INTRODUCTION

I would like to begin with an anecdote from when I was at high school in Ìbàdàn, Nigeria, which I think illustrates the core problems that 'decolonising philosophy' was meant to solve. A contingent of students from another high school in Cotonou, Dahomey (now Bénin), had come to our city for a seven-day trip, lodging with us in our dormitories at my boarding school. For the week we were all together, my schoolmates and I spent our time trying to practise our French language skills, while the students from Cotonou did the same with their English. It was not till the eve of their departure that we all discovered, doubtless to our chagrin, that they and we were all, mostly, Yorùbá. That is, we could have had more meaningful, even deeper, conversations in our shared original tongue and primary culture. It was not until 1985 at a conference in Toronto, Canada, held to mark the centenary of the infamous Berlin West Africa Conference of 1884–85, that this experience came back to me, and I was able to expand on it in a presentation entitled 'On the Political Implications of Geography'. It was almost an epiphany when I realised that long before any one of us students in Ìbàdàn or Cotonou had been born, our future mindsets had already been laid out. Our preferences—from victuals (bread/*le pain* and beer/*le vin*) to colonial capitals (London/Paris) to philosophical orientations (empiricism/*phenoménologie*)—had already been rigged in ways that we must, late into advanced adulthood, seek to undo.

So, when Ngg wa Thiong'o argues for the centrality of language in the task of decolonising the mind, I can't say there is much room for disagreement. And when Kwasi Wiredu insisted that how we think philosophically is influenced by the language in which we learn to do philosophy, one might not object too strongly to that, either. Just as Ngg reports that during his schooldays in Kenya, the pupils were discouraged (on pain of corporal punishment) from speaking their indigenous languages, and Wiredu's experience during a similar period was not that different in Ghana, I can tell many comparable stories from my own, much later, childhood in Nigeria. The schizophrenia-like condition brought about by going to school in one language and leading our non-school lives in another is one that we'll carry with us forever. Although I do not do so in this book, it's possible to trace a direct causal line from these chaotic linguistic phenomena to some of the contemporary difficulties of much of African knowledge production. It's the reason many African scholars assume that our original languages are good only for 'colloquial' conversations and fall short of the requirements of deep thinking.

Even in religious practice, especially liturgies, the domestication of Christianity has led, in Pentecostal circles, to colonial languages being the primary means of worship, with gaudy translations into our mother tongues provided almost for comic relief. The main assumption here is that anything that requires deep thought is the domain of our borrowed languages; our mother tongues are good only for the everyday, for habits or for ritual purposes, the latter accessible only to the limited few who are appropriately initiated. As a consequence, despite the current anxiety about our languages dying out, it may already be too late to save them from deepening fossilisation, even while they still appear alive. More on this in due course. The drive to rescue future generations from this fate should be welcomed by everyone who understands its terrible implications for a coherent, intellectual identity and for high-quality scholarship.

Given what I just said, why do I then think that it may be time to discard the 'decolonisation' trope in philosophy and elsewhere? When I began this work, I was mainly setting out to rethink 'decolonisation', and

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I could not have predicted what I end up offering here.[1] As I wrote in the original essay that this longer work is based on, abandoning the trope of 'decolonisation' altogether was only a possibility. But I'm now convinced of the fruitlessness of extending the scope of decolonisation beyond its original meaning—that is, of making a colony into a self-governing entity with its political and economic fortunes under its own direction (though not necessarily control), which I refer to in the book as $decolonisation_1$. 'Decolonisation' today, however, has come to mean something entirely different: forcing an ex-colony to forswear, on pain of being forever under the yoke of colonisation, any and every cultural, political, intellectual, social and linguistic artefact, idea, process, institution and practice that retains even the slightest whiff of the colonial past. I call this $decolonisation_2$.

$Decolonisation_2$ presents itself in a number of ways. Any aspect of an ex-colony that mirrors what was there during the colonial period is treated as evidence of continuing colonisation. Any institution that can be traced to colonial times must be shunned once colonisation has supposedly ended. The ultimate nebulous claim is that decolonisation is complete only after all forms of domination are overturned. In this way, decolonisation is equated with human emancipation, and this is why some people speak of 'the myth of decolonisation' in Africa. It doesn't take too much effort to see how this way of thinking is flawed. In fact, no society, whether former colony or not, is anywhere near human emancipation. Setting this as a goal of decolonisation can only stem from either a lack of understanding or from an ideological commitment. When these terms are conflated, the general objective of seeking human emancipation becomes an unfinished anti-colonial task. This is the conception that I attack in this work. As I argue, it is $decolonisation_2$ that has lost its way and is seriously harming scholarship in and on Africa.

We should rid ourselves of $decolonisation_2$ because no significant good can come from expanding its reach into the broad domain of 'cultural studies', including political, social and religious phenomena. Deploying the idea as an explanatory model, theoretical matrix or descriptive mechanism for our choice of political arrangements, the religious forms that dominate our lives or even the languages we speak in different contexts results, at best, in unsatisfactory or uncompelling outcomes. At worst, it creates confusion and obscurantism, if not outright distortion and falsification. The concept of 'decolonisation', accurately applied, describes the struggle for independence and its outcome, creating a sharp and clear division between one state and another, and aiding in our understanding. But if we extend its parameters beyond this, we are just chasing shadows and incorrectly identifying causality.

My argument follows several key lines. First, the ubiquity of 'decolonisation' in all areas of thought—from literature, linguistics and philosophy, to politics, economics, sociology, psychology and medicine—indicates that either the idea packs an explanatory and/or analytical punch like no other, or it has simply become a catch-all trope, often used to perform contemporary 'morality' or 'authenticity'.[2] I am convinced that the latter is increasingly the case. Second, I contend that many of the tasks 'decolonising' is supposed to help us with are already being, or can be, carried out without invoking this buzzword—and, I might add, without some of the histrionics that go with it. My hope is that my argument is compelling enough to persuade others to take a closer look at the real merits of the idea. Although the original inspiration for the paper which became this book was philosophy, I go beyond this and dive into history and historiography, political theory, the politics of language and the comparative experience of colonialism and its aftermath in Africa and the Caribbean. But the fundamental framework of the book remains philosophy. The reader should bear this in mind as we proceed, as it is the conceptual framing of 'decolonisation' which is chiefly responsible for the unclarity surrounding it.

This book is not so much about what the proponents of 'decolonisation' get wrong; such a focus would smack too much of finger-pointing, and would do little to advance understanding. In that regard, I won't be spending much time highlighting the weaknesses in the arguments of decolonisation's leading lights. Given that the most enthusiastic 'decolonisers' never give any thought to the kind of case I'm making here, I think a more productive approach is simply to offer other ways of looking at the same phenomena, and to allow our respective readers to choose which framework provides the best explanation of today's world. My aim in this book is more to shine a light on the omissions and blind spots of $decolonisation_2$. I believe that addressing

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these areas will ultimately create a richer discourse with tighter arguments in favour of decolonisation, or with good reasons for limiting its scope, modifying its formulation or even abandoning it outright. My view is that the latter prospects are the ones which will most improve our knowledge and understanding.

To be clear, I would like to see the trope abandoned in most areas, especially when it comes to making sense of phenomena in contemporary Africa. This is not because colonialism plays no role in explaining events, but because we must take care to specify in each case exactly how colonialism features in the explanation, and why a colonialism-driven explanation is better than the alternatives. As I argue, this procedure is rarely followed at present. I make the case for discarding 'decolonisation' in discussions on African philosophy, historiography, political science, the language we should do our scholarship in, and related areas, where it has been inserted without careful thought and in a way that actually hinders understanding. Although the proliferation of the decolonisation trope has reached most, if not all, parts of the world, I argue that its pernicious influence and consequences are more exaggerated in African discourses. Given the central place that many contemporary African thinkers assign to colonialism and its aftermath in the unfolding life of ex-colonies, it is not surprising that the idea of decolonisation has a significant attraction for these intellectuals.

Despite appearances, this is not a fighting book. No doubt, it has a polemical ring to it. But its polemical thrust is not meant to shame or name names. Rather, it simply aims to identify errors or, better still, warn unsuspecting scholars of the dangers of merely deploying the most obvious analytical tools at their disposal, embracing the language of 'decolonising' as if it were unproblematic and, in so doing, writing the kinds of questionable analyses that this book challenges.

'Decolonise This!' is my way of capturing the challenge I present to those who embrace the decolonising trope. I challenge them to show what is wrong with the work of those of us who have engaged critically with and sought to domesticate ideas from the 'West', like modernity, and even with ideas, processes and institutions originating in colonialism, as part of our common (I assume decolonisers share this goal) commitment to creating a better world for ourselves and our progeny. As I have said, I wish to offer new possibilities for those who may not be persuaded by the decolonisation trope, and identify the blind spots which characterise it. Needless to say, if it turns out that those blind spots are non-existent or less significant than I have made out, I will stand corrected and offer my apologies to my opponents. But if I thought that this was the case, it would be foolhardy to issue the challenge at the heart of this book.

Throughout the book, I point to ways in which the ex-colonised, at least in some parts of Africa, have domesticated (and not merely by mimicry) many ideas, processes, institutions and practices that are routinely attributed to colonialism, but are in fact traceable to modernity and other causes. And even if some of those phenomena were rooted in colonialism, that by itself is not enough to condemn them as evidence of the persistence of colonial forms of rule in the post-independence period. This facile attribution to colonial causation of many practices and processes comes from an absolutisation of colonialism and its supposedly almost undefeatable capacity to bend the will of the colonised.

Simultaneously, this approach denies or at least discounts the agency of the colonised. That is, it must and does foreclose the possibility that the colonised could find anything of worth in the life and thought of the coloniser which they could repurpose for their own societies, both during and after colonialism. In fact, one of my motivations in writing this book was a nagging feeling that many of the creative works of the ex-colonised are either not being recognised or not being taken seriously by the zealots of decolonising, insofar as their intellectual products or institutional practices could be considered tainted, even faintly, by the colonial experience. Worse still, due diligence is hardly ever done to establish within reasonable limits to what extent colonialism was a factor in the emergence of such products and practices.

Decolonise this! A running theme among decolonisers is their unremitting opposition to, and their overweening determination to locate, any and every colonial hangover in a process, practice or institution. The problem is that it's not enough to accommodate in our writings the contributions of scholars from the 'Global South', because some of us already do this routinely, without any reference to decolonising. Decolonising scholars cannot escape a Manichaean division in which, (just as during colonial times), the colonised and the colonisers must occupy entirely distinct spaces, and, as the British saying goes, 'ne'er the twain shall meet'. Any colonialism-tinged phenomena must be purged from the postcolonial world. Ato Sekyi-Otu provides a good description of the problems inherent in this absolutisation of colonialism, the accompanying repudiation of universalism and the paradox that a Manichaean worldview generates. He

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contends that 'to abjure universalism *tout court* because of imperialism, Eurocentric and discriminatory auspices of certain versions—as some Western conscripts to the anti-imperialism cause in common with certain voices from the global South invite us to do—is the last word of the imperial act.' He continues:

> But such is the vicious paradox of some critiques of 'universalism' from Africa and the global South: their obsessive-compulsive Eurocentrism; their willful captivity to the very discourse they are avowedly sworn to divulge and dethrone; their exclusive preoccupation with the things the West does with words in order to enforce its particulars as universals; their trained habit, in contrast, of being utterly incurious regarding what our grandmothers do with words of evaluative judgment that have universals for their predicates. It is as if purveyors of Eurocentrism *and* their critics drink from the same cup and end up inebriated in separate beds but with kindred distractions. That must be the reason why 'universalism' is chief among those ritual anathemas of anti-imperialism or, as they say 'counter-hegemonic' discourse.[3]

My hope is that Sekyi-Otu's caution and my own efforts to bring into the discussion the products of the genius of African agency, in claiming the universal against the false universalism of colonialist ideologies, will enable others to see what 'decolonisation' regularly obscures.

In this book, I wish to present to our 'decolonising' scholars and their audience evidence of how indigenous genius has taken hold of and turned to their own purposes various material and ideational artefacts that were parts of their lives before, during and after colonialism. Some of them, doubtless, either originated in colonialism or were introduced into their lives during the colonial period, without it necessarily following that these ideas or objects were constitutive parts of the colonial infrastructure.

In the following chapters, I challenge our 'decolonisers' to show us why we should decolonise beyond the need to broaden our repertoire or take seriously the works of thinkers outside of the Euro-American canon (which many already do without subscribing to the idea of decolonisation), and to consider what the consequences of decolonising the phenomena I accuse them of ignoring or sidestepping would be. This would be instead of the current preference of our decolonisers for talking in nebulous terms, forever bashing the same Euro-American thinkers for excluding native African scholars' production, even as they themselves have never considered the complexity of the work of African authors, and thereby repeat the same errors as their supposed opponents.

Let's pause for a moment to anticipate the sort of things we'd like our decolonising theorists to try their hands at decolonising. I give two examples, one from music and the other from a combination of music and literature.

The year was either 1984 or 1985. A fellow graduate student at the University of Toronto, not an African, had asked me if I was at 'the concert'. 'What concert?' I asked. 'The performance by King Sunny Ade and His New African Beats', he replied. I was not there, but I am sure now that neither he nor I could have guessed what the consequence of his effusive praise for the maestro's performance would be for me. I was a fan of Sunny Ade from my pre-teen years, when he emerged on the music scene in Nigeria, and I had already seen him perform a few times, both live and on television. And in those days, I was not always keen on going to performances by groups I already knew. Then my friend proceeded to regale me with his account of all the things that impressed him about Sunny Ade and his concert.

It went along the following lines. Sunny Ade's was a roughly 30-piece band, playing instruments, singing and dancing all at the same time, and doing so with such tightness and discipline in the arrangements that nothing was astray. That was when it suddenly struck me that, for people in North America to see that kind of complex, multi-faceted performance, they would, for the most part, have to go to a concert hall, to the opera or to see a choir. Each of these performances would likely have a conductor and sheet music for the players. That was when I realised how little we valued the accomplishments of our Sunny Ades and Ebenezer Obeys, the other maestro, who have jointly dominated Nigeria's music scene for half a century. They—with no formal training and largely self-taught on the instrument they play as leaders of their respective bands, the guitar—have put together complex pieces of music with a creative mixture of indigenous and other instrumentation that is alien to their culture, from electric guitars to accordions, trap drums to Hawaiian guitar, and the organ to wind instruments. I have not looked at Sunny Ade the same way since.

Jùjú, the genre within which Sunny Ade excels, has its roots in Yorùbá civilisation, but it emerged within the modern performance subculture that began with the proliferation of Christianity in West Africa from the early 19th century. Unlike other genres in Yorùbá music, which hew more closely to their roots, Jùjú has at its

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core musical instruments of foreign provenance. As we shall see in the coming chapters, the non-African origins of these instruments are, problematically and possibly even wrongly, often identified with colonialism.[4] In this way, Jùjú is unlike genres like Sákárà, Àpàlà, Etíyrí, Dùndún and Ṣẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀, and Lúkòrígí, all members of the Yorùbá performance family and almost all—except for electronic recording and amplification—incorporating nothing even remotely related to the former colonial powers.

Before we draw any implications from Jùjú music and its challenge to the decolonisation trope, I want to bring to the discussion another event involving music, which I believe challenges the relevance of decolonisation to creating theories and explanatory models. For some inexplicable reasons, the proponents of decolonising, who enjoy knocking Léopold Sédar Senghor and Chinua Achebe for writing in colonial languages, have never seemed as eager to excoriate Wole Soyinka for prosecuting his craft in English—Chinweizu and his collaborators being the most notorious exception.[5] At the formal presentation of his Nobel Prize in Literature in Stockholm in December 1986, the music Soyinka chose to have played was an orchestra piece by Fela Sowande, a Nigerian composer in the Euro-American classical tradition, titled 'Akinla', from *African Suite* for string orchestra. According to Dominique-René de Lerma,

> Because Dr. Sowande wanted to illustrate to his countrymen some ideas on the unification of African and European music, he selected those melodies and rhythms that would be most readily recognized by African listeners. In its full version, the suite consists of five movements: 'Joyful Day' (based on a melody by Ephrain Amu, a Ghanaian composer and conductor), 'Nostalgia' (a personal statement by the composer about his Nigerian home and family), 'Lullaby' (based on an actual song Dr. Sowande heard just before leaving Nigeria in 1934), 'Onipe' (also after a melody by Amu), and 'Akinla' (a high-life tune, popular in Nigeria and Ghana).[6]

I can think of few candidates who are more ideal for decolonising analyses: an ex-colonised person (Soyinka) handed a prestigious award for writing in the language (English) of the coloniser (Britain) by a section (Swedish) of the colonising world being serenaded by another ex-colonised person (Sowande) with music written in the syntax of the coloniser (European classical) and a song derived from Yorùbá folklore, that would later be covered by high-life—another hybrid modern genre in West Africa—artists Bobby Benson and Fela Anikulapo Kuti. To decolonising theorists, the colonial provenance and even function of Sowande's work is obvious. And to that extent, its African identity must be called into question. The reason that I have cited Sunny Ade and Sowande is that they represent the kind of African intellectual production that 'decolonisers' either fail to recognise or choose to ignore. But, I argue, for 'decolonisation' to be a legitimate lens through which to assess these artists' work, its proponents should be able to show us how the trope can actually help us to place and understand Ade and Sowande in the context of African ideas, borrowed or original.

If we deny that works such as theirs are 'African', which I contend in the following chapters they are, I am perfectly happy to give up the label and keep the music. If, on the other hand, we decide that they are indeed 'African', what on earth does that add to our judgement of their quality as works of art speaking to the human capacity for aesthetic appreciation across boundaries and as worthwhile contributions to that area of cultural life? If decolonising means no more than broadening our horizons of what counts as significant ideas or ways of thinking, many of us are already doing that without the additional fuss of subscribing to a particular ideology. And if it means that we must get rid of anything that smacks of 'colonial' inspiration in our intellectual works, even when some of us have so domesticated these syntaxes as to make them our own, we'd have to acknowledge that African agency does not count for much at all.

I invite decolonisers to apply their critical tools to the omissions in their discourse that we introduce in this book. Where in their intellectual framework is the place for Sunny Ade and Fela Sowande?[7] Sowande is a particularly instructive example of what is wrong with much of the decolonising discourse when it comes to the wilful ignorance of African ideas and thinkers whose works answer questions that our latter-day culture warriors think they are newly posing. As Ato Sekyi-Otu puts it, many of our decolonisers suffer from a 'trained habit of being utterly incurious regarding what our grandmothers do with words of evaluative judgement that have universals for their predicates'.[8] In his short discussion of Fela Sowande in his invaluable 1995 book, *Nigerian Art Music*, Bode Omojola devotes a subsection to what he calls 'Nationalism in Sowande's Music'. What is the nature of nationalism in the work and thought of an artist who, for our decolonisers, is a prime example of one whose work is not African, but European? As Omojola explains, from initially believing that 'study[ing] European music properly … was a liability … [Sowande would later]

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think on looking back it was quite an asset.'[9] According to Omojola, '[n]o other work reveals Sowande's appreciation of Nigerian culture and his strong belief in cultural nationalism more than his *Folk Symphony* (1960). … The work gives a very strong reflection of African elements and it could be argued that it marked the climax of Sowande's commitment to nationalism'.[10]

Simultaneously, as he was busy idiomatising European musical syntax in Yorùbá, Sowande insistently opposed the metaphysics of difference.[11] As Omojola explains again:

> It is, therefore, not surprising that Sowande's views on nationalism are, despite his commitment to them, marked by a characteristic open-mindedness. He believed in the philosophy of cultural reciprocity and argued against what he called 'apartheid in art'. According to him: 'We are not prepared to submit to the doctrine of apartheid in art by which a musician is expected to work only within the limits of his traditional forms of music'. He therefore warned against: 'uncontrolled nationalism in which case nationals of any one country may forget that they are all members of one human family with other nationals'.[12]

I would like to point out that this refusal to shun anything human and which promotes human progress and well-being, regardless of its origin, is a quality that all great thinkers share wherever in the world they happen to come from. The greatest African minds are no exception to this rule, but, I dare say, many of our decolonisers—who are absolutely fixated with origins and accept the Manichaean division that colonialism caused—can find no place in their intellectual framework for recognising or engaging with African intellectual discourses that come from this inspiration. This is central to the case that I make in this book.

The proponents of decolonisation may wish to connect their 'planetary ambitions', their conclusions about 'the epistemologies of the South' and other such expansive formulations (which homogenise a continent of heterogeneities and heterodoxies) to some specific examples, and show us how our world would be improved by 'decolonising' Jùjú or the Afro-classical music of Fela Sowande, Ephraim Amu, Akin Euba, Joseph Nketia and Sam Akpabot. In other words, I ask that they please stop telling us what is wrong with using knowledge or frameworks derived from the colonial period, and instead try to show us the problem by decolonising specific artefacts, genres, ideas and so on.

This book is not much interested in undermining, refuting or controverting the claims of specific decolonising theorists. The two principal ones that I engage with in the book, Ngg wa Thiong'o and Kwasi Wiredu, are chosen for their pioneering role in promoting the discourse and being its polestars. This must be made clear from the beginning. There are hardly any contributions to the decolonisation discourse about Africa that do not, at some point or another, cite either or both of these scholars in support of, or as an inspiration for, their arguments. And when it comes to philosophy, my main area, Wiredu looms large, and his many specifications for how to decolonise philosophical phenomena have strongly influenced the discussion, from religion to language to political theory. Hence, my decision to use their work as a foil for my discussion. They made the founding cases, and their successors, up to and including Achille Mbembe and Tsenay Serequeberhan, never fail to reference them in their contributions. Of course, I refer to other thinkers and frameworks, but they do not depart in any significant way from the path laid out by Ngg and Wiredu.

I am more interested in expanding the record by including areas which are usually left out, in order to cool the enthusiasm for 'decolonising' of an audience which is usually all too eager to embrace such discourses. If this book leads more people to pause and ask questions of the decolonising trope in light of what we offer here, its work will be done. I am convinced that the greatest appeal of this trope and the best explanation for its routine use even by sophisticated scholars is its repeated focus on gross representations of objective processes and events. My goal is to make it harder to adopt this discourse, while also showing how much is obscured by the call to 'decolonise' anything and everything.

The example of music that I gave above is instructive. What would it look like to 'decolonise' African music? The term 'African music' in and of itself is a serious oversimplification which, as I argue, is not a useful analytical tool for any serious theory-making. I've put it in quote marks to draw attention to how quickly we assume that such a phrase describes an objective, concrete phenomenon that can easily be subjected to 'decolonising'. 'Yorùbá music' is problematic enough if some of the things I mentioned above are taken seriously. Does the genesis of Jùjú music under colonialism make it 'colonial music', or music that was framed, or even created, by the coloniser? Does Kimbanguism qualify as 'colonial' because it is a denomination of Christianity which is usually, but wrongly, conflated with colonialism?[13]

Here is my challenge to prospective decolonisers. When you are inclined 'to decolonise X', here are some

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questions to bear in mind as or before you proceed. First, is X created, caused, determined, conditioned or influenced by colonialism? We can see from my example of music that the relationship between X and colonialism is rarely straightforward or clear-cut. Whether X is 'African music', 'African philosophy', 'African literature' or something else, the place of colonialism in its genealogy must be considered and demonstrated to show why it is a candidate for decolonising. I believe that if this were done, much of the decolonisation discourse would evaporate.

How tight the relationship is between colonialism and X depends on which of the above possibilities is relevant (whether X is created, caused, determined, conditioned or influenced by colonialism). A causal relationship would be the strongest, known in tort law as a 'but for' quality: without colonialism (the cause), X (the effect) would not have come into being. All the other relationships, with the possible exception of 'determined', imply that X emerged for other reasons or from other sources, and colonialism's role in its evolution therefore cannot be critical, much less necessary. In this way, anything that cannot be proven to have colonial origins is a tenuous candidate—if it is a candidate at all—for decolonising. Modernity, for example, was not a product of colonialism—i.e., it was not causally produced by colonialism nor was it introduced into (most parts of) West Africa by colonialism. I will not make the case for this claim here as I have made it elsewhere and, as far as I know, it has not been shown to be incorrect.[14] Efforts to decolonise modernity are both misguided and, worse still, a demonstration of a distinct lack of knowledge and sophistication, which is as bewildering as it is frustrating—especially in an African context. Indeed, part of what makes the colonialism that predominated in Africa, other than in areas of settler colonialism, problematic and inherently contradictory is that it subverted some of the core tenets of modernity as regards the principle of subjectivity (i.e., self-direction, self-ownership) and of governance by consent.

Second, once we've established X's credentials for decolonising, we must identify what sort of colonialism we're seeking to rid it of. Colonialism in Africa was anything but a monolith: settler colonialism predominated in southern, eastern and northern Africa, while exploitation-colonialism was imposed across the rest of the continent.[15] In the beginning, both France and Portugal had an orientation that held out to their subjects the promise of full citizenship if they 'assimilated'.[16] The British never did. Ultimately, all the colonial powers settled for simply pacifying their territories to ensure minimal interference from the 'natives' with the colonial regime of violence and plunder. How this policy was implemented in different colonial territories had implications for the evolution of concepts, practices, processes and institutions there. To attribute the emergence of ideas about liberal democracy to colonial regimes is to conflate two distinct things, and does little to advance our understanding. Here is yet another reason to refrain from referring to the objects of our decolonising missions as undifferentiated wholes.

Third, when X is present in a former colony post-independence, before we rush to decolonise it as a colonial hangover or product, we must consider and, if appropriate, rule out, any alternative explanations. Such explanations might include inertia or a choice by the peoples or intellectuals of this ex-colony to domesticate X in their new situation. That is, we should not be too quick to declare that the presence of X under colonialism and its persistence post-independence represent an unbroken chain of causality. We need to establish in each case whether X has actually endured because the ex-colonised themselves have embraced it. And, if so, we should ask whether this is an embrace which comes from the continuing power of colonialism to bend the will of the colonised, or if it is a case of the ex-colonised choosing, for whatever reason, to preserve X.

As I indicate in subsequent chapters, such investigations are much more illuminating than the easy but misleading attributions to colonialism. For example, it is not frequently, if ever, the case that ex-colonised writers are forced to write in the colonial language. This is one situation where due diligence must be carried out, and unqualified respect be accorded to the agency and autonomy of writers. Daniel O. Fágúnwà chose to write in Yorùbá even during his time working for and with the colonial authorities in Nigeria, while Wole Soyinka chose to write in English at the time of Nigerian independence. It would dishonour the memory of Fágúnwà, and would be a sign of ignorance of his biography, to read his choice of writing in his original tongue as being motivated by some notion of decolonising.[17] To allege, without any evidence beyond the context of Soyinka's or Fágúnwà's decisions, that colonialism played any role in either case cannot be considered serious scholarship. Years after independence, Adébáyọ̀ Fálétí and Akínwùmí Ìṣọ̀lá chose to write in Yorùbá even though they both were polyglots—speaking English, Yorùbá and French—while la Rotimi and Fmi fisan chose English as their medium, even though the latter is a scholar of French language and

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literature. And then there was Ọládèjọ Òkédìjí, an innovator of Yorùbá writing who introduced the detective genre into the literature. Again, it would be an unwarranted stretch to incorporate their preferences into any kind of decolonising discourse. I hope it is becoming clearer why such gross representations are likely to skate over deep issues at the granular levels.

Fourth, given that a positive aim of decolonising is to restore something to X that was taken away from it by its colonial origins, once we've established that there is a causal connection between X and colonialism, we might discover that in the case of an entire discipline, for example, colonial genealogy by itself means very little. Few would deny the colonial origins of anthropology. Even as many hyperventilate about, apologise for and are scrambling to distance the discipline from its colonial roots, few efforts are being made to take seriously the ends to which African anthropologists have put it. Some of the best of them have turned this field of study to making sense of their own reality away from the gaze of disciplinary gatekeepers in cultural anthropology and urban anthropology, without needing to resort to the decolonisation trope. Ironically, our decolonisers hardly ever demonstrate any knowledge of or interest in the works of these scholars.

I offer this book as a spirited counterweight to the decolonising craze, in order to sensitise scholars, and especially students, to the risks they run by agreeing to limit their horizons and engage only negatively with significant elements of the human experience. I hope they open themselves to the ideas and thoughts of African thinkers who have never accepted that their place is just to consider particularities and have always tried to speak to the universal, from within their own historical context—even when they were in thrall to slavery or colonisation.

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