



Privileging the Decolonial Critical Theory in studying the literary works of wa Thiong'o

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Abstract

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Literary theories are the lens through which reality is created and viewed. When impaired lenses affect vision, corrective lenses are used to correct vision. The literary works of Ngugi wa Thiong'o have been comfortably viewed through Marxist, nationalist and post-colonialist lenses. In this paper, I argue that although these literary theories do shed light on the works of wa Thiong'o, they prevent us from seeing what is outside the frames. The paper privileges the Decolonial Critical Theory, a theory located in the Global South, as the most appropriate lens to make visible the decolonial thoughts and philosophy of wa Thiong'o. The appropriateness of the Decolonial Critical Theory is that it provides a critical lens outside the European and North American 'mainstream' canon foregrounded in coloniality. The argument expanded here is that essentialisms and fundamentalisms like Marxism, nationalism and post-colonialism are limited in the critique of wa Thiong'o as they do not take coloniality and decoloniality into account. Undoubtedly, wa Thiong'o has been many things politically and philosophically, but decoloniality as a philosophy is the organising idea and overarching line of his thought. Like decoloniality, wa Thiong'o has developed, journeyed and passed through different ideological and philosophical liaisons to arrive at his present decolonial consciousness and activism. Decolonial Critical Theory is, therefore, the ideal lens through which to study his journey.

Introduction

In *Globalectics: Theory and the politics of knowing* (2012), Ngugi wa Thiong'o, one of the most representative writers of the Global South, talks about the need to find 'an antidote to the tendency of theory becoming like a kite that, having lost its mooring, remains floating in space with no possibility of returning to earth; or an even more needed critique of the tendency in the writing of theory to substitute density of words for that of thought' (wa Thiong'o 2012: 3). Hence the need to find and use a critical theory grounded in the locus and focus of the interlocutor. The essays and novels written by Ngugi wa Thiong'o have been critiqued mainly from Marxist, nationalist and post-colonialist literary theories. The argument brought forwarded in this paper is that although these three commonly used theories are appropriate when referring to his, they do not allow for a complete interpretation of his ideological and philosophical liaisons and his present decolonial consciousness and activism. Authors such as Antonio Gramsci, Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, to name but a few, have acquired canonical status to the extent that their ideas are used as theoretical tools to study Africa, yet they are not complete. This form of canon loses sight of the languages and narratives that are located in the subaltern location of the world because they are a form of critical thinking located within modernity. This actually implies that it is a form of thinking that is alien to the lived experience of the African subject, and the knowledge bears little relevance, even if attempts are made for the application or duplication to fit into the subaltern. It is this epistemic privilege of Western thinkers that wa Thiong'o and others in the Global South seek to negate and decolonise.

The aim with this paper is not to dismiss the Marxist, nationalist and post-colonialist studying of wa Thiong'o, but rather to acknowledge the relevance of those perspectives (convergence) and their divergence, shortcomings and limitations when wa Thiong'o is studied from the viewpoint of Decolonial Critical Theory. Sara Marzagot (2016: 16) states that wa Thiong'o's works are representative of the intellectual environment of the 1960s and 1970s, when 'nativist considerations coexisted with Marxist-nationalist perspectives. Anti-colonial and post-independence nationalism was inextricably linked to nativism. Many liberation movements drew from the pre-colonial past to define the contours of the future of the nation they were fighting for—a nation often defined in teleological terms.' Nationalism proved to be 'a powerful stimulus in the search for an authentic identity, against the colonial legacy' (Dirlik

2002: 444). Marzagot adds that in 'historiographical circles, nationalist approaches were partly replaced by Marxist perspectives, particularly as nationalist historiography came to be perceived as a legitimizing instrument of the newly independent states, whose elites were regarded with increasing dissatisfaction. Nationalism and Marxism remained interwoven' (2016: 164). It will be argued that as a decolonial philosopher, wa Thiong'o transcends Marxism, nationalism/nativism and also post-colonialism thinking.

Decoloniality

Decoloniality should not be confused with nationalism, Marxism and post-colonialism as suggested by Maldonado-Torres (2007) and Ndlovu- Gatsheni (2015), since decoloniality is not a singular theoretical school of thought, but a family of diverse positions that share a view of coloniality as the fundamental problem in the modern age.

Decoloniality, unlike Marxism, Nationalism and Post- colonialism gives ex- colonised peoples a space to Judge Euro- American deceit and hypocrisy and to stand up into subjecthood through judging Europe and exposing technologies of subjectivation. Decoloniality exposes Euro- American epistemologies as exhausted thus "opening an opportune moment for articulation of Decolonial epistemologies from the South in an endeavour to attain cognitive justice. Rationality and technology have not completely managed to overcome all obstacles to human freedom". (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015: 23)

Unlike Marxism, nationalism and post-colonialism, decoloniality involves the re-telling of the history of humanity and knowledge from the vantage point of those epistemic sites that received the 'darker side' of modernity, including re-telling the story of knowledge generation as involving borrowings, appropriations, epistemicides and denials of humanity of other people as part of the story of science (Ndlovu- Gatsheni 2015). It is also a call for democratisation and de-hegemonisation, and the de-westernisation and de-Europeanisation of knowledge.

By privileging the Decolonial Critical Theory in the critique of wa Thiong'o, and loosely also literary works from the Global South, this paper seeks to break away from exhausted Marxist, nationalist and post-colonialist perspectives (Ndlovu-Gatsheni

2015), thus inaugurating an epistemic break from the Euro-North American episteme, which had been used to study the political thoughts and literature of wa Thiong'o and other African writers. Wa Thiong'o activism regarding the revival of African languages, culture, memories and glocalised imagination of the world have marked him as more than just the occasional Marxist, nationalist, post-colonialist novelist that most readings of his work have confined him to be.

The struggle between the proletariat and the ruling capitalist that dominates the Marxist definition of struggle, the post-colonialist preoccupation with culture and colonialism as the start of Africa's problems, and nationalism with its fascination with nationhood as a form of resistance towards colonialism is but a small part of wa Thiong'o's literary expression. He goes beyond unmasking coloniality in Africa and the Global South in general; he also unleashes decolonial insights that plead for an African renaissance of languages, cultures, economies and the colonial power matrix as an answer to Guyanese historian Walter Rodney's question as to whether ideologies generated within the culture of Global North from the nineteenth century were valid for Global South just as Marxism, Nationalism and Post-colonialism were generated from the Eurocentric traditions and locus.

Wa Thiong'o's epistemic disobedience (Mignolo 2011: xxiv), evident in his novels and essays, represents fruition of his work in respect of decolonial thinking and practices that exceed the limits of Marxism, nationalism and post-colonial theories. These theories prove too narrow to truly comprehend the complex ways in which the world works where colonialism has effectively installed coloniality in its former place, taking into account Kwame Nkrumah's (2006: 3) yet unfulfilled prophecy when he said: 'Seek ye first the political kingdom, and all else shall be added unto you'. Once African countries had won the political administration of their countries, nothing else was added unto Africa. Owing to the powerful technologies of coloniality that have perpetuated the economic domination and exploitation of Africans even in the absence of the administrative structures of formal colonialism, the 'all else' that Nkrumah had promised still waits to be 'added unto' the continent and its peoples. To fulfil the prophecy, by privileging wa Thiong'o as a decolonialist, coloniality is unmasked and challenged for decoloniality is a political-cum-epistemological liberator project that seeks to extricate formerly colonised people from coloniality.

Decoloniality challenges the asymmetrical organisation of power in the world and the hegemony of Eurocentricism as a coloniality of power, being and knowledge, and masks racism and the dehumanisation of the people from the periphery. Wa

Thiong'o imagines liberation for the black majority residing in the 'zone of non-being', of marginality and dehumanisation. Decolonial Critical Theory, which wa Thiong'o refers to as the 'poor theory' (2014:2), is rooted in the experiences, conditions and histories of the colonised poor on the periphery as it embodies the struggle for liberation by the poor. Decolonial Critical Theory is not a denial of the importance of Marxism, nationalism and post-colonialism in wa Thiong'o's literature since the purpose of decolonial thinking is not to debunk other projects (Mignolo 2009), but to provide alternative options that seek to cover the gaps that are created by projects that fail to fully account for wa Thiong'o's unmasking of the global colonial matrix's power, mainly due to their locus of enunciation. Sarah Broek and Carsten Junker (2014) point out that one cannot tear down the fiction with the same concepts with which the fiction was constructed, while Audre Lorde adds that one cannot use the master's tools to dismantle the master's house.

Decoloniality, which originated with Latin-American thinkers, is privileged in that it seeks to decolonise the 'epistemologies of the south' (Santos 2014) through acts of 'epistemic disobedience' (Mignolo 2011: xxiv). According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013), it is contrary to the poverty of postmodern-postcolonial, Marxist and nationalist critique, 'which criticized modernity from within the hegemonic Western epistemology, where Decolonial critical theory is a critique of modernity from without, and thus has the potential to pursue a "democratisation of knowledge, de-hegemonisation of knowledge, de-westernisation of knowledge"' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013: 15) and Tendayi Sithole's argument that the first step in Decolonial Critical Theory is the valorisation of epistemologies 'that have been distorted, bastardised, ignored, and rendered irrelevant by the Euro-North American episteme' (Sithole, 2014: vi). The Decolonial Critical Theory is a fitting lens for the reading of wa Thiong'o, who not only identified that the colonisation of the mind (metaphysical empire) remains the most successful realm where colonialism deeply inscribes itself, but also that colonialism is a vast process requiring decolonisation to assume the character of an equally vast process to respond and fight colonialism in its multifaceted forms (wa Thiong'o 1981). Wa Thiong'o emphasised that imperialism is not just a slogan, but 'is real, it is palpable in content and form and in its methods and effects Imperialism is total: it has economic, political, military, cultural and psychological consequences for people of the world. It could even lead to holocaust' (wa Thiong'o 1981: 2).

Wa Thiong'o's literary works challenge several forms of colonialities, such as

coloniality of consciousness, coloniality of sexuality, coloniality of gender, coloniality of language, coloniality of aesthetics, coloniality of epistemology and other forms (wa Thiong'o 2016). The decolonial epistemic perspective is therefore a relevant theory for a study of wa Thiong'o's literary works as it facilitates the renaissance of the Pan-African agenda and the continuation of the decolonisation struggles during the present age of global coloniality that is informed and underpinned by invisible colonial matrices of power from the locus of the Global South, as captured by Sarah Broek and Carsten Junker when they discuss locus of enunciation. They argue that coloniality is still with us and one should not forget where it originated, which is in Western Europe and the US, while decolonisation originated in the Third World and was enacted by citizens demanding liberation from Western Europe. Western Europe could not, then or now, simultaneously 'offer' the rest of the world both oppression and liberation (Broek & Junker 2014: 21).

Decolonial Critical Theory marks a shift of the geography of reason from the European and North American content to the decolonial content, with the emphasis on the Africanist perspective as it has deep links to movements such as Pan-Africanism, Negritude, African Personality, Ethiopianism, Black Theology, African Humanism, Black Consciousness, Afrocentricity and the African Renaissance, but without being fundamentalist like nationalism, Marxism and post-colonialism as decoloniality is against essentialism and fundamentalism (Grosfoguel 2008: 23). Ndlovu-Gatsheni also clearly point out that decoloniality is the agenda of shifting the geography and biography of knowledge. But who generates knowledge, and from where?

Decoloniality's point of departure is existential realities of suffering, oppression, repression, domination and exclusion, and this cannot be said of Marxism, Nationalism and Post-colonialism, Decoloniality facilitates the unmasking of racism as a global problem as well as demonstrating how knowledge, including science, was used to justify colonialism. (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013: 24)

Marxism

There is no denial of the presence of Marxist ideology in wa Thiong'o's literature as Okolo (2007) points out that wa Thiong'o's use of the Marxist class analysis helps to simplify Africa's complex political reality. This can, of course, be seen as a weakness,

and indeed some scholars (Thompson 2000; Chabal & Daloz 1999; Turok 1987) are of the opinion that class politics in Africa defy a reduction to a simple competition between capital and labour, the exploiter and the exploited. However, Okolo adds that 'the point is that the nature of Africa's political reality is so complex as to frustrate any attempt to build a conceptual framework for it. And yet it is important to study and understand reality as far as it can be understood. It is therefore important to formulate models to help in both conceptualizing and advancing the understanding of reality' (Okolo 2007: 129). To a limited extent, wa Thiong'o's Marxist ideology has helped to provide insight into African politics and its value must be acknowledged. More importantly, it provides greater epistemological space and freedom for the study of the political condition of minorities and other disadvantaged and marginalised groups. Class analysis can also be used to enhance our understanding of the relationship between the developed world and developing African economies. Okolo goes further to suggest that wa Thiong'o sought answers for Africa's problems in Marxism (Okolo 2007), an ideology that has provided a discourse or language with codes and icons that those oppressed by capitalism felt they could use at the time. Eagleton emphasises the uniqueness of Marx's contribution and says that 'the originality of Marxist criticism ... lies not in its historical approach to literature, but in its revolutionary understanding of history' (2008: 28). Okolo (2007: 3) concludes that wa Thiong'o's literature functions as a fictional account of Marx's ideology of class struggle; the organisation of workers through unions; the transformation of African societies through an inevitable revolution that will sweep away capitalism and all the oppressive tools it has used to enslave, divide, disunite, suppress and exploit the proletariat; and the eventual triumph of communism, presented as the ideal ideology to pursue in the transformation of African societies. Mwaniki (1977), among others, disagrees with the labelling of wa Thiong'o as Marxist, arguing that he cannot be effectively appreciated from a modernity perspective as 'Ngugi stood consistently for the deprived and the dispossessed, but he was not a Marxist. He showed a remarkable understanding of the rural peasant, up to the throb of the heart, so to speak—but he was still not a Marxist. Wa Thiong'o is concerned with the individual and his consciousness, and sometimes, like D.H. Lawrence, with "outward alliances and inner compulsions"' (Mwaniki 1977: 12).

Due to a skewed worldview, African intellectuals like wa Thiong'o who were concerned with colonial legacies came to be increasingly 'dissatisfied with the containment of the colonial experience within the categories of capitalism,

demanding a hearing for the psychological and cultural dimensions of colonialism to which racism was of fundamental significance' (Dirlik 2002: 431). Overall there was shift 'from the economic and political to the cultural and the personal experiential, which coincided with the discarding of orthodox Marxism and with the "distancing of questions of colonialism from the questions of capitalism"' (Dirlik 2002: 432). Wa Thiong'o's literature moves beyond class reductionism, thus moving beyond Marxist containment as 'Marx's metropolitanism stems genetically from his class reductionism. Every marginalized movement from nationalism in the third world and black consciousness movements in Africa, America and the Caribbean to feminist's movements in the West, is reduced to "class"' (Callinicos 1989: 21). Hence feminists and black nationalists often complain that the concepts of Marxist class theory are 'gender-blind' and 'race blind' (Callinicos 1989: 21). From a Marxist point of view, 'gender', 'nation' and 'race' are relative and peripheral concepts should be transcended by more essential and universal ones like 'class', 'base' and 'superstructure', productive force, relation of production and mode of production, etc. in order to achieve international coordination for total liberation from capitalist society.

Nationalism

Wa Thiong'o has also been labelled a nationalist, with Ogude (1997: 189) once exclaiming that wa Thiong'o is overly nationalist and needs deliverance—a rebut that wa Thiong'o challenges in *Globalectics: Theory and the politics of knowing* (2012), as he believed in 'the liberation of literature from the straightjackets of nationalism' (2012: 4). Not far behind is Ngure Mwaniki (1977: 3), who states that nationalism is a predominant mode of thinking in the works of wa Thiong'o and in African political thought in general. There is no doubt that wa Thiong'o continuously advocated for African nationalism as a liberating force. Daniel Wright (2012), who unreservedly calls Ngugi a nationalist, questions the reason for the scant attention paid to wa Thiong'o's nationalist ideology and the strong focus on Marxism and what he calls the 'controversial discourse on the position of Western languages within African literature'. James Ogude (1997: 95) acknowledges that wa Thiong'o and nationalism cannot be separated as '... the new narrative of "nation formation" constituted a dialogue, not just with the West ... but also a dialogue with other adjacent zones of knowledge such as history, anthropology, political science, religion, etc. ...'. African writers, including wa Thiong'o, constituted an important part of this dialogue to

discuss the specifications of African nationalism. Wa Thiong'o himself refuses to have his literature critiqued in provincial nationalist terms as

'works of imagination are amazingly antinational even where the author may think she or he is espousing national themes. People identify with a good tale and the characters irrespective of the tale's region of origins. Like a mirror or a camera, a work of art may reveal more than consciously intended. Works of imagination refuse to be bound within national geographies; they leap out of nationalist prisons and find welcoming fans outside geographic walls. But they can also encounter others who want to put them back within the walls, as if they were criminals on the loose.' (wa Thiong'o 2012: 58)

No one can deny the role played by post-colonialism in the deconstruction of imperial knowledge and the critique of every form of universalism hostile to difference and, by extension, to the figure of the Other. In carrying out a radical critique of the totalising thought of the Same, post-colonial theory enabled the positing of the foundations to think alterity and plural singularity hence wa Thiong'o came also to be theorised as a post-colonialist.

Post-colonialism

Like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, a literary theorist, wa Thiong'o wants the post-colonial intellectual to interrogate the position of power from which writing and cultural expression originate. However, Kwame Appiah (1992: 61), who argues that the African intellectual's association with Europe is inevitable and inevitably ideologically conflicted, warns against the African intellectual's fetishising of a marginal status and becoming an 'otherness machine', to use Sara Suleri's evocative phrase (Suleri, cited in Appiah 1992: 157). For Appiah, wa Thiong'o's view of the writer in politics is inevitably 'avant-garde' and Western (1992: 149). Moreover, he regards the attempt to deny or escape from such an 'entanglement' as ineffective and dishonest (Appiah 1992: 68), the recourse of Fanon's short-sighted, colonised 'native intellectual' (Appiah 1992: 61). Tsenay Serequeberhan adds that 'to be a Westernized African in' today's post-colonial Africa means ultimately to be marked/branded—in one way or another—by the historical experience of European colonialism. We should not try to "hide" from ... this enigmatic actuality' (Serequeberhan 2007: 11).

Post-colonialism is also trapped within the critique of modernity within modernity. Our understanding of wa Thiong'o as a post-colonial thinker is therefore limited as he concerned himself with coloniality and post-decolonisation. Post-colonialism came into being by building on the epistemic blocks of post-structuralism and post-modernism. Post-colonialism differed from post-structuralism and post-modernism in that it articulated the lived experience of the Third World. However, just like post-structuralism and post-modernism, it is trapped within modernity. The 'posts' in their modes of critique—i.e. post-structuralism, post-modernism and post-colonialism—are therefore not liberating but emancipating. In other words, they do not overhaul modernity and its continued structure, coloniality, but the interest is after all only to reform the very basis and rationality of epistemic violence embedded in modernity. This keeps epistemic racism and violence intact as 'posts' and 'isms' are critiques of modernity within modernity. Epistemic racism and violence is so pervasive that even critical theory fails to take into account the naturalisation, intransigence, complicity and blindness of the long standing effects of coloniality that by origin and character can be traced from colonialism itself (Walsh 2007). The status of post-structuralism, post-modernism and post-colonialism has been that of Western canonism, the very strength of modernity. The use of Western canonism in the name of post-structuralism, post-modernism and post-colonialism is indeed radical, but this radicalism has epistemic limits since it is the critique of modernity within modernity. Their application for theoretical intervention in Africa and African writing poses some epistemic problems on the basis that it is a theoretical apparatus that negates radicalism and agency of the forms of knowledge that have been silenced and marginalised by modernity.

In Okolo's (2007) groundbreaking argument that wa Thiong'o and Chinua Achebe were philosophers, she did not name the content of the philosophy. What is discussed here is the naming of the content. It is indeed true that wa Thiong'o participated in decoloniality as a philosophy of liberation from coloniality that expressed itself in neocolonial forms of domination in Africa. Like Enrique Dussel (1985), wa Thiong'o (2012: 57) argued for a planetary and globaletical imagination, and like Aime Cesaire (1972: 32), who discouraged provincialism and abstract universalism, wa Thiong'o has gestured for a connection between the local and the universal, for a transmodern liberatory vision. It is important to note that wa Thiong'o (2009: 12) argued for an African Renaissance that would see the use of indigenous African languages as languages among other languages in the world. Such decolonial

practices and thoughts as border thinking, epistemic disobedience, transmodernity and plurerisity are central to his fiction and essays. Classically and foundationally, in his collection of essays, *Decolonising the mind*, wa Thiong'o (1981) pioneered thoughts about decolonisation of knowledge, which is a key facet of decoloniality as a theory and a philosophy of liberation, thus justifying Decolonial Critical Theory as a fitting framework for examining and understanding his work.

Besides Chinweizu, Jemie and Madubuike (1980), who wrote about the decolonisation of the African mind, and Steve Biko (2004), who argued that the greatest weapon in the hand of the coloniser is the mind of the colonised, it was wa Thiong'o (1981) who, in Africa, popularised decolonising the mind as a cause and a concept. Decolonisation has been an overarching theme in his fiction and essays. In his important definition of coloniality as a neocolonial and world systemic problem, Nelson Maldonado-Torres described how coloniality survives formal colonialism and remains after it has been abolished:

Coloniality is different from colonialism. Colonialism denotes a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on the power of another nation, which makes such a nation an empire. Coloniality, instead refers to long standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labour, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus Coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of people and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breathe Coloniality all the time and every day. (Maldonado-Torres, 2007: 7)

In his own fiction, of which *Devil on the cross* is a typical example, wa Thiong'o (1982) describes how colonialism after its demise returns in other forms to perpetuate the exploitation and oppression of the former colonies and their populations. Clearly the perpetuation of coloniality after colonialism is exhausted as a central theme in his thought and philosophy. Decoloniality as a theory and a philosophy that is the antithesis of coloniality (Quijano 2000; Grosfoguel 2007; Mignolo 2011) becomes a relevant and fitting theory for critically reading and understanding of wa Thiong'o's fictive and philosophical work. Wa Thiong'o was opposed not only to colonialism

and imperialism, and therefore to the colonial regime, but also to the Kenyan post-independence regime, which he described in his essays, short stories and novels as complicit in the oppression of the masses. Like other decolonial thinkers, he realised that the long-standing power patterns of colonialism continue to be exercised after the removal of the colonial administration (Maldonado-Torres 2007). Coloniality is not colonialism, and its existence can be traced back to long before colonialism. It mutates itself with the nature of the regime and it is now exercising oppression covertly, as opposed to overtly under colonial rule. The forms of coloniality that wa Thiong'o engages with in his literary works is coloniality of power, coloniality of knowledge and coloniality of being. In his fiction and philosophy he grappled with the problem of coloniality and sought epistemic and ontological ways and strategies to unmask and dethrone it.

It would seem that Karl Marx (1974) was right in asserting that 'the philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it'. Theory and philosophy may describe and name the world in a multiplicity of compelling ways, but what the human condition requires is change for the better, and advancement from conditions of lack to conditions of adequacy and satisfaction. Decoloniality as a theory, is central to the study of wa Thiong'o. Quijano (2000) is credited with coining the term and crafting the concept 'coloniality'. Alongside such decolonial thinkers as Grosfoguel and Mignolo, Quijano has also contributed meaningfully to the understanding of the conceptual corpus of decolonial thought when he argued that there is, in the world system, 'rhetoric' that parades Western particularism as universal and seeks to erect the Euro-American Empire as a standard of power and knowledge in the globe. This 'rhetoric' has as its 'darker side'; the 'logic of coloniality' as a global power structure that visits racism, inferiorisation, siphoning of resources and 'dispensability of lives' in the Global South. Wa Thiong'o himself has contributed immensely to the understanding of the 'decolonising the mind' through a confrontation with coloniality of knowledge (wa Thiong'o 1981).

As a response to the 'rhetoric of modernity' and its constitutive 'logic of coloniality', decolonial thinkers and philosophers have discharged what Mignolo (2008) termed the 'grammar of decoloniality', which participates in unmasking coloniality and installing such decolonial projects as 'epistemic disobedience' that will be discussed in this study of wa Thiong'o's thought and political activity. In enunciating the 'rhetoric of modernity', Mignolo argues against the principal 'myth of modernity', which notes that since the colonisation of America, Europe has been paraded as the 'centre' of the

world and the rest of the globe as an inferior 'periphery'. For Mignolo, the 'myth of modernity' has become an emphatic fallacy working through Eurocentric knowledge and perpetuating the falsehood that European provincialism is global universalism. Throughout his novels and essays, wa Thiong'o has done a lot to unmask cultural imperialism and the colonial domination and subjection of Africans.

Discussing the symbiotic relationship between modernity and coloniality, Maldonado-Torres (2007) says that modernity, usually considered to be a product of the European Renaissance or the European Enlightenment, has a 'darker side, which is constitutive of it'. That 'darker side', he argues, is occasioned by the fact that '[m]odernity as a discourse and as a practice would not be possible without coloniality, and coloniality continues to be an inevitable outcome of modern discourses'. Maldonado-Torres' argument, which suggests that coloniality is inevitably incarnated in 'modern discourses', is important to observe as, among other things, it emphasises wa Thiong'o's fictive response to the crashing arrival of the colonial empire in Kenya and Africa.

There is a keen intention to imagine futures that are not engulfed by the tyranny of both Western and Eastern knowledge systems that have been presented as universal wisdom when in truth they are no more than provincial narratives. Also noteworthy in Mignolo's (2000) definition of decoloniality is the use of the word 'delinking', which emphatically signifies decoloniality as a radical movement away from the enticements and pretences of the Eurocentric universal abstract. The emphatic 'Western macro-narratives' face abandonment in decoloniality, which seeks to invent new ways of seeing and understanding the world and how it works. One may ask whether, in 'delinking' and seeking to manufacture an alternative imagination of politics and the future, decoloniality is not establishing itself by using its own fictions as the new universal abstract that contests Western knowledge, or else an alternative fundamentalism that projects its own tyrannies and dominations. In response to this possible question, Mignolo presents decoloniality not as another messianic mission, but as a liberating 'option' that proposes new conversations in the 'dialogue between North and South'—a theme that has occupied Chinua Achebe in a significant way, especially in his insightful essay 'Hopes and impediments in the dialogue between North and South' (1989). In *Globaletics* (2012) and *Secure the base* (2016), wa Thiong'o, like Chinua Achebe, demonstrates a keen interest in the decolonial position of Africa in the globaletical sphere, or what Dussel (1985) calls the planetary scope.

However, other decolonial thinkers such as Grosfoguel (2008) insist that, in the light of the grave violence of coloniality, decoloniality ‘cannot be an option’, but is ‘a necessity’. Decoloniality projects itself not as another absolute, but, as Mignolo says, a ‘grammar’ that simply refuses to echo and repeat the absolutism of Eurocentric fundamentalisms that have imposed rigid monologues and straitjacket templates on how the world should work, defined by capitalist or communist aspirations. Grosfoguel (2008) adds that decoloniality departs from both Eurocentric and ‘Third World fundamentalism’, a view that wa Thiong’o has sustained in his writing insofar as he takes care to recognise even the weaknesses of African pre-colonial and post-independence societies as he debunks Eurocentricism.

Decolonial critical thinking thus finds post-modern critique to be an insufficient tool of which the ability to demolish the colonial master’s dwelling is in doubt. For that reason, Dussel (1985) dismisses ‘postmodernity’ as ‘profoundly Eurocentric’ and advocates for ‘transmodernity’ that will transcend the limits of Eurocentric modernity. Grosfoguel (2008) describes transmodernity as ‘critical cosmopolitanism’ that, through its utopian project, aims ‘to transcend the Eurocentric version of modernity as opposed to Habermas’ view that ‘what needs to be done is to fulfil the incomplete and unfinished project of modernity’. In the decolonial thinking of Grosfoguel, thinkers such as wa Thiong’o, and others, imagining a better world is not about complementing the present modernity, it is about challenging it to promote decoloniality and de-imperialisation.

The Portuguese lawyer and sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2007) argues that what must be imagined is ‘ecology of knowledges, post-abysal thinking premised upon the idea of the epistemological diversity of the world’. The ‘ecology of knowledges’ that Santos imagines entails ‘pluriversity’ which, to quote Dussel (1985), is ‘a multiplicity of decolonial critical responses to Eurocentered modernity’. It is a concept that Arturo Escobar (2007) imagines as the possibility of ‘worlds and knowledges otherwise’, a ‘world where other worlds’ and their bodies of knowledge can all exist, and where civilisations can have a dialogue and knowledges can participate in conversations. Decolonial Critical Theory then is the post-abysal thinking.

Wa Thiong’o (2013: x) argument that ‘the physical empire’ has been pushed back, but ‘the metaphysical empire remains’ is evident in his novels and is a constant reminder that dismemberment is still alive in the so called post-colonial Africa. In one of his novels, wa Thiong’o is the narrator—the ‘prophet of justice’, a communal

artist, the 'Gicaandi player'—who tells the communal story in the language and cultural sensibility of the people. In true decolonial style, wa Thiong'o's work, as seen in *Devil on the cross* (1982), *Secure the base: Making Africa visible in the globe* (2016), *Matigari* (1986) and his essays, confronts Eurocentric fundamentalism of knowledge and culture well beyond the epistemic racism that limits the Marxist understanding of the African experience of coloniality that the workers and the peasants endure, and the suffocating inadequacies of post-colonial theory that purveys the myth of a 'post'-colonial experience. Wa Thiong'o discharges a militant decoloniality of thought and practice that amounts to epistemic disobedience and is practised and couched in the locus of enunciation of the global South, and of colonial difference.

Conclusion

This paper delineates Decolonial Critical Theory as a fitting lens for critically examining the works of fiction and essays written by Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Decoloniality, more than Marxism, nationalism and post-coloniality, has been justified as the theory and philosophy that offers the intellectual resources and philosophical tools needed to understand the author and his approach to liberation from coloniality. Wa Thiong'o dedication to the struggle for liberation of African minds, languages and cultures from cultural imperialism needs to be understood from a decolonial loci, where the colonial victims have been dismembered through the erasing of their languages, knowledge and collective memory, so that re-remembering can only be done through the return to the base of those who exist in the margins of modernity.

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