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WHAT, AFTER ALL, IS DECOLONISATION?

When it first entered our lexicon as part of the discourse on the struggle for independence, decolonisation as a word, idea or concept had a scope whose boundaries, even if a bit fuzzy, were delimited. It referred to the ending of colonisation and the coming to sovereign status of the polities that had chafed under colonial rule. Its scope covered two clearly defined areas: politics and economics. Perhaps I have put this too simply. As I have argued elsewhere, colonisation has many iterations and is not one entity. But the implicit assumption in the decolonising discourse is that it is one, thereby glossing over this complexity.

In settler colonialism, for example, the aboriginal inhabitants were not candidates for colonisation; it was their land the settlers were interested in controlling, and the people themselves were treated as flora and fauna to be cleared out the way. In colonies divided between settlers and local populations, settlers created their own versions of the metropoles from which they had come, and the only link between the two groups was their exploitation of local labour and natural resources. In colonies designated purely for exploitation—like much of the Caribbean, Asia and Africa—there were important differences, too. Only in Africa was there absolutely no interest in anything other than the extraction of raw materials, and whatever infrastructure was put in place by the colonial powers was solely intended to enhance this process. These different trajectories have important implications for the type of decolonisation that was obtained and for which challenges had to be met in the wake of independence. For example, in colonies characterised by exploitation alone, the play of culture becomes almost non-existent when it comes to colonial policy. This colonialism is the specific one that is framed by modernity.[1]

I would like to argue that the concept of 'decolonisation' is best understood if we restrict ourselves to conceiving of it as eradicating colonialism, as we have just defined it. I know that this goes against the grain of contemporary discussions. But I'm convinced that limiting it in this way leads to the most consistent and clearest interpretation of the idea. Extending it into events after independence (the putative end of colonisation) can only cause obfuscation, non-explanations and sheer distortions of history. To show how dominant the idea of extending the scope of decolonisation to events after independence has become, it is worth taking a look at Frantz Fanon's analysis in *The Wretched of the Earth* (first published in 1961)—the book that is often hailed as the originator of the decolonisation discourse.

On balance, the central thrust of Fanon's book—framed by the nature, ontological assumptions and core practices of colonisation in Africa—suggests that the most consistent way to read his work is as an indication of what colonisation is and what ending it would look like. Chapter after chapter, Fanon makes it clear that the long, post-decolonisation future will not be framed by colonialism. Contrast that with the current efforts in decolonisation discourse to turn colonialism into the only framework for plotting life and thought in Africa, especially the periodisation of our history. Simultaneously, that future world cannot preclude the presence of elements which may have originated during colonial times, or which are traceable to the practices and culture of the colonising countries, and so on. Ongoing decolonisation$_2$ discourses about culture, including politics and economics, often claim that Fanon is on their side, but end up papering over the

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complexity of his thinking where it does not support their contentions. Or they distort, knowingly or otherwise, Fanon's ideas in the service of projects and standpoints he would have had difficulty assenting to.

Here is the key to my interpretation: 'The colonial world is a Manichaean world,' wrote Fanon.[2] What Fanon did not add to this declaration, but which dominates his analysis, is that it was also a unique world. The uniqueness deserves serious attention. Given that the exploitation-colonialism on which Fanon focused was neither the only type of colonialism known to history nor was it typical of colonialism across the world in the modern age, we must take seriously the implications of this uniqueness. It was the only colonialism in which the colonisers convinced themselves that the colonised were not merely inferior; *they were not even human*.

Take a closer look at Fanon's references to the colonised world. For him, it was a make-believe world, one that was neither a natural emanation nor an organic growth from how human beings relate with one another, even where hierarchies predominate. It was a world constructed from whole cloth entirely from the colonisers' imagination. This has implications for how we understand that world and its fate historically. This is the only way to make sense of Fanon's insistence in *The Wretched of the Earth* that 'the colonised' was created wholly by the 'coloniser' and, in *Black Skin, White Masks* (originally published in 1952), that 'the black' was a creation entirely of 'the white'. What this means is that (1) whatever the coloniser reported of the colonised in the colonial world must be treated with a boatload of scepticism; and (2) if we get rid of 'the coloniser', 'the colonised' cannot continue to exist—as Fanon affirmed in *Black Skin, White Masks*, 'the black' cannot survive the disappearance of 'the white'.[3] How we process these characterisations is key to judging the plausibility of using 'decolonisation' as an explanatory model post-independence. That is, whether the idea of decolonising offers any insight into the apparent persistence of pre-independence processes or ideas, or any explanation of why certain political and cultural choices are made by the ex-colonised, depends largely on how much store we set by the story told by the coloniser.

Because it is a contrived world where the humanity of the colonised is denied—although, of course (and this is key), the colonised never thought of themselves as such—we should be wary of building any serious analysis on unreal assumptions about various residents of the colonial world without digging deeper and seeing the reality. The colonised, in the coloniser's image of the world, were 'animals' and their quarters were not human spaces. Yet, each day under colonialism, there were constant and intimate interactions between coloniser and colonised, and the colonised were privy to the innermost recesses of the coloniser's space. What's more, all the things that make us human were shared routinely, without ceremony, by coloniser and colonised in the colonial situation.

When, therefore, Fanon said that decolonisation signalled the birth of a new human from 'the colonised', it is not that 'the colonised' were ever non-human; it is that the world in which they had been considered 'things' no longer existed, and everything pertaining to that world would be superseded. Simultaneously, by insisting in *The Wretched of the Earth* that decolonisation means a reordering in which 'the last shall be first', [4] Fanon is not demanding the subjugation of the coloniser; instead, he is calling for the restoration of the equality all humans share by virtue of their humanity itself. As far as Fanon was concerned, once this colonial world was overturned, that was the end of decolonisation. 'Becoming human', on this score, was not a process that would be concluded at a later date. In the colonial situation, the colonised were not human; after decolonisation, either the colonised has become human or the colonial world has not ended. But you cannot decolonise in a situation where 'the colonial world' is no more. This is not a semantic issue. Certainly, what kind of human the newly decolonised will become, and how far along the path to creating the best human and to establishing the conditions for the best life for the humans we are, all remain open questions that decolonisation$_1$ was not intended to answer. And the answers the ex-colonies can come up with going forward from the ground zero of becoming the makers of their own history again are no longer limited by the boundaries of colonialism and its negation. That the options of former colonies *are* still limited by colonialism is what decolonisation$_2$ sets up as the main element of its discourse. And it is what I attack because it misunderstands the problem to be solved and generates confusion.

Given this, the use of Fanon's work to legitimise decolonisation$_2$ becomes very problematic. Either 'the colonial world' survived independence and there never was decolonisation; or it did not, and we no longer have a candidate for decolonisation. I should add that I am with Ato Sekyi-Otu here in reminding us that a fundamental humanism animates Fanon's philosophy. Sekyi-Otu puts it well:

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> This, it now seems to me, is the profound meaning of the demand that Fanon makes in the introduction to his very first published work: "And truly it is a question of unleashing the human being [*Et véritablement il s'agit de lâcher l'homme*]" …. From the beginning, the central question for Fanon was always that of releasing possibilities of human existence and history imprisoned by the colonization of experience and the racialization of consciousness.[5]

Unfortunately, a lot of the oppositional discourse, of which decolonising is one example, fully embraces the racialisation of consciousness. We shall see presently how all attempts to frame modernity as an exclusively 'European' or 'Western' inheritance are examples of such racialisation; the same applies to claims about the 'Europeanness' of Reason, rationality, individualism and so on, which represent another concession to the racialisation of consciousness.[6]

If anyone remains convinced that there is no qualitative difference between colonial Africa and independent Africa, I wish them well.[7] If people think that the political and cultural problems that they find in contemporary Africa, post-independence, are still colonial problems, or try to turn colonialism into an eternal category, I wish them well, too. At bottom, this is what much of the discourse of decolonisation rests upon. This persistent ignoring and/or denigration of African agency—whether done with good or bad intentions—reaffirms the racist ideology that Africans are permanent children. The irony is forever lost on the decolonising industry. I want no part of it.

First, given the intimate inter-personal connections that were part of life in the colonial world, it should be no surprise that the colonised, humans that they always were, might have learned or appropriated ideas from the coloniser, and vice versa. To then make it a requirement of decolonisation that no part of the coloniser's life could form part of the colonised's is preposterous. The coloniser never had any qualms about appropriating African ideas or objects for their own use—whether artworks, music, cuisine etc.—confirming that they were lying to themselves in the world they contrived under colonialism.

Again, Fanon was quite forthright about this. Because he never permitted himself to believe the lies that the colonisers told about themselves, he was acutely aware of all the ideological contradictions and distortions they had to embrace in order to make their denial of their victims' humanity plausible even to themselves. Decolonisation means that the colonised also did not embrace such distortions, and from the ashes of colonisation arose humans who could make history, again, *under their own steam*—a capacity that was denied to them under colonialism. The key phrase here is 'under their own steam', and I will be making a lot of this idea throughout the book. For Fanon, as well as for Amílcar Cabral and most of the other leaders of the independence movement in Africa, the key qualitative difference between colonialism and independence was that in the one, their capacity to control their destinies was blocked, while in the other, they could make their own history under their own steam—even if they may have been doing it badly. Kwame Nkrumah had something akin to this in mind when he declared that they 'preferred self-government in danger to servitude in tranquillity'. As Cabral put it, the immediate objective of the anti-colonial struggle, decolonisation, is 'the phenomenon in which a socio-economic whole rejects the denial of its historical process. The national liberation of a people is the regaining of the historical personality of that people, it is their return to history through the destruction of the imperialist domination to which they were subjected'.[8]

For Fanon, either we have colonisation or we do not. I believe that once 'flag independence' was in place and the colonised had become captains of their own ships of state, any talk of colonisation persisting will not pass Fanonian, Cabralian or Nkrumahist muster. The dilemma posed by the continuing appearance of colonialism-like situations in the post-independence polity was accounted for by Kwame Nkrumah with his coining of the term 'neocolonialism'. If it was colonialism, it had to be a kind unlike that which had just ended with the inauguration of independence. But the idea that colonialism has not ended at all is a non-starter. The 'colonised'—considered 'things' in the colonial world—disappeared for good once independence was attained.

Any attempt to affirm an almost unbroken continuity between colonialism and neocolonialism is dubious, if not completely incorrect. But we must not simply dismiss the idea that, contrary to what we argue here, neocolonialism signals the continuation of colonialism beyond independence. Some of Nkrumah's explanations seem to support such a contention but, on closer reading, we must be wary of equating neocolonialism with colonialism. In the book he devoted to the theme, Nkrumah implicitly distinguished between the two: under colonialism, the coloniser controlled the unfolding of history within the colony and the day-to-day running of this territory; after independence, the ex-coloniser—notice the change of

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terms—would look for ways to subvert the new reality through foreign aid, evangelisation and other ploys, to *undermine*, rather than *remove*, the ex-colonised's control over their own affairs and lives. As Nkrumah explains:

> Faced with the militant peoples of the ex-colonial territories in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America, imperialism simply switches tactics. Without a qualm it dispenses with the flags, and even with certain of its more hated expatriate officials. This means, so it claims, that it is 'giving' independence to its former subjects, to be followed by 'aid' for their development. Under cover of such phrases, however, it devises innumerable ways to accomplish objectives formerly achieved by naked colonialism. It is this sum total of these modern attempts to perpetuate colonialism while at the same time talking about 'freedom', which has come to be known as *neo -colonialism*.[9]

This passage is one of several that are key to our insistence that something has drastically changed between colonialism and neocolonialism. What I hope becomes clear in Nkrumah's formulation is that the action or inaction of the ex-colonised is decisive in the success or failure of neocolonialism. That is, it all turns on agency. The same agency that removed the coloniser from the driver's seat of the colonised's history must now work to ensure that this hard-won freedom is not undermined by the ploys of the erstwhile coloniser.

The realisation that neocolonialism's success post-independence was tied to native agency was also articulated by a contemporary of Nkrumah (before Nkrumah's unfortunate dalliance with Marxism-Leninism), Obafemi Awolowo. Both individuals share the distinction of having led the most progressive regimes in Africa. Here is Awolowo in an address in 1973:

> The struggle against involuntary political and economic enslavement under colonial rule was over during the last decade in most parts of Africa.
>
> But the struggle against voluntary subservience and submission to neo-colonialism is yet to begin.
>
> Our frequent and unabating declamation against neo-colonialism appears to me to be pretentious exercise and deliberate diversion.
>
> For the true and real neo-colonialists are no other than we Africans ourselves.
>
> It is we, in spite of our political independence and sovereignty who voluntarily submit to economic, and sometime diplomatic dominance from outside our borders.[10]

Awolowo argued that neocolonialism is not the same as lingering colonialism or the continuing power of ex-colonisers to bend the will of the ex-colonised in the post-independence period. Rather, he pinned the blame squarely on the shoulders of African leaders themselves and their failure to firmly exercise their own agency. In short, as he once declared while excoriating African leaders for being reconciled to their beggar status on the world stage,[11] Africans had the option, with the recovery of their 'political independence and sovereignty', to not 'submit to economic, and sometimes diplomatic dominance from outside our borders'. There is a lesson here for all who engage in the discourse of decolonisation$_2$ and are fixated with the actions of ex-colonisers as the main, if not only, focus of their explanatory models. My point here is not that Awolowo is necessarily right. It is that those who continue to talk as if African agency does not matter, except when it coincides with their preference, would do well to rebut arguments like his.

For me, the insistence on talking as if we are still in 'the colonial world' is the most unhelpful dimension of the decolonising discourse. Constructing new societies and the new humans that are to emerge from the ashes of colonisation, and forming states headed by governments that respect the inviolate dignity of their citizens and are answerable to them—all the things that were not part of 'the colonial world'—are not the domain of decolonisation.[12] Colonialism, while it lasted, was the unique bulwark against such outcomes. But the failure to achieve them post-independence cannot solely or even principally be attributed to colonialism. If it were, we would be right to conclude that independence never happened. But 'flag independence' is still independence! As insignificant as it may seem, it may actually be the main way to represent the qualitative difference between a colonial situation and an independent polity. Awolowo's list of Africa's repeated

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failures to move its inhabitants towards attaining better humanity includes what he called ‘tenacity of office’, the proclivity of African leaders for begging, and wrong governance structures, such as, in Nigeria’s case, the replacement of federalism with unitarism.

Fanon already predicted the many ways in which the ‘new humans’ born from independence might fail at their task. But, at the same time, he was clear that nothing was off the table in conducting the all-important task, kick-started by decolonisation, of building this new world. It could not be conceived of as retrieving some illusory pristine past, untouched by time (including time under colonisation). This was the subject of Fanon’s chapter ‘The Trials and Tribulations of National Consciousness’ in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Nor would that new order be totally devoid of aspects of European civilisation. In other words, Europe is as much a quarry for models of future world-making as the various other cultures of the ex-colonised. It is worth quoting Fanon on this final point as a counter to our decolonising zealots’ desire to dump what they call ‘Euro-modernity’:

> All the elements for a solution to the major problems of humanity existed at one time or another in European thought. But the Europeans did not act on the mission that was designated them and which consisted of virulently pondering these elements, modifying their configuration, their being, of changing them and finally taking the problem of man to an infinitely higher plane.[13]

No doubt, even back then, no-one thought that the business of creating a new order with a new human would end with formal independence. The expectation that there would be additional steps to complete what decolonisation set in motion is best captured in Kwame Nkrumah’s much-quoted injunction: ‘Seek ye first the political kingdom, and all other things shall be added unto it’.[14] ‘All the other things’ include, principally, control of the economy—failure on which front prompted Nkrumah to coin the term ‘neocolonialism’—and, more broadly, other areas of life, especially, culture, comprehensively understood. It is a mistake to capture this unfinished task under the rubric of decolonisation. If colonisation here is meant literally, it is historically inaccurate; if it is meant metaphorically, as we make clear in the rest of this book, it does not much aid understanding. On the contrary, it obstructs analysis.

Many of the practices and ideas that must be expunged from our lives to move closer to Fanon’s ‘new human’ do not have their origins in colonialism. Whether it is child marriage, polygyny, caste systems, oppressive rule under native hierarchies denominated largely by chieftaincy, gender oppression, ethnic chauvinism and so on, it would be difficult to make sense of the struggles against these in terms of decolonising. We can see how the preoccupation with decolonising is likely to block serious analyses of endogenous practices and ideas that need to be severely criticised for our societies to move forward. Worse still, because of the continuing conflation of modernity and colonialism, the appropriation of modern tenets as antidotes to those practices is hindered. Indeed, I hardly see any serious criticisms of our original societies in decolonisation discourse. I take this up more fully in Chapter 3.

Decolonisers hardly, if ever, engage with Kwasi Wiredu’s call for a ‘critical and constructive analysis’ of ‘African culture’, which is rendered imperative by ‘the exigencies of the cultural transition that is taking place in contemporary Africa’. He offers a model of such analysis in his ‘philosophical treatment of a particular African culture, the Ghanaian’. He then calls attention ‘to three complaints which can afflict a society. They are anachronism, authoritarianism and supernaturalism’.[15] If these afflictions were not created by colonisation, but instead predated it, what sense would there be in thinking that decolonising is the solution? One of the main aims of this book is to focus on similar conflations in the decolonisation discourse, rather than engaging in takedowns of specific theories.

I argue that the globalisation of the scope of decolonisation, its generalised deployment across all disciplinary boundaries, and its application as the core of explanatory frameworks for understanding anything and everything has produced a concept that, for the most part, now no longer improves comprehension but obscures it. More and more it is used as a cure-all that cures virtually nothing. The consequences of this are most pernicious in African scholarship, and this is the sphere on which this book focuses.

The Two Decolonisations

As we have already established, the original concern of decolonisation was the struggle for independence from colonialism. Independence would mean the departure from Africa’s shores of colonial rule and all that

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came with it. The key phrase here is 'all that came with it'. The two dominant aspects of colonialism that decolonisation$_1$ sought to tackle were politics and economics. While the cultural and ideological dimensions are also important, I think it is fair to say that these were not as central to the discourse and practice of the initial anti-colonial struggle. The reason for this is not difficult to understand. Many of those countries were pluralist societies with diverse cultures, and it is an oversimplification to claim that those who led the struggle for independence were at the same time cobbling together a 'national' culture for their post-independence polity. The demand that the world must be remade entirely, that we must create societies and cultures that would embody the best of our nature and the slowness of our march towards it—especially in light of a seeming failure to make a clean break with our former colonial overlords—was what led some African intellectuals to adapt the discourse of decolonisation$_2$, and expand its boundaries to cover culture, expansively conceived. It is decolonisation$_2$ that I wish to swear off and expunge from our discussions.

In the political sphere, colonialism was characterised by the denial to the colonised of the modern philosophical tenet of political legitimacy, which insists that no-one should have to obey the rule of any government to which she has not consented.[16] Decolonisation in politics would therefore mean that the colonised would no longer chafe under the rule of governments (especially by colonialists) imposed without their consent.[17] In economics,[18] control over the levers of economic power—previously under the authority of the coloniser—reverts to Africans after colonialism. Other areas of culture, writ large, are supposed to be marked by the exercising of African agency in determining how life and thought are to be organised. In short, self-determination should inflect life in ways that are exactly contradictory to those of colonisation. What matters here is that people, individually or collectively, write the scripts of their own lives, a prerogative that was denied to them under colonial rule. How this unfolds, post-independence, is only partly understood as being the continuation of decolonisation. It also goes much beyond it.

A key problem suggests itself: it is not always easy to identify how agency might be expressed. But the centrality of agency and the importance of autonomy are everything in the modern system. Self-determination, individual and collective, cannot be forced or be deployed in only one predetermined way. The major difference between being under colonialism and being free from it is that the will of the colonised is bent in one and it is free and self-actuating in the other. So, when we see what appears to be the survival of aspects of the colonial, we should ask if they are still sustained by (1) the previous coercion, (2) inertia or (3) the choices of the ex-colonised. One thing is certain: we cannot simply assume that the colonised will or can never be free if they use their agency in ways that we find unacceptable or difficult to endorse.

What this means is that if we see patterns of life and thought characteristic of the colonial world occurring in the post-liberation period, we must investigate their causal antecedents before insisting that they are instances of the failure of decolonisation$_1$. That is, while there may be post-independence phenomena that mimic similar ones in the colonial period, we cannot automatically assume that they have the same pedigree. If it turns out that some do, we need further evidence to determine if the same causal agents were responsible for them both under and after colonialism. Such would be instances of a failure to decolonise. But we must break down the idea of decolonisation to isolate the causes in different cases. And if such were indeed failures, we would need to determine whether the will of the newly free is still being bent by the same colonial forces. We would also need to rule out inertia, the exercise of the will in the service of choices that negate freedom, and clear preferences for certain ideas and arrangements (even if they had colonial origins). Unfortunately, much of the discourse of decolonisation does not often apply these cautions. Yet, apply them we must if we are to come up with sophisticated accounts of how life and thought have unfolded, or ought to unfold, after the removal of formal colonialism. We must question the ease with which the decolonising trope is used without deep attention to the complexity of the issues involved.

The core of decolonisation$_1$ was the extirpation of colonial rule, symbolised by the replacement of colonial rulers with Africans and the steering of African life under the direction of African agency. I would like to style this the original 'struggle for freedom', and the significance of this characterisation will soon become clear. I put it this way because, all too often, hardly any care is taken to drill down into the many elements of this broad assignment of 'freedom' as the goal of decolonisation. Yet, it is in doing so that some

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of the fog hanging over the contemporary discussion of decolonisation begins to clear. If we say that Africa has failed to decolonise in this original sense of the term, we must identify the reason behind this failure. Here is why.

Decolonisation$_1$ is simple, straightforward and genuinely universal in its theoretical scope. From Greece in 1821 to Turkmenistan in 1991, from the United States in 1776 to Gambia in 1966, when a polity is decolonised, its members, at a minimum, recover the capacity to become history-makers again—as we saw earlier with Amílcar Cabral. They take back their ability to call the shots in determining the direction of their country's life as an independent entity, which had been taken away from them by colonialism. *All* ex-colonies—and here we are talking of the type of colonisation that involves one set of people (the colonisers) controlling the lives of another (the colonised)—answer to this description. This differs from the type of colonisation present in countries like the United States, Australia and South Africa, where the colonists (settlers) were not interested in administering the aboriginal inhabitants; they wanted the latter cleared from the land for their convenience.

But this is one of the complexities that much of the decolonisation discourse fails to consider. In their capacity as colonists in the United States or *colons* in Algeria, for example, the British and French settlers, respectively, were *not* colonisers; they, too, were the *colonised* and it is only as such that it makes sense to speak of them as candidates for decolonisation and prosecutors of struggles for independence. It is in this sense that Canadians are not different in any significant way from Nigerians or Indians when it comes to their status as ex-colonised. And if decolonisation$_2$ is of service in understanding the situation in any of them, it should be in *all* of them.

It is instructive to consider that once the American settlers attained independence, ridding themselves of the monarchy and the ideological legitimacy that underpinned it, they largely hewed to what they had inherited from old Europe—whether that was in terms of the philosophical grounds for their new political organs, their judicial systems or their economic models. What's more, when it came to the areas of cultural life that come under decolonisation$_2$—from music to philosophy, from language to architecture—the United States was largely content until late into the 20th century to be a pale imitation of the country against which they waged a war of independence. If there is anything wrong with the ex-colonised borrowing from the repertory of ideas, institutions, processes and practices inspired by their erstwhile colonisers, it cannot only be a problem in the former colonies of Africa and South America; it must be a blemish shared by *all* of them.

It may be argued that the examples I've cited here can be easily explained away by the fact that the coloniser and colonised in these countries shared racial identities, and that this was the basis of the continuities I identified. That argument does not tell us much. India, for example, is an ex-colony that also chose continuity in its political and legal institutions, and has domesticated them so successfully that some of the cases decided by its Supreme Court are cited by courts in countries as diverse as the United Kingdom, Nigeria and the United States. Add to this the countries of the English-speaking Caribbean that have also developed their colonial political and judicial inheritances in ways that, as I argue in Chapter 4, Africa would do well to emulate.

Once independence is secured by decolonisation$_1$, the type of philosophical or ideological models that the ex-colonised choose to use cannot be limited to only those options that we, anti-colonial scholars, prefer. If we find that the independent state continues to exhibit features of colonialism—such as denying freedom to its citizens, being obsequious towards the ex-colonial overlords, acting in ways that are inconsistent with their being sovereign states—we must establish, in each case, the causal factors at work. We must not automatically conclude that colonialism has not ended, unless we are prepared to grant that the rulers of such states are permanent children who are forever beholden to their former colonisers. In other words, if we find choices that mirror old colonial forms of rule, we should not rush to conclude that these could only be the result of continuing colonial hold on the ex-colonised's capacity for choice-making. We need to be reminded that the exercise of agency on the part of the colonised cannot be limited to those choices that are 'anti-colonial'. A free people can express their freedom in any manner they choose. One of the defining features of colonial rule was the denial and displacement of local agency but, as we see below, while this agency may have been curbed, it was never dormant, much less non-existent, even as colonial rule lasted.

Speaking of the post-independence period as if native agency matters little, if at all, is a remarkable failing of the decolonisation discourse. We must change course. Doubtless, in most parts of Africa, the

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project of decolonisation, expansively conceived, was never really consummated. One can concede that many African states have not provided the best examples of being the self-governing, sovereign states that decolonisation$_1$ was supposed to usher in, post-independence. But this does not mean that the only conclusion to draw is that colonialism never ended. Indeed, part of the challenge that I issue to our decolonisers is to lay out clearly and in detail what a decolonised world, on their terms, would look like.

We must sound another note of caution here. When we talk about the failure of decolonisation$_1$, there is a general assumption that this is due to external causes including, but not limited to, the machinations of the former colonial powers. However, often it is better explained by the failure of successor regimes helmed by Africans to domesticate the institutions that our forebears who fought for independence gave their lives to install. It is simplistic to attribute this failure solely or even primarily to the continuing power of colonialism. We must attribute some causality to the exercise of indigenous agency even if we do not thereby substitute another unhelpful monocausal explanation. This is the road to more complex analyses and more effective theories. This is what many who push decolonisation$_2$ do not pay attention to. But Africans did not think that freedom, control over their lives, respect for their individuality or a state whose functionaries serve them and are legitimised by them were 'European' or 'Western' concepts. Julius Nyerere counted himself among those Africans who accepted the promise of change and sought to hold the colonialists to their pledge when it came to the installation of liberal representative democracy in Africa. As he explained in 1961,

> When, later, the idea of government as an institution began to take hold of some African 'agitators' such as myself, who had been reading Abraham Lincoln and John Stuart Mill, and we began demanding institutional government for our own countries, it was the very people who had not come to symbolize 'Government' in their persons who resisted our demands—the District Commissioners, the Provincial Commissioners, and the Governors. Not until the eleventh hour did they give way; and free elections have taken place in most of our countries almost on the eve of independence.[19]

The problem is that many of our decolonisers too easily conflate modernity and Westernisation. It is a big and unwarranted mistake.[20] Needless to say, they never engage with those of us who argue the opposing view,[21] but I hope that this book helps to improve the understanding of those who are somewhat puzzled by this issue. India never abandoned the legacy of modern liberal democracy, although it is currently under severe strain with Narendra Modi's unbridled national and religious fundamentalism; South Korea has embraced it in the aftermath of dictatorial rule; Japan, literally under an American diktat, modified its monarchy after its defeat in WWII to domesticate liberalism's core principles; and young people in Hong Kong are confronting the might of the Chinese government in defence of such principles, even though they have only enjoyed these freedoms since 1997, when colonial rule ended in the city and it was handed back to China. Not to mention the hundreds in Myanmar who, in defence of the modern principle of governance by consent, have been mown down by the country's military; or the people of Sudan, where the military is killing protesters to keep hold of power they seized illegitimately; and, lately, the youths and democratic forces in Eswatini, the only surviving absolute monarchy in Africa, who are defying death and imprisonment to call for the installation of a regime authorised by the governed, rather than by hereditary principles. The same demands are being made by forces in Thailand against a so-called God-king! I am yet to see a positive programme for what a decolonised political system would look like based on the proposals of our decolonisation theorists.

As I have established, there is a conceptual distinction between decolonisation$_1$ and decolonisation$_2$, with confusion coming when decolonisation is used to describe cultural forms, philosophical orientations, language choices and so on. When scholars use the concept of decolonisation, there is an unstated assumption concerning the relationship between its two different iterations. It is almost as if (1) there is no possible difference between the two; and (2) that one can easily jump from neocolonialism and incomplete decolonisation to the decolonisation of philosophy and other cultural forms. But I argue that not only is there a difference, it is significant enough to require us to rethink our very conceptual structures and to come up with clear guidelines for our thinking, going forward.

We should not use the same terms to describe decolonisation$_1$ (the struggle for independence and/or self-determination, the journey from colony to sovereign polity) as we do for decolonisation$_2$ (the continuing

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dominance in the contemporary world of ideational structures, patterns of thought, etc. ascribed to colonialism). The outlines of colonial rule in politics and economics are easy to delineate. In politics, we distinguish between what we now call ‘flag independence’ and ‘real independence’, by which we mean the ex-colonised being in fuller control of the levers of economic power within their respective territories, and being able to order their political lives without even the appearance of control by their former colonisers. I do not think that, beyond metaphor, this distinction is meant to signal the continuation of colonialism.

Deciding on which philosophical orientations are to be embraced, which political systems to be installed and which ideological frameworks ought to dominate in this ‘really independent’ realm is another issue altogether. Many scholars tend to emphasise the impact of colonialism as the source of almost anything that comes after it, except in whatever we choose to ascribe to the indigenous societies and institutions themselves. This is both analytically unhelpful and historically incorrect. Many of the ideas that predominated in the colonial setting—democracy or lack thereof, modernity, etc.—did not have colonial provenance in, say, West Africa. But the call to ‘decolonise’ lumps together modernity and colonialism, and, in doing so, insists that the rejection of colonialism means the rejection of modernity. This is a mistake.[22]

Because the ideas and processes involved in $decolonisation_2$ (deciding which philosophical and ideological frameworks to embrace) do not always have the same origins, nor the same solutions, as the challenge posed by $decolonisation_1$ (achieving ‘real independence’), we must exercise caution when talking about both in a single breath. Indeed, I believe we must stop conflating these two distinct ideas altogether. For example, in the economic sphere, capitalism is not essentially colonial. In fact, in Africa, colonialism deliberately blocked the development of capitalism, and took active steps not only to restrict the rise of a local bourgeoisie but, also, to destroy local examples and forbid Africans from ever competing with ventures based in the metropole.[23] Some former colonies, whether settler, exploitation or a combination—including South Africa, India, Malaysia, Singapore, Canada and the USA—have managed to build robust and successful capitalist economies post-independence. To suggest that their choice of a capitalist path to development is a sign of lingering colonialism demonstrates serious ignorance or a lack of sophistication concerning the historical evolution of both phenomena.

This intellectual carelessness leads people to think that $decolonisation_2$ should also pursue the sort of total break with colonialism that $decolonisation_1$ mandates. African philosophy grew into a legible and legitimate subdivision of the discipline as a reaction to the racist theory that had consigned Africans to the status of philosophical non-beings. But $decolonisation_2$ which, if I understand it correctly, would also demand the removal of the philosophical model in which Africans were denied the status of humanity and which consigned our ideational exertions to nothing, makes some implausible or even counterproductive assumptions.

Take, for example, the most extreme case of the denial of another’s humanity: chattel slavery. In the United States, slave-owners convinced themselves that their enslaved workers were objects, consistently listing them on the same side of the ledger as farming equipment. As Aimé Césaire pointed out, in the type of colonisation that took root in Africa and in the French Caribbean, populated by African-descended peoples, colonisation was synonymous with ‘thingification’. Of course, we owe our understanding that the colonised were considered non-beings to Frantz Fanon’s characterisation of colonialism. No doubt, colonisers proceeded to organise life, work, space and thought along these lines.[24]

Did slave-owners and colonisers succeed? Not quite.[25] For one thing, it is questionable whether, beyond bluster and self-deception, the slave owners really believed their own lie about the non-humanity of the enslaved, given their repeated rapes of enslaved women and their widespread interest in producing offspring with them. Either slave-owners did not really believe their own tales, or theirs must rank as the only civilisation in history built on mass ‘bestiality’. If you are participating in a ‘breeding’ scheme—the preferred term of the slave-holding establishment—you can rise no higher than those you ‘breed’ with. It is part of the hubris of slave-owners that they did not acknowledge their bestiality if, indeed, as they held, their enslaved victims were ‘animals’. What is more, other farm implements never invented anything or created music, never improved productivity or constructed religions. If we cannot be sure that the enslavers really believed that the enslaved were non-human, we have reason to question the efficacy of those ideas even while slavery and colonialism lasted. It was why violence was so widespread and mindless while these practices lasted.

Moreover, it was one thing for slave-owners and colonisers to deny the humanity of their victims; it was

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another thing entirely to consider what those victims thought of themselves, their situations and even of their oppressors. Otherwise, we would be taking the oppressors' narratives as the only ones that matter. I argue in this work that much of the discourse on decolonising treats the colonised as if they are mute presences in the drama that other people are writing, and acts as if only two viewpoints matter: that of the oppressors and that of the analysts who think they know best what works. What is often ignored or dismissed is the work of the ex-colonised themselves, unless it squares with the expectations of decolonisers that anything with even the appearance of being related to colonialism must be discounted. This is why I have invited our decolonisers to take seriously such work.

Again, the situation of the enslaved is a good guide for how to handle what ought and ought not to be required for decolonisation$_2$. Enslaved persons in the United States were quickly deracinated and enormous efforts were made to denude them of their original cultures and expertise (whether in religion or medicine, agronomy or statecraft), as well as to rid them of any language they could use to conspire against their enslavers. But their enslavers could not deprive them of the human prerogative to appropriate what is to hand to tell their stories, to make sense of the world—especially one so cruel and inhumane—and generally to name themselves and fashion the world in their own image. The 'owners' of 'chattels' were free to believe their own lies. But the so-called 'chattel' always shocked their 'owners' by talking back and doing so in the same syntax as their supposed owners.

While enslaved persons had lost or had been taken away from their original world-making tools, must we object that English—or some variant of it mixed with elements of their previous cultural inheritances—became their vehicle for articulating their respective worldviews and experiences? If the answer is no, how much sense would it make to demand that they jettison this language and the conceptual framework it provides them with as evidence of their separating themselves from their enslaved past? By its very nature, no language can be owned by any person or any people.[26] Anyone who is willing and able to acquire a language becomes a part-owner of that language. Even when enslaved persons were forbidden from learning to read or write, their common capacity to acquire language by ear—which the slave-owner could not take away from them—allowed them to become proficient in the shared language and turn it to devastating use in calling their owners out on their hypocrisy, inconsistency, illogicality and their unspeakable cruelty, especially when they claimed to be pious Christians.

This is where the disanalogy between decolonisation$_1$ and decolonisation$_2$ comes into sharper focus. We know clearly what was wrong with colonialism when it came to political and economic operations in Africa. African lands were considered only good for extraction, and whatever infrastructure was put in place was not designed to improve the welfare of the colonised or the future development of their lands. They were colonies earmarked for supplying raw materials for the industrial enterprises of the metropole and, simultaneously, held as captive markets for the finished goods manufactured there. That is, the colonies were not permitted any choice in trading partners or the source of the manufactured goods they needed. We confront, yet again, how the issue of autonomy, of self-governance—the central credo of the modern age—was the *differentia specifica* when it came to defining the economic organisation of the colonies, with the interests of the colonised subordinated to and determined by the colonial powers.

In the political sphere, the signs are even clearer. As I argue in Chapter 4, the self-ownership of the subject underpins the demand that no government can have legitimacy unless it has been consented to by the governed—the principle of governance by consent—and this is the defining characteristic of the modern age. Modern colonialism in Africa failed this simple test where it concerned the fortunes of indigenous Africans. Colonial settlers, colonists and *colons* all travelled with their citizenship intact, and their revolts or resistance against the mother country, when they occurred, were conducted in the name of the principles guaranteed by their citizenship. The colonised never enjoyed that privilege even when the policies of 'indirect rule' (in British territories) or 'association' (in French ones) were imposed on the continent, lasting right up until the eve of independence in colonised African countries.

The parameters of decolonisation$_1$ are thus very clear. In politics, Africans should be in control of who governs them, and that governance must be based on the consent of the governed. The country in which this governance is exercised must be sovereign over its space and its social ordering, and may not be beholden to any other outside its own boundaries unless by acts voluntarily entered into and able to be reversed when the country so determines. This simple requirement is one of the strongest signs of the errancy of the

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decolonisation discourse even in this area. For example, when it became public knowledge that the then government of Nigeria had negotiated the Anglo-Nigerian Defence Pact with Britain in 1960—which would allow the former colonial power to have a military base in the newly independent country—all hell broke loose. Public opinion, led by opposition parties and the new country's intellectuals and students, forced the abrogation of the pact. Think of it, we are talking of a time closest to independence, a time when the new state's vulnerability to sanctions was most acute. Yet, the new sovereigns, the newly minted citizens of Nigeria, decided to take the risk and dare their former colonisers. Incidentally, Obafemi Awolowo was the leader of the opposition in Nigeria's federal parliament when this pushback occurred.

But years later, various African countries started making pacts with ex-colonisers and even with those, like the former Soviet Union, who never had a colonial presence on the continent, that allowed the latter to have bases inside their territory. If this is the sort of thing that is meant by those who argue that colonialism never ended in Africa—and this is the crux of the continuing appeal of decolonisation discourse—it is either that they have made the definition of colonialism so elastic that it no longer has any meaningful boundaries, or they have chosen to ignore African agency after independence. I refuse to accept this dangerous move.

In economics, the direction of the country's economy must be steered by its citizens, with a government that they have freely chosen at its helm. It must be driven with the interests of its citizens in mind and with the goal of creating a self-sustaining, independent, internally robust mode of production. How this outcome is achieved—capitalism, socialism, mixed economy—becomes less important than whether it is driven by the will of the free country and its government. Again, if anybody holds France responsible for her ex-colonies' decision to tie their currency to the French Central Bank and regards that as evidence that colonisation never ended in those countries, I beg to differ. What were Africans leaders who signed on to such deals thinking when they did? Yes, they were subjected to threats. But we must either hold them liable for their lousy choice or we must assume that they are, one and all, minors who could not say no to their 'guardians', the French. And we have evidence of various African countries exercising their autonomy in choosing which economic systems they were going to embrace after independence: Kenya was unashamedly capitalist, Tanzania went down the socialist path, Nigeria chose a mixed-economy model, and so on. Meanwhile, as I write this, various African countries are allowing military bases to be set up within their borders; are selling land to foreign countries so that its purchasers can grow food for export; and borrowing money under terms which make their major infrastructure, like seaports, vulnerable to seizures by their foreign creditors.

I am arguing that decolonisation has no place where there is no colonial presence. Whatever problems there may currently be in Africa's political and economic spheres, since the day after independence, they are no longer colonial problems. If, indeed, my dis-tinction between the two senses of decolonisation holds, it turns out there is a paradox in the discourse that has been hidden from analysts until now. If colonialism, as I argue, represents a subversion of modernity and its core tenets, processes and practices (the principle of subjectivity, the centrality of Reason, the importance of governance by consent), and the anti-colonial struggle was carried out, at least in part, to force the colonisers to live up to the ideology used to justify the colonial adventure, it stands to reason that post-independence, decolonisation would not be identified with the abandonment of those principles. Decolonisation would raise the demand not only for their realisation but for their deepening in the lives of the ex-colonised. It may be that some of our 'decolonisers' have understood this paradox but are afraid to confront it.

This may be one explanation for their deafening silence on the ongoing second struggle for freedom in different parts of Africa, best illustrated by the 2010 Jasmine revolution in Tunisia and the ensuing Arab-African Spring, as well as by other movements in Africa which began with the overthrow of the military by the Béninois people in 1991. Those movements have not been driven by flag or food, religion or creed, ethnicity or nationality. And they surely were not a struggle for independence from or against colonial rule. It was not Britain, France, Portugal or Spain who were the objects of the protesters. Nor did the protesters speak or act as if they believed that the local objects of their animus—their ruling classes—were minions of a colonial master. Rather, from Bénin in 1991 to Eswatini, Tunisia and Sudan in 2021, their demand has been for human dignity; for the state, run by people from within their own ranks, to serve and respect them; and for individuals, in their capacity as humans and citizens, to be the authors of their own scripts, and for the integrity of their person to be held sacrosanct by the state, its agents and their fellow citizens. I argue that these are the core elements that set modernity apart from previous modes of social living and principles of social ordering. Ordinary Africans had thought that flag independence would lead to this

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outcome, and when one-party and military rule distorted and diverted this political progression, they never gave up on the goal. While the first struggle gave freedom to their polities as states, this second struggle is designed to wrest freedom for them as individuals deserving of dignity by reason of their humanity alone. When we speak as if this struggle is about decolonising, we misdescribe what is happening, and we fail to hold accountable the native successors to the colonial regimes for their failure to treat their people with respect. And it does not help the argument to accuse them of being lackeys of the former colonial powers. In so doing, we lend support to the racists who contend that Africans are permanent children.

The Philosophical Case Against Decolonisation

This brings us back to the centrality of philosophical and cultural ideas to decolonisation$_2$, and how much of a problem it poses to the decolonisation trope. African thinkers in the period immediately after independence had begun to grapple with the issues of freeing African philosophy from the grip of colonialism and its ideological manifestations. That is, they had started to question the provenance of ideas and ideational structures that dominate life and thought, tracing them to the colonial period. This is the root of the discourse of decolonising philosophy as it manifests itself in Africa. Philosophers and other cultural thinkers are no less susceptible to the problems that we have highlighted so far in this discussion.

I need to be very specific in this context because much confusion is caused by what I see as unfounded generalisations about the nature of colonialism and the erasure of its specific features in different parts of Africa. In a country like Senegal, for example, where French colonialism unfolded in two distinct phases—assimilation and association—one can see the different fruits born of those phases. The differences were deeper still in areas of settler colonialism. I have searched for, but have been unable to find, examples of decolonising discourse applied to the Afrikaner experience in South Africa of being colonised by the British, and how this was incorporated in Afrikaner philosophy. Of course, it is entirely possible that Afrikaans-inflected philosophy is full of such discussions. Similar considerations can be raised for Zanzibari philosophy or Hausa philosophy, and their iterations in Islam-dominated countries in Africa. What am I hinting at? It is all too easy for us to talk about decolonising philosophy when we take Africa to be our primary referent. But, once we begin to dispel certain assumptions that inform our current discourses, things become rather more complicated. Given that much of the focus has turned on language and political philosophy, we similarly limit ourselves in this book.

I argue that the impact of what Kwasi Wiredu called the need for 'conceptual decolonisation in African philosophy' may be having some very problematic, even if unintended, consequences. These consequences can be traced to the very conception of the problem which I have just hinted at. The very concept of decolonisation, as applied to culture, is beset with significant confusion. Even among its sophisticated proponents, there is little clarity as to what a fully decolonised philosophy (assuming that were even possible) would look like. Here, one finds as many variations of decolonisation as there are thinkers promoting it.[27] If this is the case, it is only fair that I show how and why it has happened. But this can be a tricky move to pull off. I am not interested in highlighting arguments with which I am unable, given the scope of this book, to engage. What I will do over the following pages is draw attention to some of the representative samples of the confusion that I see, encourage us to identify it and avoid it in our and others' thinking. In subsequent chapters, I give more details about how inattention to the confusion that arises from the indiscriminate deployment of the decolonising trope actually subverts efforts to solve the problems that its proponents are interested in solving, either by misdiagnosing their causes or simply by inappropriately applying the decolonisation trope. This confusion includes:

(1) If we find the term 'decolonisation' used in a paper to lump together different phenomena without any attempt by the author concerned to acknowledge the shifting usages, it is fair to say this does not aid reflection. These shifting usages are not rare in many otherwise self-contained discussions. Here is an example of inconsistent usages. In a 2016 piece by Achille Mbembe, promising 'new directions' for 'decolonizing the University' and dealing primarily with South Africa (but with the usual nod to the rest of the continent), we have the following characterisations of decolonisation: first, 'decolonization on campus' refers to removing iconography that depicts racist figures. This is a specific recommendation for South

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African universities. Second, 'decolonization' is defined as rolling back 'neoliberal' influences on the university, instituted in what the author calls 'this tide of bureaucratization'. Third, we are told that 'to decolonize implies breaking the cycle that tends to turn students into customers and consumers'.[28]

We should not assume that decolonising means the same thing in each of these three characterisations. For one thing, the line that goes from colonisation to removing iconography that depicts racist figures, to removing neoliberal influences, to breaking the cycle that tends to turn students into customers and consumers is neither obvious nor straight. For all three things to refer to the same cause it must be the case that colonialism plays a causal or, at least, a quasi-causal role in their emergence and their current manifestations. In other words, we must be able to trace these phenomena to colonialism, and attributing them to such a cause must provide a more convincing explanation than competing ones.

Many who subscribe to decolonising models already take for granted that these phenomena are directly caused by colonialism, and this assumption is rarely questioned. What's more, it is difficult to persuade the proponents of decolonisation to locate themselves outside of this theory and consider that there may be alternative genealogies for processes or practices that they are all too content to trace back to colonialism. It is for this reason that I am more interested in addressing myself to those who may be considering embracing the trope, in order to prompt them to take a second look before signing up.

For now, let's stay in South Africa. To begin with, there was more than one colonialism in South Africa. Even if we were to incorrectly assume that colonialism in South Africa was a monolith, we must still admit that its victims did not all have the same experiences with it nor were they impacted upon in the same way by it. Boer settlers colonised the land, not indigenous South Africans. Some native groups imperialised, even if they did not colonise, other native groups. The British subdued the Afrikaners as well as various indigenous groups. It is British colonialism that is the focus of Mbembe's essay. Properly speaking, if the original peoples of South Africa are interested in removing iconography that depicts racist figures, it is not far-fetched that Afrikaners would be interested in removing iconography of the British figures who placed them under colonial rule (and from which they were freed in 1910, to the detriment of indigenous South Africans). I don't subscribe to the notion that the psychological harm caused by colonialism is essentially racially defined. The Irish and the English are of the same racial stock, for example, but, if the continuing struggle of Irish Republicans in Northern Ireland is any indication, they would be as invested in decolonising as descendants of South Africa's original peoples.

Even if we grant the colonial provenance of iconography—Mbembe's first object that must be 'decolonised'—it is more difficult to link 'neoliberal influences' and colonialism. Neoliberalism is a global phenomenon, which has rampaged across the world affecting coloniser and colonised alike—whether this is in the United Kingdom in the transition from Edward Heath to Margaret Thatcher in the 1970s; in South Korea and Indonesia during the financial collapse in the 1990s; in Argentina in the opening decade of our present century; or more recently in Italy, Spain, Ireland or Greece in the aftermath of the economic crash of 2008. And if one wants to focus on its specific colonial manifestations as a basis for pulling it into decolonising discourse, we must say much more than our decolonisers usually do.

The connection to colonialism is established by linking the business of knowledge production to the continuing dominance of so-called 'Western epistemic traditions', which exclude or even kill local forms of scholarship. Decolonisers have even come up with a name for this: 'epistemicide'.[29] It is this dominance with which decolonising the university and its curriculum is concerned. It is an irony that those who criticise Léopold Sédar Senghor for committing the crime of writing in French are also the ones who, simultaneously, call for precisely the kind of epistemological standpoint that he had advocated: community-oriented, emotion-inflected, spirit-infused. Dethroning so-called Western epistemic traditions from their hegemonic pedestal in the ex-colonies is one of the declared aims of decolonisation.

This is a type of decolonisation that I am convinced is totally unwarranted.[30] When decolonisers accuse colonisers of killing local epistemes, I am often at a loss to make sense of this accusation. If you wish your papers to be published in so-called prestigious journals dominated and curated by those you accuse of being colonisers, then they will insist that you meet *their* criteria for what merits inclusion. But why do we not create alternative outlets for ourselves and our audiences?[31] When the *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* was considered the place to publish when it came to African history, did anyone from Britain or the United States complain? On the contrary, it used to be the case that the most celebrated Africanist scholars touted their work's inclusion in the journal as a mark of excellence and legitimacy. Why are we now asking

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Cambridge University Press's *Journal of African History*, dominated by British and American Africanists, to decolonise? Why are we holding outsiders responsible for our own failure to commit adequate resources to studying Africa?

The complaint about colonial domination of knowledge production is, for the most part, an implicit acknowledgment that we dropped the ball on owning our reality. What's more, because Africans keep hankering after the approval of those whom we routinely accuse of not recognising our scholarship, we never fail to cite them as authorities—a move that prolongs their domination over our story-telling. We keep reinfusing their outlets with our fresh ideas, rather than moderating and curating them under our own agency. Never mind that many of those outlets would not have the depth of knowledge required for them to be competent judges of African work, if that work were really directed at creating and furthering our own intellectual traditions. Hence my argument later in this book that much of the output of the decolonising trope is dominated by extraversion. We need to turn inwards, take our agency seriously and act as if we value it.

No account of decolonisation would be complete without the usual, often unthinking, nod to Ngg wa Thiong'o's demand, as paraphrased by Mbembe, that 'a decolonized university in Africa should put African languages at the centre of its teaching and learning project'.[32] Unlike Ngg, however, Mbembe believes that French, Portuguese and Arabic have already become African languages. Since I devote a whole chapter later to the topic of language in decolonising, I do not need to dwell on it here. But a comment is relevant. This is one of those situations where a little more digging shows what decolonisers may be missing. If these foreign languages all came via colonialism and part of what decolonisation entails is the expunging of colonial modes scholarship, we must show how the French, Portuguese and Arabic colonial modes of scholarship that have become African have been decolonised and made suitable for African use. But, if this is possible with an artefact that is still so bound up with its external origins, why is the same not true for other areas or processes that are the targets of decolonisers?

(2) We next consider a second set of defects. There are those calls for decolonising which, when we reflect more deeply, place items within their domain which can either be differently explained, do not address a real problem or which address a problem that can be resolved without resorting to the drama of 'decolonisation'. When we are asked to decolonise a discipline, a discourse or a movement, there is always the assumption that our subject matter is a creation of colonialism, or that it is so steeped in colonialism that it needs a complete makeover. Here, again, we run into difficulties that are often obscured by this assumption that the process in question is inseverable from colonialism.

To illustrate the point, consider the 2015 essay, 'Decolonizing Western Political Philosophy', by the late Charles W. Mills. What does it mean to decolonise 'Western political philosophy'? According to Mills, '[w]hat we have to do, then, is to expand the current vocabulary of Western political philosophy to admit colonial and imperial dominations as political systems themselves, not merely national but global, and centrally constituted by race'.[33] If we are not co-owners of 'Western philosophy', why are we asking its chroniclers to include us in their annals? I do not see us asking to be included in Chinese or Indian philosophy. If we are asking that Western philosophy account for the historic violence, subjugation and even genocide that it abetted or caused, that is only fair. But I do not think a whole new discourse is needed to ask a discipline to tell the truth about itself.

Moreover, Western philosophy is never monolithic. As 18th-century philosophers David Hume and Immanuel Kant were libelling African-descended peoples, their contemporaries James Beattie and Olaudah Equiano, and James Africanus Beale Horton a few decades later, were rebutting their arguments within the same epistemic, metaphysical and ethical frameworks—a development that made the latter two African-descended thinkers co-owners of Western philosophy! And if Africans can be co-owners, what is called for is not decolonisation, but a more honest telling of the story of this branch of thought. If, as Charles W. Mills's piece argues, some ex-colonised thinkers can be considered Western philosophers, does that make their writings, too, candidates for decolonisation? After all, in the view of many in the decolonising community, there is no distance between colonial and imperial domination and the philosophical heritage of the colonising and imperialising countries.

Does that mean that the philosophies of the ex-colonised which are considered part of the Western inheritance are equally guilty? If the answer to this question is yes, efforts at decolonising must include philosophers like Ottobah Cugoano, Olaudah Equiano, Anton Wilhem Amo, Edward Wilmot Blyden, James Africanus Beale Horton, Alexander Crummell, Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi, Kwame

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Nkrumah, Léopold Sédar Senghor, Amílcar Cabral, Mourad Wahba, Fatima Mernissi, Obafemi Awolowo and Paulin J. Hountondji, because all of them worked within the framework of 'Western' philosophy and wrote their own 'J'accuse' from within it. If not, why are some Western thinkers candidates for decolonisation and others are not? Are we giving Frantz Fanon a free pass because he comes from 'our' community or are we implicitly conceding that there are liberatory political philosophies in the Western tradition sitting, however uneasily, alongside the philosophies of domination? What's more, whatever can be decolonised cannot at the same time have colonialism as part of its very constitution. To that extent, the colonial moment must then be incidental to Western political philosophy. Mills's essay actually seems to corroborate this point, because, as we saw above, it holds that to decolonise Western political philosophy is to recognise its underbelly of political domination denominated by race, and make the discipline more self-aware of the imperial genealogies of some of its key categories.

A similar point can be made about Adam Branch's position that 'decolonising would mean starting with attention to and learning from the specific, concrete debates that have taken place in specific locations in Africa and global Africa'. For example, it would mean going against the compartmentalisation of African thought and 'insisting on the fact that African political thought is political thought'.[34] If there is any situation for the application of Ockham's razor,[35] which cautions against the multiplication of entities beyond necessity, this is it. Many of us do what Mills and Branch are asking without any need to turn to the trope of 'decolonisation'. These are demands that a keen attention to good scholarship, especially one that answers to the call of a liberal education, should take care of quite easily. How good can scholarship be if it is blind to the experiences of a significant portion of humanity on account of their 'difference'? Can the 'best' scholarship really be produced if it conveniently ignores the ideas of a particular people and the products of their intellectual engagements with questions that have inspired other peoples to create philosophical models?

These characterisations indicate that colonialism is not integral to the constitution of Western political philosophy. Instead of calling for the decolonisation of philosophy, given that the colonial period is time-specific, why can we not answer this call by recasting the narratives of the discipline to reflect the breadth and complexity of the human experience? Why create another genre? Why not just insist that people write better histories of philosophy without reducing the problem to one of the machinations of colonialism? If we may take a leaf out of the book of feminist engagements with Euro-American philosophy, they did not create a whole new genre of 'demasculinisation'. Instead, they began to retell the story of philosophy by reemphasising the role of women in its evolution and insisting that more inclusive language be adopted to show that philosophy does not come in only one gender. They realised that androcentrism was not a constituent part of philosophy, and was merely an accident of its development.

To anticipate an argument that is developed in Chapter 2: if all that decolonising requires is that we critically consider artefacts inspired by colonialism, and can give good reasons for embracing them, then it cannot be the case that the colonial element in them is dire. Some of us have done exactly what is being asked in our own accounting of the philosophical discourse of modernity without deploying the decolonisation trope.[36]

(3) The final part of the confusion that I identify with the decolonisation discourse is the almost indiscriminate deployment of it to address anything and everything. This promiscuous application is part of what led me to think that the idea has lost its focus, and that its explanatory power has become so attenuated as to be non-existent. Under this heading, a lot of the discourse is either faddish or lends itself to bad ideological purposes. Works on this subject range from 'Decolonizing Globalization Studies', 'Decolonizing Sociology' and 'Decolonizing African Educational System as a Panacea for Africa's Educational Advancement in the 21st Century' to *Decolonising Knowledge for Africa's Renewal: Examining African Perspectives and Philosophies*, *Decolonizing Enlightenment*, *Decolonisation and Afro-Feminism* and *Decolonizing Universalism*.[37] My hope is that drawing attention to the catch-all use of this might cool our ardour for throwing 'decolonisation' at whatever ails our discussion in philosophy and culture more broadly.

In this section I've shown how a little attention to our conceptual framings might help improve awareness of the fact that many of the theories we take for granted may not have the solidity and coherence that we had previously thought. In addition to the above conceptual confusions, there are four other defects in the decolonisation discourse, which together make up the fundamental reasons why I argue we should dispense

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with the idea of decolonisation$_2$ entirely. Even if we pay more careful attention to and clear up the confusions outlined in the preceding section, I think that the trope and the discourse built on it cannot escape these defects:

a) When it comes to language, both Ngg wa Thiong'o and Kwasi Wiredu may be raising or have raised unrealistic expectations regarding what can and/or ought to be done.
b) A trope that emerged to break down the walls erected by Eurocentrism around philosophy may have become a new barrier that obscures much more than it reveals.
c) The dominant conception of colonialism in the decolonisation discourse is somewhat stilted and does not take seriously the complexity and historicity of the concept or, importantly, the different paths of modernity and colonialism in Africa.
d) The discourse ignores or plays fast and loose with the intellectual contributions of thinkers in the ex-colonies, and their reaction, relation to and engagement with the legacy of colonialism and modernity.

These last four problems will be critically discussed in the remaining chapters of this book.

I will frame my discussion by using as foils the case for 'decolonizing the mind' made by Ngg wa Thiong'o and Kwasi Wiredu's case for 'the need for conceptual decolonization in African philosophy'. I use them in this way because these two thinkers have loomed large in the debate on decolonising the humanities since they elaborated their theories in the early eighties. Both, especially Ngg, have had a far-reaching influence on university organisations in Africa. Soon after Ngg and his brave comrades in Nairobi forced the Department of English to be renamed the Department of Literature in English, my own alma mater, the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) in Ile-Ife, Nigeria, was where the train next stopped. It led to the dominance of a Marxist-inflected sociology of literature and literary criticism, which generated such fierce debate that Wole Soyinka had to address its impact in his Inaugural Lecture delivered there in the 1980s.[38]

Wiredu's voice in the emergence of African philosophy as a subdiscipline is a pivotal one. His *Philosophy and an African Culture* (1980) was one of the earliest articulations of academic African philosophy that did not allow itself to be deflected by the racism-tinged, sterile 'question' of African philosophy and the conditions of its possibility. So, in challenging his and Ngg's submissions, I am paying tribute to the enduring significance of their contributions. But challenge I must, to push back the frontiers of a debate that, I believe, is fast ossifying. As with other pioneers and trailblazers, the problem is less with the originals and more with their imitators, who remain stuck on the same note either through simple inertia or because they are too petrified to strike out on their own.

In the subsequent chapters, I address certain framing questions (outlined below) which, unfortunately, are regularly neglected by much of the discourse on decolonisation. It is likely that the enthusiasm for decolonisation stems from the fact that everyone seems to believe that they know what everyone else in the discourse is talking about. But if we put these questions at the forefront of our minds, it forces us to deal with otherwise hidden conundrums. We have seen that, for decolonisation$_1$, there are clear criteria to establish when it has been attained. So, to a great extent, these questions are more pertinent to decolonisation$_2$.

When we have decolonised our literature, philosophy and other areas of thought, what would things look like? To put it differently, what goal do we have in mind and how would the world look were we to attain a decolonised discourse in philosophy? Another way of phrasing the question is to ask what we are to understand by decolonising anything. This is not the place to get into it. Maybe someone will one day put together a taxonomy of conceptions of decolonisation in the literature. As we saw above, even in the work of a single author, decolonisation can often come in three or more variations, and the confusion is compounded when the idea is promiscuously deployed in all spheres.[39]

Some of the thinkers usually cited as authorities by the decolonising discourse do not always answer to what decolonisers believe them to be saying when it comes to the relationship between the two versions of decolonisation. They cannot be used to legitimise much of what currently passes for decolonisation. Consider Frantz Fanon and Amílcar Cabral. As we saw above, Fanon was very clear about what decolonisation would look like. So was Cabral. Cabral, indeed, is more helpful here given that he was clear that national liberation and culture are not judged by identitarian criteria—no spurious authenticity for him—but by whether the

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process of creating them unfolds under the power of the people. That is, whether it is self-directed. When it comes to decolonisation$_2$, Fanon, too, was very clear that the pieces that would be used to create a new culture, post-colonisation, would not be limited to some 'authentic', pristine past of the colonised.[40] Neither Fanon nor Cabral were worried about the colonised appropriating elements of their experience under colonialism that they deem helpful to creating their new metaphysics and social philosophy, which would reflect the humanism to be incorporated in their recently independent social formations. So, their argument is less about pedigree than it is about who chooses, what is chosen and with which goal in mind.

Neither Fanon nor Cabral set much store by decolonisation. Yes, it was important, but they did not permit themselves to think of it in absolute terms or to extend its reach beyond very narrow boundaries of economic control and political sovereignty. They therefore knew that what we have identified as decolonisation$_2$—a nod to the decolonisers but designed to show the irrelevance and problematic nature of using the term to describe something that is not continuous with its original iteration, decolonisation$_1$—would require a lot more, and its boundaries could not cover objects, processes or practices that may have been there under colonialism but were not caused by it. And even if these ideas or institutions did have some connection with the colonial period, Cabral and Fanon were not willing to make such things inseverable from colonialism.

Once we grant this, neither Fanon nor Cabral were interested in pedigree because they both knew that transforming the struggle against colonialism into a call for renouncing any aspect of the cultural, social, political or scientific life of the coloniser would be to give up on the oneness of humanity—the ultimate racist trope—and the fact that hybridity is the very core of human civilisation. They worried that such a move would mean a reversion to atavisms, identitarian politics—including ethnocentrism—and other forms of unacceptable cultural nationalism in post-independence polities, and a forswearing of what they both embraced: the politico-philosophical discourse of modernity which accused colonialism both of baiting the colonised with its promise and of switching when the time came to deliver on it. It was part of their theoretical sophistication that they did not make the error that is now rife among decolonisers—conflating colonialism, modernity and Westernisation.

For example, Cabral does not rule out borrowings from colonisers:

> Whether our new culture is in or outside of school, we have to place it in the service of our resistance, in the service of compliance with our Party program. It has to be that way, comrades. Our culture should be developed at the national level of our land, but without disparaging (or considering as lesser) the culture of others, and, with intelligence, availing ourselves of the culture of others—everything insofar as it can be adapted to our living conditions. Our culture should be developed on the basis of science, it should be scientific—which is to say, not involve believing in imaginary things.[41]

Beyond decolonisation, his commitment to humanism is very clear:

> From the beginning of our struggle, even with documents that the comrades may recognize, we addressed ourselves to the colonialists of our land, telling them clearly: 'You are the wheel of the old colonialist car that wants to continue exploiting our people.' Even they have a place in our land if they want. We want to make a land where anyone, from whatever part of the world, can live, work, and live properly, provided that they respect the right of our people to direct itself.[42]

This passage neatly, almost imperceptibly, shows that decolonisation$_1$ is what matters when it comes to demarcating a boundary between colonialism and post-independence. How we structure life after independence, and where we draw inspiration from for that purpose, is a separate issue from whether we do so under our own power or the power of another. We could have the same mode of social living forced upon us in the one case, pre-independence, or freely adopted by us, post-independence. 'Respect[ing] the right of our people to direct itself' means that we are independent, and if we remain under the direction of another, we do not have independence. But analysts may not dictate the limits of from where a free people may draw their models for organising life and thought, nor may they easily conclude that only the power of the coloniser can explain any continuities between the pre- and post-independence periods in the life of any people.

According to Fanon, colonisation and decolonisation do not form a con-tinuum such that we can affirm of them the kind of dialectical relations that exist between moments of a whole. They are mutually exclusive,

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and when we move from one to the other, there is annihilation of the previous state, not a sublation of it. In the specific colonial situation in much of Africa, the colonised were non-persons; they were consigned to a 'zone of non-being'. Becoming decolonised means vacating this zone, not amending or ameliorating it. It must be ended, period.[43] For this to happen, the coloniser qua coloniser must also become a non-being. If any piece of colonisation were to remain in the aftermath of decolonisation, that would be an indication that the latter had not occurred.

Put differently, were philosophy to be an integral part of colonisation, we cannot claim to decolonise while retaining philosophy. If we use this as our metric, then any areas of life that have anything to do with the coloniser must be eradicated. This is why it is crucial that we must not carelessly attribute more to colonialism than can be supported by the historical record. If modernity were part and parcel of colonialism, a decolonised society would clearly have no truck with it. We can easily see the many contortions analysts are forced into once they decide that modernity and colonialism or modernity and Westernisation are one and the same. It is why the theoretical landscape is now littered with such strange neologisms as 'pluriversals', 'coloniality', 'transmodernity', 'multiple modernities' and so on. Either we must establish a sharp distinction between modernity and colonialism, as I argue, or they both go down together and the ex-colonised's relationship with modernity would be forever conflicted, if not impossible. But we know that this is problematic or even implausible. It would require us to take an extremely narrow and monistic view of life under colonialism and attribute every artefact from the colonial situation to colonialism. That is, anything that is present while colonialism lasted is irremediably sullied by the colonial imprint and, therefore, can have no place in the world beyond colonialism. Given this implausible scenario, we need to be more modest and more specific in identifying the inventory of colonisation and to take a more expansive view of the plural forms of life under this system of rule.

As I argue throughout the book, we must separate changes under colonialism that were essential constituent parts of it from those that were incidental to it; those that unfolded under the direction of colonisers and were designed to reinforce the non-being of the colonised from those that were driven by the autonomous will of the colonised, however much the coloniser pretended that the colonised were incapable of choice-making. We must strive to draw out the provenance of ideas that may have been inducted into the colonial situation but were not necessarily inherent to it. This is why I insist that we do not conflate modernity and colonialism.

We must be clear which decolonisation dominates the historical and political discussions that we are interested in. What decolonisation signifies is inseparable from which iteration of colonialism, historical or conceptual, we are speaking about. When historians talk about the period of decolonisation in Africa, what should we take them to be referring to? Similarly, what was the focus of the anti-colonial struggle? This is one iteration of decolonisation, and its outcome was independence. But what was independence supposed to herald? What new state of being was to be ushered in at the dawn of independence? Certainly, there are material structures, political processes, social relations and ideological commitments involved, and we must take care to delve into some of these in this discussion. When it comes to these latter ideas, structures and processes, it is less complicated to come up with metrics for determining the relative success or failure of any decolonisation regime. It was what made it possible, maybe even easy, for Kwame Nkrumah, Amílcar Cabral, Julius Nyerere and others to (1) set a goal for what independence would mean and test for how close to those goals their polities came post-independence. And it is why Cabral could (2) make a distinction between independence and human liberation and argue that decolonisation is a mere condition for the building of a culture that has human emancipation as its ultimate goal. As he explained:

> We are struggling to build in our countries … a life of happiness, a life where every man will have the respect of all men, where discipline will not be imposed, where no one will be without work, where salaries will be just, where everyone will have the right to everything man has built, has created for the happiness of men. It is for this that we are struggling. If we do not reach that point, we shall have failed in our duties, in the purpose of our struggle.[44]

But the movement towards this outcome is no longer part of the anti-colonial struggle. As I continue to insist, colonialism has not survived independence.

Might this be what the current preoccupation with decolonisation is gesturing towards? That is, that today's decolonisation$_2$ completes the anti-colonial struggle of decolonisation$_1$? The link between the

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historical iteration and the current confused attempt to turn this into an explanatory model for the contemporary political, social and ideological reality of Africans and their societies may be the work of Frantz Fanon. The continuities are remarkable. But when we let (1) having our polities' evolution under our direction become synonymous with (2) using this control over our destinies to build a superior human society, we set the stage for the current situation where we no longer have clear, helpful metrics to test our progress. Concrete measurements like whether we have implemented governance by consent, determined what economic models to adopt and changed our education system to reflect our own preferences are replaced with vague calls to decolonise anything and everything, making it seem as if we are still on the path to decolonisation. The term has become so slippery that it no longer offers a sure handle on what success would look like in a decolonised world.

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