

# Preface

Humanity is today facing a stark reality of a modernity and civilization that is proving incapable of solving the problems it created. Modernity has created modern problems for which it has no modern solutions (Escobar 2004: 230). It is a modernity that is historically traceable to such Western processes as the Renaissance, Reformation, Enlightenment, French Revolution and Industrial Revolution, making it ontologically Western-centric. But read from a Western perspective, this modernity is sociologically credited with the creation of modern institutions such as the nation-state and basic features such as self-reflexivity as well as the disembedding of social life from local context (Giddens 1990). It is a modernity that is culturally credited with the substitution of folk knowledge by expert and techno-scientific knowledge (Habermas 1973, 1987). It is a modernity that is philosophically celebrated for creating the Cartesian subject as the fountain of all knowledge about the world.

I am here referring to Euro-American modernity that once promised humanity a brave modern world in which rationality and techno-scientific thought would be able to overcome all the obstacles standing in the way of human progress. This promise was only fulfilled to a minor extent, particularly if one interrogated the current state of the modern world order from the perspective of colonial difference and from Africa. Africa is an epistemic site where poverty has not yet been made history; where curable diseases still decimate human lives; where inequalities are still rife; where the legacies of Western racism and the dark side of modernity are still felt on a daily basis. This reality of a modernity and a civilization that was incapable of solving modern problems was clearly identified long ago by Aimé Césaire. He wrote that:

A civilization that proves incapable of solving the problems it creates is a decadent civilization. A civilization that chooses to close its eyes to its most crucial problems is a stricken civilization. A civilization that uses its principles for trickery and deceit is a dying civilization. The fact is that the so-called European civilization – ‘Western’ civilization – as it has been shaped by two centuries of bourgeois rule, is incapable of

solving the two major problems to which its existence has given rise: the problem of the proletariat and the colonial problem; that Europe is unable to justify itself either before the bar of 'reason' or before the bar of 'conscience', and that, increasingly, it takes refuge in a hypocrisy which is all the more odious because it is less and less likely to deceive. *Europe is indefensible* ... What is serious is that 'Europe' is morally, spiritually indefensible. And today the indictment is brought against it not by the European masses alone, but on a world scale, by tens and tens of millions of men [and women] who, from the depth of slavery, set themselves up as judges. (Césaire 1972: 23, emphasis is in the original)

Césaire was writing during the heyday of direct colonialism. During this time colonialism was manifesting its DNA of violence, repression and exploitation. Today the problem is not colonialism but coloniality, which emerged from colonialism and has assumed global proportions to the extent of being best understood as global coloniality. This global coloniality is a leitmotif of the currently existing empire, that of the United States of America (U.S.A.). The present crisis of modernity was predicted by such theorists as Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, Samir Amin and many others. Today even those African theorists like Achille Mbembe (2012a: 34), who has been severely critical of nationalist-inspired discourses that were consistently opposed to empire and global coloniality, who instead favoured close integration of Africa into the global community that he considered to be open to cosmopolitanism, presenting the best global future that Africa must not resist; even he is now railing against the capitalist system and present modernity. He recently wrote a short piece about 'a planetary recording of situations of misery, debt and enforced idleness'. He elaborated that today capitalism is moving in two directions, the first is towards increasing exploitation of large parts of the world through the old strategy of primitive accumulation and the second towards 'squeezing of every last drop of value out of the planet'. At the centre of this is the reality of a 'labour that has ceased to be the great wellspring of wealth' (Mbembe 2012a: 34). This is possible because capitalist production could be increased using sophisticated machinery and technologies that do not need increasing quantities of labour (Mbembe 2012a: 34). The present-day economies operate like 'speculative bubbles of a finance industry constantly refining the arts of making money by buying and selling nothing but various forms of money' (Mbembe 2012a: 34).

The result of all this has been a global crisis. It is a crisis that is wrongly reduced to a financial crisis. In reality this is a crisis of modernity and its epistemology. It is a multi-layered and structural crisis. It is a crisis of methodologies, a failure to understand how to solve modern problems. It is a crisis of legitimacy for the current world order. It is a crisis of relevance for Euro-American epistemologies that have lost their redemptive potential. At the centre of all this is the intractable problem

of the relationship of popular democracy and global capitalism. Popular democracy cannot be achieved without achievement of genuine decolonization that has the potential to empower the poor socially, politically and economically. But empowerment of the poor is seen in capitalist circles as a threat to private property and the freedom of market forces. Equitable redistribution of wealth is viewed as a threat to capitalism itself. Mbembe (2012a: 34) correctly observed that 'capital would rather abolish democracy to save capitalism from a majority dedicated to economic and social redistribution'. The fact that global capitalism and global popular struggles for popular democracy are at odds compounds and exacerbates the crisis of modernity.

It is this reality that sent me to work on two book projects beginning in 2010. This one is a sequel to my other forthcoming book entitled *Coloniality of Power in Postcolonial Africa* which deals with how coloniality made it impossible for a postcolonial African world to emerge as it disciplined forces of decolonization so that they ended up as reformist and emancipatory movements rather than liberatory ones. Reformist emancipatory movements do not question modernity per se. They operate as critics of modernity while using its terms of reference and their horizon shows democracy and human rights. Liberatory movements are expected to be qualitatively and ideologically superior to emancipatory movements in terms of seeking a radical decolonial turn that has the potential to create new humanity and genuine freedom accompanied by economic empowerment and cognitive justice.

The current book is as much about empire, global coloniality, and African subjectivity as it is about pan-Africanism and nationalism as part of African responses to global imperial designs and colonial matrices of power. Theoretically, this book is informed by decolonial epistemic perspective predicated on three core analytical concepts, namely coloniality of power, coloniality of knowledge and coloniality of being. These concepts enable not only systematic interrogation of power asymmetries, epistemological colonization, and pathologization as well as 'thingification'/objectification of what it means to be African, but also examination of the poverty of counter-hegemonic discourses evolved by Africans, such as Negritude and others that remained beholden to the immanent logic of colonialism and its racial articulation of human identities.

This book, however, does not dismiss African counter-hegemonic discourses as simply poor reverse discourses, but it rather captures their development and growth including revealing their complexities and ideological innovations and shifts in line with equally complex global imperial designs. African decolonial thought and resistance politics has never been fixed and frozen in time, but has always been complex, manifesting multiple genealogies and ideologies ranging widely from earlier versions such as Ethiopianism, Garveyism, Negritude, African Personality, Black Consciousness Movements, experimentation with Af-

rican socialism(s) to African Renaissance and revival of pan-Africanism in the twenty-first century.

At the centre of African responses to global imperial designs has been the drive to engage and disengage, negotiate and fight, appropriate some aspects and resist others, and looking back and forward. Broadly speaking, the numerous African intellectual and academic productions have been basically about capturing the diverse aspects of African experience, about understanding and articulation of the African condition; and about searching for the absent centre of ontology. This is why Toyin Falola argued that scholarship on Africa inevitably carries anger and is polemical because it has been conditioned to respond to realities of alterity and emerges from a terrain saturated with “‘others” statements, usually negative about its members and their continent’ (Falola 2004: 17). This condition brought together intellectuals and political actors into an uneasy coalition on the necessity of decolonization. But when African leaders began to manifest crises of repetition without change, abusing juridical independence to enrich themselves while keeping workers and peasants in subjection, a majority of African intellectuals turned into severe critics of the postcolonial state and began to call for genuine independence. This struggle has been ongoing since the 1960s and is ranged against inept African leadership as well as against global coloniality.

The current book’s point of departure is Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s seminal study *Empire* (2000), which offers useful interventions on empire albeit from a Euro-American perspective. A Euro-American perspective and an African decolonial perspective on empire, global coloniality and African subjectivity, differ radically in the sense that the former departs from an epistemic site where the empire deposited its positive values and cultures of modernity, secularity, mass education, human rights, ethics, equality, development and democracy, whereas the latter emerges from an epistemic site where the darker aspects of empire that include mercantilism, the slave trade, imperialism, colonialism, forcible Christianization, apartheid, neo-colonialism, neo-liberalism, underdevelopment, ‘hot wars’, and structural adjustments, were the order of interactions. This is why Hardt and Negri could write of a ‘phantasmagoric empire’ that was decoupled from imperialism to the extent that such an empire became necessary to maintain global order.

The current book is not about this supposedly benevolent and magnanimous empire with a mission to maintain global order and enforce justice; it is about the ‘actually existing empire’ that is ontologically imperialist and colonialist, exploitative and violent, underpinned by hypocrisy and double standards. It is about an empire that is double-faced, hiding coloniality behind a rhetoric of spreading modernity, civilization, development, democracy and human rights. The book delves deeper into an analysis of global imperial designs and colonial matrices of power with a view to unmask this empire’s leitmotif, coloniality. It is a

book about an existing empire that is addicted to oil and is underpinned by a capitalist order whose nervous system is maintained by oil and other natural resources available in Africa in particular and the Global South in general. It is about an empire that is fully armed with weapons of mass destruction and does not hesitate in using/abusing multilateral and global institutions, including the United Nations (UN), to authorize its predatory interventions into Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya as long as these sites have natural gas and oil.

Its approach is historical and thematic. It situates the African experience and African struggles ranged against the empire and global coloniality within the context of the unfolding of global history since the dawn of modernity. The book's main proposition, which it shares with Latin American decolonial thinkers like Arturo Escobar, Walter D. Mignolo, Anibal Quijano, Ramón Grosfoguel, Enrique Dussel and Nelson Maldonado-Torres as well as with African scholars like Archie Mafeje, Bernard Magubane, Samir Amin, Issa G. Shivji, Bade Onimonde, Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, Sam Moyo, Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, Tukumbi Lumumba-Kasongo, Thandika Mkandawire, Ibbo Mandaza, Carlos Lopes, Adebayo Olukoshi, Valentine Y. Mudimbe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and many others, is that Africans in particular and peoples of the Global South in general continue to live under coloniality and as modern subjects they breathe coloniality on a daily basis.

Approached from a decolonial epistemic perspective, the current world order is best described as hierarchical, racialized, capitalist, hetero-normative, Christian-centric, Euro-American-centric, and asymmetrical (Grosfoguel 2007). At its apex are the U.S.A. and its North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) partners. At the bottom is Africa and its people who are still struggling to liberate themselves from global imperial designs put in place at the time of conquest and colonial matrices of power that underpin ideologies and epistemologies of alterity.

Ideologies and epistemologies of alterity have combined to produce African subjectivity that is constituted by a perennial lack: lacking souls, lacking civilization, lacking writing, lacking responsibility, lacking development, lacking human rights and lacking democracy. It is an unending discourse that invents particular 'lacks' suitable for particular historical epochs so as to justify perpetuation of asymmetrical power relations and to authorize various forms of external interventions into Africa including military interventions. During the period of colonial encounters, explorers, adventurers, missionaries, colonial and imperialist ideologues like Lord Lugard, Cecil John Rhodes and Jan Smuts, and many others, including anthropologists, propagated ideologies and epistemologies of alterity. Today it is the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and the media that propagate these ideologies.

This book is written at a time when Western modernity, and its promises of a brave modern world in which rationality was expected to enable

humanity to transcend every other obstacle to its chosen trajectory, has been hit by a severe crisis. This crisis of modernity is clearly exemplified by the ongoing global financial crisis. It is also a crisis of global leadership that is manifesting itself within the multilateral and global institutions that include the UN, the World Trade Organization (WTO) and many others, where consensus has broken down on pertinent issues like military interventions, strategies of mitigating climate change and trade regimes. The world is at a crossroads whereby modernity has created a plethora of problems like those of climate change, terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, migration, and many others, to which modernity has no solutions. Euro-American epistemology is also in crisis, and this reality calls for mobilization and the harnessing of other knowledge.

It is within this context that this book joins the Latin American decolonial thinkers and African ones like Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Kwasi Wiredu, Archie Mafeje and many others: favouring a decolonial turn in the humanities and social sciences, with potential to legitimate and enable pluriversalism as opposed to the failing universalism predicated on Euro-American hegemonic epistemologies. What this decolonial turn entails is a recovery of that/those knowledge(s) that were displaced by triumphalist Euro-American epistemologies. The world can only be saved by a combination of ecologies of knowledge. This book must, therefore, be read as a modest call by a committed African scholar for another knowledge, another world, and another logic that is open to pluriversality.

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