AFRICA'S SECOND STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM: WHAT'S DECOLONIZATION GOT TO DO WITH IT?

Revised Text of a Public Lecture delivered before the African Studies Centre, University of Leiden, Leiden, The Netherlands on September 7, 2023

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One caveat is in place before I proceed to make the case I do in this lecture. In a recent interview with Mr. Sjoerd de Jong of NRC that I am sure some of you in my audience here today have read, I was asked the following questions:

De Jong: Here in Holland there is, as I told you, much debate about the Dutch slave trade. It's the main topic in the national conversation about colonialism.

How does the trans-Atlantic slave trade fit in your analysis of 'decolonization' and the effects of colonialism? You make some very poignant remarks in the book on how the topic of slavery brings the distinction between decolonisation1 and 2 in sharper focus (p, 42-44).

Could you say something on this topic? Would appreciate it very much!

O.T.: I think it is a problem to link colonialism and slavery without being very clear about how exactly the trans-Atlantic slave trade which was more pronounced or direct in West, Central, and Southern Africa relates to colonialism in those areas as opposed to how colonialism unfolded in

other parts of Africa and the causative factors as well as the contours of colonialism and its consequences in those places.

Yes, there was a connection between the trade and colonialism for the Dutch but how this is to be used ni to explain phenomena, say, in Africa, including South Africa, Ghana, Senegambia, is something that must follow my insistence that we adopt a more granular approach rather than a general approach that jumbles together stuff that deserve separation, if only analytically.

Of course, as I indicated during our conversation, if coming to terms with the Netherlands' past in the involvement in the slave trade and the impact that has had on racial relations in the country in the past and now and the country is now exercised by the need to revise its history, tell a truer version of it, accept responsibility for the consequences of this in its relations with its black folks in the metropole and in places in South America and the Caribbean, people often forget Dutch trade and colonial adventures in West Africa, especially in present-day Ghana, and people want to capture that under the rubric of decolonization, I cannot object. I would doubt, though, that decolonization as a concept has much explanatory purchase in even that case. Certainly, I welcome questions and comments on this during the discussion to follow.

Introduction

One of the most deleterious consequences of decolonizing discourse is that, given its overweening concern with detecting slights and correcting errors about Africa and trying to showcase African achievements in the face of racist denial of same and that showcase built entirely on scrupulously identity-inflected foundations, it ends up giving short shrift to African achievements in domesticating foreign ideas, processes, institutions, and practices. On this score, I must remain ever thankful to African and Africanist scholars who restrict themselves only to

such African phenomena as can be certified to owe their genealogy to "absolute autochthony" or close to it. One consequence of this restriction of the scholarly imagination is (1) the orphaning in and by African and Africanist scholarship of original African contributions to wide swathes of human practices from language to politics, from music to fine art, from philosophy to international relations theory; (2) the misdescription of [In line with some themes from the Introduction to my book, it would be interesting what decolonizers have to say about Afrobeats and Amapiano as African music that is taking the world like a storm!] if not a near total lack of awareness of life as it is led at present across the continent. I give an example of (1) without further elaboration and I devote the rest of the lecture to showing how (2) is reflected in concrete reality at the present time. While our scholars are busy chasing slights, life is happening on the continent behind their back.

Once, as is often the case with decolonizers, we conflate modernity with colonialism and Westernization, we simultaneously even if unwittingly make common cause with those who racialize thought and seek to unjustifiably ascribe ownership of a common human inheritance to only one small portion of it. It is bad enough for those like me seeking to domesticate modernity in our ex-colonies, it is much worse for those who, according to my friend and most distinguished theorist of international relations, Siba Grovogui, contrary to accepted wisdom and the racialized narratives of the discourse of modernity and the political history of colonizing powers, played crucial roles at pivotal points in the survival of the French republic and its liberal republican institutions during and immediately following the Second World War. In those situations, it turned out that the better singers of freedom's song, the abler defenders of republicanism, and the best interpreters of the core tenets of modernity were not its much/vaunted "owners" but those the latter derided as needful of evolution towards it before

they could be considered worthy of its benefits. As a study in modern African political philosophy enacted from the vantage point of International Relations Theory, Beyond Eurocentrism and Anarchy: Memories of International Order and Institutions (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) is a rebuke to those who "assume that Africans, their modes of thought, ideas, and actions have [not] been integral to the dramas of modernity." [p.8] We all should take an interest in the careers of Félix Éboué, Gabriel D'Arboussier, and Daniel Ouezzin Coulibaly and their role in securing French political institutions and, by extension, France, from the ravages of fascism while the Second World War lasted. I am not as conversant with the history of Dutch colonialism and the intellectual ferment that characterized it. For scholars in this land who wish to correct the record, please, stop looking at Africans within your purview only as mute presences or permanent subalterns in Dutch intellectual history, take their ideas seriously as worthy interlocutors—regardless of the attractiveness or lack thereof of their views—and educate the future better than the past was miseducated or inadequately educated.

When it comes to (2), we have a situation in which it appears that there is a fundamental breach between decolonizing scholarship and how life is led on the continent that is the principal object of its solicitation. It makes problematic in the extreme decolonizers' repeated declamations that they are fighting colonialism and its continuing depredations in the continent. I argued in my book that with the conclusion of what I called decolonization$_1$ colonialism ended in the continent. Ironically the only subsisting case of colonialism in the continent is Morocco's continuing colonial adventure in Western Sahara against African and world opinion and, most important, the wishes of the Sahraoui people. No review of my book that I am aware of so far has suggested that I am wrong on this score. Some have taken issue with my elucidation of neocolonialism. Again, none so far has suggested that neocolonialism is qualitatively continuous

with colonialism. And none has dared argue against the alternative interpretations I offered in the book of Nkrumah's characterization of neocolonialism much less Obafemi Awolowo's account of the same phenomenon. Others have merely asserted that I am discounting the continuing impact of colonialism on the continent.

Here is one of them: "While Taiwo has a point, his call for a total abandonment of the concept, ignores the realities of continuities in discontinuities of colonialism in contemporary times. Of course, decolonization like all other concepts might not be adequate in explaining the myriad and multifaceted challenges of today, but it remains a relevant grammar of liberation confronting production and reproduction of colonialities." [Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "In Memory of Anton Wilhelm Amo: Genealogies of Decolonization and Tasks of Decoloniality in the 21st Century", Anton Wilhelm Amo Lectures No. 9 (Halle-Wittenberg: Universitat Halle-Wittenberg, 2022), pp. 24-25.] I am not sure Ndlovu-Gatsheni realizes what a fatal concession—"while Taiwo has a point"—is represented in the opening clause of the quote. What makes this concession fatal is that I do not see anything to recommend in decolonizing discourse as I indicated in my book. I have asked that we dispense with the trope altogether, not that we preserve some bit of it. If he is willing to concede that the very idea that has practically grounded his fame and principally his scholarship "might not be adequate in explaining the myriad and multifaceted challenges of today", the onus lies on him to show that I am wrong in claiming that there are alternative and, I insisted in my book, better explanations for those same challenges. Beyond the identity-driven concerns of scholars like him, which I don't share, there is really not much to recommend the so-called "grammar of liberation" for which he wishes to continue to massage the decolonization trope. Given that he has chosen not to respond to the complex arguments and alternative models that populate my book, I think I am right to look

forward to more robust engagements with my arguments from others. I am quite content, though, to have us remain on our parallel paths and let our respective audiences choose which path speaks better to them. I can live with that.

Even among those who, like Ndlovu-Gatsheni, have accused me of discounting the continuing impact of colonialism, none has taken up my charge to show that colonialism-based explanations are the only, principal, or best ones either for historical events or contemporary conditions across the continent. Incidentally, it is very difficult to prosecute that case against the author of a work titled How Colonialism Preempted Modernity in Africa. I am not sure they are paying attention.

What is the second struggle for freedom?

I first introduced the idea of a second struggle for freedom into my work in an op-ed I published in a now defunct Nigerian newspaper as a way to make sense of the then still breaking Arab African Spring in 2011, long before the decolonizing trope attained prominence. I have in the intervening period become fully convinced that what I used then as a heuristic device captures the reality of a new dawn in African life and thought that I remain convinced even now is not being accorded the attention it deserves.

In Against Decolonization: Taking African Agency Seriously, the book that furnishes the basis for my talk here today, I identified two senses of decolonization. I called them decolonization$_1$ and decolonization$_2$, respectively. The first refers to the process through which a place or a people that had been under colonial rule become free of their colonial rulers and assume responsibility for directing the course of their lives under their own agency again. I argue that this is an idea of decolonization that is very easy to establish, can easily be verified,

and has demonstrable consequences for the lives of the decolonized. In the literature, especially when it comes to Africa, this is what is called, derided is a better word, "flag independence". Derided because many in the decolonizing industry, that is what it has become and quite a thriving one, if you ask me, insist that this was an incomplete decolonization because the countries are still very much under the thumb of their erstwhile colonial overlords. This, so the case goes, is to be seen not just in the continuing control of the politics and economics of the former colonies but, more importantly in the continuing overbearing impact of colonial ideas, practices and processes on the culture, expansively conceived, of the nominally independent countries. This latter is what I have styled decolonization$_2$. On this alternative conception, in the aftermath of the original decolonization, the ex-colonized must not evince, much less embrace, elements of life and thought that are traceable to the colonizers or were part of colonial misrule while such lasted in relevant territories. This is the decolonization that I am convinced is incoherent and has no significant value when it comes to our making sense of the life and times of ex-colonized and, therefore, must be expurgated from our discourse.

Even if we find that the erstwhile colonial overlords continue to dominate the politics and economics of the former colonies, it is implausible to say that the single, principal, or best explanation for that outcome is colonialism. This is where the issue of the agency of the ex-colonized demands attention. If the latter's will is so weak or addled by colonialism such that nothing they do could overcome the dominance of their former rulers in the post-independence period, where then lies the capacity—beyond a lot of ink and depleted forests—of decolonizing discourse to arm them with this strength to take control of their own destinies. I, on the contrary, am raising questions about agency and what role it plays in the current state of affairs. This is because, in my view, permanently assigning subalternity to Africans comes straight from a racist

playbook and makes it impossible for us to acknowledge, work with, much less celebrate African agency and its many manifestations, trends and tendencies.

What I have styled decolonization$_1$ coincides with what I earlier called the first struggle for freedom. This was the struggle fought by all parts of Africa for independence from colonialism and its depredations. People often lose sight of the reference to "all parts of Africa" because, for instance, when the Spring was going on, I actually drew some gasps from my audience at a Town Hall event in Seattle, Washington, in February 2011, when I spoke of the Arab African Spring and this because of the artificial separation of the continent both in the literature and in the global, including African, imagination. Yes, the North Africans secured independence earlier than their peers in the rest of the continent. But that does not mean that the aims that informed their respective struggles for independence were not the same. What is more, they were all united in the goal of their struggle: they wanted freedom.

Africans wanted the freedom to order their own affairs as they see fit; they did not want to be ruled by any government that they had no hand in installing; they wanted their human dignity restored from the battering it had taken under colonial rule; they wanted governments that were responsible and responsive to them. Above all, they wanted to be FREE.

In their efforts towards a continental union which culminated in the May 25, 1963, inauguration of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, the original signatories to the Charter included the leaders of the North African countries. Central to their coming together was to harness their collective strength to preserve the freedom they had just won from colonialism. Kwame Nkrumah, one of those signatories, put it very well: "In our struggle for freedom, parliamentary democracy was as vital an aim as independence. The two were inseparable. It was not our purpose to rid the country the country of the colonial régime in

order to substitute an African tyranny. We wanted to free our people from arbitrary rule, and to give them the freedom to choose the kind of government they felt would best serve their interests and enhance their welfare." [Kwame Nkrumah, Africa Must Unite (New York: Praeger, 1963), p. 66.] I am not sure that this preoccupation with freedom was as salient in the founding of the current African Union under the imprimatur of the likes of Muammar Gaddafi, Robert Mugabe, Yoweri Museveni, Hosni Mubarak [one and all personifications of "an African tyranny"], and other authoritarian and dictatorial types. And the Chinese Communist Party is setting up a Party school in Uganda to train future one-party apparatchiks, no less! But I'll let that slide for now.

Unfortunately, once independence was obtained, Africa's rulers, including Nkrumah, decided that the struggle for freedom was over and done with. They proceeded to put in place all manner of political contraptions, all designed to subvert and deny the freedom of their people, turned their citizens to subjects, substituted their wills for those of their people when it came to the installation of governments all across the continent. Any more trucking with freedom? No, they had their coats of arms, their flags, their national anthems, and so on. It was almost as if they thought that the struggle they had led for independence did not include the freedom of individual citizens to have, hold, and seek to realize their own conceptions of the good life; the proverbial freedom to be let alone, especially by their governors; the impermissibility of governmental interference with the details of their daily lives; limits on the powers of government; and the sanctity of their dignity and their life.

FREEDOM	1st Struggle	2nd Struggle
	• For groups (countries, polities)	• For groups within groups
	• from rule they have not consented to and is imposed from outside	• For individual autonomy
	○ Motivated by exploitation	• Inviolate dignity of the individual
	○ Dominated by lack of interest in, much less allowing the colonized to choose how they wish to be ruled	• For the basic civil rights to freedom of expression, conscience, association, privacy
	○ Marked by overexploitation of natural resources without development	• Right to choose your rulers and have them be responsible and responsive to you
		• The right to be let alone

Watching the images in diverse media across the continent since the Spring, the interviews with young and old, men and women, from all walks of life at the barricades, it was clear back then, that much more than the chronic economic and other problems that they have to deal with daily, paramount in their demands was their absolute insistence that THEY MUST BE FREE! When Mohammed Bouazizi committed the brave act of self-immolation that triggered the Tunisian revolution, he wasn't dying for country, ethnic group, or religion: he could no longer take the repeated assault on his freedom and dignity, as well as that of his countrymen and women. Therein lies the ultimate lesson of the current movements for change in both Africa and the rest of the world. I ask, what's decolonization got to do with all this?

That last question is not the least bit rhetorical. Indeed, it is my apprehension that our decolonizers are not listening that motivated, in part, my rebuttal of their claims in my book. Unfortunately, Africans have never been celebrated for being singers of freedom's song. Decolonizers are continuing this scandalous pattern. Yet, all it takes to correct this misleading impression is to look at the records ever since slavery and the trans-Atlantic slave trade and what you will find is that, in the context of modernity, Africans have appropriated the tenets of modernity, fought their oppressors in the name of those tenets, especially the very modern idea that to be human is to be free, and, even when they don't mean it, especially when they don't mean it, African rulers have to continue pretending that they are committed to the freedom of their peoples, in their status as individuals not as groups, not just their countries. This last distinction, as we point out presently, is not otiose.

In previous iterations of the dominant idea in this presentation, I had been concerned with writing into the record the rich history of African thinkers' engagement with the idea of freedom derived from modernity ever since the nineteenth century origins of modern African social and

political philosophy, through the struggle for independence, till now. Here is a sampler. In chapter 6 of How Colonialism, I reported two experiments at authoring and instituting a government based on the consent of the governed a la modernity in two areas of Ghana and Nigeria, respectively, in the nineteenth century. Incidentally, one of the key scholars of the Ghana experiment is your own Pieter Boele van Hensbroek of Groningen University.

At the turn of the twentieth century, as I have also offered elsewhere, the principle of governance by consent founded on the metaphysical template of the self, derived from the specifically modern principle of subjectivity, was used as a critical tool to shame British colonial administrators into seeing the evil of its denial of African freedom. Here is Joseph E. Casely Hayford on the question of who ought to rule when not all can rule.

First, he provided a basis for his agitation for self-rule in the idea of freedom.

> We are living in a new age and a new order of which we who participate in them, are hardly aware. One important element of this new order is the growing consciousness of our race the world over, of which practical statesmanship must take cognizance. Among world problems to-day is the appeal which goes from the heart of the African to be accorded certain rights which are common to humanity; …
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> We claim that we have the right to our opinion and to the express of it. We say that we have passed the childhood stage, and that, much as we appreciate the concern of our guardians, the time has come for us to take an intelligent, active part in the guiding of our own national destiny; and that is the primary fact that has called into being the National Congress of British West Africa. [Magnus

J. Sampson, West African Leadership: Public Speeches delivered by J. E. Casely Hayford (London: Frank Cass, 1969), p. 67.)

Then he proceeds to contend that no government ought to be instituted unless it is based on the consent of the governed.

> We claim, in common with the rest of mankind, that taxation without representation is a bad thing, and we are pledged, as all free peoples have had to do, that in our several communities the African shall have that common weapon for the protection and safeguarding of his rights and interests, namely, the franchise. It is desirable, we hold, that by our vote we shall determine by what laws we shall be governed and how the revenues which we help to put together shall be utilized.
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> Equally do we hold with others that there should be free scope for the members of the community, irrespective of creed or colour, to hold any office under the crown or flag to which a person's merits entitle him or her. [Sampson, p. 68.]

Let us fast-forward to the latter part of the 20th century and what we find is what I claim has not received the attention it deserves from African and other scholars of the global African world.

That Africans never gave up on freedom is attested by the prevalence of that word

> in the discourse of Africa's independence struggle and its aftermath. Obafemi Awolowo wrote Path to Nigerian Freedom; Kwame Nkrumah wrote Towards Colonial Freedom and I Speak of Freedom; Oginga Odinga lamented the unfulfillment of the promise of freedom after independence was won in Not Yet Uhuru [Swahili for 'freedom']; Julius Nyerere wrote Freedom and Development; Nelson Mandela knew that there was No Easy Walk to Freedom; and Kenneth Kaunda asserted: Zambia Must be Free. These and others are some of the basic texts of modern African political philosophy. One only wished that our professional philosophical output would reflect this simple fact. Nor were these preoccupations with freedom limited to political leaders or thinkers. They also featured in popular arts, especially highlife music by stars ranging from Ghana's E.T. Mensah to Nigeria's Victor Olaiya and Adeolu Akinsanya. [Olufemi Taiwo, "'The Love of Freedom Brought Us Here': An Introduction to Modern African Political Philosophy", South Atlantic Quarterly, vol. 109, no. 2 (Spring 2010), p. 407.]

I can cite equivalents in Fuji, a later genre, and earlier ones like calypso and reggae.

Here are two African philosophers who insisted that the struggle for independence was a lot more than a struggle for new flags, national anthems, and bureaucracies dominated by African exploiters. At the very beginning of Africa Must Unite we have the following: "Freedom! Hedsole! Sawaba! Uhuru!" [Nkrumah, Africa Must Unite, p. ix], all linguistic variations on the simple idea of freedom. Kwame Nkrumah continued: "In this [twentieth] century there have already been two world wars fought on the slogans of the preservation of

democracy; on the right of peoples to determine the form of government under which they want to live. Statesmen have broadcast the need to respect fundamental freedoms, the right of men to live free from the shadow of fears which cramp their dignity when they exist in servitude, in poverty, in degradation and in contempt" [Nkrumah, p. ix]. Finally, "In our struggle for freedom," he wrote, "parliamentary democracy was as vital an aim as independence. The two were inseparable. It was not our purpose to rid the country of the colonial régime in order to substitute an African tyranny. We wanted to free our people from arbitrary rule, and to give them the freedom to choose the kind of government they felt would best serve their interests and enhance their welfare" [Nkrumah, p. 66. My emphasis.]

So far, Nkrumah. We now supply evidence from Obafemi Awolowo. Writing in his autobiography, Awolowo affirmed his unhesitating and unequivocal preference for Western democracy in the context of the then existing division of the world into ideological camps. [Awolowo, AWO: The Autobiography of Chief Obafemi Awolowo (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), p. 309.] His unyielding and, till his death, undiminished commitment to liberal democracy was an integral part of his embrace of the much wider movement of modernity. This is not the place to expound upon this larger claim. I limit myself here to pointing out how this democratic preference has not been seriously studied or canvassed by scholars of Awolowo, not to talk of his followers. Yet, the investment in liberal representative democracy based on the party system and universal adult suffrage, in which free citizens freely choose their representatives in electoral contests marked by clear articulation of ideas and policies, ranks as Awolowo's most significant commitment.

As we planned for Nigeria's independence, we were fully conscious that freedom

> from British rule does not necessarily connote freedom for individual Nigerian citizens. I and most of my colleagues are democrats by nature, and socialists by conviction. We believe in the democratic way of life: equality under the law, respect for the fundamental rights of individual citizens, and the existence of independent and impartial tribunals where these rights could be enforced. We believe that the generality of the people should enjoy this life and do so in reasonable abundance. The most detestable feature of British administration was that the governed had no say in the appointment of those who governed them. A Nigerian administration by Nigerians must be erected on the general consent and the united goodwill of the majority of the people. In my view, there can be no satisfactory alternative to this. At the same time I fully recognize that the healthy growth of a democratic way of life requires the existence of an enlightened community led by a group of people who are imbued with the all-consuming urge to defend, uphold and protect the human dignity and the legal equality of their fellow-men. [Awolowo, AWO: The Autobiography of Chief Obafemi Awolowo (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), p. 309. My emphasis.]

Those in the know can detect echoes of John Stuart Mill and Thomas Jefferson regarding the improvability of human nature and the central role of public education in improving the capacity of ordinary citizens to use the vote judiciously. As I have argued elsewhere, the hybridity hinted at in these various discussions is essential to modernity or any other human ideas, especially those that survive and spread. [See Olúfẹ́mi Táíwò, "Of Problem Moderns and Excluded Moderns: On the Essential Hybridity of Modernity," Paul C. Taylor, Linda Martin Alcoff, and

Luvell Anderson, eds., The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Race, (New York and London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 14-27.]

While Nkrumah led his country, Awolowo never had the chance to lead his. Given this, we are not in a position to know how much fidelity he would have borne to his commitment to the principles he enunciated. Unfortunately, in the case of Nkrumah, the reason that Africans, six decades after the successful conclusion of the first struggle for freedom, are still clamoring for their freedom is traceable to the failure of leaders like him to act true to their philosophical declamations when they were in position to do so as rulers of various African countries. In both cases, however, there was a commitment to liberal democracy founded upon their study of modern political philosophy and the principles enunciated by both of them are the same ones that animate the countries, e.g., the United States, even though they are under attack there, too, that we look up to as models of the democratic way of life. Remember January 6, 2021? At the bottom of those is the core principle that no one ought to be bound by the dictates of a government in the constitution of which she has had no hand: this is the principle of governance by consent that emerged at the dawn of the modern age. Although Nkrumah subverted the same foundations when he imposed one-party rule on his country, Awolowo was resolutely opposed to one-party rule, and he did not think that a government could be legitimate that was not a product of the popular will freely expressed through the mechanism of fair elections. [Awolowo, The People's Republic, (Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1968), 'Part Three: Blueprint for Self-Rule']. [Of course, Awolowo served in a military regime at a crucial moment in Nigeria's post-independence history and some may be inclined to query his democratic bona fides on that score. This is not the place to litigate this issue. It is worthy of note that he parted ways with that regime once the national emergency that was his justification for being a part of it was over and

that regime was dragging its feet on restoring democratic rule to the country.] (This is a good place to share with students, graduate and undergraduate here present, the treasure trove that awaits them in African political philosophy, especially the modern period, when it comes to sophistication, heterogeneities, and heterodoxies in the ranks of African thinkers. I dare you to find similar positive pointers to enlightening and enlarging scholarship in the annals of decolonizing discourse.) He also was unequivocal in his sympathy with liberal democracy. "In my view, therefore, democracy exists only when the people are free, periodically and at their will, to re-elect or remove those who have been elected by them to administer their affairs. It is when this freedom exists that man can grow into the self-reliant and fearless creature that God intends him to be." [Awolowo, AWO: The Autobiography of Chief Obafemi Awolowo, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), p. 272.]

Both Nkrumah and Awolowo were insistent that the new regimes put in place after independence should not replicate the ills that characterized the colonial regime, especially its penchant for arbitrary rule, rule that is not consented to by those whom it binds. The centerpiece of this commitment to democracy is the idea of freedom. I am suggesting that political philosophy in contemporary Africa needs to retool and revamp its inventory of concepts to take account of this rich repository that our thinkers have bequeathed to us. The decolonization trope is a bulwark against this engagement.

When we give the appropriate recognition to the disquisitions of African thinkers there are significant implications for our understanding of statecraft, structures of governance, grounds of legitimacy in a polity, the limits of political power and its distribution, the principles of citizenship and what individuals or groups may or may not do to or with the body and appurtenances thereof of another.

Although I do not give more illustrations in this lecture, my research again convinces me that the treasury is no less rich from Awolowo's preference for federalism to Mahmoud Taha's efforts to rethink the relationship between Islam and modernity [Mahmoud Mohamed Taha, The Second Message of Islam, trans. Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, revised ed. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996] or Abdel Khaliq Mahgoub's insistence on using Marxist-inflected modernity to fight colonialism and its aftermath in "By Virtue of Marxism, Your Honor", translated by Salah Hassan, South Atlantic Quarterly vol. 109, no. 1; Rogaia Mustafa Abusharaf, "Marx in the Vernacular: Abdel Khaliq Mahgoub and the Riddles of Localizing Leftist Politics in Sudanese Philosophies of Liberation" South Atlantic Quarterly, vol. 108, no. 3)]. I must also mention in this regard Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im's body of work focused on adapting a version of the Shariah that is compatible with the regime of human rights traceable to modernity. [Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, Toward an Islamic Revolution: Civil Liberties, Human Rights and International Law, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990; Islam and the Secular State: Negotiating the Future of Sharia (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).] Discussions of this sort constitute the warp and woof of political philosophy. We need to identify these themes and seek to synthesize African responses to them as a primary discourse of modernity across the African continent.

Taking the individual seriously

So far, I have done the usual by focusing on the gross presentations in our social and political lives: political structure, the fate of states, and how they impact individuals. What I would like to do in the rest of this presentation is to use my own advice and ask, were we to win the second struggle for freedom, and what would be different and how in the quotidian lives of

the littlest amongst us, how the lives of ordinary Africans will differ from the current situation in which this freedom has to be struggled for? I am suggesting that one of the singular failures of decolonizing discourse, dominated as it is by identity denominated by difference is that its promoters are less exercised by the fate of the individual in our respective communities. {I hope that I have a chance to say more about this during the discussion to follow.]

Here are some of the phenomena that, I argue, when placed under the rubric of decolonizing, are likely to be misdescribed if not completely ignored:

*In Nigeria, recently, a young woman ran away from home and sued her father who was trying to marry her off to a suitor she did not fancy. The judge granted her relief but not quite because he reiterated the father's right to marry her off but pleaded with her father to be patient with his daughter and try to persuade his daughter to his point of view.

*Inter-ethnic conflicts in many parts of the continent.

*The killing of people accused of blasphemy in the northern part of Nigeria with nary a hand raised by the state against those who perpetrated such crimes

*African rulers acting on behalf of their countries ceding away huge portions of their land to foreign countries to grow food for export to the expropriating countries even while the seller countries are unable to feed their own people from the same land.

*Africans stashing their loot in foreign lands.

As I have argued at various fora since my book was published, I am not suggesting that colonialism may not have anything at all to do with the instances that I have reported above. I ask only that decolonizers show, in accordance with the four questions that I quoted from my book, how colonialism features in the causation of the items and how decolonizing might help move us away from their occurrence. I don't think that this is a charge that those who wish to decolonize take too seriously, if at all.

Let us recall some of the key points that framed the discourse of the first struggle for freedom on the understanding of Casely-Hayford, Nkrumah, and Awolowo. Casely-Hayford insisted that "we have the right to our opinion and to the express of it." [Magnus J. Sampson, West African Leadership: Public Speeches delivered by J.E. Casely Hayford (London: Frank Cass, 1969), p. 67.] Nkrumah harped "on the right of peoples to determine the form of government under which they want to live. Statesmen have broadcast the need to respect fundamental freedoms, the right of men to live free from the shadow of fears which cramp their dignity when they exist in servitude, in poverty, in degradation and in contempt". [Kwame Nkrumah, Africa Must Unite (New York: Praeger, 1963), p. ix. My emphasis.] Awolowo contended that

> We believe in the democratic way of life: equality under the law, respect for the fundamental rights of individual citizens, and the existence of independent and impartial tribunals where these rights could be enforced. We believe that the generality of the people should enjoy this life and do so in reasonable abundance. … At the same time I fully recognize that the healthy growth of a democratic way

> of life requires the existence of an enlightened community led by a group of people who are imbued with the all-consuming urge to defend, uphold and protect the human dignity and the legal equality of their fellow-men. [Obafemi Awolowo, AWO: The Autobiography of Chief Obafemi Awolowo, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), p. 255. My emphasis.]

This is where, were I possessed of the smarts and grace of the late Tina Turner, from whom I borrowed the second half of my title, I would perform a call and response in which "What's decolonization got to do with it?" would be the refrain as I chant the key phrases that I have just underscored. Alas, I'm still working on my gifts in that sphere. But here is what is important. Once we get away from the institutional, gross representations and move on to the granular level of individual experience of daily life in our various countries, we can see how far we are from accomplishing success in this second struggle for freedom for the littlest amongst us.

A life of freedom that is not marked by what Awolowo called "the all-consuming urge to defend, uphold and protect the human dignity" of our fellow humans is an empty shell of a life. The object of concern here is the individual human. That is, freedom belongs to human beings qua human beings. One way in which freedom is manifested is through the capacity of humans to express themselves in the world, that is, act in and on the world, in large part to attain their desires and interests. Autonomy of action refers to the fact that humans are free and that they should be free to act. Since it is in action that our purposes cross and conflict with one another, it is only post-action, not prior to it, that, properly speaking, law becomes relevant. Given what I have just said, it should be obvious that any law that is designed to pre-empt action will be an

anomaly, a distortion within this legal system. There is no punishment for thought; nor should there be any.

The freedom of the individual is absolute. Of course, I exaggerate a little. But I do so to underscore the point that I make later. The absoluteness of the freedom of the individual is best construed in a presumptive sense. It is similar to what we mean when we say that human beings are essentially free in modern philosophy. We do not ask human beings to show why they should be free; we ask those who wish to curb human freedom to show why humans should not be free. By the same token, from the assertion that the freedom of the individual is absolute, it does not follow that this freedom may not be curbed; it merely means that anyone, including governments and their functionaries, seeking to curb it must discharge the burden of proof that the interference is warranted and can be justified. I would like to submit that successive constitutions across our continent do not recognize this kind of freedom. They may be full of high fallutin pronouncements regarding the freedom of the individual. In reality, though, beyond the ritual boring retelling by our intellectuals of the genealogy of human rights from the Magna Carta on, which narrative is itself inaccurate, [The agreement was not between the masses and their rulers; it was struck between the monarch and the aristocracy and later extended to ordinary subjects.] there is no serious engagement on the part of our scholars, in the main, with the philosophical anthropology which alone gives the relevant principles regarding the nature of the human person and the dignity that pertain to it their pith. [This has been the thrust of my work on modernity, generally.] Additionally, many of those provisions are thwarted by "clawback clauses" usually framed in terms of "except where …"; fill in the blank spaces—usually spurious appeals to the security of the state, the ruler, dubious cultural values, and so on. [See Olufemi Taiwo, "The Legal Subject in Modern African Law: A Nigerian Report", Human Rights Review

vol. 7, no. 2 (January-March 2006), pp. 17-34.]

This is the creature whose dignity Awolowo charges us to defend with an all-consuming urge. I would like to suggest that our societies do not routinely evince this all-consuming urge to do so. We see it in our almost cavalier attitude to human life and to its degradation, beginning with there being no severe exercise on our imagination when it comes to our lived environment across the continent. Coming to terms with the existence of slums, gloating sometimes about the size of some of them, does not bespeak a concern to create a world without slums.

Let me reiterate something I said in my introduction. To blame this situation on colonialism, this situation in which we seem to replicate the "native quarters" damned by Fanon in the first chapter of The Wretched of the Earth in our cities while pretending to ensconce, as elite members, in the tony areas either left behind by the colonizers or newly chartered but modeled after the same philosophy of space that characterized it, is to do one of two things and here there is no third possibility: either we agree that we have been brain damaged by colonialism such that we lack the wherewithal to undo whatever terrible legacies colonialism left us with or we have refused to lay hold of our possibilities and imagine a different world in which Awolowo's charge is our guide. Here I am pointedly ignoring the specious distinction that is often made between leaders and followers in the discourse about Africa: they are the same people.

The other part of Awolowo's charge relates to "equality under the law, respect for the fundamental rights of individual citizens, and the existence of independent and impartial tribunals where these rights could be enforced". Again, once we move away from the grandiloquent proclamations of our legal luminaries, the empty pronouncements of our politicians, and the perorations of our scholars many of whom have refused to take seriously and

become serious students of the undergirding philosophical templates from which our legal systems are fashioned, we find again that the reality of daily living for the littlest amongst us bears no resemblance to the demands of equality under the law, respect for the fundamental rights and inviolate dignity of individual citizens, and the existence of independent and impartial tribunals where these rights could be enforced." Again, the refrain, what's decolonization got to do with this failure on our part?

When our intellectuals refuse to be exercised by the fate of the legal subject, the central focus of solicitude in the modern legal system, because most of us, almost thoughtlessly, repeat to the point of banality the refrain that we are a communal people, [I have polemicized against this tendency in other works. See "Against African Communalism," Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy-Revue de la philosophie française et de langue française, vol. XXIV, no. 1 (2016), 81-100; "Can Kwame Gyekye's Moderate Communitarianism Take The Individual Seriously?" in Gamal Abdel-Shehid and Sofia Noori, eds., Partisan Universalism: Essays in Honour of Ato Sekyi-Otu (Cantley, Quebec: Daraja Press, 2021), pp. 167-190.] the stage is set for having a legal system—administration of justice, law enforcement, prisons system, the judiciary—that is only modern in name but cannot guarantee what Awolowo said should agitate us. Let us forget the reign of impunity in many of our jurisdictions, let us forget the repeated claim to be operating under the rule of law, what is of moment is how well are we doing in infusing both operatives of our system and ordinary people, yes, ordinary people, in their relations with the system and with their fellow humans, with the appropriate temperament that makes following rules, ensuring that rules are followed, intervening to ensure that rules are followed, etc., in the ordinary cause of our daily lives a banal element of our ordinary lives? Because this is not what obtains, the freedom of the individual to lead lives of their own

authorship, the proverbial right to be let alone, is always under threat from both the state and from our fellows. We see this when women are abused and violated on the street because they are not conforming to someone else's idea of decent dressing. In Nigeria, even universities could not resist getting into the odious business of measuring how far from the knee their female students' skirts should be. Remember, we have clear laws on "indecent exposure" on our books. We find it in play when individual lifestyles are criminalized because they do not conform to the specificities of "our culture".

The same intellectuals who pretend to serious scholarship on all the preceding issues are often AWOL, if they are not cheerleaders, when we specify homosexuality as a capital offence are too quick to go with ordinary minds in affirming that "guilty people are being let off on technicalities" when their education ought to inform them that only a properly constituted tribunal, Awolowo again, can pronounce on guilt or innocence. Once that pronouncement is "not guilty", case closed: they are not guilty. Now, think of the jeopardy an accused person is in before a judge who is supposed to operate under the doctrine of the presumption of innocence till proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt but already believes that, as the saying goes, "there is no smoke without fire", in other words, "why was it that it was you and not others present there that was arrested?" you can imagine how much justice would be served by such a court.

What of Nkrumah's proclamation of "the right of men to live free from the shadow of fears which cramp their dignity when they exist in servitude, in poverty, in degradation and in contempt"? To take just one example, I am convinced that my homeland, Nigeria, is a veritable republic of fear, as I write this. [For those who think, there he goes again, I have in the past published an op-ed with the same title referring to these United States, my adopted homeland. Just another reminder to our decolonizers, there is nowhere in the world where people don't

gather their chickens at dusk. See 'U.S.A.: The Republic of Fear', https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/u-s-a-the-republic-of-fear/.]

Nigeria is a veritable Republic of Fear, a land of fear, an emporium dominated by fear. We are all, from the President to the lowliest Nigerian, subjects of Fear's domain. Our children live in fear. Husbands live in fear. Wives live in fear. Students live in fear. Teachers, at all levels, live in fear. The governor lives in fear. Doctors work in fear. Civil servants work in fear. Transport operators live in fear. Traders live in fear. Priests and supplicants, alike, live in fear. Househelps live in fear. The list is endless. No one escapes the clutches of fear.

How can we say that we live in freedom or are free under the conditions that I just described? If you are gay in our countries, you are unfree and you live in fear. Thank goodness for South Africa, Gabon, Namibia, and Botswana for showing that there is no singular way of being African or maybe, they are all no longer African countries in allowing themselves to be seized of the dignity of their LGBTQ citizens and residents. For the rest, you don't even have to be gay to be afraid: think of blackmail, extortion, false imputations, and so on and the implications for the dignity of the individual must not be too difficult to divine.

This last point focuses on the minutest of our granular concerns. An overweening focus on state-citizen relationship is likely to not be as concerned as it should be with citizen-citizen relations in the context of civil society, the experience of living in groups where heterodoxies are frowned upon, and the transaction costs of being different, of eccentricities, can be almost debilitating. Many of these continue to dog many of our societies, for the most part, under the rubric of cultural values and respect for such. Widowhood rituals, interventions in the sexual lives of minors, coerced membership of cultural formations that an individual does not really care for at the risk of becoming a nonperson through ostracization by her fellows. I ask, what are

blasphemy laws doing in a state that proclaims secularism as a principle of constitutional organization? As bad as that is, what is worse is when individuals are subject to murderous violence by non-state enforcers of rules determined by a particular faith or cultural group as is happening right now in some parts of Nigeria. This is where the works of scholars like Fatima Mernissi and Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im on the problem of being an Islamic state while, simultaneously, claiming to be a constitutional one, are very crucial to advancing our understanding. Remember the refrain, what's decolonization got to do with it? Yet, at this granular level, the quality of life of ordinary citizens when it comes to the inviolate dignity that attaches to their sheer humanity and their freedom to be the authors of their own lives' scripts are the unlamented, assuming it is even registered as such in our reckoning as scholars, casualties of an attitude that frequently, if not always, locates the causal antecedents of some of what I have been describing to colonialism and its effects.

The freedom of ordinary Africans and their ability, at the individual level, to control their lives, lead lives marked by inviolate dignity of their persons and concurrent limits on the reach of governments and of their fellows in their daily lives, must never be up for negotiation. Indeed, this ought to be the standard by which we judge the legitimacy and attractiveness of any government and the quality of any of our societies in the continent as it increasingly is the case in other parts of the world that are also embracing engaged in struggles similar to what I have here called our second struggle for freedom. As I have written in Against Decolonization, Africa is not alone in this connection at the present time. Other examples include Pakistan, India, the United States, and Iran. The difference is that those who are dominated by what I call the metaphysics of difference that underpins an unhelpful cathexis to identity are loathe to see these similarities and, as a result, leave themselves without help from the experiences of other humans

both in the past and at present. What's decolonization got to do with it? The basic principles for which Africans are immolating themselves, risking life and limb in standing up to dictatorial\authoritarian regimes and generally insisting that they, too, must be free are shared with other oppressed humanity from Denmark to Myanmar, from Eswatini to China. By their current actions across the continent, Africans are reminding us, for the umpteenth time, that FREEDOM is not a geographical, cultural, or national thing: it is a human attribute. Are we listening?