

Ngugi Wa Thiongo: Globalectics and The Postcolonial Intellectual



Prof. Ngugi Wa Thiongo speaks to Anindya Sekhar Purakayastha and Mursed Alam of *Kairos, the Journal of Critical Symposium*. They caught up with him in the *Ideology in the Postcolonial Text and Context Conference* in the University of Munster, Germany in May 2015 where Prof. Ngugi delivered the Keynote Address. The initial dialogue began in Munster and the rest of the conversation was carried out subsequently through email conversation.

Ngugi Wa Thiongo in conversation with *Kairos, the Journal of Critical Symposium*

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ASP & MA: Prof. Ngugi, thank you so much for agreeing to speak to *Kairos*. Our first question relates to your new book *Globalectics: Theory and the Politics of Knowing* (2012). We would like to know how you would connect the central thematic of this new work of yours with your initial project of decolonizing the mind.

Ngũgĩ: They are mutually connected. Decolonizing the Mind is a necessary step towards globalectic imagination. Globalectic imagination is necessary in decolonization of the mind. Both reject seeing languages and cultures in terms of hierarchies of power.

ASP & MA: When you said, “globalectics embraces wholeness, interconnectedness, equality of potentiality of parts, tension and nation. It is a way of thinking and relating to the world, particularly in the era of globalism and globalization.” - What did you exactly mean by that? Could you please elaborate on that?

Ngũgĩ: Nature is interconnected. Humans, plants, animals, we breathe the same air, drink the same water, depend on the same sun. Parts of the body, while each having its particularity, are connected. The whole embraces the parts; the parts inhere in the whole. Globalization is global dominance of Finance capital. Money moves the globe, making a mockery of national barriers, laws etc. But labor, no matter the national base, faces the same finance capital. Globalization is the process of turning the globe into a vast theater of finance capital. Finance capital needs a divided labor, into religions, faiths, and ethnicities, even nations. You note how the different governments are putting up or trying to put up actual walls, physical walls, to prevent the movement of labor. Of course there are many more invisible walls. But there are no barriers to the movement of finance capital across national boundaries. Hence the need for Globalism and a globalist social consciousness. Capitalist fundamentalism generates religious fundamentalisms in alliance with it or in opposition to it. But such religious fundamentalism, to the extent that it divides

labor into religious camps, objectively works for and in concert with capitalist fundamentalism in its Financial Robes.

ASP & MA: Do you believe that existing templates of postcolonial theory is inadequate or ill equipped to engage with the current issues of subjugation, global finance capital as you said or disjunctions and new modes of state coercion? And in that way, can your theory of *globalectics* provide an answer to these domains of subjugations?

Ngũgĩ: Post colonialism, while illuminating some aspects of global realities, is always in danger of glossing over the neo-in-the-post-of post-colonialism. Kwame Nkrumah once talked of neo-colonialism as the situation where a country may be independent in legal form, but in reality, its economy, and hence its politics and culture, are controlled from the metropolis of imperialism.

ASP& MA: Some critics have linked your *globalectical* vision with the current Arab uprisings (known as the Arab Spring) in the Middle East, as they believe your globalism “transcends colonial heritage and hegemonic theoretical underpinnings.” How would you react to that?

Ngũgĩ: The only genuine spring is that of working people. I did not see the so called Arab spring rise up against the feudal and military establishment that work in concert with imperial powers. But poverty of the masses, the increasing gap of wealth and power between the haves and the have-nots, the continued control of their natural resources (oil for instance) by Western corporations, with the help of their “national” state, and the repressive practices necessary for the maintenance of the status-quo, fueled the anger, and the energy, but the repressive mechanisms and the economic systems they protected were never threatened. In some places, religious fundamentalism presented itself as the cure.

ASP& MA: Well, that is a fair critique of the Arab uprisings but let us now move to another of your valiant position of critique of western epistemes. In your book on globalectics you have severely critiqued both Kant and Hegel for their “limited experience of the world,” something, on which they predicated their universal hypothesis. Your hostility to such Euro-centric imaginaries is understandable but do you think that all globalectic imagination should also include Western paradigms in its attempt to launch a critique of the West? In other words, we cannot abandon Kant although we have many objections against him or other mainstream Western philosophers. What is your take on this?

Ngũgĩ: I was trying to point out how in their views of Africa, and the world outside Europe, they betrayed their dependence on explorer and missionary narratives of their time. European Enlightenment needed the darkness of the other to see the clarity of its luminosity. The different particularities of our experience of the world contain elements of universality. True universality is the creative union of the elements of the universal in the different particularities. There is a lot good stuff in European thought. But so also in Asian and African thought. The problem comes when one particularity sees itself as universality or as the only form in which universality is expressed. Eurocentrism sees its particularity, as the Universality. Globalectics rejects any view that substitutes any form of particularity as the universality towards all must aspire. Globalectic imagination and globalectics free the human from the prison house of the domination by any particular center. That’s why I argue that any center can be the center of the globe as long as we can see the real connections that bind us. I can’t really say it better than William Blake who talked of seeing the world in a grain of sand; eternity in an hour. But he did not say that the grain and the hour are located in Europe only.

ASP& MA: Absolutely. Taking a cue from that let us move on to similar issues of the continuation of Eurocentrism or recolonisation. In the third essay of your book entitled, “Globalectical Imagination: The World in the Postcolonial” you made a very interesting point about “postcolonial colonialism” to suggest neo-colonial tendencies. How do you look at today`s geo-political configurations in the middle east or in the global south? Do you really believe that the time has come to identify more domains of re/neo-colonisation?

Ngũgĩ: Globalization takes neo-colonial forms. Globalization is finance capital in neo-colonial robes.

ASP & MA: That said, let us now dwell on something related to language and Eurocentrism. In your book you have engaged with the issue of language in which globalectical discourse would be conducted but we would request you to briefly summarize that once again, because if we continue with the English mode then certain colonial traces continue to linger even within the globalectic expanse.

Ngũgĩ: I have talked of languages and cultures relating, not in terms of hierarchy, but network. In a network, languages relate in terms of equal give and take. In such a relationship there are no big or small languages. But up to now Languages and cultures relate, to have been made to relate in terms hierarchy. Hierarchies of power, unequal power relationship. I would like to see translation practices become part of the education system from elementary to Universities. As for English, I always say: Use English but don't let English use you. In particular use English to enable but not to disable.

ASP& MA: That is very well said indeed, “use it to enable and not to disable.” Your emphasis on translation is also highly important and we would like to inquire exactly on that because talking about language, you described translation as the

“language of languages.” Could you please specify what exactly did you mean by this?

Ngũgĩ: If languages had a common language, that common language has the name of Translation. That’s why I called translation the language of languages. I meant to underscore the importance of translation. We sometimes forget the impact of translation on history. The main book of religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, have spread through translations. You cannot conceive of European renaissance without translations from Greek and Latin. Marx, Mao, Lenin and Fanon are known in many societies through translations. And yet their thoughts have fueled struggles for Independence, national liberations and social revolutions everywhere.

ASP & MA: Right. Now, you have also come up with new coinages such “orature” and “cyberture” and you seem to have high hopes on these new modes of communication. We would be grateful if you could elaborate on them as well.

Ngũgĩ: I have explained these terms in my book, *Globalectics*. Orature is what used to be called Oral literatures, which, by definition, placed the oral as a lower form of the written. But this not true. Again many religions arose in the form of orality. The written always conserves; but orality revolutionizes. The written is static, a captive; the oral is restless, always changing, coining new words, new expressions. Cyberture is orature of the Cyberspace.

ASP& MA: Thank you so much for taking time off to talk to us. ■