Decolonisation, Identity, Neo-Colonialism and Power

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Abstract

This paper explores the implications of "decolonisation," first by focusing on the work of African thinker, Frantz Fanon's work in this regard, particularly his insistence that decolonisation entails the creation of "new" people, before moving on to the related question of "identity." Here the emphasis is on the work of Manuel Castells, specifically his examination of three kinds of identity-construction, the third of which he regards as being the most important category for understanding this process in the 21st century, namely "resistance identity." It is argued that this casts the decolonisation debate in South Africa in an intelligible light. An interpretation of E.M. Forster's paradigmatically "decolonising" novel, *A Passage to India*, is offered to unpack the meaning of the concept further, before switching the terrain to the question of the urgent need for a different kind of decolonisation, today, pertaining to the economic neo-colonisation of the world by neoliberal capitalism. The work of Hardt and Negri on the emerging world order under what they call "Empire" is indispensable in this regard, and their characterisation of the subject under neoliberal Empire in terms of the figures of the indebted, securitised, mediatised and represented, stresses the need for global decolonisation in the name of democracy. This part of the paper is concluded with a consideration of what decolonisation is really "all about," namely power.

Keywords: decolonisation; economic; Empire; identity; neo-colonialism; neoliberalism

Fanon and Decolonisation

One possible approach to the debate about the decolonisation of knowledge adopts an "affirmative" stance of sorts, emphasising the appropriation of any and all sources of knowledge, with the purpose of achieving relative epistemic autonomy (and, in doing so, epistemic justice) for previously unacknowledged and/or suppressed knowledge-

traditions. I wrote "relative … autonomy" because no complete autonomy is possible for human beings; we are all relatively dependent on others, on language and on culture for the means to "autonomy," and as something of human creation, knowledge-systems are subject to such "relative autonomy" as well. Frantz Fanon is a representative of this kind of decolonisation, given his appropriation of the work of Western authors such as Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud and Jean-Paul Sartre, *but* not to emulate or simply repeat their insights. Fanon used what he had learned from these thinkers to understand colonisation in all its invidious manifestations and to formulate his resistance to colonial power (Fanon 2008, 1–4; 44; 109). But more than that—and this is where the decolonisation movement in South Africa can learn from Fanon (1963)— he insisted on the necessity to turn towards the future instead of repeating the past. Decolonisation, therefore, means, for him, the creation of a new human being, impervious to the hierarchisation of humanity into a racial or cultural "centre," and a number of subaltern races and cultures—the colonised. Today, more than ever, when the neoliberal economic regime is erecting partitions, reminiscent of what Fanon (1963, 36) called "a [colonial] world divided into compartments," between people globally according to economic class, we need to embrace Fanon's decolonising vision of one, indivisible humanity. In *The Wretched of the Earth* Fanon articulates this vision poignantly in relation to decolonisation (1963, 35–36):

> Decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is, obviously, a program of complete disorder. But it cannot come as a result of magical practices, nor of a natural shock, nor of a friendly understanding. Decolonization, as we know, is a historical process: that is to say that it cannot be understood, it cannot become intelligible nor clear to itself except in the exact measure that we can discern the movements which give it historical form and content …

> Decolonization never takes place unnoticed, for it influences individuals and modifies them fundamentally. It transforms spectators crushed with their inessentiality into privileged actors, with the grandiose glare of history's floodlights upon them. It brings a natural rhythm into existence, introduced by new men, and with it a new language and a new humanity. Decolonization is the veritable creation of new men. But this creation owes nothing of its legitimacy to any supernatural power; the "thing" which has been colonized becomes man during the same process by which it frees itself.

Unless the decolonisation project in South Africa be pursued in the terms of "refusal" set out by Fanon, contributing, instead, incessantly (because it is a never-ending project) to the incremental constitution of a "new humanity," beyond racism, beyond colonisation and oppression, it runs the risk of polarising people all over again. One should remind oneself that, in Fanon's case, it was the colonial powers that had subjected Africa to their exploitative occupation which were his target of refusal; today one might refer to the economic, globalising neo-colonialism (more on this below) of the big corporations as the appropriate power to resist, given the (growing) inequalities between the North and the South, as well as within Northern hemisphere cities, where, unsurprisingly, those suffering economic discrimination are mainly from those nations

that used to be the colonised as well as the sources of slavery and, later, migrant labour. Regarding the truly revolutionary thought of Fanon, Alice Cherki (2011, 132–133) points out that:

> This time is governed by a society of contempt, where the power of money triumphs and is erected as a true ideology inducing fear of the other, regardless of what form it takes, from North to South. This ideology can be characterized by financial capital, corruption, subjection of the impoverished, and a culture of fearing the other, which leads to exclusion … securing an atmosphere for hegemonic, repressive, and violent statements.

Hence, one should not make the mistake of thinking that today, supposedly "after" historical decolonisation, the violent subordination of people does not occur any longer, even if they are no longer the "colonised" in the political sense. Before his premature death of leukaemia at age 36 in 1961, Fanon had already warned against "postcolonial nationalism," where the "same structures of domination and confiscation of wealth" were duplicated by the newly empowered. Today, Cherki (2011, 133) observes, it happens "… closest to us, outsourced factory workers, suppressed and stifled revolts and strikes and all other emerging forms of unexpected resistance qualified as illegal."

One wonders whether, under present circumstances of economic neo-colonialism— where many of those in developing countries are constantly at the receiving end of the always-advancing, innovating production of (especially automotive and electronic) commodities, exported from developed countries—a recurrence of what Fanon (in *The Wretched of the Earth*; 1963, 108–109) described as "petrification" on the part of indigenous peoples under colonial rule, perhaps in a different form, may become evident. Douglas Ficek (2011, 76), writing on Fanon and petrification, reminds one that, by "petrification," Fanon meant an excessively strong adherence to tradition in the face of the coloniser's culture, which brings about a kind of paralysis or "immobility" of the culture of the colonised, more especially so in rural areas. This socio-cultural "petrification" expresses itself as a commitment "to the old ways, to the superstitions and rituals that, however fantastic, offer outlets for their profound anger … they effectively distract themselves from the hard realities of colonialism, and this ultimately benefits the colonisers, the architects of petrification" (Ficek 2011, 76). The benefit that the globalising economic neo-colonisers of today would derive from such socio-cultural petrification on the part of the neo-colonised is the assurance that, while the latter are committed to various out-dated beliefs in an immobilised cultural tradition, the neo-coloniser would retain economic (and political) power over them. There is a valuable lesson here for proponents of decolonisation at South African universities today.[1]

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1   In a recent article (CHE 2017, 8), the Council on Higher Education (CHE) of South Africa— confirming Fanon and Ficek's insights, quotes Ndofirepi as follows: "… the problems of aping and educational borrowing growing out of globalisation and the global forces for convergence to neo-liberal norms and competitiveness as enshrined in the global university rankings offer significant

Needless to point out, the neo-colonisers go out of their way to guarantee that the postcolonial leader(s) benefit handsomely from their neo-colonial economic strategies—witness the various "gifts" (allegedly) received by government officials in the so-called "arms deal" in South Africa, while others, such as Tony Yengeni of the ANC, served time in prison for fraud after being found guilty in 2003 for receiving a similar kind of "benefit." But more seriously, there is another side to petrification that Fanon alerts one to, namely the deliberate cultivation of such petrification on the part of the people by the new leader(s), which is designed to prevent criticism of their economically privileged position, and effectively prevents the process of decolonisation from being carried to completion (Ficek 2011, 83)—in this way ensuring the people's complacency and lack of criticism of the new, "post-colonial" regime. In Fanon's words (quoted in Ficek 2011, 83):

> During the struggle for liberation the leader awakened the people and promised them a forward march, heroic and unmitigated. Today he uses every means to put them to sleep (Fanon 1963, 168).

Ficek might have quoted the sentences immediately preceding these as well (Fanon 1963, 168):

> The leader, because he refuses to break up the national bourgeoisie, asks the people to fall back into the past and to become drunk on the remembrance of the epoch which led up to independence. The leader, seen objectively, brings the people to a halt and persists in either expelling them from history or preventing them from taking root in it.

In other words, it is easy to dwell on past cultural utopias (whether of imagined cultural "purity" preceding imperialist colonisation, or successful resistance to colonial authorities), and deflect one's attention away from present (neo-) colonisation, where one has to "take root" to be able to resist it successfully. This should make it abundantly clear that Fanon's intellectual work is as relevant for new and newly-mutated varieties of colonisation today, as it was for what are now historically terminated cases of colonialism.

The Question of Identity

Given its intertwinement with issues of (de-)colonisation, the vexing question of (cultural) "identity" cannot be ignored here—after all, those intent on decolonising must, of necessity, quest after what they believe to be their own "authentic" cultural

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threats to values and cultural norms and the knowledges produced by African people …" The point is that, as long as (South) African universities allow their educational and scientific agendas to be determined by neoliberalism, their cultural "petrification" would remain the *status quo*; instead—as I have argued in this paper—(South) African universities should strive for relative autonomy rooted within, and concomitant with, a *living* cultural tradition, appropriating other knowledge traditions (including Western and Eastern ones) from a resolutely African perspective in terms of the African value placed on community (and, one may add, ecology), above that of (exploitation by) capital.

identity, if such a thing exists. Although it may be approached from various perspectives, the social theorist, Manuel Castells (2010a) seems to provide the most relevant perspective on this question in relation to that of decolonisation. His assessment of the "power of identity" must be seen in the context of his earlier analysis of the "rise of the network society" (Castells 2010b; Olivier 2014a), where he traces the emergence of contemporary society on the basis of the revolution in electronic communications media, with its roots in the invention of television, and culminating in the invention of the internet—a revolution that has left no area of cultural, social, economic and political life on Earth untouched. Castells (2010a, 6–7) regards "identity" as something that is constructed, instead of being "naturally" inherited or spontaneously created, and contrasts the manner in which identity was constructed during the modern era (which is coming to a close), with novel processes underpinning the formation of identities in the current "network society."

He distinguishes among three forms of identity-construction (Castells 2010a, 8–10): "legitimizing identity" (which depends upon dominant social institutions such as education and religion, and contributes, in turn, to the establishment and maintenance of civil society); "resistance identity" (which manifests itself as active opposition to processes of social alienation and exclusion); and "project-identity" (that appears when social agents employ cultural material for the construction of a novel, socially redefining identity, with a view to the transformation of the social structure in its entirety, such as in the feminist movement). Castells argues that the second type of identity, namely "resistance identity," may, in fact, be the most important kind of identity construction in contemporary society. It is recognisable in the generation of collective resistance against what is experienced as unbearable oppression or exclusion, specifically of identities which have been shaped comparatively clearly by historical, cultural or geographical forces and developments (Castells 2010a, 9)—an insight that resonates with Samuel Huntington's (1993) controversial views in this regard, namely that conflict in the present era would increasingly assume the form of a "clash of civilisations" (cultures), such as between Western culture and Islam, and not, as before, between divergent ideologies such as capitalism and communism. Because one of the eight "civilisations" distinguished by Huntington (1993, 25) is the African, it stands to reason that conflict between what is perceived as Western and African culture may be understood in these terms, and may simultaneously be subsumed under the aegis of what Castells labels "resistance identity." He also points out that, if and when such identities emerge in the contemporary "network society," it is usually the result of community-resistance of some kind (Castells 2010a, 12), and writes further (2010a, 11–12) [emphasis in original]:

> Under such new conditions, civil societies shrink and disarticulate because there is no longer continuity between the logic of powermaking in the global network and the logic of association and representation in specific societies and cultures. The search for meaning takes place then in the reconstruction of defensive identities around communal principles. Most of social action becomes organized in the opposition between

unidentified flows and secluded identities … I propose the hypothesis that the constitution of subjects, at the heart of the process of social change, takes a different route to the one we knew during modernity, and late modernity: namely, *subjects, if and when constructed, are not built any longer on the basis of civil societies, which are in the process of disintegration, but as prolongation of communal resistance*. While in modernity (early or late) project identity was constituted from civil society (as in the case of socialism on the basis of the labor movement), in the network society, project identity, if it develops at all, grows from communal resistance. This is the actual meaning of the new primacy of identity politics in the network society. The analysis of processes, conditions, and outcomes of the transformation of communal resistance into transformative subjects is the precise realm for a theory of social change in the information age.

It appears to me that Castells's incisive analysis of the grounds of identity-construction today allows one to understand the decolonisation project in South Africa (and elsewhere) as, precisely, part of this worldwide phenomenon of "resistance identity," where "defensive identities" emerge in the face of processes that are perceived as threatening identities that have their provenance in historical, cultural and/or geographical factors.

A Paradigmatic Literary Perspective on Decolonisation

Against this backdrop of "resistance identity," it might be productive to remind students and academic staff alike of one of the most eloquent critical literary explorations of colonialism, and of the question, what "decolonisation" would entail. I am thinking of E.M. Forster's novel (2005), *A Passage to India*, which was also made into a classic film by David Lean (1984). It is a stirring literary and cinematic evocation of India under British rule, centred around the drama of a young Indian doctor (Dr Aziz) being accused of having attempted to rape a British woman (Adela Quested), who is visiting her probable future husband (Ronny Heaslop)—who happens to be the city magistrate in the colonial city of Chandrapore—with his mother, Mrs Moore. The question of (de-)colonisation is thematised in both the novel and the film, namely, what one has to do to "find" or understand the real "India" (that is, any country colonised by a foreign power). The unfolding narrative constitutes a multi-faceted answer to the title of the novel/film, *A Passage to India*, if the latter is understood as a question: What does a "passage to India" amount to? Applied to each of the main characters, this question—which comprises an interrogatory grid of sorts—yields interestingly divergent answers.

Briefly, Miss Quested and Mrs Moore are on a visit to the city of Chandrapore (a "city of gardens") in India, more particularly to see Mrs Moore's son Ronny Heaslop, the magistrate, who also happens to be (potentially) Adela Quested's prospective husband. The nature of colonialism is insightfully conveyed in many ways by both the novel and the corresponding film—in different registers, of course, one being a literary and the other an audio-visual medium—for example when, in the novel, a group of Indian friends discuss whether or not "it is possible to be friends with an Englishman," and in

the film, where Dr Aziz and a colleague, on their bicycles, are roughly forced out of the way of a car carrying the British Viceroy and his wife, and yet do not show noticeable (and justifiable) exasperation in the face of their rude treatment. Mrs Moore and Dr Aziz inadvertently meet in a mosque where he is enjoying the peaceful surroundings, and she is seeking to escape the stuffiness of the Club. They are taken with each other—she, because she judges people intuitively and without the usual "colonial" prejudice, he—because she comes across as being the first sympathetic English lady he has met, who understands his dissatisfaction about the condescending way he is treated by the British. He even gives her the compliment of telling her that she is "Oriental." Miss Quested (as well as Mrs Moore) is interested in discovering the "real" India—much to the incomprehension and dismay of the other British (including Ronny Heaslop), who hold only contempt for Indians, thinking the "natives" are below them, and that India is a "benighted country."

Adela is particularly interested in the famous, if not notorious, Marabar caves about twenty miles from the city (about which Professor Godbole, an Indian philosopher, is strangely and portentously evasive), and as things turn out she and Mrs Moore are invited to go on a picnic to the caves (because Aziz is too ashamed of his humble bungalow to invite them there). On the day of the picnic, Mrs Moore, after an unpleasant experience in the first cave, decides not to accompany Adela, Dr Aziz and a guide to the big "pocket of caves" of the Kawa Dol because it involves climbing. In the course of a conversation about love—Adela having realised with a shock that she does not love Ronny, although they have just got engaged—Aziz is discomfited by her questions and "escapes" into a cave to have a cigarette. Not seeing Aziz, Adela also enters one of the caves, and when Aziz emerges, she is nowhere to be seen, although the guide tells him that she went into a cave.

It turns out that "something" happened in the cave, and Adela fled from it "in a state" to the bottom of the hill, coincidentally arriving there when a British woman was dropping off Mr Fielding, a schoolteacher who had missed the train that morning. Little knowing that a catastrophe is in the process of occurring, Aziz and Fielding—who are friends, unlikely as it may seem for a Brit and an Indian to be friends—joke with each other, but on their return by train to Chandrapore, to his consternation Dr Aziz is arrested by the inspector of police, on suspicion of the attempted rape of Miss Quested. To cut a long story short, although Dr Aziz is implicated by a deposition signed by Miss Quested, in the course of the court case—where Ronny Heaslop recuses himself to allow his deputy (an Indian magistrate) to preside over proceedings—something totally unexpected happens.

For most of the British, who regard the proceedings as a mere formality preceding the foregone conclusion of Aziz's (feverishly desired) conviction—an expectation shared by hundreds of Indians, mostly outside the courthouse, but for different reasons, and anticipated with feelings of righteous indignation—it comes as an incomprehensible shock, therefore, when Miss Quested, under interrogation by the prosecutor, Mr

McBryde, hesitates when he asks her whether Dr Aziz followed her into the cave, and then, more firmly, replies that he did not. When she finally insists that she is withdrawing all charges, and the presiding magistrate declares Dr Aziz fee to go, pandemonium erupts. The British are outraged, and the Indians overjoyed, and in that moment one understands what it means to be colonised, and to score an unlikely victory against the coloniser. This is brilliantly executed in the novel, and David Lean does justice to it in the film. One might say that, while colonial discourse had pre-determined that Aziz was guilty, Adela's retraction of the charges against Dr Aziz constituted discursive "dissonance," and as such was unintelligible to the colonial British.

Regarding the question which of the principal characters manage to make the "passage to India," that is, to discover the true India, the answer is complex. Dr Aziz, an Indian, who was under the spell of British power to begin with, despite his occasional grumblings about their treatment of him, is lionised by the crowd after his acquittal, and gains new self-confidence as an Indian. He opens his own clinic away from Chandrapore, and makes the "passage to (rediscovering) India" most successfully—that is, he resists the domination by the British successfully and appropriates his freedom as an Indian. Cyril Fielding and Mrs Moore, who, alone among all the British, see Dr Aziz as a true friend, may be said to make this passage to the extent that cultural "others" can do so, while Miss Quested does not, as the episode in the Marabar caves, which leaves her shaken to the core, testifies. This is presumably after being confronted by the "naked" otherness of India inside the cave—contrary to Plato's (1991, 193–196) myth of the cave, where leaving the cave into the sunlight signifies the discovery of truth, she escapes from the cave into the sunlight in a state of confusion.

Nevertheless, the novel (and film) ends with Dr Aziz finally writing her a letter to acknowledge that her courage to speak the truth was what gave him his freedom. Right at the end of the novel there is a passage where Dr Aziz and Mr Fielding—having married Mrs Moore's daughter—go horse-riding together, and in their agonistic conversation it becomes clear that although they are friends, they would only truly be able to acknowledge this friendship when India is free from British rule. The truth about decolonisation, as demonstrated in Forster's novel is, *not* to return to some mythical state that supposedly existed before the arrival of the colonising settlers—something manifestly impossible, anyway: how do you traverse the historical layers of complex cultural intertwinements that stand between the present and the past? It is to reclaim your own cultural independence, to refuse the domination of the colonising power, even when you use the knowledge of the colonial power towards your own ends and in your own way, as Dr Aziz does in Forster's novel by opening his own medical clinic for Indians. This mode of decolonisation corresponds to what Derrida (1978, 360–361), following Lévi-Strauss, has described as the practice of the *bricoleur*, which means here the piecemeal appropriation of any and all more or less "ruined" (cognitive) instruments for the construction of cultural artefacts, from the sciences to the arts. (This contrasts with the practice of the "engineer," which denotes the use of instruments of precision for the construction of systems of knowledge that supposedly resist the erosion of time.)

The question therefore arises: If Dr Aziz had to reclaim his own cultural autonomy in the face of British cultural hegemony, what is the colonising power that one should refuse today (in South Africa as in the rest of the world)?

The more urgent Decolonisation Project

Cast in the light of Forster's perspicacious literary elaboration on the conditions of possibility of decolonising oneself and one's culture, the question above can be answered as follows. In this regard it is imperative to shift one's attention from the narrow focus on "decolonisation" in the sense of removing all vestiges of erstwhile colonial powers from university curricula—or, more accurately, of appropriating Western knowledge from one's own cultural perspective, alongside the cultural knowledge that one values—and concentrate instead on the (neo-)colonisation process that is (ironically) going on right under the noses of those calling for decolonisation. I am referring to the on-going economic (neo-)colonisation of the world by global capital, which brings with it not only dependence on the all-powerful global market, but also casts one into subordination to the economic, political and military domination of the world by the capitalist states comprising Empire. Here Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2001) provide indispensable insight.

The history of colonisation in the modern world is complex, and cannot be dwelt on at length here; suffice it to say that, after centuries of European exploitation of colonial territories in terms of mineral resources and labour to grease the wheels of capitalism, the era of imperialist colonisation of the world by European powers unravelled after the Second World War. From the late 17th to the later 19th century it was aided, ironically, by productive slave labour in America, which was tolerated, if not welcomed, by capital despite it being predicated on the idea of "free labour," until it became untenable for the future of capitalist production itself (Hardt and Negri 2001, 120–124; 244–249). As everyone familiar with the Marxist principle—that economic processes constitute the foundation of all social and political practices—knows, the process of "decolonisation" that was set in motion in the 20th-century post-war period, and that is associated with the role of liberation organisations such as the Mau-Mau in Kenya during the 1950s, cannot be divorced from economic events either. But instead of restricting this to a local context, Hardt and Negri (2001, 244–245) place this in a global economic perspective:

> As a result of the project of economic and social reform under U.S. hegemony, the imperialist politics of the dominant capitalist countries was transformed in the postwar period. The new global scene was defined and organized primarily around three mechanisms or apparatuses: (1) the process of decolonization that gradually recomposed the world market along hierarchical lines branching out from the United States; (2) the gradual decentralization of production; and (3) the construction of a framework of international relations that spread across the globe the disciplinary productive regime and disciplinary society in its successive evolutions. Each of these aspects constitutes a step in the evolution from imperialism to Empire.

This historical decolonisation process did not occur in a vacuum, but unfolded in tandem with the Cold War between the Soviet Union and America, which meant that liberation organisations had to choose between these ideologically and economically divergent world powers and what they represented. With the end of the Vietnam War, which concluded the American "imperialist" role inherited by it, and given the eventual triumph of neoliberal capitalism when the USSR collapsed in 1989, in effect this meant that the new "global order" of Empire could start emerging. For the proponents of decolonisation at South African universities, it is crucial to understand the following (Hardt and Negri 2001, 246):

> Little by little, after the Vietnam War the new world market was organized: a world market that destroyed the fixed boundaries and hierarchical procedures of European imperialisms. In other words, the completion of the decolonization process signaled the point of arrival of a new world hierarchization of the relations of domination—and the keys were firmly in the hands of the United States. The bitter and ferocious history of the first period of decolonization opened onto a second phase in which the army of command wielded its power less through military hardware and more through the dollar.

The reason why this is imperative to understand is for SA "decolonisers" to be able to grasp their own position *vis-á-vis* the present, global colonising power, neoliberal Empire, and simultaneously, that the grounds for their demands are less political than economic: they are really disempowered by the fact that they—like millions of other people in the world—do not have an equitable share in the wealth produced by the world economy (see in this regard Hardt and Negri's *Multitude,* 2006). Nor should this surprise them—the dominant discourse today is that of neoliberalism, which blatantly rules the world through the structures of Empire. There is hardly any political leader in the world today who is not in thrall to neoliberal capitalism.

Where they discuss the second mechanism that organised the emerging new order in the post-war period, namely "the gradual decentralisation of production," they allow one to perceive the shape of the present order, particularly in the fact that:

> … transnational corporations … became the fundamental motor of the economic and political transformation of postcolonial countries and subordinated regions. In the first place, they served to transfer the technology that was essential for constructing the new productive axis of the subordinate countries [including those in Africa]; second, they mobilized the labor force and local productive capacities in these countries; and finally, the transnationals collected the flows of wealth that began to circulate on an enlarged base across the globe [which they still do, now more than ever] … Furthermore, the constitution of capitalist interests tied to the new postcolonial nation-states, far from opposing the intervention of transnationals, developed on the terrain of the transnationals themselves and tended to be formed under their control. (Hardt and Negri 2001, 246–247)

The third mechanism, "the construction of a framework of international relations," which accompanied the structuring function of the other two, entailed—in terms borrowed from Foucault—"the spread of disciplinary forms of production and government across the world … In the postcolonial countries, discipline required, first of all, transforming the massive popular mobilisation for liberation into a mobilisation for production. Peasants throughout the world were uprooted from their fields and villages and thrown into the burning forge of world production" (Hardt and Negri 2001, 247). If one sees apartheid as an extension of colonialism, then South Africa today (and for the last 25 years) is no exception to this rule. Ironically, the model for this disciplinary regime, which was essential for sustained production, was American, namely the Fordist model. Importantly, however, while it entailed high wages in First World countries, in the "subordinated" countries (including South Africa), this was not the case (Hardt and Negri 2001, 247–248). All of this happened under the ideological aegis of "modernisation and development"—an ideology that, as Hardt and Negri stress, has been almost exclusively that of the postcolonial elites. Again, South Africa is no exception.

Against this backdrop the irony of the oft-heard call, in South Africa, for "economic liberation," should be clear: what it means in the context of a neoliberal economy is that economically disempowered people should be "developed" and given their place in the neoliberal capitalist sun. Why ironic? Because buying into neoliberalism does not bring liberation—on the contrary, it brings enslavement to the transnational corporations. Only what Hardt and Negri (and others) conceive of as an "alternative globalisation movement," which puts economic power back into the hands of ordinary people, can bring economic decolonisation. And there are signs of a growing awareness of the need for this globally—the election of Donald Trump (however misguided and ironic) as president of the US is symptomatic of people turning in this direction, away from the political and economic elites.

Present Manifestations of the Need to Decolonise

Pursuing this theme of the present need for decolonisation, in the face of the most encompassing (neo-)colonising power in history, a bit further, one might ask what the present "symptoms" of its urgency are. For Hardt and Negri, these symptoms are an indication of a contemporary global crisis, and in their more recent *Declaration* (2012) they articulate this crisis in terms of four "figures," or "subjectivities" produced under conditions of Empire, the new sovereign economic and political power ruling the world. These are the following:

> The triumph of neoliberalism and its crisis have shifted the terms of economic and political life, but they have also operated a social, anthropological transformation, fabricating new figures of subjectivity. The hegemony of finance and the banks has produced the indebted. Control over information and communication networks has created the mediatised. The security regime and the generalised state of exception [the

use of force where international law would normally prohibit it; BO] have constructed a figure prey to fear and yearning for protection—the securitised. And the corruption of democracy has forged a strange, depoliticised figure, the represented. These subjective figures constitute the social terrain on which—and against which—movements of resistance and rebellion must act … these movements have the ability not only to refuse these subjectivities but also to invert them and create figures that are capable of expressing their independence and their powers of political action. (Hardt and Negri 2012, 9)

The figures capable of expressing their independence are precisely those who, as I have argued above, engage in a process of decolonisation. Their discussion of each of these subjectivities produced under current socio-economic and political conditions (which, under Empire, are all intertwined) brings forward just how hamstrung people in today's world are by the powers that be—Foucault would be astonished to see that the "docile bodies" that he theorised in *Discipline and Punish* (1995; originally published in French in 1975) did not yet represent the nadir of docility, which we are fast approaching today. The "indebted" is a figure that marks the general condition of being in debt today, and their enumeration of all the levels and sites of debt (including house mortgages, student loans, car-instalments, personal loans to pay any number of other debts) resonates with the experience of most people today, called the 99%, and with good reason. Loans have indeed become the primary means to be able to live in a social context, and are as effective a means to control a society as any ever devised.

But more than that, apart from "welfare" having turned into what they call "debtfare," debt may be said to take Foucaultian discipline further: it controls everything, from consumption to your very survival. The fact that, under neoliberalism, coercive control is exercised through economic, rather than disciplinary means in a Foucaultian sense, was already pointed out by Gilles Deleuze (1992) decades ago. Without exaggerating, Hardt and Negri (2012) point out that it determines one's choices, such as those confronting you when you finish your university study with a repayable loan, and have to find a job to be able to pay off your debt, or being held captive to work uninterruptedly by a mortgage on an apartment, lest you lose it. They compare debt to the work ethic, with the difference that the latter is "born within the subject," while debt starts as an external force, only to invade one's subjectivity later. Under debt, for which you are responsible, guilt (of a financial kind, in contrast to earlier forms) becomes a "form of life."

The indebted is the contemporary, non-dialectical counterpart of Hegel's slave. The figure of "the mediatised" appears today as the inverse of people's position regarding the media in former eras, when they could legitimately complain that they did not have sufficient access to information and means of expression. Hardt and Negri readily grant that there are still governments today which limit access to communicational means such as websites, and so on—something that should justly be opposed. But that is not what "the mediatised" refers to; in fact, it suggests the exact opposite, namely that

"mediatised subjects" today are choking on a surplus of information and ways to express themselves. No wonder Deleuze remarked that the problem, today, is not that people don't express themselves; it is rather how to find "little gaps of solitude and silence in which they might eventually find something to say … that might be worth saying" (quoted in Hardt and Negri 2012, 18).

Commenting on this, Hardt and Negri (2012, 19) observe: "Primarily at stake in the question of political action and liberation … is not the quantity of information, communication, and expression but, rather, their quality." This is a stark reminder of the utter vacuity of the vast bulk of tweets and texting, even if, under conditions of political resistance, they can become meaningful as means to action, as it happened at Tahrir Square in 2011 (Olivier 2014b). It is actually more complex than this, though, as they hasten to remind one—communication devices and social media *both* liberate one from, *and* tether you to your job, because with a smartphone, for instance, you can work from anywhere you may go, and often you do. This is another manifestation of being colonised by neoliberalism. Hence, "mediatisation" exacerbates the blurring of the boundaries between work and your personal life.

"The securitised" indexes the "dizzying" extent of information that is being produced about everyone most of the time, from heightened surveillance in certain places to airport security checks, election fingerprinting of voters, unemployment registers, hospital admissions and the like—covering everything (and more) that Foucault (1995) listed under the "panoptical" surveillance of modern, carceral societies. Add to this credit card purchases, texting on your mobile phone, e-mailing and internet searches, all of which may be intercepted at any time, and it should be clear that no one escapes being "securitised." As Hardt and Negri put it (2012, 19): "Security technologies have leapt forward in recent years to delve deeper into society, our lives, and our bodies." In this society everyone is expected to play the roles of both "inmates" (subject to surveillance) and "guards," in so far as you are expected to be on the alert for any "suspicious" activity, to be part of this globalised "security machine."

Despite the fact that it is constantly rammed down one's throat that we live in an age of democracy and human rights, and that the existence of repressive regimes, even today, gives credence to that claim, a curious phenomenon exists regarding the almost universally valorised representative forms of government—so-called democracy. This phenomenon entails the rejection of "representation" by many of the protest movements of especially 2011 (which Hardt and Negri list at the beginning of the book). "How is this possible"—one may ask—"to reject the gift of democracy?" Hardt and Negri explain (2012, 24):

> To understand their critique we must recognise that representation is not, in fact, a vehicle of democracy but instead an obstacle to its realisation, and we must see how the figure of the represented gathers together the figures of the indebted, the mediatised, and

the securitised, and at the same time, epitomises the end result of their subordination and corruption.

What this means is that the "power of finance and wealth" prevents ordinary (indebted) people from organising themselves effectively into political entities that could contest elections—usually only the very rich (like Donald Trump) can do so under their own steam.

Secondly, to harness one's political beliefs effectively in a mediatised world one needs the media, but the dominant media usually block independent movements, while economic and political elites easily find the financing to use the media. Lastly, through the media the natural associative or social tendencies of people are transmogrified into the "fearful isolation" of the securitised. And "representative democracy" wastes no time in making ordinary people aware of what Hardt and Negri call "this world of filth"; the "fanaticism and violence" generated by the dominant media's "scare tactics" (Hardt and Negri 2012, 27). There is hope, however, for these authors believe that all four of these "dominated figures of contemporary society" have the ability to become "figures of power" instead. It is not difficult, moreover, to find individuals who have succeeded in transforming these "figures" into "figures of power" which resist neoliberal Empire; the Indian eco-feminist activist, Vandana Shiva (2012; 2016), for example, who has resolutely resisted the sustained attempts of corporations such as Monsanto (recently acquired by Bayer), to colonise people across the world as far as their food-security is concerned. Although I cannot pursue the matter at length here, decolonisation in this ecological context also involves, crucially, resisting neoliberalism and the ecological degradation wrought by its insane policies of economic growth at all costs in a finite ecosystem (Klein 2014; Olivier 2014a). Unless universities make students critically aware of the conditions discussed above, they are failing in their democratic duty to the public.

What it is it all about: Decolonisation and Power

So what is this all about, that is, what is the driving factor behind these (neo-) colonising strategies of Empire? Here one should remind oneself of Michel Foucault's considered judgement regarding the perspective which, for him, is the appropriate one for understanding human beings—their behaviour, actions or practices. Foucault acknowledges the role of language as "discourse" (which already indicates the convergence of power and meaning), but nevertheless argues that there is something more decisive than the "great model of *langue*," or the linguistic system of signs and relations of meaning (appropriated by many of his fellow poststructuralists, including Lacan and Derrida), when it comes to grasping the behaviour of human beings (Foucault 1980, 114):

> Here I believe one's point of reference should not be to the great model of language (*langue*) and signs, but to that of war and battle. The history which bears and determines

us has the form of a war rather than that of a language: relations of power, not relations of meaning. History has no "meaning," though this is not to say that it is absurd or incoherent. On the contrary, it is intelligible and should be susceptible to analysis down to the smallest detail—but this in accordance with the intelligibility of struggles, of strategies and tactics. Neither the dialectic, as logic of contradictions, nor semiotics, as the structure of communication, can account for the intrinsic intelligibility of conflicts. "Dialectic" is a way of evading the always open and hazardous reality of conflict by reducing it to a Hegelian skeleton, and "semiology" is a way of avoiding its violent, bloody and lethal character by reducing it to the calm Platonic form of language and dialogue.

This explains the fact that Foucault (1980, 123) has inverted Clausewitz's famous formula concerning the relation between politics and war to read: "Politics is the continuation of war by other means." This applies to the present struggle concerning decolonisation in South Africa as well, because it is also, in the final analysis, about power. And if anyone should argue that it is not, at least not about what is commonly (and erroneously) regarded as "political power" in a restricted sense, allow me to remind them, again with reference to Foucault, that the very discursive form that this struggle has assumed, testifies to its constitutive imbrication with power-relations. In his inaugural address, Foucault elaborated on those mechanisms which function to "control" the working of discourse in societies at all times, albeit articulated by him in an exemplary postsructuralist fashion, namely by bringing together the particular (that which changes over time) and the universal (that which is encountered in every society). What is most pertinent to my present argument is Foucault's observation, formulated as one of the principles specified under *rules for the conditions of employment* of discourse (Foucault 1972, 227), namely "social appropriations of discourse," where Foucault specifically refers to education. He elaborates on it as follows:

> Education may well be, as of right, the instrument whereby every individual, in a society like our own, can gain access to any kind of discourse. But we well know that in its distribution, in what it permits and in what it prevents, it follows the well-trodden battle-lines of social conflict. Every educational system is a political means of maintaining or of modifying the appropriation of discourse, with the knowledge and the powers it carries with it. (Foucault 1972, 227)

Here I must insist that readers set aside, for the moment, that I am invoking a "Western" thinker for the understanding of (the discourse of) decolonisation, where it should be clear that "discourse" means something like "the use of language for the promotion or contesting of existing power-relations." No thinker, Western, African or Asian can escape the discursive functioning of language, because languages, despite their differences, all function diacritically, that is, on the well-known pattern of signification uncovered by De Saussure, namely a system of signs comprising signifiers (spoken or written words) and their corresponding signifieds (conceptual meanings), which organise the world in terms of power relations.

Conclusion

As I have argued elsewhere (Olivier 2018), "decolonisation" as the demand that university curricula be purged of contaminating Western influences, is underpinned by an untenable logic, which presupposes that a "pure" African culture and/or knowledge be attainable. This may be seen as a projection of a *desire* for an imagined past, rather than a past that *can* be reached in unadulterated form. While this desire is understandable, given the past (and present) subordination of Africa, India and other parts of the world to imperialist colonial powers, I argue here that Fanon's insight into the need for moving beyond colonialism towards a "new humanity" offers a more worthy goal to pursue, even if it is perhaps only a regulative utopian ideal. Utopia has, after all, a critical function insofar as it indicts the degraded present. In this regard, Hardt and Negri's critique of the neoliberal order of Empire is a salutary reminder that the true vocation of decolonisation, today, is to resist the neo-colonialism that Empire, or neoliberalism, perpetrates globally, mainly by economic means. Only by working towards a relatively autonomous condition, economically, politically and culturally, can (South) Africa avoid being just another source of wealth for the transnational corporations which comprise the economic face of Empire. To this end, education—which, as Foucault shows, is a powerful source of discursive power—can and must be enlisted to equip students intellectually to be able to confront the forces of Empire. A multi-linguistic approach to education would go far to achieve this end, instead of the Anglo-monolingualism which plays right into the hands of Empire.

My position is indebted to that of Fanon to a large degree, and like Fanon, who did not hesitate to use knowledge gained from Western sources against the West (Europe), I do not believe that one should burn one's epistemic bridges. One cannot avoid appropriating knowledge from any cultural or scientific source where it is to be found, and in doing so making it your own, to be used for your own cultural ends, without being subordinate to any other power.[2]

2　Jansen (2017, 11) seems to be in substantial agreement with me on this issue, where he states: "Surely the most powerful statement on decolonisation would be to provide every school student with a high quality education that enables them to engage the world of science, knowledge and authority with confidence and competence." See also Jansen's (2017, 13) insistence, referring to pre-university school education, that university students should be "… prepared with the capabilities to acquire critical knowledge and succeed in post-school studies." It is particularly his use of "critical" that resonates with my argument. The point concerning the need for Africans to retain (relative) epistemic and cultural autonomy, here phrased in terms of "primary," but nevertheless "communicable" African experience, is also made by the CHE (2017, 8–9) with reference to the work of Nkoane, Ramose and Essop.

Acknowledgement

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