Knowledge Creation: An Imperative for Africa's Decolonization

By:

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It is the colonial peoples who must liberate themselves from

[Neo]colonialist domination.

Frantz Fanon

Introduction

Ian Taylor's article "Sixty Years Later: Africa's Stalled Decolonization" is premised on Kwame Nkrumah's view of neo-colonialism, which holds that the independence of post-colonial states constituted political independence in theory. This stemmed from the retention of externally controlled economic systems that vitiated political independence. As beneficiaries of the status quo, "comprador elites" in these states, "resisted any wholesale restructuring of the economic and political ties" from the colonial era. The external domination of African economies obstinately persists and the corollary— as advanced in

Taylor's argument, is that Africa is still waiting for "true independence". Although the old wineskin of colonial domination was drenched with the new wine of independence, it ceased not to be old wineskin.

The title of Nkrumah's book *Neo-Colonialism, the Last Stage of Imperialism* encapsulates the crux of the issue; in the introductory line of his book, Nkrumah posits that this last stage of imperialism is "perhaps its most dangerous." The term 'neocolonialism' represents the evolution of language as a critique to the cloak of autonomy from colonial domination draping over the so-called independent states. Language is referred to here not in the linguistic sense but as a repository of ideas, concepts and ideologies. The 'true independence' of Africa is predicated on extricating itself from the economic entanglement that was historically and currently remains diametrically opposed to its people's interests. (People as *wananchi* – the ones to whom the country belongs as opposed to *wenye nchi* – the ones who own the country).

Imperialist capitalism and the decolonization of knowledge

The centrality of exploitative capitalism in stalling Africa's decolonization is well expounded by Taylor. A feature of imperialist capitalism is the extraction by the 'metropolitan center' from the 'periphery' for its own benefit whilst engaging in the "super-exploitation" of the periphery's labour. It is argued here that this stalling is inextricably linked to the colonization of knowledge or what Nelson Maldonado-Torres refers to as the 'coloniality of being'. Language is "the location where knowledge is inscribed" — knowledge and language are therefore inseparable. As per Torres, the colonization of knowledge has engendered 'ways of being and doing'. Africa's ways of being and doing are steeped in colonial epistemology. As Walter Mignolo puts it with respect to the hegemony of Eurocentrism, "it will not suffice to denounce its content while maintaining the logic of coloniality and the colonization of knowledge, intact." Deconstructing this hegemony requires- of necessity, a critical interrogation of the foundational notions of capital and its confluence with power in the colonial conquest. A rudimentary distinction between capital and capitalism is worth making at this juncture. Walter Mignolo refers to capital as resources required to produce and distribute commodities while capitalism refers to a philosophy that undergirds a certain type of economic structure; 'capital' is a component of 'capitalist economy' but the two should not be conflated. Mignolo refers to

Adam Smith's retrospective view that the conjoining of 'capital' and 'knowledge' birthed the conceptualization of 'capitalism' in the sixteenth century. According to Mignolo, capitalism was founded on a 'colonial matrix of power' and one of the domains of this matrix is the "appropriation of land and exploitation of labour"; decolonization is thus as an epistemic project of de-linking from the colonial matrix of power. Epistemic decolonization or the decolonization of knowledge entails foregrounding other forms of knowledge and understanding – inculcating new ways of being and doing. It necessitates the creation of a "multiverse of knowledges". This endeavor can only be undertaken by the 'decolonized mind' and in 'liberated spaces' that Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Micere Mugo write about. Frantz Fanon alludes to the "germs of rot" left behind by imperialism, which we must "clinically detect" and remove from our minds.

The language of neoliberalism (alongside the globalization of capital) has advanced the exploitative tenets of imperialist capitalism. For instance, discouraging industrial development is said to have been a "deliberate colonial policy". Moreover, as opined by Nkrumah, a "neo-colonialist trap on the economic front has come to be known as 'multilateral aid'." This was true of Nkrumah's time as it is presently. Taylor debunks the inaccuracy of the common notion that developed countries supply capital to Africa given the colossal sums lost through 'illicit financial outflows' at the behest of multinational corporations with the complicity of African governments and their cronies; these outflows by far exceed what Africa receives in the form of donor aid or foreign direct investment.

The debilitating impact of the Structural Adjustment Policies of the 1980s, which diverted state funding from essential public services such as health and education in favour of privatization, is well documented. The rationale for these policies was the reduction of "high budget deficits on the economy" and the liberalization of trade. Increased inequality and accumulation of foreign debt are among the ramifications of these neoliberal policies. A key distinction that Taylor makes between "articulated" and "disarticulated" economies is relevant in this regard. Articulated economies are those characterized by mutually reinforcing economic sectors, which stimulate development (p.42) and disarticulated economies (a feature of underdeveloped countries), is the existence of mutually exclusive economic sectors and this stymies

development (ibid). The separation in the latter case is manifest in production and consumption patterns of these countries; they produce what they do not consume and consume what they do not produce, thus remaining beholden to the interests of the "metropolitan economy". The overreliance of African economies on exports (mainly of primary commodities) that Taylor refers to has its origins in the stranglehold of neoliberal policies adopted by 'independent' states. This domination has not been supported by enhanced production for internal mass markets and as a result "fosters stagnation, mounting inequality, dependency in multiple forms and political impotence" (p.49). The COVID-19 pandemic has been a great revealer of such dependency.

The flower industry in Kenya is a case in point - the industry is predominantly export oriented and although multinational corporations dominate the industry, Kenya has a unique feature of a growing sub sector of smallholders growing flowers for export.

The industry was adversely affected by the slump in European demand during the height of the pandemic. Majority of workers in flower farms were reportedly sent home while the remaining ones were paid to "harvest and destroy flowers" . While the absurdity of this may be jarring, it is perhaps unsurprising considering that in the Dutch market which is the principle recipient of Kenyan exported flowers, "millions of flowers" were destroyed in what is said to have been the "only solution" due to lack of demand. Ironically, as of 2016 Nigeria was importing Kenyan flowers via Europe in what Nungari Mwangi described as a perpetuation of "the neocolonial hegemony of Europe as the hub of trade". Whereas the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was unprecedented, the destruction of flowers in Kenya behooves a number of questions – was destruction the only solution? What other possibilities could have been explored even in a context where the economic value of the flowers was diminished? How does the predominance of multinational corporations serving the exclusive interests of an export economy engender the 'ways of being and doing' in the sector? Taylor's assertion on the development of capitalism in the periphery is instructive: there are "certain congenital and pathological qualities" inherent to the nature of capitalism and exploitative extraction that impedes the auto-centered growth of African economies (p.47).

Emerging forms of capitalism in the periphery

The development of capitalism in the periphery has contemporaneously evolved with new ‘language’. The language of indigenous capitalism is an example. In Nigeria, a government policy of indigenization in the 1970s transferred stakes in the economy from foreigners to Nigerians although this resulted in an “an indigenisation of capitalism rather than its replacement”. The oil and gas industry, a major foreign exchange earner for the country is still foreign owned but with ruling elites as key beneficiaries of the sector. Hence, “the problem was not that of the dichotomy between foreign and indigenous capitalists, but fundamentally the problem of capitalism.” In other words, indigenous capital acquired a new language but retained the same extractive DNA of imperial capitalism. This is precisely the caution that Mignolo gives when he refers to maintaining the ‘logic of coloniality’. Clothing capitalism with auto-centric language such as ‘afro capitalism’ whilst remaining rooted in imperialist ideologies pacifies at best and is destructive at worst.

The spatial categories of ‘center’ and ‘periphery’ that Taylor refers to can be juxtaposed with the dichotomy of the formal and informal sectors of African economies. In Kenya for example, the informal economy is said to account for over over 80% of employment and contribute approximately 35% to GDP. Despite this, the informal sector is “neglected by government policies at the local level and by development financiers at the global level”. This is in tandem with Taylor’s assessment that the inflow of FDI in Sub-Saharan Africa although capital intensive, creates minimal employment.

The language of romanticizing entrepreneurship as a panacea to social problems has gained traction. The “fetishization” of entrepreneurship is said to be the latest liberal fad that overlooks a fundamental issue that we cannot “entrepreneur our way around bad policies.” Neo liberal policies separate social policy from economic policy and give prominence to “market based social policy instruments". Although framed as being poverty-centered, these policies do not interrogate structural transformation. Such transformation requires a “systemic overhaul, which will set African economies on a new footing”.

Creating new language in manifold spaces

The language of structural reform of imperialist capitalism in all its configurations needs to take root. It is an endeavor to “de-commodify and de-

privatise the commons" as critically pointed out by Issa Shivji. It is fundamentally, a struggle for social justice by *wananchi* to "reclaim the commons and liberate them from the clutches of monopoly finance capital assisted by our comprador states."

Taylor concludes his treatise by stating that: "Most African elites today are visionless and corrupt, caring little for their people. Those leaders who have sought to critically interrogate the global system and Africa's place in it have been swiftly dispatched" and cites Patrice Lumumba, Kwame Nkrumah, Thomas Sankara and Amilcar Cabral. The revolutionary seeds of Lumumba, Nkrumah, Sankara and Cabral must be (re)planted and re(watered) in the minds of the (re)colonized people that Fanon refers to. A new language must raise consciousness by centering the ideologies of African women liberators such as Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, Mabel Dove-Danquah, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, Miriam Sankara and Muthoni Nyanjiru; women whose role in the liberation struggle is often erased.

Neocolonialism permeates virtually all spheres of society. The endeavor to inculcate new ways of being and doing – a new language, is one to be undertaken in liberated pockets of these spheres. It is a language that is to be conversed by a plurality of voices. As Micere Mugo retells of oral tradition, "to hold dialogue is to love". It is an endeavor for all working people mobilizing for social change and for radical lawyers who need to disinfect themselves of the 'liberal virus' that Issa Shivji refers to. It is one for students and scholars engaging in critical decolonial pedagogy; it requires fostering discourse on decolonization that is grounded in contemporary realities – it is incumbent upon us to ensure that this discourse traverses classrooms and does not remain a preserve of the social sciences but instead encompasses a cross fertilization of ideas in various disciplines. It requires transcending traditional spaces that inhibit robust decolonial discourse by scholars and taking up the invitation to engage on social media, which "allows for radical and alternative ideas to flourish". The replication of these conversations in diverse spaces holds enormous potential for creating a 'multiverse of knowledges'.

The quest for Africa's decolonization is existential and must therefore go beyond platitudes and rhetoric. The exhortation by Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni on the risk of decolonization losing its "revolutionary potential" is germane: decolonization "comes from within, as a revolutionary concept that speaks

about rehumanization—which is a fundamental planetary project”.

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