Metaphysical Empire, Linguicides and Cultural Imperialism

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To cite this article: Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) Metaphysical Empire, Linguicides and Cultural Imperialism, English Academy Review, 35:2, 96-115, DOI: 10.1080/10131752.2018.1530178

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/10131752.2018.1530178

Published online: 06 Dec 2018.
Decoloniality names the decolonization of the twenty-first century that is ranged against the ‘metaphysical empire’, compared to the decolonization of the twentieth century that targeted the ‘physical empire’. The ‘metaphysical empire’ co-exists with the ‘commercial-non-territorial-military empire’ with its insatiable appetite for strategic economic resources. The ‘metaphysical empire’ operates and subsists on invasion of the mental universe of the world. Consequently, it unleashes epistemicides, linguicides and cultural imperialism. Mental dislocation, cascades from the invasion of the mental universe. The introduction of imperial languages and the displacement of indigenous languages were deliberate interventions of the ‘metaphysical empire’ on colonized spaces. Inevitably, it provoked epistemological decolonization, which is predicated on the demands for cognitive justice as an essential prerequisite for re-humanization/re-membering of the dehumanized and dismembered.

**Key words:** culture; empire; English; imperialism; linguicide; multilingualism

**Introduction**

Mind control through culture was the key! Cultural subjugation was a necessary condition for economic and political mastery. (Ngugi wa Thiong’o 1997, 8–9)

My focus is the topical issue of decolonization. I have chosen to open the scope of the discussion wide on the subject by situating and contextualizing it within the subject of empires, linguicides, and cultural imperialism. The leading South African economist Sampie Terreblanche, in his ground-breaking work entitled *Western Empires, Christianity, and the Inequalities Between the West and the Rest, 1500–2010*, argued thus:

* This article is a revised version of the English Academy Percy Baneshik Lecture, given on 22 November 2017 at the Cape Peninsular University of Technology (CPUT). The article has been peer-reviewed. (please insert as footnote to this page)
We cannot understand the challenges of our time without understanding the ways in which 500 years of Western empire building, often with the complicit of the elites of the Western world, have shaped our world into the deeply unequal and gratuitously unjust place that it is today . . . We cannot hope to remedy the brokenness of our modern economic system without understanding the economic, social and political drivers that have brought us here, and that continue to dictate the narrative of institutionalised poverty and globalised inequality. (2014, 3)

Still writing on the subject of empires and how they contributed to the creation of the present, the historians Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper in the award winning *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* argued thus:

Investigating the history of empires does not imply praising or condemning them. Instead, understanding possibilities as they appear to people in their times reveals the imperatives and actions that changed the past, created our present, and perhaps will shape the future. (2010, 3)

Burbank and Cooper emphasized that ‘empire is a useful concept with which to think about world history’, and added that ‘empire-builders – explorers, missionaries, and scientists, as well as political and military leaders – strove to make “we/they”, “self/other” distinctions between colonizing and colonized populations’. Today the world is haunted by the consequences of the inscription of the paradigm of difference, which according to Burbank and Cooper is traceable to the social engineering work of empires (2010, 9–12).

Reflecting on the African predicament in particular, Ngugi wa Thiong’o warned us that ‘imperialism is not a slogan. It is real, it is palpable in content and form and in its methods and effects’. He elaborated thus: ‘Imperialism is total: it has economic, political, military, cultural and psychological consequences for the people of the world’ (1986, 2). Regarding the current predicament of Africa specifically, Ngugi wa Thiong’o boldly stated:

The present predicaments of Africa are often not a matter of personal choice: they arise from an historical situation. Their solutions are not so much a matter of personal decision as that of a fundamental social transformation of the structures of our societies starting with a real break with imperialism and its internal ruling allies. Imperialism and its comprador allies in Africa can never develop the continent. (1986, xii)

I am hopeful that such a historical decolonial structural approach enables a deeper understanding of the challenges that we are facing today – particularly the systemic and epistemic challenges haunting us at the universities and the logics of the demands and struggles for decolonization. I am in agreement with Immanuel Wallerstein’s argument, contained in *The Uncertainties of Knowledge*:

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 reorganization 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 of our structures of knowledge. (2004, 58)

We have indeed been thrown into the maelstrom of epistemological debates in which we have to ask new questions even on languages of instruction such as English and to explore the possibilities of using indigenous languages as a part of the rescuing of the academy from collapse. Thus, this lecture cannot be complete without a reflection on the topical question of language. But let us begin with the subject of three empires and the three trajectories of decolonization they provoked.

**Three empires and three trajectories of decolonization**

Continuing with the historical framing of the current systemic and epistemic challenges, let me introduce the notion of three empires (the physical, non-territorial-commercial-military, and metaphysical) and the three trajectories of decolonization (political, economic, and epistemological). The first empire was the ‘physical empire’. This is what was targeted by political decolonization. Kwame Nkrumah’s dictum ‘seek ye the political kingdom and all else will be added unto you’ (1964) was an elaboration of the primacy of political decolonization.

At the centre of the physical empire emerged a struggle that pitted the entrenched white colonial administrative elite against the emergent black propertyless native elite over state power. It was specifically with reference to political decolonization struggles that the Nigerian sociologist Peter Ekeh defined as constituted by contestations between colonizing elite and colonized elite, both deploying ‘interest-begotten’ ideologies of legitimation.

In many ways, the drama of colonization is the history of the clash between the European colonisers and African bourgeois class. Although native to Africa, the African bourgeois class depends on colonialism for its legitimacy. It accepts the principles implicit in colonialism but it rejects the foreign personnel that rule Africa. It claims to be competent enough to rule, but it has no traditional legitimacy. In order to replace the colonisers and rule its own people, it invented a number of interest-begotten theories to justify that rule. (1975, 96)

The ‘physical empire’ was successfully dismantled in the twentieth century.

The second empire is the ‘commercial-non-territorial-military empire’ which is consistently and constantly thirsty for oil and other strategic resources located in the Global South. David Nugent (2010) argued that this commercial-non-territorial-military formation is in charge of production and division of labour on a world scale. It is underpinned by a particular epistemology predicated on ‘area studies’ which enables it to know its hunting grounds very well. It is this non-territorial empire that has established military bases in all the areas of its hunting for commercial resources.
Nkrumah was referring to the technologies of the ‘commercial-non-territorial-military empire’ when he introduced the concept of ‘neo-colonialism’. Nkrumah argued thus:

In place of colonialism as the main instrument of imperialism we have today neo-colonialism. The essence of neo-colonialism is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside. (1964, ix)

Nkrumah went on to explain the danger of neo-colonialism compared to the old form of colonialism that was symbolized by the ‘physical empire’: ‘Neo-colonialism is also the worst form of imperialism. For those who practise it, it means power without responsibility and for those who suffer from it, it means exploitation without redress’ (p. xi). It is an irresponsible empire that uses such slogans as ‘the right to protect’ to invade other countries. This empire speaks the language of democracy, human rights, and humanitarianism (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013b). It is this empire that Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, in their celebrated book simply entitled Empire, tried to sell to the world as benign, ethical, and dedicated to maintaining world order. This is how they defined it:

The concept of the Empire is characterised fundamentally by a lack of boundaries: Empire’s rule has no limits. First and foremost, then, the concept of Empire posits a regime that effectively encompass the spatial totality, or really that rules over the entire ‘civilized’ world. No territorial boundaries limit its reign. Second, the concept of the Empire presents itself not as a historical regime originating in conquest, but rather as an order that effectively suspends history and thereby fixes the existing state of affairs for eternity . . . The Empire we are faced with wields enormous powers of oppression and destruction, but the fact should not make us nostalgic in any way for old forms of domination. The passage to Empire and its globalization offer new possibilities to forces of liberation (Hardt and Negri 2000: xv).

The key problem with Hardt and Negri’s analysis of the ‘commercial-non-territorial-military’ empire is that they fell for the rhetoric of this empire, particularly its discourse of maintaining order and stability, and its claims to spread democracy and human rights across the world. So they ‘misread not only the political constitution of the empire but also its global mission’ (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013b, 21). Propelled by this misreading of the empire, Hardt and Negri argued:

In the warning years and wake of the Cold War, the responsibility of exercising an international police ‘fell’ squarely on the shoulders of the United States. The Gulf War was the first time the United States could exercise this power in its full form. Really, the war was an operation of repression of very little interest from the point of view of the objectives, the regional interests, and the political ideologies involved . . . Iraq was accused of having broken international law, and it thus had to be judged and punished. The importance of the Gulf War derives rather from the fact that it presented the United States as the only power able to manage international justice, not as a function of its own but in the name of global right. (p. 180; original emphasis)
Hardt and Negri left us with the idea of an empire that was decoupled from imperialism and conquest – an empire that offered possibilities for liberation. This is a distortion of the character of the empire. The Latin American scholar Atilio B. Boron, in his extended criticism of Hardt and Negri’s conceptions of the empire, noted:

Today’s imperialism is not the same as the one that existed thirty years ago; it has changed, and in some ways the change has been important, but it has not changed into its opposite, as neo-liberal mystification suggests, giving rise to a ‘global’ economy in which we are all ‘interdependent’. It still exists, and it still oppresses people and nations and creates pain, destruction and death. In spite of the changes, it still keeps its identity and structure, and it still plays the same historical role in the logic of the global accumulation of capital. Its mutations, its volatile and dangerous combinations of persistence and innovation, require the construction of a new framework that will allow us to capture its present nature. (2005, 3)

The decoloniality framework enables us to understand the ‘global coloniality’ created by empire (more on this in the next section).

The third empire is the ‘metaphysical empire’ which survived dismantlement of the ‘physical empire’ (Ngugi wa Thiong’o 1986). Ngugi wa Thiong’o explained that the ‘metaphysical empire’ is better understood in terms of how it worked on the minds of the colonized in the process adversely affecting the entire mental universe of the colonized through such technologies as epistemicides, linguicides, alienation, and cultural imperialism. Ngugi wa Thiong’o enlightened us on how the ‘metaphysical empire’ operated through detonating a ‘cultural bomb’ at the centre of the universe of the colonized:

But the biggest weapon wielded and actually daily unleashed by imperialism against the collective defiance is the cultural bomb. The effect of the cultural bomb is to annihilate a people’s belief in their names, in their language, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland. It makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves; for instance, with other people’s languages rather than their own. It makes them identify with that which is decadent and reactionary, all those forces which would stop their own springs of life. It even plants serious doubts about the moral rightness of struggle. Possibilities of triumph or victory are seen as remote, ridiculous dreams. The intended results are despair, despondency, and a collective death-wish. Amidst this wasteland which it has created, imperialism presents itself as the cure and demands that the dependent sing hymns of praise with the constant refrain: ‘Theft is holy’. (1986, 3)

The success of the ‘metaphysical empire’ has been in its submission of the colonized world to European memory. The consequence has been the re-making of the African people in the image of the colonial conqueror. Metaphysical empire even invented new political identities such as ‘native’. Mahmood Mamdani explained the invention of ‘natives’ in these revealing words:
Unlike what is commonly thought, native does not designate a condition that is original and authentic. Rather... the native is the creation of the colonial state: colonized, the native is pinned down, localized, thrown out of civilization as an outcast, confined to custom, and then defined as its product. (2013, 2–3)

The ‘metaphysical empire’ targeted the minds of the colonized. When the Latin American decolonial theorists introduced the concept of ‘coloniality’ they were capturing the combination of the ‘metaphysical’ and ‘commercial-non-territorial military’ empires in the creation of ‘global coloniality’ (Quijano 2000; Mignolo 2000; Grosfoguel 2007; Maldonado-Torres 2007).

Provoked by these three empires, it became logical for decolonization in Africa to take three inextricably intertwined trajectories. The first is the political decolonization that is elaborated above. The Bandung Conference of 1955 that sought a decolonial pathway freed from Cold War global coloniality spoke to both political and economic trajectories of decolonization. In his opening speech at the Bandung Conference, President Sukarno of Indonesia warned his colleagues to avoid a shallow understanding of colonialism:

I beg of you do not think of colonialism only in the classical form which we of Indonesia, and our brothers in different parts of Asia and Africa, knew. Colonialism has its modern dress, in the form of economic control, intellectual control, actual physical control by a small but alien community within the nation. It is a skilful and determined enemy, and it appears in many disguises. It does not give up its loot easily. (Sukarno in Asia-Africa Speaks 1955, 23)

It was at the Bandung Conference that Asians and Africans posed soul-searching questions about a future defined by them, as well as about their self-identity and the rejection of being controlled and defined by others:

Are we copies of Europeans or Americans or Russians? What are we? We are Asians or Africans. We are none else, and for anybody to tell us that we have to be camp-followers of Russia or America or any country of Europe, is, if I may say so, not very creditable to our dignity, our new independence, our new freedom and our new spirit and our new self-reliance. (Sukarno in Asia-Africa Speaks 1955, 186)

The Bandung Conference must be seen as the launching of decolonization within a context of Cold War global coloniality, and laying of the foundation for further political, cultural and economic decolonization.

Thus the second discernible trajectory of decolonization is that of economic decolonization. The demands for a New International Economic Order (NIEO) and the Lagos Plan of Action, among many other initiatives, became the centrepiece of economic decolonization (Weber 2016). Political economy approaches dominated and inspired the struggles for economic decolonization. It was during the height of struggles for economic decolonization that Walter Rodney published his celebrated book entitled
How Europe Underdeveloped Africa (1972) and Samir Amin published his Delinking: Towards a Polycentric World (1990a).

To Amin, one of the weaknesses of economic decolonization and the development plans it enabled has been the failure to think about the African economy outside classical economic thought (1990b). The necessity of economic decolonization is well articulated by Yash Tandon, in the details provided of how Europe and North America have developed such institutions as the World Bank (WB), International Monetary Fund (IMF), General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), and World Trade Organization (WTO) to underpin and drive the ‘commercial-military empire’. On the WTO, Tandon argued:

The WTO is a veritable battleground where the warring parties fight over real issues – as lethal in their impact on the lives of millions in the South as ‘real wars’. Trade kills. The big and powerful employ sophisticated weapons – technical arguments, legalisms, and ideological and political weapons with deftness and chicanery – as lethal as drone attacks. (2015, 51)

The third is the current epistemological decolonization represented by the Rhodes Must Fall (RMF) and Fees Must Fall (FMF) movements in South Africa, and which demand decommissioning of colonial/apartheid iconographies, changing the very idea of the university, its curriculum, scholarship, institutional cultures, and pedagogies (Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Zondi 2016; Nyamnjoh 2016; Ray 2016; Jansen 2007).

Three units of analysis in decolonization

Atilio B. Boron urged scholars to develop ‘new framework that will allow us to capture its present nature [Empire]’ (2005, 3). The decoloniality framework is one such framework that enables a deeper understanding of the empire. The decoloniality framework is constituted as a radical anti-systemic intellectual, political, and ethical movement. It is concerned with how to produce ‘radical anti-systemic politics beyond identity politics’, and how to set up ‘a critical cosmopolitanism beyond nationalism and colonialism’ (Grosfoguel 2011, 1). The decoloniality framework is poised against all forms of fundamentalism, be they those cascading from Eurocentrism or Global South nationalism, in its production of knowledge. It is not grounded on ‘absolute negativity’ in its critique of modernity, as it is cognisant of the dangers of ‘throwing away the best of modernity’ (Grosfoguel 2011, 21).

The decoloniality intellectual framework is not against ‘the universal’ per se. Its position on ‘the universal’ is well expressed by Aime Cesaire, who had this to say about ‘particularism/‘provincialism’ and ‘universalism’:

Provincialism? Absolutely not. I’m not going to confine myself to some narrow particularism. Nor do I intend to lose myself in a disembodied universalism. There are two ways to lose oneself: through walled-in segregation in the particular, or through dissolution into the
‘universal’. My idea of the universal is that of a universal with all that is particular, rich with all particulars, the deepening and coexistence of all particulars. (In Grosfoguel 2011, 1)

Building on this argument by Césaire, decoloniality theorists have coined the term ‘pluriversality’ in their attempt to name a new world in which diverse forms of life and living will be accommodated (Mignolo 2011). What they are critical of is what Achille Mbembe (2016) has termed the ‘paradigm of the One’ which ironically is predicated on the ‘paradigm of difference’ that was well-articulated by Valentin Y. Mudimbe (1994). The paradigm of difference has now given birth to the Cartesian subject that exists as a spectre that is haunting the modern world.

There are three useful units of analysis, or concepts, that underpin the intellectual framework of decoloniality. The first is the concept of power, which enables a deeper understanding of the invention, architecture, configuration and universalization of modern asymmetrical global power structures, and the visible and invisible colonial matrices of dehumanization, exploitation, domination, and control (Quijano 2000; Grosfoguel 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013a; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013b).

Decoloniality’s interventions begin with the moment of ‘modernity’ as a ‘dominant frame for social and political thought’ (Bhambra 2007, 1). Decolonial theorists have argued that ‘coloniality’ is constitutive of the underside of modernity (Mignolo 2011). Gurminder K. Bhambra noted that modernity rests on ‘two assumptions: rupture and difference a temporal rupture that distinguishes a traditional, agrarian past from the modern, industrial present; and a fundamental difference that distinguishes Europe from the rest of the world’. Through this technology, modernity managed to ‘colonize time’ (2007, 1).

Deploying the concept of power, decolonial theorists perceive that the dominant global power structure is constituted by ‘hetararchies’, that is, multiple, vertical, horizontal and criss-crossing strings of ‘colonialities’ that touch every aspect of human life (Grosfoguel 2007). Informed by a combination of Marxist and decolonial thought, Ngugi wa Thiong’o correctly depicted colonialism ‘as a vast process’ that affected every aspect of the life of the colonized African people including their consciousness. Therefore, decolonization has to be an equally ‘vast process’ so as to expunge colonialism in every aspect of life ranging from ideology, language, aesthetics to sexual orientations (Ngugi wa Thiong’o 1986).

The complexity of modern asymmetrical power structures makes it hard to describe them in one word or single phrase. This is why there is such a long description as modern/colonial/capitalist/racial/hetero-normative/patriarchal/racist/sexist world system (Grosfoguel 2007; Grosfoguel 2011). At the apex of this power structure is the United States of America with its Pentagon. The power structure is maintained above all other means by accumulation and monopolization of weapons of mass destruction.

The second important unit of analysis is that of being. Decolonial theorists have forcefully argued that being human itself suffered a form of colonization known as ‘coloniality of being’ (Maldonado-Torres 2007). At the centre of ‘coloniality of being’
is the consistent and systematic denial of humanity of those who became targets of enslavement and colonization. The denial of humanity of others was a major technology of domination which enabled them to be pushed out of the human family into a sub-human category and a zone of non-being (Fanon 1968). Two techniques were deployed in the ‘colonization of being’. The first was social classification of human species. The second was racial hierarchization of human species in accordance with invented differential ontological densities (Quijano 2000; Maldonado-Torres 2007; Dastile and Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013). Race actively worked as the reorganizing principle.

During the first phase of the unfolding of Euro-North American-centric modernity, characterized by the so-called ‘voyages of discovery’ that resulted in the Portuguese and Spaniards colonizing the Americas, ‘coloniality of being’ entailed committing genocides – total elimination of those people whose being was denied. Later, the imperatives of capitalism indicated that those people whose being was denied were useful as sources and providers of cheap labour. This imperative led to a new colonial/imperial idea which legitimized forced labour as part of a process of ‘civilizing’ the natives (Magubane 2007). This colonial ‘humanizing’ was determined by the logic of capital. It prevented a ‘final solution’, but continued to dehumanize.

Building on the concept of coloniality of being, one can speaks about three ways of rebuilding the human. The first is re-humanizing/re-membering. The second is humaning. The third is posthumanism. The first is well expressed by Ngugi wa Thiong’o (2009a; 2009b) who defined colonialism as a grand dismembering/dehumanizing process that inscribed itself on the non-European world through a combination of physical decapitation of resisting African leaders, and metaphysical invasion of the mental universe of the colonized through such technologies as genocides, epistemicides, and linguicides that enabled cultural imperialism and its alienating logics (see Ngugi wa Thiong’o 1986; Ngugi wa Thiong’o 2012). The long term consequence has been mental dislocation.

On the physical decapitation of African leaders, the example of King Hintsa of the Xhosa comes to the mind, but there were many others like Waiyaki wa Hinga who had actively fought against British colonization of Kenya, and who was not only buried alive but upside down to symbolize the entry of colonial world and its epic transformations of the African world (Ngugi wa Thiong’o 2009b, 3–4). Ngugi wa Thiong’o explained the colonial logic of cutting of heads of African leaders who resisted colonialism thus: ‘The head that carries memory is cut off from the body and then either stored in the British Museum or buried upside down’ so as to plant European memory (2009b, 6). African memory had to be buried for European memory to flourish.

For Ngugi wa Thiong’o, dismemberment was ‘[a]n act of absolute social engineering, the continent’s dismemberment was simultaneously the foundation, fuel, and consequence of Europe’s capitalist modernity’. Beyond physical dismemberment, there was also the splitting of what Ngugi wa Thiong’o termed ‘the African personhood’ into ‘two halves: the continental and its diaspora’ during the enslavement of African people.
This was followed by the Berlin Conference of 1884–5 which ‘literally fragmented and reconstituted Africa into British, French, Portuguese, German, Belgian, and Spanish Africa’ (Ngugi wa Thiong’o 2009b, 5).

Re-humanizing/re-membering for Ngugi wa Thiong’o (2009a; 2009b) is a struggle that is constituted by various initiatives. These initiatives date back to the mythical story of Osiris in Egypt who was killed by his evil brother who cut the body into fourteen pieces and scattered them all over Egypt. This act provoked Isis (‘in an act of love and devotion’) to gather the fragments as part of re-membering. To Ngugi wa Thiong’o re-humanizing entailed ‘re-membering’ as a decolonial act underpinned by a ‘quest for wholeness’. This quest ‘has underlain African struggles since the Atlantic slave trade’. The re-membering initiatives and struggles included Ethiopianism, Garveyism, Negritude, African Personality, Pan-Africanism, Harlem Renaissance, Afrocentricity, African Renaissance, and many others (Ngugi wa Thiong’o 2009b, 24–28).

Zimitri Erasmus introduced the concept of ‘re-humaning/humaning’. This constitutes the second philosophical framing. She posited:

> Humaning is a different activity from humanizing. To human is a lifelong process of life-in-the-making with others. To humanize is to impose upon the world a preconceived meaning of the human . . . There is no one way of humaning. There is no perfect way of going about it. Humaning is a social and cultural practice which we constantly hone. Humaning as praxis is historically and contextually specific. (2017, xxii; original emphasis)

Erasmus, like Fanon (1968) and Ngugi wa Thiong’o (2009a; 2009b) before her, is deeply committed to the struggles for initiating a new humanism. Her book is actually subtitled *Forging a New Humanism for South Africa*. She makes two interrelated gestures of acknowledging that we today live in a racialized world, while at the same time refusing to be determined by race.

> All of us live in amongst racialised structures of social meaning. We cannot live outside, above, or beyond the past and the present. Nor can we be outside, above, or beyond the race. Because we are embedded in a racialised world, its ways of seeing and its injustices can be apparent to us, and we can be inspired to change it . . . In the ongoing process of our liberation we must create openings in the racial house. We must refuse to live by its rules of dominance and its significations. (2017, xxiii)

The third philosophical framing is posthumanism. The posthumanism argument is well summarised by Druclluma Cornell and Stephen Seely:

> For posthumanism, any focus on specifically human agency (such as that involved in the struggle against capitalism and colonialism) always risks a reinstatement of the old humanist subject, effectively smuggling in the Man who fucked everything up in the first place through the back door. Thus many posthumanist critics are engaged in a hypervigilant search for Man in every form of theory and politics, and any trace of him must be sussed out and rejected in the name of ‘life itself’ and the future of the planet. (2016, 3)
Decoloniality is not for a posthuman world. It is for ‘decolonization of being’. This entails, in the words of Sylvia Wynter (2003) shifting from ‘Man’ to ‘Human’. This is termed bringing about a new humanism. While decoloniality is not anti-human, it is committed to changing the relationship of the ‘human’ with other forms of ‘being’, living and non-living (Cornell and Seely 2016). This point comes out clearly from Ngugi wa Thiong’o who understood decolonization as ‘the search for a liberating perspective within which to see ourselves clearly in relationship to ourselves and to other selves in the universe’ (1986, 87). It does not make sense for those people from the Global South who have not yet even enjoyed the status of being ‘fully human’ to join forces with those from the Global North who have been enjoying the monopoly of being human for over five hundred years, to push for ‘posthumanism’. For decoloniality, another world underpinned by another knowledge that does not socially classify and racially hierarchize human species is possible.

The third important unit of analysis is that of knowledge. The dehumanization of the colonized as part of the process of coloniality of being, was accompanied by theft of history so as to sustain the myth of a people without history; appropriations of indigenous people’s knowledges; outright epistemicides, linguicides and introduction of cultural imperialism. This constituted what is known as ‘coloniality of knowledge’. Anibal Quijano explained that coloniality of knowledge unfolded in terms of systematic repression of the specific beliefs, ideas, images, and symbols constitutive of the colonized people’s indigenous knowledge systems. Those aspects of African indigenous knowledges that were considered useful for global imperial designs and colonial process were looted and stolen (2007, 169).

Ngugi wa Thiong’o explained the modus operandi of the coloniality of knowledge in these very clear terms: ‘Get a few of the natives, empty their hard disk of previous memory, and download into them a software of European memory’ (2009b, 21). The long-term consequences of epistemicides, linguicides and cultural imperialism include ‘annihilation’ of a ‘people’s belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment’, and ‘in their heritage of struggle’ (Ngugi wa Thiong’o 1986, 3). This is why today we find many Africans with European names and speaking those languages that were imposed by colonialism. The long-term consequence of coloniality of knowledge is deep-alienation and deep-mental dislocation:

The colonial process dislocates the traveller’s mind from the place he or she already knows to a foreign starting point even with the body still remaining in his or her homeland. It is a process of continuous alienation from the base, a continuous process of looking at oneself from the outside of self or with the lenses of a stranger. One may end up identifying with the foreign base as the starting point towards self, that is from another self towards one-self, rather than the local being the starting point, from self to other selves. (Ngugi wa Thiong’o 2012, 39)
Imperialists and colonialists have used ‘knowledge to obscure reality and force a certain perception of reality’ (Ngugi wa Thiong’o 2012, 30). They were never satisfied with physical control only. They invaded the mental universe. The result has been well-captured by Ngugi wa Thiong’o: ‘Your past must give way to my past, your literature must give way to my literature, my way is the high way, in fact the only way’ (2012, 38).

**Epistemological decolonization and restoration of epistemic virtue**

Denial of being automatically denies epistemic virtue. This is simply because non-humans do not produce knowledge. They might have instincts but not knowledge. Thus the struggle for re-humanizing has to entail epistemological decolonization. We have not yet reached a stage where we can talk of ‘global economy of knowledge’ as a common human heritage. The work of Paulin J. Hountondji (1997; 2002) pointed to the continued asymmetry of power in knowledge production and circulation, that he understood as constituted by ‘scientific extraversion’ which necessitated the epistemic struggle to ‘create, in Africa . . . autonomous space for reflection and theoretical discussion that is indissolubly philosophical and scientific’ (see Hountondji 2002, 103). The table below summarizes the complex dimensions of epistemological decolonization, and the equally complex circulation of knowledge.
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<tr>
<td>1 Provincializing Europe while deprovincializing Africa/Moving the centre</td>
<td>This entails two moves: restoration of Africa as a legitimate epistemic site of knowledge, and taking seriously African knowledge as a departure point without necessarily throwing away knowledge from Europe and North America. The purpose is to deal with the crisis of relevance and alienation. It is a restorative move that enable Africans to see themselves clearly. It entails shifting of a position from which Africans know and interpret the world (Ngugi wa Thiong’o 1986). Thus while others like Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) emphasized the notion of ‘provincializing Europe’, the African decolonial theorists of the twenty-first century are pushing for ‘deprovincialising Africa’, making it a centre after centuries of peripherization (Mbembe 2017).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Africanization of knowledge</td>
<td>This entails re-assertion of African identity and re-founding of knowledge on African cultures and values. It is a recovery process predicated on ideas of endogenous knowledge as ‘an internal product drawn from a given cultural background, as opposed to another category of knowledge which would be imported from elsewhere’ (Hountondji 1997, 17).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Adding/including African knowledge into the existing canon of knowledge</td>
<td>This is a poor form of decolonization which takes the lazy format of just adding new items to the existing canon and existing curriculum. The pre-occupation here is with adding new content without re-configuring the curriculum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Decolonial critical engagement with existing knowledge</td>
<td>This approach entails deep questioning of ‘received’ knowledge and critical engagement with the politics of knowledge production and dissemination. This approach seeks to unmask the concealed problems such as racism and embedded asymmetrical power dynamics. Decolonial critical engagement with existing knowledge must also involve questioning even endogenous knowledge in the manner Hountondji did when he raised the problem of unanimity and collectivity in what became known as ‘ethnophilosophy’.</td>
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The language question in the decolonial humanization struggle

A definition of language is the ideal beginning. Ngugi wa Thiong’o provides a comprehensive definition of language. In the first place it is ‘a communication system’. In the second place, it is ‘the means and carrier of memory’—a bearer of a people’s civilization (2009b, 20). A sound understanding of the operations of the ‘metaphysical empire’ enables a clearer comprehension of the significance of current debates on the language question in Africa in general, and South Africa in particular. Introducing the way the ‘metaphysical empire’ impacted on languages of Africa Ngugi wa Thiong’o posited that ‘Europe also planted its memory on the mind. If planting of its memory on the body was affected through names, the one on the mind was accomplished through a vast naming system of language’. He proceeded to coin two useful concepts that enable us to understand the importance of the language question in the decolonization struggles of today. The first one is lingucide. The second one is linguifam. Linguicide and linguifam underpinned ‘linguistic logic of conquest’, which deeply affected Africans on the continent and those in the Diaspora. This is how Ngugi wa Thiong’o put it:

Africans, in the diaspora and on the continent, were soon to be the recipients of this linguistic logic of conquest, with two results; lingucide in the case of the diaspora and linguistic famine, or linguifam, on the continent. Linguicide is the linguistic equivalent of genocide. Genocide involves conscious acts of physical massacre; lingucide, conscious acts of language liquidation . . . This is precisely the fate of African languages in the diaspora. (2009b, 15–17)
Turning to the fate of indigenous languages of those who remained on the African continent, Ngugi wa Thiong’o argued:

On the continent, languages are not liquidated in the same way. What happens to them, in the post-Berlin Conference era of direct colonialism, is linguistic famine. Linguifam is to languages what famine is to people who speak them – linguistic deprivation and, ultimately, starvation. (2009b, 18)

The combination of linguisicide and linguifam, in diverse ways of course, resulted in the confinement of indigenous African languages to what Ngugi wa Thiong’o depicted as ‘graveyards over which now lie European linguistic plantations’. He went on to explain the implications of interventions of the metaphysical empire on the African languages domain, in these revealing words:

To starve or kill a language is to starve and kill a people’s memory bank. And it is equally true that to impose a language is to impose the weight of experience it carries and its conception of self and otherness – indeed, the weight of its memory, which includes religion and education. (Ngugi wa Thiong’o 2009b, 19–20).

In both the continent and the diaspora, Africans resisted the killing of their languages. With specific reference to the Africans in the diaspora, Ngugi wa Thiong’o argued that “[t]hough his language may die, the Diasporic African’s memory of Africa does not itself turn into a corpse”, and these people invented new languages such as Patios, Creole, and Ebonics. On the continent, despite the banishment of African languages from the academy, marketplace and administration, ‘they did not die; they were kept alive by the peasantry in the culture of the everyday and in the great tradition of orature’ (Ngugi wa Thiong’o 2009b, 49–50).

Because the African indigenous languages are still alive, and are only suffering from being overshadowed by European languages; the current struggles have taken the form of pushing for ‘intellectualization’ of indigenous languages, that is, ‘usability and actual use of any language in all semantic and pragmatic domains’, particularly in education (from grade R to university level and beyond). This intellectualization also entails elevating previously ‘disempowered languages’ to ‘the same as so-called international languages of wider communication’ (Maseko, Wolf and Kaschula 2017, xiii–xiv). In South Africa specifically, indigenous African languages have been given ‘official language’ status in the national constitution, and the next phase is how to introduce them into the national system of formal education.

Three imperatives inform the current drive to introduce African languages in the academy. The first is decolonial re-humanization imperative, which links the ontological and epistemological question in its quest for the restoration of denied ontological density and epistemic virtue. This perspective underscores the right to use of one’s own language. The second is the ‘science-based position of experts in linguistics and pedagogy’, which has made it clear that ‘mother-tongue-based education, whether...
monolingual or multilingual, provides the most effective, most efficient and most sustainable educational model for successful teaching and learning, including the better learning of a foreign language such as English’ (Wolf 2017, 5). The third is recognition of the multilingual reality in Africa generally, and South Africa in particular, which demands that we use multiple languages in the academy.

What do we do with colonial imposed languages?

Imperialism and colonialism introduced six European languages in Africa namely English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, and German. Walter D. Mignolo (1995) argued that it is these six languages that make the West a linguistic family. In a foreword to Hamid Dabashi’s book provocatively entitled Can Non-Europeans Think? (2015), Mignolo noted:

What constitutes the West more than geography is a linguistic family, a belief system and an epistemology. It is constituted by six modern European and imperial languages: Italian, Spanish and Portuguese, which were dominant during the Renaissance, and English, French and German, which have been dominant since the Enlightenment. (Mignolo 2015, xxv–xxvi)

The question of the role of these European languages in Africa has provoked intense debates. Leading African writers such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong’o and many others have expressed their opinions on this subject from different vantage points. Kole Omotoso (1966) provided a summary of some of the key ideas of African literary giants on the ‘use of English to produce African literature’. The first argument was that the continued ‘use of European languages in the expression of African sentiments and culture would end in cultural cul-de-sac’ and there was need for African writers to use African languages to create African literature (see Obi Wali in Omotoso 1966, 145). It was this type of thinking that led Ngugi wa Thiong’o in 1972 not only to change his name but to shift from writing in English to writing in Gikuyu. Despite the fact that Ngugi wa Thiong’o resumed writing in English, he still insists that there is need for ‘the African elite’ to ‘return to its real base: the people’ (2016, 49). In his latest book entitled Secure the Base: Making Africa Visible in the Globe, Ngugi wa Thiong’o writes:

A return to the base, the people, must mean at the very least the use of a language and languages that the people speak. Any further linguistic additions should be for strengthening, deepening and widening this power of the languages spoken by the people. (2016, 49, 50)

To Ngugi wa Thiongo (1986) Africa is continuing to suffer from a linguistic encirclement and the African elite continue to reproduce this encirclement: the immanent logic of colonialism is carried into the present by the African elite, despite its sometimes radical articulation of cultural nationalism. This is why he posited that:
Cultural imperialism in the era of neo-colonialism can be a more dangerous cancer because it can take new, subtle forms. It can hide under cloaks of militant nationalism, calls for dead authenticity, performances of cultural symbolism, and even under native racist self-assertive banners that are often substitutes for national self-criticism and collective pride in the culture and history of resistance. (Ngugi wa Thion’o 1997, 10)

Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka took a different view from the position of Ngugi wa Thion’o. Achebe presented two defences of use of English. The first was a political, pragmatic, and convenient defence. He posited that English was a language of national unity for those countries like Nigeria, characterized by a kaleidoscope of ethnic and linguistic differences. Achebe’s second argument was that English or any other European language could be successfully used in expressing African culture and African sentiments (Omotoso 1966, 145). Achebe elaborated that the use of English enables Africans to be heard at the global level. Soyinka first emphasised the importance of choice, before he became an advocate for Swahili as a continental language for purposes of enhancement of pan-African unity (Omotoso 1966).

**Conclusion**

A clear understanding of the empire forms an ideal entry point in making sense of the logic of the decolonization of the twenty-first century. How do we subvert and resist the ‘metaphysical empire’? Two strategies are worth exploring. The first is the ‘triple heritage’ approach cascading from the work of Edward Wilmot Blyden ([1887] 1888), Kwame Nkrumah (1964), and Ali A. Mazrui (1986). It is a strategy of appropriating rather than being appropriated. It is a realist strategy that entails taking into account the history and heritages constituting Africa, embracing them and synthesising them for present positive use. At the centre of this strategy is recognition of Africa as a mosaic of cultures and histories and a melting pot of ideas and traditions. In this strategy, English is part of African heritages. It is a progressive strategy that avoids both absolute negativity and cultural fundamentalism. Nkrumah (1964: 78-85) termed this strategy ‘concienscism’, which underscores the importance of consciousness of diverse heritages and the purposeful use of these to build the present and the future. It would seem that Ngugi wa Thion’o (1993, 23) also subscribed to this strategy when he wrote:

> African languages will borrow from one another; they will borrow from their classical heritages; they will borrow from the world – from the Caribbean, from Afroamerican, from Latin America, from the Asian—and from the European worlds. In this, the new writing in African languages will do the opposite of the Europhone practice: instead of being appropriated by the world, it will appropriate the world and one hopes on terms of equal exchange, at the very least borrow on its own terms and needs.

The last strategy is that of ‘provincializing Europe’ while deprovincializing Africa. Building on the work on Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) the strategy entails appropriating,
translating, indigenizing and using for African purposes whatever Europe had monopolized as its own. Selectivity becomes imperative to target the domestication of all those positive human values that Europe had claimed and monopolized. Deprovincialization necessarily entails opening up the continent rather than closing it to ecologies of knowledges and all other positive human creations.

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