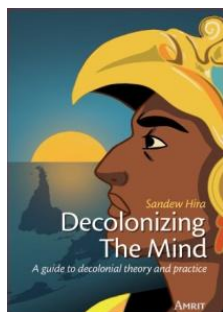


A response to Marxist critiques of decolonial theory from Vijay Prashad, Mikaela Nhondo Erskog and Kevin Ochieng Okoth

Sandew Hira, July 1, 2024

1. Introduction



This article is based on my book *Decolonizing The Mind*. See for more information www.sandewhira.com

In many civilizations people have thought about the future of mankind. The European Enlightenment has produced two narratives about this subject. The Hegelian narrative proclaims liberalism as the end of history and the Marxist narrative proclaims communism as the end of history. In the past four decades decolonial theory has risen as a new narrative of world history. Three Marxists, Vijay Prashad, Mikaela Nhondo Erskog and Kevin Ochieng Okoth - I will refer to them as Prashad c.s. when I speak about them as a collective - have taken issues with decolonial theory and offered a critique. I welcome their critique. We need to have a dialogue between different philosophies of liberation. Here is my response to their critique.

2. The Marxist critique of decolonial theory

On July 10, 2022, Vijay Prashad published an [article](#) on the website of *People's Democracy* with the title "*On Marxism and decolonisation*". He says that "*decolonial thinking remained trapped by European thought, returning again and again to European philosophy.*" He continues: "*The only real decolonisation is anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism. You cannot decolonise your mind unless you also decolonise the conditions of social production that reinforce the colonial mentality. Post-Marxism ignores the fact of social production, the need to build social wealth that must be socialised. Afro-pessimism suggests that such a task cannot be accomplished because of permanent racism. Decolonial thought goes beyond Afro-pessimism but cannot go beyond post-Marxism, failing to see the necessity of decolonising the conditions of social production.*"

Afro-pessimism is a theoretical framework that regards the current system of racism as not being very different from the system of slavery in the USA. Post Marxism offers a critique of some core doctrines of Marxism but remains committed to build some form of socialism.

In the same article Prashad continues: "*Our tradition of National Liberation Marxism felt flattened, not able to answer the doubts sown by post-Marxism and post-colonial theory. And our traditions did not any longer have the kind of institutional support provided in an earlier period when revolutionary movements and governments assisted each other and when even the UN institutions would work to advance some of our ideas. It is telling that the slogan of the World Social Forum was another world is possible, not socialism is necessary, but just another world—even perhaps fascism.*"

For him there is no alternative road to liberation than socialism. Socialism is the only way for humankind to emancipate.

In September 2022 Prashad published an [article](#) with ten theses on Marxism and Decolonisation. In October 2023 I [responded](#) to that article with a critique of per thesis. He never replied to that critique.

In the second thesis on the battle of ideas he criticizes Post Marxism and Postcolonialism. Post Marxism is a reformist, not revolutionary, answer to the historical need for socialism. Postcolonialism favours revolutionary impossibility. He lumps postcolonialism

and decolonial theory together. Prashad: *"Decolonial thought or decolonialidad trapped itself by European thought, accepting the claim that many human concepts – such as democracy – are defined by the colonial 'matrix of power' or 'matrix of modernity'. The texts of decolonial thought returned again and again to European thought, unable to produce a tradition that was rooted in the anti-colonial struggles of our time. The necessity of change was suspended in these variants of post-colonialism."*

He regards decolonial theory as part of European thought. Decolonial thought fails to see the necessity of decolonising the conditions of social production. In Marxist terminology the conditions of social productions are the social, economic, technological and natural circumstances under which the production of commodities takes place.

In a [YouTube](#) video published on June 13, 2024 with the title *Decolonization via a Marxist Lens!* Prashad blames decoloniality for looking only at culture, and neglecting *"the political economy that structures everyday life and behavior."*¹

On June 1, 2024, Vijay Prashad and Mikaela Nhondo Erskog, published an article in the socialist magazine [Monthly Review](#), in which they review the work of Kevin Ochieng Okoth on Marxism and decoloniality. They write: *"For Okoth, Decolonial Studies, like Afropessimism, diminishes the economic and political structures of the world and minimizes the fact of the class struggle—if not going so far as to dismiss it altogether."* The result is that decolonial studies *"evacuate any space in their theories for praxis. There is simply no room to maneuver, no agency afforded to people of African descent or colonized peoples to struggle to change the world."*

Following Okoth, Prashad and Erskog list three features of Decolonial Studies.

"First, there is a dismissal of any serious attention to class relations and to the class struggle, which means—in essence—a rejection of Marxism. The entire Marxist tradition is pilloried for being Eurocentric, despite the long history of engagement by non-Europeans and the long history of elaboration of the Marxist tradition to be "slightly stretched" (as Fanon put it) or revised "to make it more precise and give it an even wider field of application" (as Cabral put it) in order to understand the relationship of the slave trade and colonialism to capitalism."

"Second, there is a dismissal of praxis, with the emphasis being no longer on trying to change the world, and not even—in the case of Afropessimism—of trying to understand the world, but merely to recognize hierarchies as eternal, and hope as futile. This reprieve from the idea of change draws thought into an impasse, allowing intellectuals effectively to remain detached from the actualities of the struggles of humans to attain some kind of dignity in the world."

"Third, because of the magnetism of the proponents of national liberation Marxism, even the most anti-Marxist thinkers are drawn to them. The challenge for the anti-Marxist theorist is to domesticate the national liberation leaders and treat them as assemblers of ideas and not people who were part of movements to transform the world. Effectively, these anti-Marxist currents—such as Afropessimism and Decolonial Studies—surrender to reality, allowing themselves to believe that a critique of epistemology and ontology is sufficient as a form of radicalism."

Prashad and Erskog take issue with the movement for reparations. Many decolonial activists support the demand for reparations. But Prashad and Erskog assert that *"without a class demand here, the reparations will likely go to a national bourgeoisie who will not advance any agenda to benefit the people."* The demand for reparations is a social democratic demands that turn activists away from revolutionary politics.

On September 22, 2021, Kevin Ochieng Okoth published an [article](#) in *Salvage*, a bi-annual journal of revolutionary arts and letters, with the title *"Decolonisation and its Discontents: Rethinking the Cycle of National Liberation"*. He notes that some decolonial theorist criticize Marxism as a Eurocentric theoretical framework. He responds: *"This claim is, of course, both theoretically and historically false."*

According to Okoth Decolonial Studies (DS) has shifted *"the terrain of decolonising from political economy to the more abstract question of decolonising knowledge"*.

Furthermore, he thinks that many proponents of DS *"are based in the resource-hoarding universities of the global North (especially the US)? Is there not a danger of reproducing precisely the kind of epistemic coloniality from which we are trying to de-link?"*

Okoth concludes: *"On closer inspection, then, DS turns out not to be an emancipatory discourse at all. In fact, if one is inclined to take any perspective that holds on to even the smallest commitment to the idea of revolution, it is openly reactionary."* He explains the reactionary character of DS: *"The relationship between thought and revolutionary action has long been a concern of Marxist thought... But the idealism of DS is ... 'a philosophy of order', a reactionary theoretical discourse which affirms the academic hierarchy of intellects and positions while perpetuating the institution's functioning.... How exactly DS is supposed to help us fight state violence, racial oppression, labour exploitation, military occupation, or imperialism more broadly, remains a mystery."* Two years later, in 2023, Okoth published a book with the title *"Red Africa. Reclaiming Revolutionary Black Politics"* in which he further develops the argument.²

The purpose of the book is to challenge common misconceptions about national liberation by developing a distinctly anti-colonial and Black-revolutionary historiographic perspective which links *"the contradictions of postcolonial sovereignty with universal questions about socialist strategy, and allows us to place anti-colonial Marxism within its proper historical and theoretical context."*³

He uses the phrase *'Red Africa'* to distinguish a revolutionary anticolonial tradition from the reformist politics of African socialism. Some African socialists sought to distance themselves from Marxism and argued for a *'third way'* socialism rooted in traditional African culture. Examples of this type of socialism was to be found in the ideas of Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana, Julius Nyerere in Tanzania, Sékou Touré in Guinea, Kenneth Kaunda in Zambia, Léopold Senghor in Senegal and Modibo Keita in Mali. Okoth: *"Their anti-colonial politics were inspired by Nasserism – which had laid the foundations for non-alignment – and their socialism was based on the conviction that traditional communal elements of African culture were inherently socialist, and could serve as the basis for an egalitarian programme of national development."*⁴

He concludes that they *"only served to mask class relations in independent nations. Though they appealed to socialism as a source of political legitimacy, their ideological commitments were weak. Often, the idea of a 'pre-colonial' socialism, emptied of its revolutionary content, was used to silence a leftist opposition which sought to challenge the one-party state by evoking a different, more radical kind of Marxian socialism."*⁵

I summarize their critique on decolonial theory as follows.

1. Decolonial theory neglects the conditions of social production and the political economy that structures everyday life and behavior.
2. Decolonial theory is embedded in European philosophy, despite its claim to be a critique of Eurocentrism.
3. Decolonial theory does not acknowledge the importance of class and class struggle.
4. Decolonial theory is not about changing the world. It is just a critique and not a practical philosophy.
5. Socialism should be the end goal of the struggle of humankind and Marxism is the best alternative for African experiments with socialism.
6. Decolonial theory regards Marxism as a Eurocentric theoretical framework, which is incorrect.

3. A DTM response to the Marxist critique

3.1 What are the sources of the Marxist critique?

If I offer a decolonial critique of Marxism, I take the writings of Marx and Engels as the sources of my critique. What are the decolonial sources that Marxists criticize? There is not one or just a few sources that represents the whole panorama of decolonial thought. Okoth acknowledges the problem: *"What do we mean when we speak about decolonisation? Despite an endless stream of op eds, essays, features, panels and books on the subject, there seems to be little agreement on what exactly we want to achieve by 'decolonising' something. Confusion about the term is constitutive of contemporary conversations."*⁶

Prashad c.s. take the writings of Walter Mignolo and Anibal Quijano, two leading scholars of decoloniality in Latin Abya Yala, as the source of their critique. But there are many thinkers outside Latin Abya Yala (Malaysia, New Zealand, India, Africa) who made important contributions to decolonial theory. Nevertheless, it would not be fair to blame them for not taking all these contributions into account in their critique. They have every right to criticize only those thinkers that they have issues with. In my response to their critique I will not go into the authors they discuss. I will focus on the concepts from decolonial theory, that they criticize.

3.2 A DTM critique of decoloniality

Before I respond to the Marxist critique of decoloniality, I should make my position clear on decolonial theory. I come from a Marxist background. I was a member of the Trotskyite Fourth International. I evolved towards becoming a decolonial theorist and activist. I also have a critique of decoloniality as a theoretical framework. I published this critique [here](#). Compared to Marxism, the school of decolonial theory is very young, only a few decades. The Marxist tradition is almost 200 years old. So it is understandable that there is not yet a fully developed decolonial theoretical framework.

I make a distinction between decoloniality and Decolonizing The Mind (DTM).

Decoloniality is a concept developed in Latin Abya Yala that states that there is another side of modernity. Modernity is seen by the European Enlightenment as something good because it represents (European) progress and rationalism. The other side of modernity is the brutal colonial oppression and exploitation of the colonized world.

DTM is not a concept, but a comprehensive, coherent and integral theoretical framework with many interrelated concepts. A comprehensive, coherent and integral theoretical framework has the following characteristics:

1. It is comprehensive because it has produced concepts on how to look at the most important dimensions of a society: a view on world history, economics, politics, social relations including relations with nature (ecology), and culture. There are other important aspects of a society, but these dimensions are essential to make a framework comprehensive.
2. It is coherent because the concepts of the different dimensions don't contradict each other. They are consistent and logical.
3. It is integral because the concepts of the different dimensions are not just lumped together but are related to each other from one or more basic concepts.

Marxism is a comprehensive, coherent and integral theoretical framework; decoloniality is not.

Decoloniality has made important contributions to decolonial theory: the acknowledgement that there is another side of modernity, the acknowledgement that colonialism has a cultural dimension besides the economic and political dimension, the focus on knowledge production as part of the cultural dimension, the attention for the importance of race and racism in social relations and the impact of colonialism on these relations including in the field of identity formation and the critique of the nation-state as the center for social analysis and the need to look at colonialism from a global perspective.

But decoloniality has its weaknesses:

- It is not comprehensive. There is no decolonial economic or political theory. Prashad c.s. are right when they point to this weakness.
- It is not coherent. The many different contributions can contradict each other. You will find reactionary element with some decolonial authors, as Okoth points out.
- Decoloniality is not integral. It is not clear what the foundational category for decolonial theory is from which to reconstruct a whole new (decolonial) knowledge system. In Liberalism it is individualism. In Marxism it is class. What is it in decoloniality? The critique of Prashad c.s. that the lack of class as a basis of analysis holds in so far that decoloniality does not offer an alternative basic concept of theoretical analysis.

- Decoloniality is mostly a critique, but in order to survive it needs to move to the stage in which it provides practical answers to practical problems. The lack of practical solutions for current world problems is a big defect of decoloniality. This point is rightly made by Prashad c.s..
- Decoloniality does not provide organizational concepts for social struggle. How do we organize for social struggle? Marxism proscribes building political parties to lead socialist revolutions. What does decoloniality suggest? This is a valid critique that is also voiced by Prashad c.s..

DTM is an effort to bring decolonial theory to the next level. There are three dimensions in DTM:

- The critique of Eurocentric knowledge production.
- The development of an alternative comprehensive, coherent and integral knowledge production.
- The translation of this new knowledge into viable and practical policies to build a new pluriversal world civilization.

As such it is an alternative philosophy of liberation, that is different from Marxism. The basis category in DTM is the concept of civilization. I define a civilization as a collection of societies with economic, political, social and cultural institutions that have a common cultural base. I define colonialism as a collection of global systems of economic, political, social and cultural institutions that the Global North has created in order to rule the world in a colonial world civilization since 1492. The common cultural base for the colonial world civilization is the European Enlightenment.

3.3 A DTM response to Prashad c.s.

With the DTM framework it is easy to answer the critique of Prashad c.s. The first critique is the neglect of the conditions of social production and the political economy that structures everyday life and behavior. In DTM we look at civilization as a collection of economic, political, social and cultural institutions. We analyze these institutions as an interconnected whole. It is not only about culture. In my book on Decolonizing The Mind I have a whole chapter on economic theory.

The second critique is that decolonial theory is embedded in European philosophy, despite its claim to be a critique of Eurocentrism. This is a curious critique from a school of thought that is embedded in the European Enlightenment. Anyway, DTM is a critique of the European Enlightenment, and questions its basic proposition from experiences of civilizations from the global south. Our critique of the European Enlightenment is based on knowledge that civilizations in the Global South have produced in various discipline, from philosophy and economic theory to mathematics and the natural sciences.

The third critique is that the importance of class and class struggle is not acknowledged. In DTM we argue that the Marxist concept of class is insufficient to understand social relations. In Marxism class is defined as a social group related to the ownership. If you broaden the definition, then class can be a relevant concept in DTM. In Subaltern Studies, a school in Marxism, class is defined as a social group that is oppressed on the basis of class, caste, age, gender or in others ways. In DTM we can stretch this definition in a more general way. A class is defined as a social group with common social-economic characteristics, such as income, property, or even social-economic lifestyle. There is no reason to stick with the Marxist definition of class. If you stick to this definition, social struggle must be defined as class struggle. If you accept other definitions, then social struggle is a struggle for social justice. That struggle can be a national struggle, a struggle of ethnic communities for social justice, but it can also be a social-economic struggle (uplifting people from poverty), and thus not necessarily a class struggle. The demand that social theory should be based on class and class struggle only holds when you are a Marxist. It cannot be imposed on those theories of liberation that are not Marxist.

The fourth critique is that decolonial theory is not about changing the world. That does not hold for DTM. DTM formulates a vision for the future: the transition from the current colonial world civilization towards a new pluriversal world civilization. How this world

civilization will look like will be determined not by theory but by the practice of decolonial struggle.

The fifth critique is that socialism should be the end goal of the struggle of humankind. If you are not a Marxist, then obviously this critique does not hold. In other philosophies of liberation other models of civilizations and societies are as valid as socialism.

The last critique is that it is incorrect to view Marxist as a Eurocentric theoretical framework. Marxism originated from the European Enlightenment, so obviously it has Eurocentric roots. The only way to claim that it is not Eurocentric is to assert that it is universal. Well, that is exactly an important characteristic of Eurocentrism: the claim of universality of knowledge that originated in Europe.

From a DTM perspective the Marxist critique of decolonial theory of Prashad c.s. is invalid. I will offer a DTM critique of Marxist theory and practice.

3.4 A DTM evaluation of Marxist theory

DTM is not just a critique of the European Enlightenment, Marxism included. It also an alternative philosophy of liberation. Prashad c.s. acknowledge only one valid philosophy of liberation: Marxism. The DTM evaluation of Marxist theory covers a broad spectrum of topics.

Philosophy

First, the subject of philosophy, and specifically epistemology. Epistemology is the theory of knowledge: what is knowledge and how is it produced? The Eurocentric view (both the Liberal and Marxist one) is that the purpose of knowledge production is the search for truth about the natural and social world. In DTM epistemology, it is not only about seeking the truth, but it is also about exposing lies. That is absent in Marxist philosophy. In DTM, the notion of lies is inherent to Eurocentric epistemology. DTM epistemology has a specific method in detecting lies. The method is conceptual thinking. A concept is an idea that describes and explains certain aspects of the social and natural world.

Knowledge is contained in concepts. The concept is the basic unit of knowledge. A concept consists of five elements: terminology (a term is a linguistic expression of a concept), observation (a collection of facts about the object of knowledge production), analysis (a framing and a storyline with a certain logic that makes us understand reality), theory (a collection of interrelated concepts that provides a bigger picture of the natural and social reality) and ethics (knowledge is not only about true or false, but also about right and wrong).

DTM analyses the colonization of the mind on the level of epistemology by showing how these five elements are used to manipulate our view of reality.

There are six major differences between Eurocentric epistemology and DTM.

First, the purpose of knowledge. In Eurocentrism the purpose is seeking the truth. In DTM is about seeking the truth and dismantling lies, which are part of the colonization of the mind.

Second, the object of knowledge. In Eurocentrism the object of knowledge is limited to the observable world. In DTM the object of knowledge extends to the spiritual world, because the spiritual world is the basis for ethics in many civilizations.

Third, the sources of knowledge. In Eurocentrism there are only two sources of knowledge: observation and reasoning. In DTM we acknowledge the importance of these sources, but take other sources of knowledge into account: innate knowledge, common sense, social interaction, revelation, creativity, and imagination.

Fourth, the methodology of knowledge production. In Eurocentrism the same methods are used for natural and social sciences: mathematics, induction and deduction, separation of ethics from knowledge, employing two value logic (only true and false). In DTM there are different methods for natural and social sciences, because ethics are intertwined with knowledge.

Fifth, the logical system. Eurocentrism uses two value logic (true and false). Marxism uses Hegelian dialectics which goes beyond two value logic. DTM uses seven value logics of Indian philosophy of Jainism that includes the factor of uncertainty that is missing in Hegelian dialectics.

Sixth, the role of ethics. In Eurocentrism knowledge is objective. Ethics is separated from knowledge. In DTM ethics is part of knowledge.

With this framework we reconstruct knowledge for a new world civilization using the insights of old civilizations and our creativity and imagination.

World history

The European Enlightenment has the concept of the end of history. It is an old concept that was put forward almost two centuries ago by German philosopher George Hegel (1770-1831) in his notion that Europe is the pinnacle of human history, the end of history, or as Hegel puts it: "*the last stage in History, our world, our own time.*"⁷ History has come to an end with the rise of European modernity. Hegel wrote this in 1830. For Marxism the end of history comes with communism.

If there is one single lesson that we can draw from history, it is the proposition that there is no end of history. We cannot know how the world will look like in 70,000 years. The last 7,000 years of the history of civilizations show that there is a wide variety of possible worlds. The colonial world civilization is only five hundred years old and its dominant knowledge base - the European Enlightenment - is only 350 years old. Both Liberalism and Marxism have a unilinear view of the development world history.

World history has not developed in a unilinear way, but as a spider web. Each civilization has contribute to the growth of humankind from its own specific background. With the colonial world civilization we have reached a stage in which humankind has become a global community with legacies of diverse civilizations.

The question "What are we fighting for?" has a very simple answer that can be found in the hearts and desires of human kind and has been articulated in many civilizations. We are fighting for a future based on social justice, prosperity, peace, harmony, dignity, love, and freedom.

Social justice is about eradicating exploitation and oppression. Prosperity is about providing a decent standard of living and eradicating poverty. Peace is about creating conditions for a life without violence. Harmony is about creating conditions to solve problems through dialogue instead of fights. Dignity is about showing respect to yourself and others. Love is about caring for yourself and others. Freedom is about finding a balance between rights and duties.

We live in a world, a civilization, without social justice, prosperity, peace, harmony, dignity, love, and freedom. We are fighting for a new world civilization that is based on these values. Market and public or private ownership of the means can play a positive role in this world.

Marxist economic theory

The core of Marxist economic theory is the theory of labour value. Labour produces value. The value of a commodity is determined by the amount of labour that is necessary to produce the commodity. Because the capitalist owns the means of production and the commodities that the labourer produces, it has the power to appropriate the total value and to pay the labourer less than the total value. The difference is surplus value.

Marxism does not acknowledge a right of an entrepreneur to surplus value. Profit is surplus value that is appropriated by the capitalist, and this is the essence of capitalist exploitation. Marxism regards this as a scientific discovery. It is a fact and has nothing to do with ethics.

The practical implication of this theory is that we need to strive to abolish private ownership of the means of production and markets and replace them with public ownership of the means of production and central planning.

DTM regards the labour theory of value as an axiom and based on ethics, not on science. Entrepreneurship can add value to the economy with innovation, vision and managerial

talents. Private ownership of means of production is not by definition equal to exploitation. Whether there is exploitation depends on how in a particular society social justice is perceived. It depends on ethics.

DTM economic theory is concerned about how to build economic institutions and structures that can develop the infrastructure of a society and provide a decent standard of living for the people. It is also based on social justice. Each society will have its own ethics that defines social justice. It is not universal.

The practical implication of DTM economic theory is the rebuilding of the economy of different societies and reorganizing the global economy in order to serve the need of the people.

Marxist social theory

Marxist social theory is based on Marxist economic theory. The concept of class is based on the concept of surplus value. In capitalism surplus value is appropriated by the capitalist class because of the ownership of the means of production and the necessity for the working class to sell its labour power to the capitalist. If you don't subscribe to the labour theory of value, then you don't have to accept the notion of class as the cornerstone of society.

DTM social theory is based on the concept of community. A community is a social group that is defined by an identity. The basis of this identity can be historical (a common history), ideological (a common belief system), cultural (a common language and other cultural traits) or other characteristics that define the identity of a community.

A big difference between DTM social theory and Eurocentrism is that in Eurocentrism humans are regarded as social objects. Natural sciences study natural objects like the moon, a rock or an atom. It studies the characteristics of the object: its shape, matter, functioning etc. In a similar way, Eurocentric social sciences study human beings as objects. The concept of patriarchy studies gender as part of a system of social structures, and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women. In this concept there is no room for love between men and women. Humans are studied as social object with characteristics as domination, oppression and exploitation. Yet, the same human beings can be seen in loving relationships as husband and wife, father and daughter, brother and sister. In order to understand both elements (oppression and love), we need another concept of human beings, not as social objects, but as ethical beings with the capacity to shape their lives (individually and socially) by interacting with the natural and technological environment and based on an ethical system that provides guidelines for norms and values. Once we take this approach, social theory cannot be universal nor objective. Some communities, like the Yoruba in Africa, don't even have words for gender (father, mother, man and woman). Therefore, how would their social theory look like? In DTM social theory we acknowledge the role that colonialism has played in instituting racism in social relations. Racism is the articulation of superiority and inferiority among human beings based on theology, biology or culture. It plays an important part in the study of social relations. In Marxism racism is an instrument of dividing the working class. It does not see the concept of superiority/inferiority as an tool of organizing social relations.

The practical implication of DTM social theory is to develop policies to empower communities that fight injustice and to develop anti-racist policies that confronts the foundations of the institutions that drive racism. It constructs the unity of relation between humans and nature and between communities with divergent ethics.

Marxist political theory

Marxist political theory is based on Marxist economic and social theory. Social is based on the concept of class. The political struggle is a class struggle. The state is an instrument of the ruling class. A revolution is needed to bring down the capitalist state and build a new state based on the dictatorship of the proletariat. The socialist state is a secular state. The institutions of the capitalist state are fundamentally different from the institutions of a socialist state.

In DTM every state has an ethical foundation, be it implicit or explicit. Ethics determines how a community should run its society through the state. A Buddhist, Confucian, Muslim or Hindu society is based on the ethics of that particular civilization.

Marxist cultural theory

I define culture as a system of production and dissemination of knowledge about nature and society and the material and immaterial expression of this knowledge. The production of knowledge is not only about producing insights into nature and society. It is also about values, belief systems, communication, feelings and emotions of individuals and social groups about their identity and rules and rituals that express their identity. Furthermore, it is about the relationship between humans and nature. Culture is institutionalized in educational institutions that produce knowledge, in institutions for the dissemination of knowledge and expressed in material culture (clothing, food, housing, architecture etc) and immaterial culture (language, art, customs, rituals etc).

Cultural theories are theories that describe and explain the phenomenon of culture. In Marxism culture is part of the superstructure of a class society and as such is influenced heavily by its base (economic and technological foundation). Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) developed a Marxist cultural theory with the concept of hegemony. The capitalist class maintains its rule not only by force and coercion, but also through cultural domination. Gramsci saw Europe as basis for his theory. He did not study colonialism, which dominated much of the world. His narrow-mindedness prevented him from seeing how colonialism colonized the mind.

His contemporary from Jamaica, Marcus Garvey (1887-1940), had a much wider vision of culture and power. He developed the concept of mental slavery and the mechanism of how Western political domination was based on racism and the colonization of the mind. The practical implication of DTM cultural theory is a wide range of policies to decolonize the mind.

3.5 A DTM evaluation of Marxist practice

The Marxism of Prashad c.s. has to answer a simple question. The logical consequence of the labour theory of value is that social justice can only be achieved by building a socialist economy in which the means of production are owned by the state and the production, distribution and financing of goods and services are organized on the basis of central planning. You might temporarily use private entrepreneurs and the market to overcome a period in which the socialist economy is not fully developed, but this temporary situation is accepted out of political and economic necessity.

The simple question is this: if the ultimate goals of socialism is public ownership of the means of production and central planning, what are the lessons these Marxists draw from the demise of the Soviet Union and the introduction of private ownership of the means of production and markets in China? From a DTM framework the answer is simple: the history of Russia and China show that there is no universal concept of justice, and thus of one universal just economic system. There are different economic system that provide a valid answer to the question of social justice. In Islam there is even a religious concept of a just economic system. It is possible to have a just economic system that includes private ownership of the means of production and markets. According to the labour theory of value that is impossible.

Prashad says that we should look at the introduction of private ownership of the means of production and markets in China through the lens of a dialectical process.⁸ Then the question arises: where is the process going ultimately: public ownership of the means of production and central planning?

Prashad c.s. argue that African activists should study the working of the revolutionary leaders of the African liberation movements, especially the Marxists in those movements. Take South Africa. Apartheid was abolished in 1994. The ANC, supported by the South African Communist Party, has not been able to achieve a substantial improvement of the living standards of ordinary South Africans. Capitalism has not worked. What is the alternative economic program for South Africa from a Marxist perspective? From a DTM perspective it is about bringing ethics back in economic processes. The state should take

a leading role in uplifting people from poverty and developing the economy. They can use an array of instruments: public ownership of specific industries, taxation, rules and regulations, stimuli for private entrepreneurs and use their talents to build a strong economic base for the country.

My problem with the emphasis on going back to the Marxist classical thinkers, in Europe and the African liberation movement, is that ultimately their strategy for public ownership of the means of production and central is an impractical strategy.

What kind of political system to Prashad c.s. propose? In DTM I argue that there is no universal political system, that we should strive for, but base a strategy on the historical traditions of a country and their communities. For Iran, with a tradition of 1,400 years of Islamic civilization, it is natural to look at political systems that Islamic scholars have thought about and that fits in that civilization. In Venezuela the socialist have opted for a parliamentary democracy. The could work very well for Venezuela given their history and traditions. Is there a universal socialist political system that Marxists should fight for?

3.6 The relationship between DTM and Marxism

In many parts of the world and in many social movement decolonial thought is very much on the agenda. That as an impetus for the critique of Prashad c.s. on decoloniality. The purpose of my DTM evaluation of Marxism is to start a dialogue with activists and theoreticians from different backgrounds, but with the same drive for social justice, on how to build a new and better world. Many Marxists have played and are still playing a crucial role in the fight for a better world. Prashad has done wonderful work in the critique of imperialism and in the defence of the major enemies of imperialism, notable China. He refrains from defending Iran in the imperialist assault on the Islamic Republic. Iran together with China and Russia are playing an important role in shaping a multipolar world.

Many socialists and progressive people are taking an interest in how the multipolar world is developing. That includes an interest in the political and social systems of the countries who are in the lead: China, Russia and Iran. YouTube has many videos of Mohammad Marandi, professor of English Literature and Orientalism at the University of Tehran, who engages with progressive activists in the global north. Marandi paves the way for a dialogue between socialists, progressive anti-imperialist and the Iranian revolution.

I hope that Prashad c.s. can be convinced to join this dialogue on building a new world civilization and the role that Marxists can play in this regard.

¹ Timeslot 18.15-18.27.

² Okoth, K.O. (2023): Red Africa. Reclaiming Revolutionary Black Politics. Verso. London.

³ Okoth, K.O. (2023), p. 13-14.

⁴ Okoth, K.O. (2023), p. 78-79.

⁵ Idem.

⁶ Okoth, K.O. (2021): Decolonisation and its Discontents: Rethinking the Cycle of National Liberation. <https://salvage.zone/decolonisation-and-its-discontents-rethinking-the-cycle-of-national-liberation/>.

⁷ Quoted in Hira, S. (2023): Decolonizing The Mind. A Guide to Decolonial Theory and Practice. Amrit Publishers. The Hague, p. 476.

⁸ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mz40oRYmnfU> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3X7U2W6ryjE>.