

Language and Alienation: Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o on Returning to Oral Tradition

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Abstract

Language played a pivotal role in establishing hierarchy during colonialism. The colonial language was unjustly imposed on people, which mostly affected them in exploitative ways. They were not free to use their own native languages and were forced to translate their thoughts into the imposed colonial language if they wanted their view to be heard or considered. Many post-colonialist thinkers emphasised the psychological effects of colonialism, which create a sense of inferiority in people and ultimately take them away from their own indigenous culture. This paper will attempt to analyse the struggles colonised people face in expressing their thoughts in an imposed language, with reference to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. It will examine the underlying epistemic injustice that arises when one is forced to narrate their lived experience in a foreign language. In addition, the loss of aesthetic sense resulting from the imposition of language, and a profound feeling of alienation from their immediate environment—an environment they constructed—are also matters of concern. The paper will examine the extent to which Ngũgĩ's suggestion to return to the oral tradition can resolve these issues.

Keywords:

postcolonialism, Ngũgĩ, language, alienation, oral tradition

Introduction

The question of what distinguishes humanity from other forms of life has always interested philosophers across eras. While some thinkers considered sentience uniquely human, others perceived humans as rational animals. Nevertheless, they all stressed the overarching role of human linguistic ability as grounding human existence in the world. Reflecting on this distinct human capacity will yield perplexing insights into the essence of humanity. Beneath all the hitherto changes in the world, behind all the developments in the sphere of knowledge and all imaginations of reality, human ability for language lies as an all-pervasive essence. Martin Heidegger (1998) calls language “the house of being in

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which the human being ek-sists by dwelling” (p. 254). Language is human. Language is social. It has made humans an animal that writes its own history.

Sophistication in communication is an essential manifestation of linguistic ability. It has transcended a simple form of existence into an active transformation of the world around. Language, in a sense, helps shape who humans are. This is why history shows that one of the most evil ruptures in human history was caused by control over the sphere of language. In the colonial era, language was a crucial factor in establishing the power hierarchy between natives and colonisers. Colonisers imposed their own language on native people to establish their superiority, thereby using it as a means of power. This has resulted in an adverse situation in which natives are losing their hold over their own language. Norman Fairclough (1989) discusses this in the context of English historically becoming the dominant language worldwide. Similarly, Gauri Vishwanathan (1989) discusses the dominating effects of colonial language and literature in Indian colonial history. Such works show that colonialism has made the natives a dark fissure between the imposed language and their own mother tongue. They become alienated from their culture, history and eventually from even themselves. There are several contemporary studies that focus on linguistic hegemony in the context of European colonies. For instance, the work of Francesco Ricatti (2025) titled “Indigenous Sovereignty and Multilingual Multiculturalism: Challenging the Monolingual hegemony of settler colonialism.” He focuses on how English has systematically risen to become a dominant language in the context of Australia’s linguistic diversity and how this monolingualism acted as a tool that pursue the objectives of settler colonialism.

Every effort towards a decolonial present undeniably assumes an examination of colonial history. When history itself is woven with language, it is significant to examine colonial roots through that lens. This paper, therefore, examines how language becomes instrumental in shaping power structures and how its imposition erases the native voices in the context of colonial history.

However, there has been no consensus among intellectuals on the effect of colonial language on native identity. Many African anti-colonial theorists and even Indian theorists have debated the imposition of language. Some of them found that upholding colonial languages like English has some practical benefits. They considered it as a way to reach larger audiences or to overcome the social hierarchy. According to these thinkers, the imposed language had the power to uplift and secure recognition. On the other hand, thinkers such as Tagore and Gandhi in India and Ngugi and Fanon in Africa found it important to focus on the mother tongue. For such thinkers, it was a tool of oppression. Therefore, this paper seeks to examine the paradox whereby accepting a foreign language can uplift the masses while also alienating people from their own identity and culture.

Thinkers like Frantz Fanon and Ngugi wa Thiong’o focused on the psychological impact of colonialization, in which language played a crucial role. They showed how colonialism systematically oppressed indigenous people and created a feeling of inferiority in them. They gave examples of people from Martinique and Kenya, respectively, to show how people began to lean toward European identity, believing their own traditional history and language were backward and lacked power. They contend that even after colonial rule ended, this psychological manipulation persisted. They found that liberation ultimately requires ending this mental subjugation and reconnecting people to their own environment. Accordingly, Ngugi suggested returning to the oral tradition, which he saw as an anti-colonial form of resistance, and believed it could bring harmony. Given this, this

paper analyses his claim in the backdrop of the debate over the role of colonial language in the colonies. It will explore whether returning to oral tradition actually helps end this colonial alienation and other injustices.

This paper is divided into three sections. Section 1 will discuss works that show how colonialism affected people politically, economically, and, most importantly, psychologically. It will refer to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963) and *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967), Renate Zahar's *Frantz Fanon: Colonialism and Alienation* (1974), Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986), and Miranda Fricker's *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (2007). Furthermore, section 2 will discuss the issue of linguistic hegemony, the role of language in colonial domination, drawing mainly on the accounts of Norman Fairclough and Gauri Vishwanathan to examine how language gains power and how that power relation is normalised through language. Section 3 will analyse the plausibility of Ngũgĩ's call to return to the oral tradition by situating it against the arguments of thinkers such as Chinua Achebe, Ambedkar and Gandhi.

Impact of Colonialism

To understand colonial alienation, it is essential first to examine colonialism, the practice of domination based on superiority over the subjugated people. It was not just economic or political domination, but also psychological domination. It created a hierarchy between colonisers and colonised, making the other less human. Renate Zahar, an Italian socialist, in her work, *Frantz Fanon: Colonialism and Alienation*, said that

Colonialism provides the ideological foundation of the division of society into human beings and the natives. Colonisers consider themselves as human with freely exercising their rights, and for the other, the absence of their rights sanctions their ignorance, subhuman status. (Zahar, 1974, p.19).

This shows how colonisers considered themselves superior and civilised human beings exercising their rights. However, they considered natives as less human, uncivilised, and barbarous. Sartre, on the other hand, defined a native as an oppressed person who feels that he has no right to exist.¹ The colonisers aimed to control wealth and modes of production in the colonies. They tried to control what colonies produced and how they produced. Therefore, to dominate social production, they relied on military and political tyranny, yet they felt the need for something more. That is mental domination, and for that, they attacked the culture, as to dominate people's culture is to dominate their tool of self-definition.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986), a Kenyan writer and critic, extensively discussed this cultural domination in his book *Decolonising the Mind*. He said it involves two aspects of the same process: first, the devaluation of the culture, history, art, and language of native people, and second, the elevation of the language and culture of colonisers. Colonisers were able to do so by using the cultural bomb, which ended people's belief in their own culture, language, heritage and even in themselves. It made them feel like their past was a wasteland, and they should distance themselves from it. This devaluation of the culture and history of indigenous people made them think of themselves as less and inferior to others. Such thought leads to colonial alienation, which distances natives from their own reality and leads to identification with that which is external to their environment. This

¹ Sartre, *Materialism and Revolution*, pg. 215

systematic psychological oppression manipulates the indigenous people to such an extent that they themselves accept it as fact. They believed they were inferior and that European culture and language were the cure for their perceived inferiority. It created a compelling urge in them to adopt the colonisers' language and culture, forming a new identity.

Under colonial rule, people faced epistemic injustice²; the voices of natives got erased, their culture got devalued, and they faced injustice in every sphere of life. Their native tongue was stigmatised and lost its significance, so if they wanted to be heard, they had to translate their experiences into the colonisers' language. This foreign language, which reflected colonisers culture and which was not part of native's own culture, lacked the concepts to describe their experiences, leading to hermeneutical injustice (in terms of Fricker). In such a situation, translating their experiences into other languages undermines their authenticity and aesthetic value. The worst part was that it was imposed to such an extent that even when they thought of the misery caused by colonialism, they thought of it in the language of colonisers. Moreover, it affected their capacity to learn, as the child now had to learn this new language first to understand or form new ideas in it. It made the whole process more complex. In countries like India, it deepened internal hierarchies, as this foreign language was accessible only to the elite, yet necessary for access to good opportunities or progress in life during that period and even now.

It shows how colonialism affected people physically, economically, and psychologically. It also showed how imposed language alienated people from their own identities and immediate surroundings, causing them to suffer. It raises an important question: how can one language hold so much power while the other is simply ignored as a backward language? How does language become an instrument of subjugation?

Role of Language

Language is usually understood as a structured system of communication that consists of symbols, gestures, and sounds to express meaning. Norman Fairclough (1989), a British social theorist and linguist, considers language as social action, as ideology (assumptions), as discourse (contextual), and not just as a system of sentences. He said it contains existing hierarchies (such as teacher > student) and continuously recreates them. These power relations operate through common-sense assumptions. According to him (1989), power in language is exercised and enacted through two aspects: power in discourse (in actual interactions) and power behind discourse (forces that shape those discourses). He talked about the standardisation of language, which emerged alongside capitalism following the end of British feudalism. Capitalism required unified economic markets, which in turn led to political and cultural unification. This standardisation, by reducing dialect differences, helped improve communication and foster good trade. During this time, standard English was regarded as correct, and other dialects, even Asian dialects, which were the languages of the colonies, were stigmatised not just for their incorrectness but also as reflections of the lifestyle and culture of their speakers. So, the working class were called barbarous, vulgar, underdeveloped, lawless and so on. This dominance, in turn, contributed to the

² Miranda Fricker (2007) in *Epistemic Injustice: Power and Ethics of Knowing*, defines it as a type of injustice where someone is wronged in their capacity as a knower. She talks about 2 kinds of injustice i.e., testimonial injustice, where person's voice gets ignored due to hearers' prejudice and hermeneutical injustice, where person face issue in expressing their experience due to lack of such social concepts or language. In case of colonized people, they face these both kind of epistemic injustice.

capitalist class's dominance over the working class. The codification of standard language played a big part in this process. He said:

By becoming associated with the most salient and powerful institutions like literature, Government and administration, law, religion, education, etc., standard English began to emerge as the language of political and cultural power, and as the language of the politically and culturally powerful. (Fairclough, 1989, p.56).

Norman, by taking the English language as an example, showed how its standardisation, codification, and association with powerful institutions made it a powerful language. This clarifies how language holds power, and some languages become more powerful than others.

Ngugi also discussed language and the domination of one language over another. He explained that language, beyond being a mode of communication, is a mental construct that carries culture, beliefs, and memories. This can be understood with the example that, for India, English is only a mode of communication, whereas for Britain it is also a carrier of its history and culture. Ngugi showed that imposed language alienates people from their culture, environment, and even from their own identity. He sees the domination of language as a means of subjugating the soul. To understand it well, we have to see language as both a form of communication and a form of culture, as he discusses. Language as communication has three aspects: the language of real life (as a code for understanding social roles), speech, which imitates the language of real life, and the last is written sign (as a carrier of culture, passing on our history and tradition to future generations), which imitates speech. In many societies, the spoken and written languages are the same, making it easy for a child to see the harmony in these three aspects. However, in colonised countries, the spoken and written languages differ, making it difficult to establish harmony. He also talks about language as culture, saying that it is a memory bank of their historical experiences. Language as culture also has three aspects i.e., language as the production and formation of history, and as an image-forming agent (which helps us create a view of ourselves and the world, and we confront reality on the basis of whether those images correspond to reality). The last aspect is language as a means of cultural transformation; language carries an image of the world, and it transmits these images through written literature and orature. Language, as communication and as culture, is connected. It carries culture, which carries values, and that shows us who we are and where we fit in the world.

He pointed out that most Africans speak African languages; they communicate in those languages and have the right to intellectual production in them, even if only five people speak them. Afterwards, it can be connected to other languages through translations or by adding other languages to what it already has. However, the problem with colonies is that their entire intellectual production is in European languages, the language of power. On the other hand, the majority of the colonies speak their own mother tongues, such as African languages, but these are not the languages of power or intellectual production. Or to say whatever is produced in this indigenous language was not being considered as knowledge, or in Aristotelian terms, *episteme*. This difference separates them from the immediate environment, ending harmony in different aspects of language. It led to feelings of inferiority and a sense of suppression. Banning the mother tongue and detaching the culture and history in that language, then imposing another language and forcing them, or making them believe that this imposed language is the best for them, and that their own language, culture and history is a wasteland, was the colonisation of the

mind. He gave an example from Kenyan schools around 1952, where English was imposed as the medium of instruction, so all knowledge production and ideological formation occurred in English, while at home, those students spoke their native language (Gikuyu). In schools, they were humiliated and punished if found using their own mother tongue, and rewarded for using the imposed language. It creates a view of the worthlessness of one's own language. In this way, the systematic suppression of the native language took place under colonial rule. It took people away from their own culture, environment, and themselves. This also pointed out another destructive aspect of this colonial education system, which was creating a distance between the spoken and written languages of those children. He says that Fanon was the one who showed what was happening in the postcolonial era. Fanon (1967) said that political independence does not necessarily entail economic and cultural independence. He believed that "...to speak means to exist absolutely for others" (p. 17). He showed that language is related to power; the stronger your hold on superior language, the more power you will have. Through this, he showed the psychological impact of colonialism. People try to learn and use the language of power to gain a higher status. Indian literary critic and cultural activist G. N. Devy pointed out that during modernisation or colonialism, whatever was written was considered true, and whatever was not written was either considered untrue or folklore. Many tribal communities of India, in particular, and some colonies in general, lacked this written language, so whatever they had was in spoken form and considered as folklore or untrue. He tried to show that writing is not a necessary factor for the preservation of thoughts and ideas in a language.

Gauri Vishwanathann, in her work *Masks of Conquest*, discussed English as a medium of education in India. She said that the aim of colonisers was to produce workers who would be Indian by blood but English in sentiment. People who could serve as good clerks, take care of orders, but could not think for themselves. The aim was not only to establish English as a mode of communication but to make natives internalise the superiority of the English language so that colonial culture could automatically be superior. It is very obvious that they succeeded in their goal. Indian people have tried and are still trying to adapt the English language and emulate Western culture. The same was true in Africa, as Fanon and Ngugi noted, with people in Martinique and Kenya feeling a sense of superiority because they spoke the European language and forced their kids to learn it. Though there was another factor, i.e., this imperial language was not accessible to all, as there was also a class division in those colonies, deepening that hierarchy.

To end such psychological domination by colonisers on people's language and culture, Ngugi calls for a return to the oral tradition. He started writing in Gikuyu, his mother tongue, and drew on oral traditions, including myths, legends, and African proverbs, in his works.

Ngugi on Returning to the Oral Tradition

Ngugi was of the view that the native language connects people to their own environment, history, and people, so he emphasised returning to the oral tradition, the African storytelling tradition, to end this mental domination and alienation from their own culture. The reason was the rootedness of oral tradition in the lives of the peasantry. It is a rich living tradition with many sides to it. Ngugi (1986) explained that "it is primarily their compositions, their songs, their art, which form the basis of the national and resistance culture during the colonial and neo-colonial times" (p.95). He saw this oral tradition as

supplement also to modern African literature as it could bring them closer to their own roots and their own cultural history

In 1977, he started writing in the Gikuyu language, for which he said, in a “*Decolonising Mind*”, that “my writing in Gikuyu language, a Kenyan language, an African language, is part and parcel of the anti-imperialist struggles of Kenyan and African people” (Ngugi, 1986, p.28). Before that, he was writing in English, and he found that problematic. Therefore, he switched and argued that other African writers should also bring back African languages to the centre. He questioned those thinkers who are radical against imperialism but adore the imperial language and express their criticism of Europe in that language. It is important to note that he was not the first person to discuss the African writer and their language for writing. This issue has been addressed at the famous Conference of African Writers of English Expression at Makerere in 1962 and in print by many African writers, including Achebe, Senghor, Okara, Mphahlele, Obi Wali, and others. Fanon also explored it around 1959 in “Congress of Black African Writers at Rome”. In the 1962 Makerere conference, two viewpoints were presented. Few writers, like Achebe, said that the European language could be seen as a gift of colonisers to natives. Others, like Obi Wali, defended African literature to be in African languages. In colonial India, we also had two views on the English language: thinkers like Gandhi and Tagore emphasised keeping the mother tongue as the medium of instruction, while thinkers like Ambedkar saw English as a gift (a means of liberation) for Dalit people to escape their misery. In the case of Ambedkar, he saw traditional Indian language, which was Sanskrit, as a tool of Brahmanical domination and patriarchy. It was accessible only to the so-called upper castes, specifically to brahmins. However, English, as he saw it, was a neutral, empowering means of accessing knowledge needed to fight discrimination.

Chinua Achebe (1936), in his work “African Writers in the English Language”, discussed this issue and questioned, “Is it right that a man should abandon his mother tongue for someone else's? It looks like a dreadful betrayal and produces a guilty feeling. But, for me, there is no other choice” (p.434). He suggested that African writers should use English by appropriating it while retaining oral traditions and original African terms to convey their experiences most effectively. Ngugi pointed out a paradox in Achebe's claim: the feeling of guilt and the act of writing in English. He said that Achebe offers a “fatalistic logic,” the practical and political reason for the language's global acceptance and reach. Ngugi (1986) wonders “how did we arrive at this acceptance of 'the fatalistic logic of the unassailable position of English in our literature', in our culture and in our politics?” (p.9).

He questions all the writers who are trying to enrich European languages with their mother tongues, rather than enriching their own mother tongues with European languages. He even differed on the point of global acceptance of English as a reason to write literature in a European language. He believed that literature has the capacity to fire the imagination and capture the reality of the world, and therefore, it becomes very important. Ngugi believes that African literature should be written in African languages so that African students no longer have to learn about Africa through European-language literature. This literature describes their language and culture as underdeveloped, less intelligent, and humiliating. He said that literature written by African writers in European languages can be called Afro-European literature and said that it would last as long as Africa is under this neo-colonial setup. He even pointed out that reality is so upside down that when he started writing in Gikuyu around 1977, he was questioned many times as if it were abnormal. However, writing in one's own mother tongue can never be abnormal. He even pointed

out that, in fact, Africa enriches Europe, yet Europe is portrayed as capable of saving Africa from poverty. He criticised this upside-down reality. His aim was to ensure that the Kenyan children would not go through the same humiliation, suffering and manipulation that his generation suffered. He wanted to restore the harmony broken by the dissociation of the language of conceptualisation, formal education, or thinking from the language of daily interaction in the home and community. He tried to bring the African language and the struggle to the centre, so it could be their new perspective. He opposed the use of English as the medium of instruction in African schools. He believed that it separates a child from her roots and makes learning difficult for them. This European lens would provide them with a Eurocentric view where African languages and cultures were uncivilised and underdeveloped. It will create the same sense of inferiority in this new generation and lure them into adopting this so-called well-developed and civilised culture and language. Here, we have to keep in mind that he was not suggesting that Africans or any colonised people should not learn other languages. His goal was to decentre European language and culture. In his (2012) work *Globlectics: Theory and the Politics of Knowing*, he argued that in literary studies, every language and culture should be treated as an equal point on the globe; one cannot be at the centre and the rest at the margins. What he wanted was to bring harmony, as he said: “With that harmony between himself, his language and his environment as his starting point, he can learn other languages and even enjoy other people’s literature and culture without complexes” (Ngugi, 1986, p.28).

So, he suggests that first, a child should be well connected to and well aware of his or her own language, history, and culture, so that he or she can form a worldview of his or her surroundings and the world, keeping his or her own cultural lens at the centre. In this way, she would not be embarrassed by her own identity, past or present, and she would not consider it unintelligent or backward. Only then should they learn other languages and literatures. Keeping one's own language at the centre will also help them provide a correct perspective on themselves. In other words, Ngugi and other thinkers like him suggested keeping oral tradition at the centre of literature because a good educational policy would enable students to first study the culture and environment of their society, then situate it in relation to those of other societies. Therefore, Ngugi (1986) sought to show that African literature and indigenous experiences must be at the core of the syllabus (p.97).

Furthermore, he said that it is not enough that African literature is in an African language and follows the African style of storytelling, or orature, and so on; it is important to bring in the anti-imperialist struggle of African peasants and the revolutionary working class, and the issue of African lives in that literature.

Conclusion

Postcolonial discourse underscores that language is not merely something that exhibits power but also shapes the structures through which power relations are exercised and sustained. Norman Fairclough showed that when ideological assumptions are accepted as common sense or a state of affairs that are reproduced through daily conversations, language attains power. For example, a normal conversation between a teacher and a student rests on the assumption that the teacher generally has more wisdom than the student, creating a hierarchy between them and legitimising the teacher's authority over the student. The conversion of the ideological assumption into common sense naturalises it as the only right way to interact. In this way, people reproduce such unequal power unknowingly (Fairclough, 1989, pp. 18, 91). Other than that, shaping certain unequal

treatments towards language as part of the conventions is another way to exercise power, for example, standardisation of language, in which some specific dialect gets codified and elevated as superior or correct language, and other dialects get stigmatised. This clarifies a few instances of how one language dominates another.

We also found that linguistic domination can subjugate people's selves. It can alienate them from their immediate surroundings, their culture, and even their true being, as people make sense of their connection to their environment and others through their mother tongue. A language, as Fanon pointed out, constitutes and reflects people's lifestyles, worldviews, and cultures. In light of that, this paper showed how colonial imposition worked, making people feel inferior and manipulating them into believing their own traditions, language and history as worthless. The result of this was nothing but the alienation of people from their roots, pushing them to a state where the superiority and domination of the West is an undeniable fact.

Furthermore, the imposition of European Language and education was used as an instrument to materialise the imperial aim of widening European cultural and political power. However, this imposition was carried out in the name of civilising the uncivilised and alleviating their poverty. This was the sole reason why imposition of the language and Western education was criticised by thinkers like Fanon and Ngugi. Another thinker, Gauri Viswanathan (1989), criticised the teaching of English literature as a form of cultural hegemony. She said that English education and the curriculum in India were not meant to preserve culture but to organise power. It did not just impose power, but its unequal distribution created an internal hierarchy. It was accessible only to the elite class in India. So, the existing gap between classes in India widened as only the so-called upper classes were able to reach this intellectual leadership by learning English and adopting English culture.

Viswanathan's claim underscores that linguistic hegemony reproduces or reinforces existing social injustices, such as caste-based injustice. Moreover, the imposition of language leads to several other instances of injustice in the domain of episteme. The colonised people find it difficult to learn the colonial language, but in order to be heard, they were left with no alternative choices. For indigenous people, it was difficult to express their experiences in a language that was not part of their lives or culture. So, they get trapped in the web of translation, losing authenticity. If we consider this more deeply, we can see that the language and knowledge system were structured around keeping the West at the centre as superior, so any description of the other within those concepts and language would never capture its real essence.

This provides the necessary context for understanding Ngugi's rejection of linguistic hegemony. He explained that, since most African cultures were passed down through oral tradition, they were preserved from generation to generation. Nevertheless, colonialism and the new language disrupted the flow of customs, storytelling, and culture from one generation to the next. It created a vacuum that was eventually filled by colonial aesthetics, sympathy, and ways of writing. Therefore, Ngugi felt the need to bridge this gap by writing literature in native languages and by incorporating legends, myths, and proverbs to preserve African oral tradition. It could be a way to pass it on to the next generation, who would otherwise have almost lost their connection to their own culture. He said that there is a need to reclaim resistance histories and culture, and to preserve African values. Therefore, he suggested including stories of the revolutionary struggles of African peasants and the working class to keep them alive and pass these values on to

future generations. His ‘returning to oral tradition’ in a sense offers a way to dismantle colonial imposition by connecting people to their own histories and realising the worth of their own language and culture.

Ngugi is not in fact against learning a new language or culture. What he was opposing was a system that places Europe at the centre and everyone else at its margins. He was against the system that compels people of Africa to learn their own culture through languages that were once imposed on them. Colonial history has enriched only European languages, leaving other native languages vulnerable. Therefore, any further act of placing languages like English above African languages would worsen this condition. This is why Ngugi criticises Achebe's argument in support of writing in English. He calls Achebe's argument for writing in appropriated English—since English has a larger global audience—“fatalistic logic,” since it keeps enriching the English language.

Though Ngugi and even Fanon were talking about instances of Africa, it could be applied to all the colonies. Postcolonial thinkers in India are also seeking to reclaim India's history, traditions, and culture. One can see the same disruption in the flow of traditional values and knowledge in India's colonial history. Especially in the field of philosophy, the imposition of English and Western education has created a chasm between the premodern and postcolonial discourses of Indian philosophy. Thus, current decolonial interventions emphasise restoring India's indigenous knowledge and languages, and creating an indigenous knowledge system. In short, colonial powers pursued their domination differently across the world. However, the imposition of colonial language on natives and its adverse effect on indigenous language and minds were common across the globe. This explains why decolonial discourse across the world, despite considerable differences, accepts a ‘going back’ as an essential part of the process. In India, this refers to a leaning towards the lost wisdom of the premodern era, whereas in Africa it means, as Ngugi tells, an inevitable return to the oral tradition.

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