



Voyage in Subaltern Voices: Kwasi Wiredu and his Idea of Conceptual Decolonization: Propositions and Perspectives

رحلة في أصوات المهمشين: كواسي ويرودو وفكرة التحرر من الاستعمار

المفاهيمي: اقتراحات و آفاق

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ملخص

رغم التطورات المميزة في النظرية ما بعد الكولونيالية، إلا أن بعض الأسماء والأفكار تظل مهمشة. والمثال الذي يستهدفه هذا البحث هو كواسي ويرودو وفكرته عن التحرر ما بعد الاستعمار المفاهيمي. وعلى أساس نهج ما بعد الكولونيالية وتداخل التخصصات، يركز هذا البحث على فكرة السفر المتبناة من طرف إدوارد سعيد، والتي تسمح للعقل بالتوغل في الخطابات المهيمنة للسلطة وتفكيك روابطها ومعانيها المخفية. وهذا الجهد المبذول ليس فقط من طرف سعيد وسببفاك وبحابها، بل أيضا من طرف ويرودو، ويرأهلية ويرودو لاحتلال مكانة مرجعية في النظرية ما بعد الكولونيالية. إضافة إلى ذلك، يربط هذا البحث بين التحرر ما بعد الاستعمار المفاهيمي عند كواسي ويرودو مع رفض نقوقي للغة الانجليزية في الكتابة الإفريقية، وتهجين اللغات عند أتشيبي. وتدور الحصة الرئيسية حول أحقية كواسي ويرودو في احتلال مكانة مهمة في النظرية ما بعد الكولونيالية جنباً إلى جنب مع أسماء مثل سعيد، سببفاك، بهاها، نقوقي وأتشيبي. ويتمثل الأثر الرئيسي لإدماج كواسي ويرودو هو إثراء النظرية ما بعد الكولونيالية بعمق ودقة أكثر.

الكلمات الدالة: كواسي ويرودو؛ التحرر ما بعد الاستعمار المفاهيمي؛ السفر؛ إدوارد سعيد؛ غياتري سببفاك؛ هوميهاها؛ نقوقي واتينكو؛ تشينوا أتشيبي.

Abstract

Despite advances in postcolonial theory, some names and concepts remain underexplored. The example that this article targets is Kwasi Wiredu and his idea of conceptual decolonization. On the basis of postcolonial and interdisciplinary frameworks, this article focuses on Said's notion of *voyage in*

that leads to the immersion of the mind in dominant discourses of power and to the dissection of its ties and hidden meanings. This endeavour, undertaken not only by Said, Spivak, and Bhabha but also by Wiredu, justifies Wiredu's eligibility for a referential rank in critical postcolonial theory. Furthermore, it links Wiredu's conceptual decolonization with Ngugi's rejection of the English language in African writing and with Achebe's hybridization of languages. The key outcome revolves around Wiredu's entitlement to a valuable place in the critical postcolonial theory and alongside names like Said, Spivak, Bhabha, Ngugi and Achebe. The major implication is that integrating Wiredu enriches the critical postcolonial theory with more rigor and depth.

Keywords: Kwasi Wiredu; Conceptual decolonization; Voyage in; Edward Said; Homi Bhabha; Gayatri Spivak; Chinua Achebe; Ngugi wa Thiong'o

Introduction

Since its appearance, postcolonial criticism has constituted a response to colonialism and has framed a critical thought about its cultural, political, and social legacies. This wide scope has resulted in numerous distinguished scholars from different countries who have continuously pinpointed how colonial power structures functioned during the colonial era, how colonized peoples resisted them, and more importantly how these very structures persist in the post- independence era.

Indeed, these scholars continuously introduce interesting ideas by which they try to explain the colonial and postcolonial conditions. One can mention the Palestinian-American Edward Said, the Indian Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha as outstanding examples of vigorous producers of postcolonial criticism. Indeed, the three are named as the 'Holy Trinity' of postcolonial criticism. This criticism at first glance can be related to their original condition and/or to their homelands as colonized/ex-colonized people and countries.

In other words, with regard to the above examples, the critic's colonial condition as an experience lived by the critic or his people has undoubtedly a direct link with the expressed thoughts, the defended positions and the critical stance on colonization and its aftermath, postcoloniality. Edward Said witnessed Al Nakba (1948) at the age of thirteen; his books revolve around the defence of the Palestinian cause and the description of the experience of displacement Palestinian people underwent. His characteristic position is that the western scholarship on non-Western cultures is not scientific and academic, it is, on the contrary, biased and distorted, thus becoming an apparatus of



imperialism. All this has constituted a nexus of postcolonial studies of which he is considered the founder.

Spivak and Bhabha are not totally different from Said's case. Though they did not experience colonization and displacement the way Said did (Spivak was five years old when India became independent, and Bhabha was born two years after its independence), their writings express a deep analysis of the colonizer, the colonized and the subaltern. The explanation that one can put forward is that the two critics had a direct relation not with colonization as such but with its residues.

In fact, when the essence of knowledge stems from experience itself, it can be more authentic. Albert Einstein stated that "the only source of knowledge is experience" (Einstein, Quotefancy). John Locke thought that "no man's knowledge can go beyond his experience" (Locke, 1689, p.106), and Mahatma Ghandi (1948) believed that Knowledge through experience is far superior and many times more useful than bookish knowledge.

The crux of the matter is not to frame knowledge out of experience the way the three postcolonial critics have done; instead, the matter is that some thinkers whose background is similar, for example, to Said's, i.e., they lived under the shackles of colonization and oppression, have achieved to produce some knowledge and elaborate concepts but are intentionally or unintentionally excluded from this field. The name that definitely pops up is Kwasi Wiredu, the Ghanaian philosopher. Indeed, he can be classified as an African intellectual from an ex/colonized country and a continent whose ideas are directly related to the discourse of colonialism (i.e. the object of postcolonial theory), yet he is neglected in the critical postcolonial circles. As a result, the question that this article addresses is: isn't it high time the postcolonial criticism bibliography included the name of Kwasi Wiredu?

Grounded in postcolonial and interdisciplinary frameworks, the aim of this article is to celebrate Kwasi Wiredu as an African scholar who elaborated interesting ideas on the colonial and postcolonial conditions and to propose the inclusion of his name and writings in the body of postcolonial studies. Somehow, the utility of his ideas (besides Said's, Spivak's and Bhabha's) within the scope of postcolonial theory can prove supportive in the process of freeing knowledge from biases and exclusions and making it authentic along with helping Africans to revive



their belief in their capacities not only to produce knowledge but also to include it as a referential one, all the more when it has a direct link with their history and future. The latter is a solid reason why the focus of this article will be on one of his concepts, conceptual decolonization.

The following development will shed light on postcolonial criticism and on its link with the interdisciplinary methodology. Then, it will summarize Said's, Spivak's and Bhabha's immersions in the West and in its knowledge. These experiences can be named *voyages in* following Said's parlance. It will then introduce Wiredu, report his trajectory, analyze his idea of conceptual decolonization. The last point of the article will discuss Wiredu's concept and will inevitably compare it to Ngugi's and Achebe's positions in order to showcase his merit and enter the critical postcolonial theory arena much like Said, Spivak, Bhabha, Ngugi and Achebe.

1. Postcolonial Criticism and Interdisciplinarity: Connections and Correlations

Many literary scholars, like Jean Marc Moura, Chantal Zabus, and Anne McClintock, have seriously pondered on the meaning of the term 'postcolonial'. In an attempt to explore it, Padmini Mongia's and Grant Farred's definitions are referential in this article, as they better clarify and sum up its functions. In his introduction to Contemporary Postcolonial Theory, Padmini Mongia focuses not only on the historical denotation of the postcolonial, that is, on being 'a historical marker referring to the period after official decolonization as well as a term signifying changes in intellectual approaches' (Mongia, 1997, p.2) but also on its thoughtful analyses of the colonial discourse, of a 'Third World' immigration to the 'First World' and of the oppositional discourses that stem from hegemonic and counter-hegemonic schemes of power between the two worlds (Mongia, 1997, p.3). Likewise, Grant Farred, after having dissected further the function of postcoloniality, reaches the conclusion that "postcoloniality typifies discursive and fragmentable fields within which hegemonic and counter hegemonic power are articulated by people and societies in describing themselves and their world" (Farred, 2003, p.2) and within which "lie collisions, collusions and fusing of histories and cultures... This immediately means postcoloniality is the cultural foundation on which an alternative society is conceptualized and lived" (Farred, 2003, p.5).



In sum, one can adopt the position that postcolonial thought is an intellectual production that aims at identifying and deconstructing the ideas of the colonial discursive 'store', better still disclosing, for example, an African worldview belittled or caricatured in colonial records. In other words, the major task of postcolonial criticism is to depict and analyse dominant power structures and discourses such as colonialism and imperialism and their outcomes, explain the mechanism of the culture which sustains them and concentrate on post-independence complexities. One of its salient objectives is to explain how two cultures meet and how they maintain oppositional discourses.

In fact, it is this very great endeavour to explain and point to oppositional discursive structures and their functioning that justifies the inherent recourse to other disciplines, hence interdisciplinarity. Etymologically speaking, interdisciplinarity implies merging knowledge and methods from multiple fields. Julie Thompson Klein and William H. Newell define it as "a process of answering a question, solving a problem, or addressing a topic that is too broad or complex to be dealt with adequately by a single discipline... [It] draws on disciplinary perspectives and integrates their insights through construction of a more comprehensive perspective" (Klein & Newell, 2003, pp.393-394). A deep observation of interdisciplinarity can result in its description as an engine in the postcolonial criticism. The latter has integrated ideas and concepts from other disciplines, such as sociology (Foucault) and psychoanalysis (Lacan) for the sake of thorough explanations and analyses of many a phenomenon characterizing the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discursive entities.

At this juncture, Azzedine Haddour contends that the French philosopher, Jean Paul Sartre, deserves to be considered as a reference in the frame of postcolonial studies. He notices that "although overlooked by critics in postcolonial studies, Sartre's contribution to the debate on colonialism is of a great importance...[it] informed the debate around decolonization and played a vital role in the emergence of major critics such as Césaire, Fanon and Memmi" (Haddour, 2001, p.7). Indeed, Sartre's influence on Fanon has been studied and celebrated by many researchers.

As an illustration, Fanon's idea of violence as a cleansing force that "frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; [that] makes him fearless and restores his self-respect" (Fanon, 1963, p.94)



echoes Sartre's link between violence and right, an idea written in 1947-1948 and published in *Notebooks* in 1983. Sartre maintains that "there has never been any violence on earth that did not correspond to the affirmation of some right" (Sartre, 1983, p.142) and that "the oppressed should use violence to deny the right of property, therefore to refuse the right of the oppressor" (Sartre, 1983, p.177). It is of no surprise that Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* is prefaced by Sartre. In a section of thirty pages, he developed more his ideas on the colonizer's dehumanizing violence and the native's subsequent violence "which is however only the last refuge of their humanity" (Fanon, 1963, p. 16). The settler's violence is reflected in the native's violence (Fanon, 1963, p.18), a fact that must dissuade any European to describe the native as violent, inferior or subhuman. This overview brings to the fore an already existing bridge between postcolonial criticism and the philosophy of existentialism; hence interdisciplinarity.

In fact, the consequence of the inclusion of interdisciplinary methodology in postcolonial criticism is counter-hegemonic in itself. It allows opening the field to other valuable ideas regardless of their geographical, cultural or linguistic origin. Thanks to interdisciplinary crossing, an African, Asian or Native American body of thought can be inscribed in postcolonial criticism. Wail S. Hassan and Rebecca Saunders call the exclusive reliance on the West in critical theory "a theoretical imperialism' and view interdisciplinary methodologies as a solution to overcome the Eurocentrism of postcolonial theory" (Hassan & Saunders, 2003, p.21.). These methodologies "would safeguard against postcolonial theory's current inscription of the model according to which the West furnishes universal theoretical paradigms while the rest of the world yields the objects of analysis" (Hassan & Saunders, 2003, p.21).

It is in this category that this article falls. On the basis of postcolonial and interdisciplinary frameworks, it will highlight an African philosopher, Kwasi Wiredu, and his idea of conceptual decolonization and will argue for his inclusion in the list of postcolonial critical theorists. It will also align Kwasi Wiredu with the postcolonial 'Holy Trinity' by summarizing their physical and intellectual journeys in the West. All this will converge towards the effort of reducing the Eurocentric omnipresence in postcolonial criticism.



2. The Voyage in and the Birth of an Oppositional Reading of the West

2.1 Edward Said: The Other's Voyage in

Undeniably, Edward Said (1935–2003), the Palestinian-American academic and literary critic, emerges as perhaps the most influential figure in postcolonial studies. Indeed, he is renowned for founding this academic field. Born in Palestine, he was educated in both Egypt and the United States. He earned degrees from Princeton and Harvard in English literature. Said's influential works include, to name a few, *Orientalism*, *The Question of Palestine*, *Culture and Imperialism*, *Covering Islam*, and his memoir *Out of Place*.

His groundbreaking book, *Orientalism* (1978) critically examined how the West constructed the "Orient" as exotic, backward, and inferior, thereby justifying colonial domination. Michel Foucault's theory of knowledge and power nourished his thesis that within orientalism, the two are interrelated and construct a basis for an ideological project serving Western imperial interests. Besides, his idea of "Othering" explains the process by which the dominant West defines those who are different as the Other: inferior, exotic, or threatening; hence the cultural and political divides between the west and the 'rest'. His concluding remarks encompass the nature of orientalism as "a style of thought" (Said, 1978, p.3), as "a discourse of representation and a will or intention to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world" (Said, 1978, p.13), and as a whole, "a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture" (Said, 1978, p.13).

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said devises a theoretical frame on resistance by developing the idea of *voyage in*. He defines it as "the conscious effort to enter into the discourse of Europe and the West, to mix with it, transform it, to make it acknowledge marginalized or suppressed or forgotten histories carried out by dozens of scholars, critics and intellectuals in the peripheral world" (Said, 1994, p. 216). The *voyage in*, as "a sign of adversarial internationalization in an age of continued imperial structures" constitutes a hybrid cultural work producing an 'oppositional and independent scholarship' (Said, 1994, p.239), out of what Michel Foucault calls subjugated knowledges, testifying to "a spiral away and extrapolation from Europe and the West" (Said, 1994, p.266).



This overview obviously situates Said as an Other who has tasted and tested the experience of the *voyage in* within Western academia. It goes without saying that “much of the personal investment in [orientalism] derives from [his] awareness of being an “Oriental” as a child growing up in two British colonies” (Said, 1978, p.33). His study of orientalism has been an attempt to detail the powerful traces of the dominant Western culture upon him as an Oriental subject and upon all Orientals (Said, 1978); hence knowledge out of experience. This means he did not just study Western stereotypes of the East; he experienced them and their impact: his people were portrayed as uncivilized in need of Western “salvation,” which justified the Other’s dispossession and the Westerner’s superiority.

By a conscious reading and writing on the West, he scrutinizes its discourse and achieves to understand its functioning; he then criticizes it and dissects its power structures for the sake of dismantling them. His texts are replete with Western referential authors like Jane Austen and Rudyard Kipling, whom he discovered as being supporters of the imperial enterprise. By working through the novel, his *voyage in* allows him to make an analysis “infrequently encountered in mainstream interpretations” (Said, 1994, p.95), “complementing the others, not discounting or displacing them” (Said, 1994, p.95). Convincingly, he succeeds in resituating Austen’s *Mansfield Park*. He refuses to be complacent about the idea that it is one of the great literary masterpieces though he admits it but goes further to describe it as one ‘that opens up a broad expanse of domestic imperialist culture without which Britain’s subsequent acquisition of territory would not have been possible’ (Said, 1994, p. 95). As to Kipling, Said argued that Kipling’s “*Kim* is a major contribution to this Orientalized India of the imagination” (Said, 1994, p.149). Said considered the orphan Irish boy Kim as the real leader in the novel rather than the Tibetan Buddhist lama, in a way to reinforce the Western superiority over the Indian (Said, 1994, p.226). In sum, Said’s readings, which he himself considers complementary, belongs to an oppositional scholarship that can create fissures in the mainstream one.

2.2 Gayatri Spivak: the Subaltern on the Subaltern

One of the most influential intellectuals today, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (born February 24, 1942, in Calcutta, India) is an Indian literary theorist, a postcolonial theorist, and a university Professor at Columbia University. After her graduation (BA) in English from the University of



Calcutta (1959), she moved to the United States in 1961 and earned a master degree then a PhD in Comparative Literature from Cornell University in 1967. Her feat emanates from her article ‘*Can the Subaltern Speak?*’.

Well-versed in deconstruction theory, Spivak clarifies that subalterns are literally silent, that their speech cannot be heard or recognized within dominant discourses, be it colonial, patriarchal, or Western intellectual (Spivak, 1988). There is “no unrepresentable subaltern subject that can know and speak itself” (Spivak, 1988, p. 285). Stripped of history and speech, the subaltern undergoes representation that suits the dominant discourses and agents. Spivak’s trajectory resembles Said’s in one aspect. Said targets the colonial and imperial discourses and deconstructs their power structures; Spivak studies the Western, patriarchal and capitalist dominant discourses and structures her theory after voyaging in the long tradition of these discourses.

2.3 Homi Bhabha: Ambivalent Concepts from the Third Space of Enunciation

Homi K. Bhabha is viewed in many critical sources and sites as one of the best-known contemporary representatives of the academic branch of Postcolonial studies. Born into a Parsi family in 1949 in Bombay (India), he completed his secondary education there and graduated from the University of Mumbai before obtaining his doctorate at Oxford University. His influential publications include *The Location of Culture* (1994) and *Nation and Narration* (1990). Bhabha is renowned for introducing key concepts such as hybridity, mimicry and ambivalence, which analyze how colonized peoples resist and negotiate the power imposed by colonizers.

Bhabha adds to postcolonial theory concepts of hybridity, mimicry and the third space. With regard to mimicry, Bhabha sums it in “the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite.” He also underlines that it is “at once resemblance and menace” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 86), as it implies copying the colonizer’s culture and manners, yet it bears an occasion of menace because it may undermine colonial authority and superiority. By mimicking the colonizer, a space of resistance may be created, leading to an ambivalent condition. Bhabha’s explanation of ambivalence encompasses the simultaneous, contradictory feelings and attitudes



shaping colonial encounters between colonizer and colonized such as attraction and repulsion, admiration and resentment (Bhabha, 1994).

As to the concept of hybridity, Bhabha argued that colonial encounters create hybrid identities. Hybridity describes the ways in which cultures and identities become mixed as a result of colonial encounters. Bhabha argues that colonialism produces ongoing exchanges that form newly hybrid identities and meanings; thus destroying the myth of a pure culture. This cultural dynamism happens at the level of what Bhabha calls the interstitial space, or the third space of enunciation. "The interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (Bhabha, 1994, p.4). Thanks to this space that carries the burden of meaning of culture, polarity can be eluded (Bhabha, 1994).

Having presented the three thinkers together uncovers some summative remarks. First, these scholars belong to what is called the Third World, i.e., they inescapably experienced situations of injustice, oppression or biases. Second, the three were educated in the West, which obviously was an enriching stopover in their careers. But, above all, they penetrated the Western academia and learnt deeply the workings of the dominant discourses in the West about the Other, be he black, colonized, female or poor. The outcome is the production of an undeniable body of postcolonial texts that inform a third world scholarship. The latter can also enfold many thinkers. The best example that is known (to me personally) is Kwasi Wiredu, whose path is not different from Said's, Spivak's and Bhabha's in a way or another.

3. Kwasi Wiredu and Conceptual Decolonization: A Reconsideration

Wiredu was born in Kumasi, in the Ashanti Region of Ghana, on 3rd October 1931. After his secondary education at Adisadel College in 1948, he proceeded to the University College of the Gold Coast (UCGC) in 1952, where he studied for the Intermediate Bachelor of Arts degree and obtained that qualification in 1955. He then embarked on studies toward an Honors degree at UCGC and completed them in 1958. He went in the same year to Oxford University for the Bachelor of Philosophy degree. Graduated in 1960, he was immediately offered a lectureship position at the University of Leeds. He returned to Ghana in 1961 to assume a lectureship position at the University of Ghana, after



which he gradually achieved professorship and headship of the department. Wiredu remained at the University of Ghana until 1984, when he joined the Department of Philosophy at the University of South Florida as Professor. From 1987 until his death, he remained Emeritus Professor at this University. Some of his books published are: *Philosophy and African Culture*, *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective*, *A Companion to African Philosophy*, *Decolonizing African Religion: A Short History of African Religions in Western Scholarship*, *Conceptual Decolonization in African Philosophy: Four essays*, *Death and the afterlife in African Culture*.

These titles (and others) attest to his active role in the production of knowledge that Africans as ex-colonized subjects can make use of in order to immerse themselves in the process of decolonization fully and correctly. His intellectual adventure expresses, in Said's terms, a *voyage in* the dominant discourse, an adoption of an oppositional stance vis-à-vis the dominant West and the traditionalist Africa. Simultaneously, he rehabilitates Africa inasmuch as he places it at the centre of his studies and defends some of its cultural practices.

Wiredu defines conceptual decolonization as "the elimination from our thought of modes of conceptualization that came to us through colonization and remain in our thinking owing to inertia rather than to our own reflective choices" (Wiredu, 1995, p.23). He highlights that the root cause of this inertia goes back to a long history of colonialism which "caused a widespread involuntary intermixing of Western and African intellectual categories in the thinking of contemporary Africans" (Wiredu, 1995, p.26). Worsened by colonial education of the past generations and by contagion of the younger ones, African "minds have been institutionally soaked in Western modes of philosophical thinking" (Wiredu, 1995, p.24). In some words, this blend leads Africans to unconsciously internalize Western concepts and consider them as unquestionably universal references.

Therefore, Wiredu believes that the levelheaded function of the 'Africans of the immediate post-independence era [is to] try to unravel the conceptual entanglements' (Wiredu, 1995, p.30). This function can be fully accomplished by philosophy which, in Wiredu, questions the taken-for-grantedness of concepts and ideas and reconstructs them critically. Wiredu sees that because of its mixed content, the African colonial and



post-colonial history obviously calls for a critical spirit in order to construct a philosophy suited to present-day existence.

The process that Wiredu targets is twofold. First, African thought must not romanticize the African past. "In this project there is no assumption that what comes from Africa is necessarily true, sound [and] profound" (Wiredu, 1995, p.42). Second, its sources should be multiple without an over-valuation of the Western tradition, for 'such an over-valuation, at an apparently semi-conscious level, is the hallmark of that infelicity of the mind called the colonial mentality that still afflicts us in African philosophy and other areas of African intellectual life' (Wiredu, 1995, p.45). To cure it, however, does not require the discredit of all foreign sources. The alternative, Wiredu suggests, is to rely on a global cross-fertilization of ideas from Africa, the West and even the East; hence adaptability and mutual enrichment.

Due to this background, Wiredu's conceptual decolonization can be viewed as 'a methodological imperative' for African thinkers to reshape/renew their thought traditions in service of their societies. It entails liberating African thought from inherited modes of understanding brought by indigenous tradition and colonialism and denuded of reflection. This in no way means rejecting whatever is traditional and/or Western; rather, Wiredu's conceptual decolonization requires eclecticism, critique, and reconstruction of conceptual frameworks that suit the African decolonized society.

However, Wiredu sees Western languages as an obstacle that impedes this process (Wiredu, 1995). He maintains that "languages ...carry their own kinds of philosophical suggestiveness, which foreign as well as native speakers are apt to take for granted" (Wiredu, 1995, p.53). Indeed, the Western conceptions of, for example, reality, truth, soul and mind, are embedded in Western languages. Then:

If, by virtue of a colonial history, you are trained right from the beginning in a foreign language ... then certain basic ways of thought that seem natural to native speakers might become natural to you too. Consequently, you might not even realize that those ways of thinking may not be all that natural or, if your own language is radically different, even coherent from the standpoint of your own language. This means that you might not even be aware of the likely neo-colonial aspects of your conceptual



framework. This is one of the greatest impediments to conceptual decolonization (Wiredu, 1995, p. 54).

In other words, African thinkers may uncritically absorb and reproduce Western thinking just because the language they use to think and write ‘suggests’ this thinking as “natural.” He writes:

Intellectually, we are brought up in Western-style educational institutions. What we learn in these institutions in both philosophy and general knowledge comes mostly from Western sources. More significantly still, our philosophical researches and results are propagated in one Western language or another. And to cap it all, many of us are up to the neck in Western religious and metaphysical assumptions (Wiredu, 1995, p. 56).

The solution he proposes to conceptually decolonize the African mind is to think in African vernaculars even if the publication of the results is in some Western language. Wiredu provides an example of how vernacular philosophical thinking can challenge Western assumptions. His analysis of the Akan concept of *adwene* (mind) reveals fundamental differences. Dissimilar to the Cartesian view which sees the mind as a substance, the Akan conception treats *adwene* as a capacity intimately dependent on the functioning of the brain (*amene*). Even though he had been attracted by Descartes’ ideas, he had remained puzzled by his dualism of body-spirit. Years after, he understood the source of his puzzlement. He had always thought of mind in terms of Akan linguistic terms. He admits that the delay in understanding his rejection of the mind as a substance arises from the colonial institutional education he had received. Moreover, he finds that the Akan conception of the mind shares other important affinities with contemporary Anglo-American functionalism. For example, both approaches view the question of the nature of the mind as distinct from that of the existence of the spirit. On the whole, the conclusion Wiredu reaches is that decolonization stems from the force of vernacular thinking and that it is a process of intellectual freedom thanks to the potential of enlightenment far beyond the dictates of one culture.



4. Wiredu, Ngugi, Achebe: Three Directions of Conceptual Decolonization

Digging deep into the African knowledge produced in the postcolonial era, one can find overlapping terrains between Wiredu, Ngugi and Achebe. Kwasi Wiredu uses English in his writings but encourages Africans' thinking in indigenous conceptual frameworks. His conceptual decolonization underlines a postcolonial critical examination of the African thought in order to retain useful indigenous concepts while discarding unquestioned Western concepts; thus the revival of African vernaculars/languages and the abandonment of the metropolitan languages inherited from colonialism.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the Kenyan writer/scholar whose early education was in Kenya, university education in Uganda then England, rejects English entirely. Indeed, his voyage in the West opened up his eyes towards the latent link between speaking and writing in English and the postcolonial/neocolonial condition. Put differently, for Ngugi, the African's use of English in the postcolonial era is an indirectly persistent endorsement of a lingering colonialism. Deductively, Wiredu's 'conceptual decolonization' defended in 1980 (published in 1995) was already a methodological imperative employed by Ngugi in 1977 when he wrote his novel, *Caitani mũ tharaba-Inĩ*, translated as *Devil on the Cross* in prison on toilet paper and when he changed his name from James to wa Thiong'o.

Ngugi's book, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986) theorizes on this issue. He observed that in Kenya English was "the language, and all the others had to bow before it in deference" (Ngugi, 1986, p.11). His question, "by our continuing to write in foreign languages, paying homage to them, are we not on the cultural level continuing that neo-colonial slavish and cringing spirit?"

(Ngugi, 1986, p.26), can be clearly answered in the affirmative. Indirectly, he puts the African writer who believes in Africa's dependence on European languages on the same footing as the politician who believes that Africa cannot surpass imperialism (Ngugi, 1986, p.26); they both contribute to the construction of what he calls the cultural bomb. The effect of the latter is to "annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their



capacities and ultimately in themselves” (Ngugi, 1986, p. 34), in one word, to alienate Africans. This alienation “starts with a deliberate disassociation of the language of conceptualisation, of thinking, of formal education; of mental development, from the language of daily interaction. It is like separating the mind from the body” (Ngugi, 1986, p. 35). To this situation, “imperialism presents itself as the cure” (Ngugi, 1986, p. 3) which renders the common sense of using local languages of other Cultures in these people’s writings problematic in African writings (Ngugi, 1986, p. 28). Alternatively, Ngugi’s cure is to retrieve the African local languages and their active role. Writing in the Gikuyu language, a Kenyan language or in any African language, he asserts, is part of the anti-imperialist struggles of Kenyan and African peoples, making of African languages the enemy of neo-colonialism. In fact, what Ngugi projects to do is a return to the normal; that is, using African languages to express African realities to African people and indirectly showing that the subaltern can speak and in his mother tongue for a genuine representation.

Ngugi remained faithful to his position. He wrote all his subsequent literary works in the Gikuyu language, and he translated them himself into English later: his *Caitani Mutharabaini* (1980) was translated as *Devil on the Cross* in 1982, while *Mũrogi wa Kagogo* (2004) was translated as *Wizard of the Crow* in 2006. His epic poem *Kenda Mũ iyũ ru: Rũgano rwa Gĩkũyũ na Mũmbi* (2018) was translated as *The Perfect Nine: The Epic of Gĩkũyũ and Mũmbi* in 2020. The only exception were *Matigari Ma Njiruiingi* (1986), translated by Wangui wa Goro as *Matigari* in 1989, and *Itũĩka Rĩa Mũrũngarũ: Kana Kĩrĩa Gĩtũmaga Andũ Mathiĩ Marũngiĩ* (2016), translated by the Pan-African collective Jalada Africa in 2016 as *The Upright Revolution: Or Why Humans Walk Upright*. Herein one must underline that his translations demonstrate that his opposition was not mean against the English language per se but against what Ngugi calls, the “imperialism of language” (Ngugi, 1993, p. 30), seen in the English language privileged position on an African soil over the local means of communication and all that it entails. Ngugi’s efforts and voice were so ceaselessly present that in the late 1960s the University of Nairobi dropped English Literature as a course of study and replaced it with African Literature.

With regard to Achebe, he seemed more or less moderate. Instead of rejecting English the way Ngugi did, he used Ibo words in his narratives



written in English. Achebe recognized the possibility of considering the African's use of European languages as a sign of betrayal, but he admitted that he used the language he had been once given (Achebe, 1975), an attitude which Ngugi qualified as a 'fatalistic logic' (Ngugi, 1986, p.7), but can't it be positioned within Bhabhian hybridity?

Achebe, contrary to Ngugi and Wiredu, viewed the English language as a medium capable of bearing the African experience provided that it undergoes alterations to suit it. Somehow, Achebe appropriated the English language, and this can be described as a strategy to reach global audiences while embedding Ibo culture, hence a postcolonial use of *le butin de guerre*, using Kateb Yacine's words.

Yet, his position cannot be seen fully against Wiredu's thesis on conceptual decolonization. In keeping Ibo words untranslated, he showed a case of the inability of the English language to reflect an African experience. This untranslatability, in fact, implied Achebe's going through a process of conceptual decolonization which made him conclude that some words should be kept in the vernacular since the English language could not translate their concepts. Therefore, in Achebe's case, the inertia Wiredu mentioned is not African but English. At this juncture, his *Things Fall Apart* can stand as a very good illustration. In this novel, Achebe integrates the Ibo proverbs and folk tales as evidence of an indigenous cultural epistemology. The taken-for-grantedness which Wiredu warns against is carefully avoided by Achebe who moreover makes of his novel a decolonizing tool in the sense that he revives the Ibo pre-colonial culture and society portrayed as an entity attacked by the colonizer who brings about chaos, fragmentation and collapse of the precolonial African societies.

In sum, alongside Said, Spivak, Bhabha, Ngugi and Achebe, Wiredu can be placed in the realm of postcolonial criticism. The pretext that he is a philosopher and not a postcolonial theorist is not strong enough as many Western philosophers are made referential figures in postcolonial critical theory. The idea that he is not excluded and can be referred to is merely a fallacy as literally his name, unlike Achebe's and Ngugi's, does not appear on the long list of postcolonial criticism bibliographies. Generally, he is overlooked even though his ideas are, besides probing, relevant to the African condition. As stated by Osha, "his project is historical,



metaphilosophical and regenerative, and this is why it can be applied to a seemingly infinite array of African contexts” (Osha, 2023, p.176).

Conclusion

This article has shown that Wiredu’s conceptual decolonization is a postcolonial imperative that must be studied and practised by Africans throughout the process of decolonization; hence its place in postcolonial criticism. According to Wiredu, decolonization is not only political, it is primarily a conceptual task. The solution to continuously embracing unquestionably some Western words/concepts is to critically review and sieve them. Obviously, this does not mean a wholesale rejection of the Western ideas and an impulsive romantization of the African tradition. A distinction between the imposed and dangerous and the useful and relevant concepts amounts to the process of conceptual decolonization, the absence of which can only reflect a state of inertia and uncritical allegiance.

The other major point revolves around language. Language, Wiredu contends, is not a static entity, and Western languages cannot replace an African one because they cannot in all cases translate an African experience. Instead, African vernaculars can. This reality attests to the dynamism of African vernaculars. In other words, an African thought is better expressed by an African mother tongue, and if a Western language intervenes due to some circumstances-like colonialism and imperialism-, a distortion of the African realities can take place.

Therefore, conceptual decolonization becomes an ethical necessity and an epistemic imperative. One is called upon not to extol African purity and not to reject wholly Western knowledge. Alternatively, a rational process of selecting appropriate concepts connected to the African context is mandatory to ensure a reflective autonomy rather than a usually uncritical deference to the West or to the African tradition. Mereley, this is the essence of conceptual decolonization, the basic purpose of which is to restore African thinkers’ capacity to define their own problems, methods and concepts. All this can be achieved thanks to the experience of the voyage in dominant discourses and taken-for-granted truths, in the way Said, Spivak and Bhabha did. The *voyage in*, which has emerged in this article as a motif, leads to structure an oppositional scholarship as Said stresses.



Moreover, conceptual decolonization as such, whether in Wiredu's, Ngugi's or Achebe's ways, can be described as a decolonizing apparatus. It can stand as a cannon in the face of a ceaselessly imperial Western enterprise that has put Africa under its scrutiny. It can also be valuable for any researcher to uncover the silenced voices, such as Wiredu's, that can enrich the body of knowledge as a whole and contribute particularly to the reclamation of their countries' histories and cultures in the postcolonial era. Thereupon, correcting, complementing and curing the body of knowledge, i.e., decolonizing it, can be possible.

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