

*Literature, Human Rights Law, and the Return
of Decolonization*

Joseph R. Slaughter

Ousmane Sembène's 1974 film *Xala* opens with a tight focus on a beating drum amid an ecstatic celebration. The scene shifts between a jubilant crowd outside the *Chambre de Commerce* in Dakar and the postcolonial power drama taking place inside, as a voice-over, speaking in formal French tones reminiscent of Senegalese president Léopold Sédar Senghor, delivers a rousing declaration of independence: "Mr. Minister, Deputies, and honorable colleagues. Never before has an African occupied the presidency of our chamber. . . . We must take control of our industry, our commerce, our culture" (my translation). Seven men in chic West African dress enter the Chamber to confront three White French administrators; they seize two alabaster busts of Marianne, placing them on the steps outside the building and then expel the Frenchmen, as the voiceover resumes: "Our march is irreversible. . . . We are businessmen. We must take control of all directorships, including the banks. . . . This is the culmination of our struggle for *true* independence." On the Chamber steps, the Senegalese men raise their arms in victory as the colonial administrators depart; drums beat; dancers whirl; decolonization is done!

And yet the farcical aspects of the scene already anticipate the hairpin turn in decolonization that follows the native bourgeoisie's occupation of the Chamber of Commerce. The old French administrators march back into the building carrying seven hefty briefcases. The independence speech voice-over returns as well: "We have chosen socialism, the only *true* socialism, the African path of socialism, socialism on a human scale. . . . Our independence is complete." The speech is undercut instantly as the camera finds the seven Senegalese "businessmen," now attired in full tuxedos, sitting silently as the former administrators place an attaché case before each of the new deputies, stepping back to assume the attentive position of ministerial advisors. With big smiles, the businessmen unlatch their briefcases to find stacks of West African CFA franc notes. The new

Chamber president rises to proclaim their revolution a success and to announce the wedding of one of their own to a much younger third wife. “Our modernity must not mean that we lose our *africainité*,” the president insists, to enthusiastic shouts of “*Vive l’africainité!*”

Xala lampoons the hypocritical corruption of postcolonial Senegal’s native bourgeoisie, whose affirmations of “*africainité*” preserve selfish political and patriarchal privileges. It vividly illustrates the pitfalls of decolonization coopted by a comprador elite whose “sole motto,” in Frantz Fanon’s words, is “Replace the foreigner” (158). Indeed, it reads like a satirical dramatization of the “Pitfalls of National Consciousness” chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth*: in the postcolony, “the national middle class constantly demands the nationalization of the economy and of the trading sectors. . . . To them, nationalization quite simply means the transfer into native hands of those unfair advantages which are a legacy of the colonial period” (152). In *Xala*, decolonization is a farce; the new postcolonial administrators put a Black mask on neocolonialism while the white-skinned former masters retain hold of the puppet strings. Instead of the revolutionary “disorder” that seeks “to change the order of the world” itself (Fanon 36), decolonization here looks more like interior decorating; the contents of the Chamber of Commerce have changed, but the institutional form and its colonial, predatory functions remain. Indeed, in Sembène’s stinging caricature, formal decolonization, where the new state has “all the outward trappings of international sovereignty,” is camouflage for neocolonialism as Kwame Nkrumah described it in 1965: the postcolonial state is “nominally independent” but, in fact, “its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside” (ix).

Sembène’s comical depiction of neocolonialism’s arrival on the heels of decolonization offers a *tableau vivant* for visualizing what Aníbal Quijano called “the coloniality of power” – “the European paradigm of modernity/rationality” (172) that “is still the most general form of domination in the world today, once colonialism as an explicit political order was destroyed” (170). Sembène’s vignette about the lingering coloniality of power exposes a divergence within decolonization between two versions of the process. The first, formal decolonization (or “flag independence”) is construed as a relatively straightforward matter of filling colonial forms with native content – an act of simple substitution. The second entails the more challenging problem of decolonizing colonialism’s residual forms – that is, of unmaking and remaking the political, legal, economic, social, cultural, and epistemological forms that colonialism leaves in its wake and through which the coloniality of power persists. Formal decolonization is

generally treated as a political event completed when a colonial power returns territory and administrative authority to a native or postcolonial regime – celebrated when the new nation raises its flag. The second vision of decolonization is epistemic and cultural, with no attendant celebration; it insists that “*colonial forms* might need decolonizing themselves” (Gevers 384). In this processual version of decolonization, colonial institutions, economic systems, modes of production, educational programs and curricula, political structures, legal codes, social relations, patterns of thought, cultural modes, literary genres, and so on need to be dismantled and reconstructed in order to serve local realities and priorities. In historical practice, these two impulses of decolonization are rarely separable and not entirely differentiable from one another. Indeed, with every effort in the “unfinished project” of decolonization (Wenzel 449), the two impulses operate simultaneously, sustained in dynamic tension, sometimes one weighted more heavily than the other.

With the recent return of decolonization to the political and intellectual agenda, most conspicuously inside educational institutions of the old imperial powers, it is worth attending to the historical differences between formal decolonization and the decolonization of forms as they continue to shape today’s debates. The problems of decolonization are not new, even if wider understanding of the pervasive perniciousness of things like institutional racism and systemic sexism (or the currency of the term “decolonial”) might give them a renewed sense of urgency for a new generation of eager decolonizers. Likewise, the tension between the dual impulses for decolonization (sometimes dismissed too quickly as reformist or celebrated too easily as revolutionary) has been part of the problematics of decolonization whenever and wherever colonialism has landed. In practice, demands and projects for decolonization have historically (perhaps inevitably) entailed tacit acceptance, if not embrace, of some institutional and epistemological forms of colonial domination. This phenomenon reflects not only decolonization’s double bind – that is, the tremendous difficulty (impossibility?) of trying to think and achieve decolonization wholly outside of terms legated by colonialism itself – but also the ontological fact that, as a historical matter of human liberation (or of liberating humanity), decolonization is never entirely done – that is, we can never be done with decolonization.

The first view of decolonization (formal decolonization) tends to treat the political, economic, and cultural forms of the colonizer (whether the nation-state, wage labor, the novel, etc.) as historically necessary or desirable, sometimes as “natural,” “universal,” or even “superior.” These are, of

course, the very terms in which European colonialism justified itself as the conveyor of universal norms and benefits. For such reasons, Walter Mignolo, a leading advocate of “decolonial thinking” today, describes the historical “political decolonization movements that existed approximately between 1947 and 1970” as “failed”; “they changed the content but not the terms of the conversation, and maintained the very idea of the state within a global capitalist economy” (50). For Mignolo, mid-century decolonization movements “failed” because they did not attempt to decolonize the political and economic forms of colonial modernity. However, such a blanket dismissal oversimplifies the heterogeneous forms of mid-century decolonization, failing to recognize (or ignoring) the facts that political independence was never the only agenda for decolonization and that political decolonization was, in any case, always shadowed (sometimes overshadowed) by comprehensive calls for economic, cultural, and epistemological decolonization.

In the “Cold War” context in which salt-water decolonization unfolded, differences between the two impulses of decolonization were often signaled in anticolonial discourse by the application of emphatic adjectives to articulate goals of “*true* independence,” as the Senghorian voiceover in Sembène’s film declares. In other words, desires for something more than the mere political independence of formal decolonization were often expressed by adding absolute adjectives (“true,” “full,” “complete”) to intensify ideals of freedom, in which we might hear the echo of Aimé Césaire’s famous adjectival indictment in *Discourse on Colonialism*: “the West has never been further from being able to live a *true* humanism – a humanism made to the measure of the world” (73; my emphasis). Those adamant adjectives can tell us much about the incomplete project and ever-receding horizon of decolonization.

It is true that, for the most part, mid-century decolonization movements were strongly marked by a “methodological nationalism” that naturalized the nation-state as the “necessary form of colonial emancipation” and treated decolonization as primarily a matter of filling its form with native administrators (Wilder 4). Both the Afro-Asian Conference of Bandung in 1955 and the Non-Aligned Movement meeting in Belgrade in 1961 generally reflect this approach. Instead of rejecting the founding principles of nation-statism or Eurocentric international law, the conference in fact doubled down on the standard principles and Westphalian promises of the international legal order, insisting that the basic package of international rights be extended to all peoples through the form of the nation-state. Indeed, the Final Communiqué of Bandung “declared its full

support of the fundamental principles of Human Rights as set forth in the Charter of the United Nations” (3) and, like the later Non-Aligned Movement, decried the lack of a Marshall Plan for the Third World, calling on the World Bank (later cast as a chief villain of neocolonialism) to allocate “a greater part of its resources to Asian-African countries” (2).

In 1960, a high-water mark for national independence in Africa, the Bandung declaration served as the basis for UN General Assembly Resolution XXIV, “The Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples,” which expanded the compass of the “universal” principle in international law that “all peoples have the right to self-determination; by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development” (Article 2). Thus, recently independent postcolonial states managed to enshrine an implicit human right to formal decolonization within the text of international law under the rubric of self-determination in the form of the nation-state, construed as the ultimate (or at least historically necessary) vessel for fulfilling a people’s desires for modernization, ethno-national aspirations for self-expression, development, and human freedom.

However, after a couple decades of collective experience with the pitfalls of formal decolonization and the betrayal of promises for state sovereignty and self-determination, attention turned to the coloniality of international law itself. Given the de facto subordination of postcolonial states within the international order (a situation that Algerian international lawyer and politician Mohamed Bedjaoui described as “nominal decolonization” or “fictitious independence” [81]), many anticolonial movements and thinkers knew that the nation-state could not be an end on its own; rather, they sought to use it as a means to decolonize the international order itself. As Antony Anghie has shown, many of the central doctrines of international law were forged in large part to manage and normalize “the colonial confrontation” (*Imperialism* 3). Thus, while still aspiring to occupy the form of the nation-state, they also wrestled with the colonial origins, imperial legacy, and neoimperial implications of the very international order that made such occupation necessary in the first place.

Anticolonial solidarity conferences throughout the 1960s and 70s gave increased urgency and expanded briefs to decolonization, which often found rhetorical expression in revolutionary adjectives interposed in the text of international law. The Tricontinental meeting in Havana (1966) is perhaps the most explicit example; the assembled African, Asian, and Latin American states and liberation movements proclaimed “the inalienable right of the peoples to *full* political independence and to resort to all

forms of struggle that may be necessary, including armed struggle, to conquer that right” (106; my emphasis). The revolutionary assembly unfurled a series of amplifying militant adjectives to stress the unfinished business of decolonization: “In order to achieve *total* liberation it is necessary to eliminate *all forms* of imperialist oppression and exploitation, carry out profound changes in the social and economic structures . . . To political emancipation must be added economic liberation. Only in this way can social equality of all men and *true* independence of all states be insured” (106; my emphasis).

Against mere political independence is posed “true independence”; against mere national liberation is posed “full liberation.” Relationally, the first term in each pair signifies an insufficient approach to decolonization (i.e. filling colonial forms with native content), while the adjectival insistence of the second term indicts the first by signaling the pressing need for more radical efforts to decolonize the incomplete forms of formal independence. Rhetorically, “true independence” always comes after independence alone has disappointed, redoubling the demand for emancipation (what Achille Mbembe calls “a second abolition” [50]) under the sign of revolution; historically, this corresponds with a shift in emphasis from formal decolonization to the decolonization of forms. This pattern, I suggest, continues today, with “decoloniality” presenting itself as the current champion of “true decolonization” in opposition to what it dismisses as false forms pursued by postcolonialism and Cold War anticolonial movements, inevitably (unwittingly?) repeating a historical pattern within decolonization discourse that wavers between prioritizing one of the two poles of decolonization, forever in search of a truer decolonization.

In principle, the universal needs no adjective, and it is, of course, not possible to make imperialism, international law, or capitalism blush at their venal hypocrisy simply by adding firm adjectives to liberationist ideals that purported to be universal all along. Moreover, what at first appears as wholesale rejection of “false” forms of decolonization is often articulated in pursuit of repossessing and renovating (that is, re-forming), with a difference, colonialism’s pretended “universal” forms. Thus, although Fanon observed that, because decolonization takes many forms, “reason hesitates and refuses to say which is a true decolonization, and which a false” (59), he nonetheless famously asserted that decolonization is revolutionary disorder that brings “with it a new language and a new humanity” (36); “this new humanity cannot do otherwise than define a new humanism both for itself and for others” (246). With echoes in both Césaire and Sylvia Wynter, this “new humanity” and “new

humanism” are implicitly counterposed to the old humanity and classic humanism that were historically complicit with colonialism, slavery, and genocide – called to the lower task of justifying the mass exclusion of most human beings from the real and symbolic benefits of “civilization,” “modernity,” and human liberation. From this perspective, Fanonian decolonization is a dialectical historical process for dismantling, remaking, and occupying the space of the universal itself.

For the Tricontinental, speaking in the name of “This Great Humanity,” conquering the “inalienable right” to *true* self-determination meant taking the fight to cultural and epistemological dimensions in order “to expel from their cultural life the expressions of imperialist influence, thus enriching the lives of their peoples with *true* art and culture” (112), while demanding “access to the enormous material and intellectual wealth that the knowledge and the work of man have accumulated for centuries” (103). Claiming entitlement to the vast cultural heritage imperialism had amassed might look like acceptance of Eurocolonial constructions of the “universal.” However, the radicalness of the Tricontinental’s demand for decolonization and redistribution of humankind’s cultural and intellectual “wealth” (a term that nonetheless seems to capitulate to a colonial-capitalist logic of property) perhaps resonates better if we read it in the same reparatationist vein as Fanon’s unequivocal insistence that “The wealth of the imperial countries is our wealth too. . . . Europe is literally the creation of the Third World. The wealth which smothers her is that which was stolen from the underdeveloped peoples” (Fanon 102). In other words, the Tricontinental insisted that the cultural and intellectual wealth of the imperial countries was (always) already the wealth of colonized peoples too, with the inescapable implications that so-called European culture was the creation of the Third World and that colonialism created Europe. Thus, as Mbembe repeatedly insists, given the long “entanglement of histories and the concatenation of worlds” (112) – the fact that “as form and figure, act and relation, colonization was in many regards a coproduction of colonizers and colonized” (4) – decolonization could never be a simple matter of expelling imperialist influence or “decolonial delinking” (Mignolo 45), since what we think of as colonialism’s forms (and our thinking about them) were themselves formed dialectically (albeit on unequal terms) in colonial contact zones across the globe.

Although the most immediate practical goal of mid-century decolonization was the occupation of the nation-state form, the new postcolonial majority of the UN also trained its sights on remaking the forms of international law. Thus, within the General Assembly, they tried

collectively to leverage the relatively weak power of “Third World sovereignty” (Anghie, *Imperialism* 2) to change “the rules of the game” of an international order that emerged in large part to exploit their human and natural resources (Abi-Saab 30). That is, they sought to wring some of the coloniality (of power) out of the international legal order, to “reform an international system that had been created to subordinate it” (Anghie, “Legal Aspects” 149). In addition to strengthening (Westphalian) territorial doctrines of political sovereignty, the newly independent states produced twin proposals for decolonizing the international order on both economic and cultural fronts. In 1974, the General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order (NIEO), which sought to clear away “the remaining vestiges of alien and colonial domination, foreign occupation, racial discrimination, apartheid and neo-colonialism *in all its forms* [that] continue to be among the greatest obstacles to the *full* emancipation and progress of the developing countries and all the peoples involved” (Article 1; my emphasis). In the late 1970s, Third World states also pressed the cultural/epistemological side of decolonization, proposing a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) that pursued the “decolonization of information” (International Commission 38) to help bring about “the abolition of the vestiges of domination as *full* national liberation becomes a reality” (6; my emphasis). As Sarah Brouillette has described it in more humanistic terms, postcolonial states “argued not just for the expansion of publishing industries but for the right to tell their own stories and be heard” (13). In Fanon’s terms, these legal efforts to decolonize the international order express a new humanist desire for a revolutionary new humanities (a new arts and sciences) that might foster a new humanity – a “humanity” that cannot be taken for granted nor prescribed in advance.

Far from simply accepting the international order as colonialism bequeathed it (as Mignolo intimates), the Third World bloc instead dared to attempt to decolonize global capitalism itself, albeit by trying to leverage the nation-state (itself historically a creature of and for modern capitalism) against what the Tricontinental called “the world system of exploitation” (103). First step or last, the nation-state may well be the dead end of decolonization, but instead of viewing mid-century decolonization simply as “failed,” it would be more accurate to say it was debilitated by neoimperial agents serving vested corporate interests of the most powerful states and elite class interests of the weaker ones. As I have argued elsewhere, the fates of the NIEO and NWICO are part of the more general history of the rise of neoliberalism in the 1970s and revanchist responses to

Third World challenges to Western hegemony, what Walden Bello called the “rollback” – “the structural resubordination of the [Global] South within a U.S.-dominated global economy” (Bello 3) – that entailed other reversals of radical efforts to decolonize the forms of the international order, including the Euro-American “hijacking of human rights” (Slaughter, “Hijacking”).

When Fanon urged his readers to “rid ourselves of the habit . . . of minimizing the action of our fathers,” saying that “they fought as well as they could, with the arms that they possessed then,” he did so while emphasizing the historical contingencies that conditioned mid-century decolonization. In particular, he stressed the international dimension of anticolonial struggle and the transformed character of the Cold War international order within which it unavoidably operated: “if the echoes of their struggle have not resounded in the international arena, we must realize that the reason for this silence lies less in their lack of heroism than in the fundamentally different international situation of our time” (206–7). Indeed, for Fanon, decolonization was the pursuit of resonance in the international arena. We, too, would do well to rid ourselves of the habit of minimizing mid-century decolonization movements, since like their fore-runners (and ourselves today), they fought with the arms they possessed – or, in the case of the nation-state, with debilitated versions of a form they sought to occupy.

Calls for formal decolonization, by both anticolonial movements and colonizers alike, tend to imagine the nation (or “nation-ness,” as Benedict Anderson described it) as a set of modular components that coordinate the “Westphalian unities of nation-time and nation-space” (Slaughter, *Human Rights* 92). In Anderson’s influential account, the “cultural artefacts” of nation-ness created at the end of the eighteenth century in Europe and the Americas quickly became “capable of being transplanted” (4). Historically, colonialism and decolonization both served to transplant, normalize, and naturalize the form of the nation-state, with its liberal ideals of popular self-determination and rights-based citizenship as “the highest worldly forms of [human] expression of an abstract universalism” (Slaughter, *Human Rights* 120). Indeed, following mid-century decolonization, Anderson says, “the very idea of ‘nation’ is now nestled firmly in virtually all print-languages; and nation-ness is virtually inseparable from political consciousness” (135). Fanon himself operated and theorized from within this conceptual framework and understood well the international bind of decolonization – that, as a practical matter, both political and epistemological decolonization would inevitably have to unfold within a preestablished international

system of states, and, therefore, to be undertaken historically they entailed a certain embrace of the nation-state as the near (or at least nearest appearing) horizon of decolonization. Thus, when Fanon writes that “national consciousness, which is not nationalism, is the only thing that will give us an international dimension” (247), he concedes to historical constraints on forms of emancipation and reinforces a formula for decolonization (mental, cultural, and political) that affirms the nation as the key conduit of a people’s collective self-determination and self-expression – thus, his unwavering focus throughout the book on *national* consciousness, *national* liberation, *national* life, *national* culture, and so on. As Egyptian international lawyer George Abi-Saab observed, one of the “great handicaps” (34) of formal decolonization in the mid-twentieth century was the creation of many new states without nations, leaving the daunting task of “building the social and economic infrastructure necessary to support a modern State” (35) – in a word, “nation-building” (35). Culture was understood to be part of the required infrastructure for “translating independence into a social reality” (Abi-Saab, 34), and literature specifically was often tapped to serve the postcolonial cause of building nation-ness, as with Fanon’s urgent appeal for “a fighting literature, a revolutionary literature, and a national literature” (223).

The problems of political decolonization in the legal arena are intertwined with parallel projects of cultural decolonization in literary studies, whether in the form of canon wars, curricular reform, revolutionary pedagogies, new field formations, or postcolonial proposals for “the abolition of the English Department” (Ngũgĩ). As Christopher Gevers has shown, Third World legal debates over decolonization followed the patterns of well-known debates among African authors in the 1960s about the legacy of colonial languages in developing and sustaining African national literatures and nation-ness. The literary debate is typically illustrated by the contrast between Chinua Achebe’s famous assertion in “English and the African Writer” that the English language “will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English . . . altered to suit its new African surroundings” (30) and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s later insistence that “true decolonization required nothing less than abandoning the English novel altogether” (Gevers 384), which he theorized in *Decolonising the Mind*. As Gevers reads it, the debate hinged upon a dispute over the coloniality of forms – of languages and literary genres – and whether “colonial forms” could be repurposed “without residual colonial influences” (391). The genre of the novel has often been a privileged site for such literary debates over the dual approaches to

decolonization, probably because of its close historical association with nation-ness, famously pinpointed by Anderson as a key modular technology of print-capitalism (along with the newspaper) involved in producing the “imagined political community” of the nation (6). In the context of mid-century decolonization, occupying the form of the novel can be understood as part of the greater effort to occupy the form of the nation itself.

These Third World approaches to international decolonization give real weight to the links between law and literature that are purely metaphorical in the dominant paradigms of world literature today, such as Pascale Casanova’s influential account of “world literary space and the international laws that structure it” (94). Emerging from the same philosophical/philological tradition and ethical framework of liberal humanism (with its attendant pretenses to universality), international law, human rights, and comparative and world literature studies were assembled around the central unit of the nation. Historically, they all also share fundamental assumptions about the modularity of nation-ness. As regulatory regimes, international law, human rights, and world literature have functioned like empires, organizing and managing diversity and difference (e.g. national languages, literatures, and laws) under the sign of the universal and the principle of abstract formal equality; they provide institutionalized mechanisms (however limited) for expanding the scope of their own incumbent “universality” without fundamentally threatening the system or its forms of operation. In each, nation-ness and its ready-made forms are said to be ready for transport and for immediate occupation. Thus, they incentivize reformist approaches to decolonization that encourage the historically dispossessed to occupy the empire’s preferred prefabricated forms – novels as much as nations.

Even in our putatively globalized world – that is, formally but still only nominally decolonized – the nation remains the most weighted category for entry into the catalog and canon of world literature. Indeed, deep assumptions about nation-ness and the modularity of modern literary forms underpin our most influential theories of world literature today. For example, in Casanova’s account of “the formation of international literary space” (79), nations and authors (representing nations) compete for standing and privileges within a system of recognition where the so-called “independent [putatively universal] laws of literature” (86) were determined by the old and new imperial powers in Europe and the United States. Moreover, the generic rules of the international game for what counts as literature (more pointedly, as *national* literature) were largely

formulated before the arrival of “the newly independent nations of Africa, Asia, and Latin America,” who are obliged, she says, to “[obey] the same political and cultural mechanisms, moved to assert linguistic and literary claims of their own” (79). Thus, formal cultural decolonization in Casanova’s account amounts to claiming the modular European literary forms of nation-ness as one’s own, forgetting that so-called European literary forms were themselves formalized within the crucible of colonialism. Franco Moretti is even more explicit (and more forgetful) in this regard, claiming to have discovered what he calls a “law of literary evolution”: “in cultures that belong to the periphery of the literary system (which means: almost all cultures, inside and outside Europe), the modern novel first arises . . . as a compromise between a western formal influence (usually French or English) and local materials” (58). Moretti never asks after the colonial conditionality of his examples, or after the coloniality of power within either the world literary system or literary form itself. Instead, Moretti’s law is absolute (universal): “when a culture starts moving towards the modern novel, it’s *always* as a compromise between foreign form and local material” (60). Here the novelistic equivalent of formal decolonization features as the primary mechanism by which peripheral literature is worlded – and worlded in the image of literature that the colonizers insist is their own, having nothing to do with colonialism or the colonized. In other words, what we have been calling formal decolonization is, in both Moretti’s and Casanova’s models, the world literary system’s own reformist mechanism for expanding access to the regime of the universal, extending its scope by pouring new “native” content into old colonial forms.

The imperative to decolonize the curriculum is nearly as old as the imperial curriculum itself, its impulses ranging from formal decolonization to the decolonization of curricular forms. I conclude with a particularly rich example from colonial West Africa, where desires and designs for decolonization might be especially difficult to appreciate viewed through today’s decolonial lenses. More than a century ago, just a year after Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* consolidated the colonial image of Africa as a place without civilization, nations, or even “recognizable humanity” (Achebe, “Image” 9), Gold Coast lawyer, writer, and politician J. E. Casely Hayford published his anticolonial treatise, *Gold Coast Native Institutions* (1903). Hayford argued passionately that “the Native State itself has been disorganised by British aggression and interference” (27); the complexity of his vision of decolonization is announced in the book’s subtitle *With Thoughts upon a Healthy Imperial Policy for the Gold*

Coast and Ashanti. Card-carrying member of the Gold Coast Aborigines' Rights Protection Society, Hayford was especially concerned about the destruction of native forms of social and political life, but his demand for decolonization is framed as a right to imperialism: "I have ventured to suggest a key to the solution of the problem. It is none other than the imperialisation of the Gold Coast and of Ashanti on purely aboriginal lines" (ix). Addressing British readers directly, Hayford insists that the "only way to remedy the past is to undo what wrong . . . has already been done; and the way to do so is by restoring [the] Native State System as nearly as may be" (100). Political decolonization for Hayford entailed repatriation (that is, restoration of what the author regards as a precolonial polity resembling, or nearly enough, a modern nation-state) and political self-determination, "the keynote of healthy imperialism" (126). For Hayford, a restored native state, within an international order of similar sovereign states under British Empire, is the only form that can secure the rights and interests of colonized peoples, giving access to a historical regime of the universal. Thus, Hayford stakes out a critical position that is at once anticolonial and proimperial, where political decolonization means imperialization: *Imperium in Imperio*.

Advocating formal decolonization, *Gold Coast Native Institutions* itself occupies the generic form of a rather conventional "customs and manners" ethnography like those British anthropologists produced in service of colonial administration. Hayford offers detailed policy recommendations for securing his "ideal of Imperial West Africa" (269) that, in outline and substance, resemble the framework for Indirect Rule that Frederick Lugard later famously formulated in *The Dual Mandate* (1922), which became the backbone for both official British colonial policy and the League of Nations' Mandate System that normalized colonial rule under modern international law. Indeed, Hayford clearly imagines decolonization and imperialism, or what he sometimes refers to as "true imperialism" (125), as coproductions. The generic conventionality of *Gold Coast Native Institutions* contrasts sharply with Hayford's more experimental and genre-bending novel, *Ethiopia Unbound* (1911), which, among many other things, lays out a program for decolonizing the native mind by remaking colonial institutions, in particular by establishing a national university with an Africa-centered curriculum. One of the earliest examples of the anglophone African novel, *Ethiopia Unbound*, subtitled *Studies in Race Emancipation*, is a marvelously disordered (in the revolutionary Fanonian sense) text that does not fit standard European generic conventions nor abide Moretti's "law of literary evolution" and, perhaps for that reason, has

largely been ignored by both institutionalized World Literature and the dominant “global” histories of the novel. With a fictionalized version of Hayford himself acting as protagonist, the novel both imagines and performs cultural decolonization as it seeks “to learn to unlearn all that foreign sophistry has encrusted upon the intelligence of the African” (*Ethiopia* 164). Together, Hayford’s two books form a diptych that epitomizes the dual mandate of decolonization, but both press the same polemical point: “the eternal verity remains that the natural line of development for the aborigines is racial and national, and that this is the only way to successful European intercourse and enterprise” (*Ethiopia* 69). For Hayford, decolonization is a dialectical process that entails both inhabiting and remaking colonialism’s legated forms in the struggle to join empire and rewrite “universal history,” a primary topic to be taught at his decolonized National University, “with particular reference to the part Ethiopia has played in the affairs of the world” (*Ethiopia* 194).

The tension between the two decolonizing impulses has intensified in recent calls to decolonize everything from hearts to minds to life, love, and land. In 2012, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang famously rejected what they saw as the “colonization” of decolonization by “civil and human rights-based social justice projects” (2), especially curricular reform efforts in the settler-colonial context of the United States, insisting that decolonization is not a metaphor. For Tuck and Yang, decolonization is “unsettling work” (4) – where “unsettling” is also not a metaphor – that requires above all “the repatriation of [stolen] Indigenous land and life” (21). The legalistic Latinate word they use in their essay to describe the ultimate goal of decolonization – “repatriation” – seems to push the pendulum back in the direction of formal decolonization and to reaffirm classic (even colonial) linkages between territory, identity, and freedom that postcolonial studies often sought to delink. Indeed, unless “repatriation” is itself a metaphor in Tuck and Yang, the word seems anachronistic, implying a certain acquiescence to the coloniality of property and power, since it draws its usual meaning from the political framework and vocabulary of a modern international order in which the world’s lands and peoples are already partitioned into nation-state units – a world order of territorialized ethnic identities presumably under contest by radical (“true”) decolonization.

The decolonization of forms is no more metaphorical than formal decolonization, and literature (the traditional realm of metaphor) has never been merely metaphorical in relation to acts of possession, dispossession, and repossession. Fanon’s sustained interest in matters of literary form in “On National Culture” attests to the important dialectical

relations between forms of expression and the material forms that both domination and emancipation take. Indeed, the linguistic, legal, and cultural forms in which the dispossession of peoples and the possession of land and resources were claimed are inextricable from the material acts and facts of possession themselves, inflecting the real terms of colonialization and decolonization. Thus, the forms through which all claims of possession (colonial, native, or other) are made not only shape the material reality in which life and land are perceived, imagined, and lived, they also shape the historical possibilities for both formal decolonization and the decolonization of forms.

Both the modern nation-state and the classic English literary curriculum were forged with the project of European colonialism; but they are not simply or merely colonial constructions or impositions, at least not as we must reckon with them today. Both the nation as we know it now and literary studies in our current moment were also shaped by the energies and histories of mid-century decolonization and never-ending efforts by dominated groups to decolonize their forms. It does decolonization no good today to pretend otherwise, that is to pretend that we are simply dealing with colonial forms endlessly perpetuating the coloniality of power, or that we could as a practicable matter entirely wring coloniality out of power itself, when they are also forms forged in the crucible of multiple decolonizations. Given the centrality of colonialism in shaping our present – our modes of being, knowing, and feeling – decolonization can never be completely done once and for always. Indeed, the eternal return of desires for decolonization indicates (and not for the first time) the undying need for a second “true” decolonization that neither diminishes nor forgets previous efforts.

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