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BOOK REVIEW

The Case for Epistemic Decolonization: How Africa Can Take Its Development upon Itself

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Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni. *Decolonization, Development and Knowledge in Africa: Turning Over a New Leaf*. London and New York: Routledge. 2020. 188 pp., $160 hardback, $44.05 ebook (ISBN: 978-1003030423).

How do "decolonization," "development," and "knowledge" relate to one another, especially when applied to Africa? Most people understand the first two—that is, the achievement of decolonization in African states; development as an ongoing, problem-solving, international endeavor; and the specific developmental challenges that arise in postcolonial states. Knowledge, however, proves more elusive. In the decolonization process, many believe colonial parent states held knowledge that they imparted to postcolonial states. In the context of development, many see knowledge as an outcome of developed states' successes, something to be distributed to less developed states worldwide. Reflections about the appropriateness of Western-centrism and the colonial roots of mainstream worldviews in international relations (IR) encourage a rethinking of those views and, consequently, Africa's place in the world's past, present, and future. Decolonial works such as *Decolonization, Development, and Knowledge in Africa* further that rethinking.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni builds on and synthesizes his munificent work on African decolonial studies. In a systematizing, almost pedagogical effort, he combines Pan-Africanist thought and the Latin American modernity/coloniality school, showing synergies, notwithstanding their different genealogies. As a scholar-activist proudly asserting a normative approach, he embodies a "writer in politics" (Ngugi wa Thiong'o 1981), siding with the "wretched of the earth"—those actively striving for ground in public debates.

Unlike his previous work, Ndlovu-Gatsheni emphasizes the third element of the triad in this book: *knowledge*. Knowledge is fundamental in "turning over a new leaf"—that is, to realize an African decolonial turn (p. 17–40), and advance an "African idea of Africa" (p. 87). The analysis shows how the processes of "decolonization" and "development" in African states are incomplete without a fundamental reconsideration of "knowledge" as *epistemic freedom*. As a precondition for authentic decolonization and development, knowledge must emancipate itself from premodeled (Eurocentric) ways of thinking. The reasoning, which adheres to the "epic school of colonialism" (i.e., colonialism fundamentally altered African situations; p. 30), revolves around the opposite Ngugian metaphors of "dismemberment" (operated by modern/colonial power) and "re-membering" (p. 73). "Re-membering" is understandable as an imperative of memory, reconstitution of common

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membership, and reunification. It implies the disruption of an ongoing coloniality of power (i.e., control over the economy, family, and education, as well as exploitation of labor and natural resources), of knowledge (i.e., interference with modes of knowing), and of being (i.e., de-humanization). Successful disruption, in turn, depends on active resistance and African agency. Ndlovu-Gatsheni calls for just such a "re-membering." The decolonial turn starts with African populations (and, eventually, their allies) epistemically liberating themselves from the "cognitive/metaphysical empire" (p. 29); it reasserts the primacy of epistemic freedom—that is, recognition that all humans have legitimate knowledge systems—over epistemic injustices.

The first element of the triad, *decolonization*, reads as the unfinished process of liberation from the "European game" (with "Europe" as synecdoche for "Global North"; Fanon 2011), including its racism, exploitation, dehumanization (i.e., cultural and psychological alienation), and material dispossession (pp. 1–15). Ndlovu-Gatsheni recalls how transnational South–South solidarities (e.g., "Pan-Africanism" and the "Bandung spirit"; pp. 45–65) tried to materialize such demands, and how "Blackness" and "Africanness" (pp. 69–87) rose as forms of identity specular to racism—potentially problematic because they originate as a response to the same divisive logic. The decolonization process, in contrast, implies a recalibration of IR, particularly the North–South divide, toward a new humanism—one not based on universalized particularistic knowledge, but on "pluriversality" (p. 24).

Ndlovu-Gatsheni analyzes the second element of the triad, *development,* in the wake of Africa's "entrapment" within the global economic system (since the Atlantic slave trade). Close to post-development theory, Ndlovu-Gatsheni considers the limits of development as neoliberal economic growth and globalization, calling for us to delink development from an "exhausted" model (p. 96) that stems from Western faith (Rist 2013) and institutions (p. 112). Development is, in his view, only possible through the decolonial concept of *African Renaissance* (AR), or a process of self-sustained rehumanization that autonomously searches for a democratization path that encapsulates political, economic, cultural, and epistemic decolonization (Diop 1990; Nabudere 2001; Ngugi wa Thiong'o 2009). Because AR passes through both delinking and continental unification, the nexus with Pan-Africanism becomes clear (p. 120).

AR has had multiple, partly contrasting, conceptualizations. The perspective proposed by the New Partnership for African Development, for instance, is identical to neither the one suggested by Diop (1990) nor that theorized by Ngugi wa Thiong'o (2009). Ndlovu-Gatsheni offers a broad analysis, but not a systematic explanation, of the similarities and differences among these. Although the author leans toward the Ngugian perspective, the book would be more intelligible if it better explicated these different perspectives.

The relevance of *epistemic decolonization* manifests throughout the entire book. Connecting to the Rhodes Must Fall Movement, it endorses the need to rediscover "African humanities," implement African curricula (not merely a "university in Africa"; p. 156), provincialize Europe, deprovincialize African knowledge systems (p. 142–65), and invert the material and psychological extraversion that impedes development. In so doing, it resumes a multidimensional quest for a decolonized Africa in a "decolonized, de-patriarchized, de-imperialized, detribalized, de-corporatized, and genuinely democratized" global order (p. 87). Decolonization and development, through knowledge, are individual and collective objectives that the majority of Africans themselves must achieve, with visionary leadership and humble followership (e.g., allies) playing complementary roles. This only becomes possible when we de-Westernize development *and* knowledge.

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