles from every crack. (Cesaire, 1972, p. 36)

Hitler's application to white people of colonial racist practices and technologies of subjectivation aroused the Western world to the dangers of extreme nationalism and racism even though they had been practicing them against non-Western people for centuries (Du Bois, 1947, p. 230).

What is important for Africa about the rise of the post-1945 United Nations sovereignty order is that it provided Africans with a platform to critique and exposed the hypocrisy and double-standards of the Western colonial powers (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2001). Therefore, the struggles for decolonization proceeded as claims for the inclusion of Africans in the post-1945 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 decolonize Africa.

When eventually decolonization was realized beginning in the late 1950s and 1960s, the reality was that postcolonial states were admitted into the lowest echelons of the hierarchical and asymmetrically organized global international system. Consequently, the decolonization process brought into the post-1945 modern world order a large number of the world's weakest and most artificial states (Clapham, 1996). The post-1945 United Nations sovereignty order succeeded in accommodating most of the anti-systemic movements that had arisen in the peripheries of the Euro-American-centric world-system. As noted by Mamdani:

Decolonization was the 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 the independent state a history and the later to create a common citizenship as the basis of national sovereignty. (Mamdani, 2013, p. 85)

These were modernist inventories that Europe had monopolized as it denied Africans not only history but sovereignty and citizenship. Admission to the United Nations was part of the process of realizing state sovereignty. The question that has always escaped proper analysis is that even at the United Nations the states are hierarchized with the USA and the major European powers monopolizing the permanent seats in the UN Security Council and the veto power in this body. The United Nations is part of the Euro-American dominated world-system and constitutes another world order that has accommodated

anti-systemic political formations in the Global South and in the process shielded the world-system from decolonization and deimperialization.

When the Organization of African Unity (OAU) at its formation in 1963 accepted the principle of the inviolability of the existing boundaries inherited from the colonial era and the Berlin consensus of 1884–1885, it became clear that the decolonization struggle was permeated by what Fanon called “repetition without change” (Fanon, 1968, pp. 23–25). Indeed, the “pitfalls of national consciousness” and coloniality prevented Africans from abandoning the “European game.” This “repetition without change” is in fact a crisis of agency and imagination.

### **The Cold War as Imperialism**

The Cold War (1945–1989) dramatized the emergence of two competing imperialist empires, one claiming to be spreading international socialism and the other to be defending Western capitalist and Christian civilization. The Cold War was a creature of Euro-American modernity. Communism and capitalism existed as oppositions within the discursive edifice of modernity. Both the United States of America (USA) and the now defunct Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) were imperialist and colonialist whilst at the same time posing as supporters of decolonization (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012). Inevitably, the anti-colonial liberation struggles became imbricated in the post-1945 superpower ideological struggle. Postcolonial Africa became a terrain for some of the most brutal and “hot wars” sponsored by the two superpowers.

The Cold War provided Africans with two ideological options: a capitalist path or a socialist path. Of course, Africans tried to navigate around this binary choice through such initiatives as the Bandung Conference of 1955 that emphasized decolonization as a central choice for the Global South; the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM); the attempt to create 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 Programmes (AAF-SAP), the African Charter for Popular Participation for Development; and the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD).

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

under the leadership of Adebayo Adedeji, who has explained 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” (Adedeji, 2002, p. 4). Adedeji 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 the DMS, regardless of the negative impact of these imported policies on the African economies and politics. (Adedeji, 2002)

What emerges clearly here is that what Adedeji describes as the DMS promote coloniality and actively works to deny agency to Africans who seek to chart an autonomous path of development.

### **Washington Consensus, Neoliberalism and Coloniality of Market Forces**

The Western powers’ economic grip on Africa was intensified in the 1970s as they underwent a prolonged recession. The Washington Consensus emerged as a Western initiative for managing the economic recession. The Western welfare state based on Keynesianism was replaced by neoliberal principles that privileged market forces in the struggle against inflation. The Washington Consensus was constituted by a set of ideas and institutional practices that began to dominate the world economy from the 1970s onwards. At the centre of these neoliberal ideas and institutional practices was what Adedeji described as the development merchant system (DMS). This world order is characterized by neoliberalism. David Harvey has provided a comprehensive definition of neoliberalism:

Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate for such practices. The state has to guarantee, for example, the quality and integrity of money. It must also set up those military, defence, police, and legal structures and functions required to secure private property rights and to guarantee, by force if need be, the proper

functioning of markets. [...] State intervention in markets (once created) must be kept to a bare minimum because, according to the theory, the state cannot possibly possess enough information to second-guess market signals (prices) and because powerful interest groups will inevitably distort and bias state interventions (particularly in democracies) for their own benefit. (Harvey, 2007, p. 2)

What is distinctive about neoliberalism is its anti-statism philosophy which culminated in the imposition of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) in Africa and other parts of the world. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) directly intervened in the African economies through the imposition of what became known as “conditionalities” that eroded the social programs of the postcolonial state, and as a result exposed it to protests and riots from poor people (Laakso & Olukoshi, 1996). The imposition of these SAPs took away the little that was remaining of African control over economic policy.

As a result, the 1990s were 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 an African drive to own its developmental trajectory in the twenty-first century. These initiatives emerged within a context of the revival of Pan-Africanism that witnessed the transformation of the OAU into the African Union (AU) in 2002 (Mathews, 2009).

The other initiative is that of intensifying regional integration as well as South–South solidarity that was laid down many years ago by the Bandung Conference of 1955. South–South solidarity is taking the form of blocs such as that of the now well-known association of emerging economies known by the acronym of BRICS, which stands for Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. The objective of these blocs is to speak with one voice in multilateral forums such as the United Nations (where Africa is fighting for a permanent seat), the World Trade Organization (WTO) and other international fora where global governance issues are increasingly being discussed.

All these initiatives are taking place within a modern global order governed by what David Slater (2004) terms the ‘imperiality of knowledge.’ The nature of the “imperiality of knowledge” is that while it embraces the ideas of diversity and limited juridical–political independence, it does not concede the rights of people 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, p. 211). This means that the imperialism of knowledge governing the Western initiatives can only be changed through a radical move towards decolonization and deimperialization.

### **Decolonization and Deimperialization**

The world-system and its world order has entered a crisis since the attacks against the USA on September 11, 2001 and this crisis deepened with the global financial meltdown of 2008. This situation prompted Slavoj Žižek to declare that neoliberalism has died twice – as a political doctrine and as an economic theory (Žižek, 2009). These realities led scholars such as Patrick Chabal to write about “the end of conceit” and to declare that “Western rationality must be rethought” (Chabal, 2012). According to Chabal, 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, p. 3).

The West is beginning to see the falsity of its prior claims to being the center of the world. The rise of China is bringing about a degree of “de-westernization” and the centre of the world is shifting back to Asia with the revival of the “Sinocentric system of trade and tribute” that existed in the past (Chen, 2010, p. 5). Instead of Europe and America responding with initiatives of “re-Westernization,” they need to undertake the “deimperialization” of the existing world order as a voluntary Euro-American radical transformation of the world-system to complement the Global South’s initiatives towards decolonization.

Kuan-Hsing Chen is the proponent of this strategy of simultaneous decolonization and deimperialization to create the conditions for a global future of genuine democracy. He defines decolonization as follows:

By decolonization, I do not simply mean modes of anticolonialism that are expressed mainly through the building of a sovereign nation-state. Instead, decolonization is the attempt of 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, p. 3)

As for what deimperialization entails, Chen says the following:

If decolonization is mainly active work carried out on the terrain of the colonized, then deimperialization, which is no less painful and reflexive, is work that must be performed by the colonizer first, and then on the colonizer's relation with its former colonies. The task is for the colonizing or imperializing population to examine the conduct, motives, desires, and consequences of the imperialist history that has formed its own subjectivity. The two movements – decolonization and deimperialization – intersect and interact, though very unevenly. To put it simply, deimperialization 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, p. 4)

Chen's arguments build on the work of Albert Memmi (1957, p. 146) who argued:

The disclosures having been made, the cruelty of the truth having been admitted, the relationship of Europe with her former colonies must be reconsidered. Having abandoned the colonial framework, it is important for all of us to discover a new way of living with that relationship.

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

### **Conclusion**

It appears the "European game" which denies Africans agency can only be resolved through a simultaneous process of decolonization and deimperialization. These processes require constructive dialogue between the erstwhile colonizers and the colonized. In addition, deimperialization is required to de-structure the racially hierarchical modern world-system and re-structure the asymmetrical power relations in this system. As presented in the opening epigraph of this article, decolonization must be deepened to deal with profound cultural, psychological and epistemological issues. Without these processes taking place, the possibility of

African people exercising extra-structural agency remains pie in the sky. Deimperialization entails the acceptance of non-Western people as human beings with ontological density equivalent to that of Western people, and both Africans and Westerners have to decolonize their minds and their practices if another world is to emerge.

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