

1 *Language and liberation*

David Boucher

Introduction

Colonisation is fundamentally a dehumanising process, a subjugation of one people by another, a violation of human rights by denying the value of the history, culture and language of the colonised. Jean Paul Sartre, the anti-colonial French existentialist philosopher, contended, with reference to Algeria, that ‘no one is unaware that we have ruined, starved and massacred a nation of poor people to bring them to their knees’ (Sartre 2006 [1962]: 148). He maintains that the French left nothing for the Muslims in Algeria and forbade them everything. They were denied the use of their own language, and their civilisation was liquidated while at the same time they were denied the civilisation of the French. The Algerians were refused integration and assimilation, and denied the same rights as the colonisers in order to legitimise colonial over-exploitation. Colonisation counts among its successes the cancelling out of the colonised (Sartre 2006 [1958]: 85).

In Taiwan under the Japanese, and in Singapore and Kenya under the British, for example, the Japanese and British languages respectively became the media of instruction at schools, and the histories and literatures of the two empires dominated the curriculum. Language is one of the principal instruments of control and oppression through which the superiority of the colonising culture is imposed, not only as the language of officialdom, but also through control of the curriculum in schools and universities. The elites were for the most part, of course, educated in the universities of the metropole, but the metropole also ensured that its canon was taught in the colonies through missionary schools and universities, such as Fort Hare in South Africa, and the overseas extensions of the University of London in Uganda, Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Kenya and Tanzania. Nelson Mandela lamented: ‘The education I received was a British education, in which British ideas, British culture, and British institutions were automatically assumed to be superior. There was no such thing as African culture.’ He added, ‘Whites were either unable or unwilling to pronounce an African name and considered it uncivilised to have one’ (Mandela 1994: 13). At Alliance High School in Kenya, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o learnt from Principal Smith not to overcomplicate sentences and follow the example of Jesus, who spoke perfect English (Ngũgĩ 2013: 23)! Both Mandela’s and Ngũgĩ’s education reflected the principle laid down by TB Macaulay, with reference to India, in 1835. Macaulay argued that ‘We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern – a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect’ (1835: 34).

Literature, and the choice of language in which it is written, therefore has an important and distinctive role to play in the liberation struggle. The politics of language is integral to the fight for liberation. At its core is the search for a liberating perspective from which the colonised see themselves in relation to themselves and to other selves in the cosmos (Ngũgĩ 1986: 87, 108). To be silenced through the suppression of one's language and the imposition of another is a form of dehumanisation. Paulo Freire contends that the coloniser imposes his objectives on the colonised, who in turn internalises them and is rendered ambiguous and reduced to the status of a thing (2017: 138).

It is a cultural invasion which by necessity disrespects the potentialities of the oppressed people, inhibiting their creativity and modes of expression (Freire 2017: 152). Freire maintains that the essence of human existence is the naming of the world and in doing so changing it. He contends that those 'who have been denied their primordial right to speak their word must first reclaim this right and prevent the continuation of this dehumanising aggression' (Freire 2017: 88). But reclaiming one's voice poses the question in which language one authentically speaks. Freire, having worked in Guinea-Bissau on educational policy after independence, was vehemently opposed to Cabral's policy designating Portuguese as the language of state and language of education. It was, in Freire's view, a continuation of colonisation and the coloniser's values (Freire 1978; Freire & Macedo 2004).

This chapter will examine the cases of three different but overlapping arguments for the importance of language in the process of decolonisation and resistance. The cases are notionally distinct but co-exist in the writings of liberation theorists, with each giving different weight to different theories. The first case recommends the appropriation of the language of the coloniser as a resource for uniting a people in the revolutionary struggle. It argues the case for the importance of language as instrumental in forging the ties between linguistically diverse groups within the same colonial domain, as for example in Singapore, and for making good the deficiencies in underdeveloped languages for effective communication. There is an element of contingency, or pragmatism, in the arguments. There are two variations: a) sees the language as purely instrumental, while b) sees its appropriation and transformation as a subversive act. The second of the anticolonial positions takes language to be integral to identity and cultural inheritance. It does not deny that it may be necessary to use the coloniser's language for communication, but nevertheless recognises it as alien and destructive of identity and culture. The third view of language and decolonisation recognises the value of 'hybrid' languages, that is, the creolisation of cultures, maintaining that the 'new' creation generates exciting and vibrant forms of expression. In fact, this may be understood as an extension of the second argument, and entails casting aside the stigma and opprobrium with which creole languages are viewed by colonisers and the bourgeois colonised alike.

Revolutionary appropriation of language

There are colonised societies, of course, where reviving a native language is not an option, or where the diversity of languages militate cross-cultural communication and political resistance against the coloniser. Here language may be viewed as instrumental, or the appropriation of the language of the coloniser as subversive. When there is no language comprehensible to the majority, as in India and large parts of Africa, nationalists frequently appropriated the idiom of the colonial rulers. The widespread use of English facilitated the coordination of the Indian liberation struggle across the whole sub-continent (Rushdie 1992: 125). In this respect language is not viewed as constitutive of identity, nor essential to the authentic expression of national consciousness. It is a variation of, and consistent with, the idea of what Chomsky calls Universal Grammar (UG), or what Charles Taylor calls Human Linguistic Capacity (HLC), which posits that universal linguistic principles are innate and generate, constrain, and determine the range of our linguistic capacities (Chomsky 1965). Taylor's category of Human Linguistic Capacity is a universalist conception of language attributable primarily to Hobbes, Locke, and Condillac. They understood language as an instrument. It is a means to encode information which is detachable from reality, rather than constitutive of it (Taylor 2016: 4–5).

Among the revolutionary African liberation theorists, Amílcar Cabral placed significant emphasis on education in the elimination of ignorance, and he believed that Portuguese was a more sophisticated language in which to do it. He maintained that the revolutionary movement should make a professor of every party leader, and militant comrade. Everyone had an obligation to teach. Cabral found it endearing that many among his revolutionary comrades valued the local languages such as Creole, Fula, Mandinga, Pepel, and Balanta, but he contended that it was no longer possible to communicate effectively through them because of the diversity of the written form, and lack of phonetic uniformity in a language such as Balanta, the language of the largest ethnic group in Guinea Bissau. Cabral wanted to refute the argument that it was fundamental to the liberation struggle to teach in Creole, Balanta, or other languages of Guinea-Bissau (Davidson 1979: xiv). There would be time in the future, he argued, for developing Creole, but at that time Portuguese was the written language, and the indigenous languages, Cabral claimed, had not evolved to the same level of sophistication as an instrument of communication as Portuguese. He did not see Portuguese as a threat to the culture of Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde, 'because language isn't evidence of anything, but an instrument for men to relate with one another, a means for speaking, to express realities of life and of the world' (Cabral 2016: 134–5). He had a purely instrumental view of language, and believed the acquisition and communication of knowledge was much more effective in Portuguese, especially in relation to scientific advances. Cabral argued that 'We of the Party, if we want to lead our people forward for a long time to come – to write, to advance in science – our language has to be Portuguese. And this is an honour. It's the only thing we can appreciate from the *tuga*, because he left his language having stolen so much from our

land' (Cabral 2016: 136). Using Portuguese, in his view, was not a capitulation to the enemy. It was just like employing Russian, English or American tractors to increase the yield at harvest time. As long as the Portuguese language works and brings about independence, its use is justified on pragmatic grounds.

A different, and perhaps more subversive, version of the appropriation of the coloniser's language emanates from the idea that the language of the coloniser can be used in the service of political subversion. Jürgen Osterhammel argues that with the colonial destruction of old traditions, after two or three generations 'the languages of the colonisers evolved into a means of criticising colonialism. This was particularly the case in the New World where Spanish, Portuguese, English, and French smothered indigenous idioms' (Osterhammel 2005: 103–4). The Negritude movement, for example, was the deliberate genesis of a diasporic black consciousness in revolt against French colonialism and racism which emerged from the collaboration of three black subjects from different French colonies: Aimé Césaire (1913–2008) from Martinique in the lesser Antilles; Léone Gontran Damas (1912–1978) from Guiana, a French overseas Department on the North Atlantic coast of South America; and Léopold Sédar Senghor (1906–2001) from Senegal, West Africa.

Jean Paul Sartre argues in *Black Orpheus* that the white man's gaze creates the negro in a protagonistic relationship which precipitates the racism of the white against the black, and that to belong to a given society inescapably binds its members to the elocutions of its language that are untranslatable, and make substantive its peculiar traits. Because the idea of negritude is diasporic in character, its disciples are compelled to articulate its philosophy in the French language, the only lingua franca available to them through which to communicate. Paradoxically, in doing so they expressed the very culture they sought to reject (Sartre 1965: 23). Nevertheless, Sartre believed that it is a necessary stage in the process of liberation because negritude is the negro's consciousness of race, of his deprecation by the white. Proponents of the Negritude movement speak French in order to destroy, or de-Gallicise, the language of the oppressor.

Writing of Birago Diop's book *Contes d'Amadou Koumba* (*Tales of Amadou Koumba*), Sédar Senghor praises the author for using the French language in rescuing the spirit and elegance of traditional African fables and folk tales. He insists that while Diop rendered them into French, 'he renews them with an art which, while it represents the genius of the French language, that language of gentleness and honesty, preserves at the same time all the virtues of negro-African languages' (cited in Ngũgĩ 1986: 7). Aimé Césaire conceded that there were French influences on him, in particular, French literature, but he emphasised that his aim was to create a new language in which the African heritage could be communicated. French was an instrument for him in which to communicate new means of expression: 'I wanted to create an Antillean French, a black French that, while still being French, had a black character' (Césaire 2000: 83). In other words, he was advocating a language that was not the French Creole of Martinique, but a transformation of the French language to express the experience of the black man. He did this by using the weapons of surrealism as a liberating force. It was, he said, a 'weapon that exploded the French language' (Césaire 2000: 83).

He confesses that superficially he was French, branded by Cartesian philosophy and bearing the marks of French culture, but in plumbing the depths of this influence, rejecting his alienation and detoxifying, he found what was fundamentally black by discovering Africa through Senghor, resisting the French ideal of turning the African into a Frenchman with black skin (Césaire 2000: 84–85, 88).

Sartre's resolution of the problem of racism lay in a Marxist dialectic which finds its synthesis in a classless society in which whites and blacks come to together. White supremacy in both theoretical and practical terms constituted the thesis; the reaction of negritude provided the antithetical moment of negativity which was necessarily only preparatory to the synthesis. Negritude, for Sartre, 'is dedicated to its own destruction, it is a passage and not objective, means and not the ultimate goal' (cited in Haddour 2006: 13).

Where the English language had become dominant in British colonies, the language has similarly been appropriated. The Nigerian poet, novelist and critic Chinua Achebe (1930–2013), for example, believed that English could carry the weight of his African experience, transformed by modifications to suit its African surroundings, while at the same time remaining in communion with its European roots (Achebe 1975). Gabriel Okara (1921–2019), a Nigerian poet and novelist, at first sight appears to agree with those who believe that language is integral to character, culture and identity. He maintained, for example, 'from a word, a group of words, a sentence and even a name in any African language, one can glean the social norms, attitudes and values of a people' (Okara 1963: 15). On the other hand, he argued that where English had become dominant in colonised countries life, and vigour had been added to the language by reflecting the special character of each culture. He asks, why shouldn't there be Nigerian, or West African English capable of expressing in its own way the uniqueness of the African cultures (Okara 1963: 15–16).

For Salman Rushdie, India has passed beyond the pros and cons of using the ex-coloniser's language. Indians have domesticated and remade it, appropriating it as their own to the extent that the children of independent India appear not to view English as irredeemably tainted and use it instead as an Indian language in the service of their own designs (Rushdie 1992: 64). Yasmin Alibhai-Brown argues that in India the language of subjection and control was appropriated with a considerable degree of imagination and dexterity. Those who resisted colonisation used the words of the coloniser, which proved stronger than conventional weapons. Hers is an extension of Cabral's argument, but without suggesting an eventual return to native tongues. The English language is endlessly accommodating, and capable of absorbing a range of Indian, Caribbean and African words and concepts (Alibhai-Brown 2020: 19). Whereas language is usually associated with power, Alibhai-Brown argues, English is different. It is an amazingly porous language in that no other 'is as wanton or as responsive to the world's diverse streams and currents' (Alibhai-Brown 2015: 211) in its absorption of words from other languages, and in bequeathing English to 'the nations of the world to use, play with, nativise and eventually own' (212).

Language as integral to identity, and the repository of culture

The extent to which language is viewed as constitutive of our identity, or incidental to it as a means of communication, is a significant ground of contestation in the decolonisation literature. The Enlightenment with its emphasis upon Kantian universalism prioritised established languages such as Latin, French, and English, to which Gottfried Herder reacted. James Tully expresses the paradigmatic characterisation of the Kant/Herder relationship in claiming that Herder completely rejects Kant's contention that 'all cultures can be ranked relative to a European norm' towards which all develop (Tully 2002: 344). Kant is more often than not presented as the exemplification of cosmopolitanism, while Herder is portrayed as the exact opposite, a cultural relativist and particularist. Herder argued that each nation should have its own language to express itself and remain faithful to its own traditions. All people, for him, were equal, and the criteria for beauty that non-Europeans employed were as valid as those of Europeans (Bernal 1997: 23). Such a view of language is known as linguistic relativity, and acknowledges that different languages have different conceptual structures which reflect their speakers' cultural practices and thought processes. Gumperz and Levinson argue that 'the semantic structures of different languages might be fundamentally incommensurable', each the manifestation of an inextricable relation between language, thought and culture, constituting distinctive world views (Gumperz & Levinson 1996: 2).

The extent to which language is not merely seen as a reflection of reality, or simply as a means of communication, is now quite commonplace among contemporary philosophers of language. PH Matthews, for example, argues that the meanings of words are not merely givens or a simple reflection of how the world is. They are inextricably bound up with a culture of which language is one aspect (Matthews 2003: 9). He contends that 'Language itself is "natural" in that it is an inherited characteristic of our species. Particular forms of language are, in contrast, aspects of culture of specific human societies. But such societies never stand still. We make continual changes in the precise cut of our clothes' (Matthews 2003: 38). The emphasis of some liberation theorists upon the importance of reviving and promoting indigenous languages as integral to national identity, and upon creole as an authentic cultural expression of identities forged in the crucible of colonisation and slavery, are both versions of the linguistic relativity thesis.

Jean Paul Sartre argued in 1948 that most oppressed ethnic minorities in the twentieth century passionately attempted to revive their national languages in their struggles for independence. To be Irish, he argued, is not only to belong to and identify with a collectivity, but also to '*think Irish*, which means above all to think *in* Irish'. He identifies the unique and specific traits of a society with 'the untranslatable locutions of its language' (Sartre 1965: 23). Ania Loomba argues that 'Colonial attempts to classify, record, represent, and educate non-European societies were efforts to re-order worlds that were often incomprehensible to the masters in order to make them more manageable and available for imperial consumption and exploitation'

(Loomba 2015: 110). The play *Translations*, for example, by Brian Friel, depicts the colonial struggle in Ireland as the contestation over words and language. British cartographers, failing to comprehend Gaelic, depended upon their Irish subordinates to help them set about the transliteration and anglicisation of Gaelic place names, not only appropriating the land but also colonising and mutilating the map by replacing Gaelic with English transliterations (Friel 1984).

One of the common features that punctuate the literature that calls for a return to indigenous languages, and as we will see also pidgin and creole, is the view that they are the authentic expression of the lived experiences of a people and culture. They give primacy to the ordinary person or peasantry, as carriers of traditional life, whose emotional being is expressed through the unique character of their language. The peasants are frequently elevated in postcolonial literature to the status of guardians of culture and language because they are further distanced from the taint of imperialism than the emerging bourgeois classes. Freire and Macedo argue that to teach literacy in the language of the coloniser is to reproduce a neocolonialist elitist mentality, denigrating indigenous languages as inferior. In so far as language is constitutive of the lived culture of a people, and most rural peasant peoples are untouched by the language of the dominant culture, to make the language of instruction that of the former coloniser is to disengage their lived experience from literacy. Freire and Macedo argue that it is imperative that the student's primary language be given priority in literacy to enable them to 'reconstruct their history and their culture' and develop their own voice and self-worth, in opposition to those who attempt to neutralise the efforts of educators to decolonise the mind (2004: 141, 142). Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, for example, contends that the most important breakthroughs in agriculture, science and technology have been influenced by the peasantry and working class, and this is no less true in the fields of music, dance and literature (Ngũgĩ 1986: 68).

I will focus upon two arguments, those of Albert Memmi, born in Tunisia in 1920, and of Jewish extraction, and, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, a Kenyan writer born in 1938 and the author of over forty books, including *The River Between*, and *Weep Not Child*.

Memmi acutely recognised the importance of the retrieval of indigenous languages in the decolonisation process. Memmi contended that the heritage of people is handed down in language which is the reservoir of enriching past and new experiences. He argued that the colonised, or at least those fortunate enough to go to school, had a memory assigned to them: the memory of the coloniser, not of their own people (Memmi 2016: 190). Memmi argues: 'For the colonised just as for the coloniser, there is no way out other than a complete end to colonisation. The refusal of the colonised cannot be anything but absolute, that is, not only revolt, but a revolution' (Memmi 2016: 194). The colonised knows who Colbert, Cromwell or Joan of Arc were, but nothing of their own heroes. The experience of Ngũgĩ confirms this. He complained that after the state of emergency in Kenya in 1951, English became the language of formal education to which 'all others had to bow' (Ngũgĩ 1986: 68).

Memmi contended that the educated colonised are saved from illiteracy only to become ensnared in a linguistic dualism, having to endure the 'the tortures of colonial bilingualism' (Memmi 2016: 150), while the uneducated have nothing but their native tongue, neither written, read, nor valued, and therefore contributing to a limited oral development. The mother tongue is allowed no influence on contemporary social life, and plays no role in government administration, nor in directing the postal service: 'the entire bureaucracy, the entire court system, all industry hears and uses the coloniser's language. Likewise, highway markings, railroad station signs, street signs and receipts make the colonised feel like a foreigner in his own country' (Memmi 2016: 150–1).

The colonial context requires bilingualism for culture, communication and progress, which broadens the horizon of the colonised at the price of 'cultural catastrophe' (Memmi 2016: 151). In the colonial context, possessing two languages does not mean the acquisition of two tools, but instead participation in two realms that are psychically and culturally different. The two worlds symbolised by two tongues are in conflict. The mother tongue that sustains and expresses the emotions, feelings, dreams and aspirations of the colonised, has the greatest emotional impact, but is the language least valued: 'It has no stature in the country or in the concert of peoples. If he wants to obtain a job, make a place for himself, exist in a community and the world, he must first bow to the language of his masters' (Memmi 2016: 151). In being disconnected from their language, the colonised know only a lowly form of dialect, expressive of only an elementary 'monotony of emotions' (Memmi 2016: 178).

In this inner conflict of colonised experiences, it is the mother tongue which is crushed. Even more tragic, Memmi suggests, is that the colonised are ashamed of their inadequate language, discarding it and hiding it from strangers, and this has repercussions for all of the creative arts: 'His linguistic ambiguity is the symbol and one of the major causes of his cultural ambiguity' (Memmi 2016: 152).

It is the middle class colonised who are the greater victims of bilingualism. They live their lives in cultural anguish, while the illiterate person is 'walled into his language and rechews scraps of oral culture' (Memmi 2016: 163–164). Decolonisation requires the liberation, revival and restoration of indigenous languages through which re-engagement with the interrupted flow of time and history may be attained in order to re-establish continuity. Colonised writers have mastered European languages, but only in so far as they are in search of their own, in railing against the coloniser.

Memmi contends that colonised literature is condemned to die young. Following generations, born in liberty, will write spontaneously in their mother tongue (Memmi 2016: 155). It will, he argues, be an arduous process which may at times appear insular, exclusionary and chauvinistic in placing national solidarity above human solidarity, and even ethnic solidarity above national solidarity. It is ludicrous to expect humanist and internationalist values to prevail while the colonised 'is still regaining possession of himself, still examining himself with astonishment, passionately demanding the return of his language' (Memmi 2016: 179).

Ngũgĩ argues in his *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, published in 1986, that his intention is not to denigrate the talent and genius of Afro-European literature written in English, French and Portuguese, but to highlight once again the pernicious effect of colonialism in not only stealing the art treasures of Africa to decorate their homes and museums, but also the treasures of African minds to enrich their languages and cultures. 'Africa,' he declares, 'needs back its economy, its politics, its culture, its languages and all its patriotic writers' (Ngũgĩ 1986: xii). There is, in Africa, he argues, a struggle between two opposing forces: the imperialist tradition maintained by native flag waving ruling classes complicit with an internationalist bourgeoisie, on the one hand, and a tradition of resistance on the other, spearheaded by the peasantry and proletariat, assisted by progressive elements from the petty middle class, including patriotic students, intellectuals, and soldiers. At the centre of these two opposing forces in Africa is the language issue (Ngũgĩ 1986: 4). Imperialism, Ngũgĩ argues, daily unleashes a cultural bomb, the effect of which is to undermine and annihilate the belief a people has in its names, languages, environment, heritage and capacities. His own experience was to be taught after 1952 in English when it became the official language of instruction to which all other languages had to defer.

Any language, Ngũgĩ, contended, has a dual character. It is both a means, or tool, of communication and a repository, or carrier, of culture. In this respect, Swahili, for example, is a useful means of communication across many nationalities in East and Central Africa, but is not a carrier of culture among those peoples. In parts of Kenya, Tanzania, and in particular Zanzibar, in addition to being a means of communication, Swahili embodies, or banks, the culture of those who speak it as their mother tongue (Ngũgĩ 1986: 13). In this latter sense language carries the values of a people's identity, their uniqueness or particularity in the human race. Ngũgĩ argues: 'Language is a carrier of people's values; values are the basis of a people's self-definition – the basis of their consciousness. And when you destroy a people's language, you are destroying that very important aspect of their heritage ... you are destroying that which helps them define themselves ... that which embodies their collective memory of people' (Ngũgĩ & Hdumbe 1985: 156).

Language as culture is the collective memory of a people's experience in history. Culture, he argues, is almost indistinguishable from language, in that language enables cultural genesis, growth, consolidation, articulation and generational transmission. Ngũgĩ contends that 'a specific culture is not transmitted through language in its universality but in its particularity as the language of a specific community with a specific history. Written literature and orature are the main means by which a particular language transmits the images of the world contained in the culture it carries' (Ngũgĩ 1986: 15). Language is inseparable from the self-perception of individuals in a community with a specific form, history, character and relationship to the world. The domination of people's languages by the language of the coloniser was crucial to the subjection of the mental world of the colonised. The result of colonisation and the imposition of European languages was the destruction and deliberate devaluation of native cultures, including art, dance, religion history, geography, orature and literature, and

the elevation of the coloniser's language and culture as exemplars to be emulated. The result was the domination of the mental universe of the colonised, in which bourgeois Europe became the centre of the universe and the learning experience of the colonial child became a purely cerebral and not an emotional experience. The colonial child is, then, alienated, because he or she sees a world refracted through the culture and language imposed by the colonisers (Ngũgĩ 1986: 17).

Ngũgĩ is dismissive of Senghor for capitulating in the face of the imposition of the French language upon him, and becoming subservient to it, and denigrating African languages whose words he believed were saturated with sap and blood, whereas 'French words send out thousands of rays like diamonds' (Ngũgĩ 1986: 19). Senghor was seduced by his colonial masters and amply rewarded for his championing of the French language by being honoured and anointed by the French Academy, the keeper of the purity of the language. Senghor epitomises the final triumph of a system of domination in that he as the dominated extolls its virtues (Ngũgĩ 1986: 20). Whereas a fellow Senegalese, David Diop, deplored the dominance of European languages, viewing their use as a matter of temporary historical necessity. Surely, Diop contended, no right-minded African writer, liberated from oppression, would dream of expressing his or her feelings through any other idiom than his or her rediscovered language. Ngũgĩ forcefully contends that there is no difference between the racist imperialist who argues that Africa would be nothing without Europe, and the writer who contends that Africa cannot do without European languages (Ngũgĩ 2013: 25–26).

Pidgin and creolisation

Creolisation is a familiar concept that refers to distinct cultural formations such as language, for example, Jamaican Patois, or the French Creole of Haiti and Martinique (Nair 2000: 237). Creolisation as a term to describe a process is of more recent origin. It was used in the nineteenth century in explanation of hybrid and unique aberrational cultural forms that developed out of plantation societies, primarily in the New World, but also in coastal areas of Africa and Asia where enslaved Africans were in contact with white Europeans in circumstances where indigenous peoples were almost completely wiped out. The mixture of white settlers, waves of itinerant labourers, slaves and diminishing native populations through design, chance and circumstance, encountered each other in brutally unequal relations, rupturing any vestige of collective meaning. They were encounters between groups of people only tenuously connected to their new location and unable to anchor themselves firmly to civilisations elsewhere. Jane Anna Gordon suggests that 'new combinations of once disparate meanings took on degrees of stability and standardisation charting a distinctive genealogy, newly indigenous to the place' (Gordon 2015: 6). Nancy Morejón, preferring the term 'transculturation', suggests that it is a process of 'constant interaction, transmutation between two or more cultural components whose unconscious end is the creation of a third cultural whole – that is – new and independent, although its bases, its roots, rest on preceding elements' (Morejón 1993: 229). It has been argued as early as 1899 that Afrikaans was the result of creolisation incorporating Malayo-Portuguese trade jargon

(Decamp 1974: 13). Creole, linguists suggest, is a form of language historically derived from an earlier form of 'pidgin' (Matthews 2003: 79).

John Reinecke formulated an influential distinction between the pidginisation and creolisation of language. He argued that pidgin languages were ad hoc adaptations which reduce and condense the structure and use of primary languages, and which are not one's first language (Reinecke 1969). Chaudenson and Mufwene argue that pidgin languages have a limited function and are used by speakers who speak another language for 'full-fledged communication', belonging to a social group that is largely autonomous (Chaudenson & Mufwene 2001: 22). Creole is the development of pidgin into primary languages (Reinecke 1969). The main distinction appears to be that pidgin develops as a form of communication, originally between traders, where neither speaks the other's language. Decamp maintains that pidgin can only survive by evolving into creole, that is, its syntax and vocabulary are extended and it 'becomes the native language of a community' (Decamp 1974: 16). Hymes argues that pidgin and creole languages have been viewed not as adaptations, but as degenerations, derivative from other systems of language, explained not in terms of social and historical forces, but the result of ignorance, indolence and inferiority. He argues that not least among the crimes of colonialism 'has been to persuade the colonised that they, or ways in which they differ, are inferior – to convince the stigmatised that the stigma is deserved. Indigenous languages, and especially pidgins and creoles, have suffered in this respect' (Hymes 1974: 3).

On the contrary, Decamp argues, they have uniform and coherent structures of their own. They 'are genuine languages in their own right, not just macaronic blends or interlingual corruptions of standard languages' (Decamp 1974: 15). In many respects, creole is the antithesis of the imperialist denial of native histories and cultural value by emphasising the important contribution of slaves, peasants, freed people and labourers to the dynamics of the historical process, which they did not passively accept, but actively created (Bolland 1998: 4). The emphasis upon the distinctiveness and originality of creole cultures became more pronounced in the 1970s as part of a decolonising ideology analysing the origins of a common creole culture constituting the process of nation building. Bolland believes that the concept of creolisation is important because it rejects at once the view that enslaved Africans were robbed of their cultural identities by the imposition of European norms and values, and that the vestiges of an African heritage in the Caribbean is evidenced only by retentions or primitive survivals (Bolland 2006: 1).

Frantz Fanon is implicitly a precursor of the Caribbean *créolité* movement. Fanon argued, when the 'British West Indies' became the 'Federation of the West Indies' in 1958, with the prospects of becoming a Dominion within the Commonwealth, that a cultural renaissance had occurred in the nineteenth century of the awareness of Caribbean history, a revival of popular traditions, and a rediscovery of African cults that served as a form of popular resistance to western and Christian oppression. There was an acceptance of the history of slavery and a pride in being a member of the black race. The renaissance, he argued, had now become vigorously manifest at the

intellectual level in Haiti, the French Antilles, and the British West Indies where the common language was 'Creole' which better expressed the Caribbean consciousness than any of the colonisers' languages (Fanon 1958: 586). Fanon was acutely aware of the role of language in the colonial process, and its importance as a weapon for getting under the skin of the colonised. He contended that to speak implies a capacity to use a particular syntax, to understand the morphology of a particular language, but more significantly it meant to imbibe a culture, which is the foundation of a civilisation (Fanon 2008: 8). Every colonised people, he contended, in whose souls an inferiority complex has been ingrained by the suppression of indigenous cultures, found itself confronted by the language and culture of the coloniser. He mockingly argued that 'The colonised is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. To internalise the language of the west is to adopt a civilisation and culture that gave birth to colonial racism, and European racist structures, reflected in the discourses of knowledge that emanate from it and reinforce structural domination (Sardar 2008: xv).

In the Antilles, Fanon argued, the negro is deemed proportionately more white, a synonym for human, the more adept the mastery of the French language: 'he becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness' (Fanon 2008: 9). Colonised peoples, deprived of their local cultural originality and the dialects that are their ways of thinking, are confronted by the language of the 'civilising' nation, that is, the culture of the coloniser. And even worse still they want to be like the coloniser. The dual worlds of the settler and the native are diametrically opposed: rich and poor; white and non-white; civilised and savage; good and evil. Fanon contended, 'there is no native that does not dream at least once a day of setting himself up in the settler's place' (Fanon 2001: 30).

The manifesto of the Caribbean *créolité* movement declared: 'Neither European, nor Africans, nor Asians, we proclaim ourselves Creoles' (Bernabé, Chamoiseau & Confiant 1990: 886). The aim was to reject 'exteriority', that is viewing the world through the lens of western values, the self through the eyes of the other, deported outside of themselves at every turn, maintaining in their minds 'the domination of elsewhere' (Bernabé, Chamoiseau, Confiant 1990: 886). While rejecting the idea that the black person's African heritage is constitutive of his or her identity, the authors made a subtle distinction between it and Césaire's idea of Negritude. The importance of Césaire, they maintained, was his restoration of Africa and black civilisation to a place of centrality against European dominance, giving creole its African dimension. Negritude constituted an intransigent resistance to the assimilation of the exteriorisation of Africanness and Europeanness. The writers of the manifesto declare that Negritude was the baptism, or primal act, that restored dignity. Césaire was not anti-creole, but *ante-creole*.

The movement celebrates the creativity and expressiveness of creole languages, asserting their cultural importance, and denying their subservience and perceived inferiority to the languages from which they derived, and which they inventively transformed. Its claim was that 'Creoleness is the *interactional or transactional aggregate* of Caribbean, European, African, Asian and Levantine cultural elements, united on the same soil

by the yoke of history' (Bernabé, Chamoiseau & Confiant 1990: 891). The movement based its philosophy on a distinction formulated by Édouard Glissant between cultures that are atavistic, based on a foundational myth of some kind with which he associates sub-Saharan African cultures, which are to be distinguished from cultures that are 'composite', circumstantial historical creations. In explaining his own genesis, Glissant sees it forged in the galleys of the slave ship, not by Africa from which its grotesque cargo sailed, but by the unpredictable journey itself to foreign shores precipitating and proliferating metamorphosed identities born of fusions (Glissant 2003: 111).

This is essentially what Fanon is celebrating in his chapter on language in *Black Skin, White Masks*. He made the assumption that the French Creole of the Caribbean, of which the Lesser Antilles speaks one of its four dialects, is the authentic language of the people. In a veiled criticism of Negritude, Fanon complains that the black person speaks a European language, and becomes proportionately more white the more adeptly it is mastered. The problem with which the black person was confronted was how to conceive of and project a black self in a language that at best rendered him, or her, invisible, but at worst reviled and denigrated the negro, equating black with impurity, evil and savagery. When in France for example, Fanon contended, it was not only the language that changed, but the person was transformed by having his or her knowledge of such figures as Voltaire and Montesquieu imparted in French, and it was from France that doctors and figures of authority, including innumerable petty bureaucrats, emanated. It was not, then, just the language, but the white civilisation of which it was the repository that was the problem: 'A man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language' (Fanon 2008: 9). Fanon's depiction and analysis of the colonial and postcolonial condition is a deep-rooted exposure of the impediments indelibly ingrained in black identity by western civilisation which serve to militate choice in cultural identity. Colonialism with its accompanying racism constituted, for Fanon, the 'systematised oppression of a people' which destroys ways of life and cultural values, demeaning language, cultural practices and dress (Fanon 1967: 33). The indigenous language of Martinique was Creole, intentionally developed as the lingua franca of the plantation (Zeilig 2016: 19), and Fanon writes of how it was frowned upon by the middle class, who only spoke it to their servants, disparaging it as a halfway house between negro-pidgin and French (Fanon 2008: 10). School children were taught to scorn the dialect which their parents ridiculed and forbade.

Creolisation was embraced as a nationalist aim in Caribbean decolonisation efforts of the 1970s and required emphasising the multiple origins of a common culture in the process of state-building (Bolland 2006: 2). Gordon & Roberts state that 'there was no singular primordial nation to which the emergent state could refer, no original purity that would be endangered by public recognition of the pluralistic culture that had already grown up there' (Gordon & Roberts 2015: 6). In the 1970s, creole language politics in Martinique was correlative with the rejection of French metropolitan domination, legitimisation of the language of the masses, and pride in being indigenous and black (Nair 2000: 239).

Fanon contends that 'To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture. The Antilles negro who wants to be white will be the whiter as he gains greater mastery of the cultural tool that language is' (Fanon 2008: 103). Sartre, Fanon contended, deprived negro people of making meaning for themselves in positing a dialectic that already attributes meaning, pre-existing, 'the torch that was already there, waiting for that turn of history' (Fanon 2008: 103). Fanon argued that a negro person is wholly what he or she is and does not need to pursue the universal because their negro consciousness is not exhibited as a lack of something. It simply is. In resolving the problem of racism into a classless society, Fanon claimed that Sartre was robbing negroes of their negro past and negro future, making it impossible for them to live their negrohood. Fanon laments: 'Not yet white, no longer wholly black, I was damned. Jean-Paul Sartre had forgotten that the negro suffers in his body quite differently from the white man' (Fanon 2008: 106).

Conclusion

What this discussion has demonstrated is that language was an important element in the colonising process. To deprive a people of its language was one of the instruments of dehumanisation, along with taking control of the colonised peoples' history and culture, rendering them worthless in comparison with the superior civilisation of the coloniser. National liberation struggles used the resources available to them in generating national consciousness, which meant their view of language and culture were necessarily contingent, and pragmatic.

Politically, there are subtle undercurrents. For those who suggest that the language of the coloniser be appropriated and developed, this reproduces the class-structural dominance and elitism of their former colonisers. To have so adeptly embraced and transformed the language of the coloniser, especially among literary activists, was nevertheless a tacit denigration of indigenous languages, and an endorsement of their inferiority. For those who agitate for the elevation of indigenous languages, politically it is to bring the rural peasantry, its values and cultures, centre stage in the rebirth of national consciousness. It is an attempt to overturn the perpetuation of the elitism of their former colonists. The case for creole is the most radical in that it not only denies the denigration of its languages as underdeveloped and derivative of other cultures, but is an assertion of the creation of new worlds out of unique experiences, having value in and of themselves, forged in the galleys of slave ships and in the crucible of enforced displacement.

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