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# A decolonial reading of the Third Chapter of the Gospel of John in Moffat's Translation of the Catechism into Setswana (1826)

## ABSTRACT

*The Setswana language is one of the Southern African languages that was "reduced" into a written language through the translation of Christian literature by the London Missionary Society. The introduction of the Setswana spelling book in 1826 epitomised the vernacularisation and standardisation of Setswana. In 1826, Robert Moffat also translated the first Setswana catechism. Rev. William Brown's Catechism served as a source text. He also added the third chapter of the Gospel of John and the Lord's Prayer. This paper focuses on the second section of the 1826 Setswana catechism, namely the third chapter of John's Gospel. It is argued that translation does not happen in a vacuum; rather, it also has the ideological intentions of the translator. Through the translated texts, Moffat performs a technology of power by eroding, dislocating, and disassociating the Batswana from their epistemic and spiritual heritage. The paper applies a decolonial lens to analyse the theme of conversion (metanoia) in the Gospel of John, as translated by Moffat.*



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## 1. A DECOLONIAL CRITIQUE OF MOFFAT'S TRANSLATION OF REV. DR WILLIAM BROWN'S CATECHISM INTO SETSWANA

Reflecting on the use of language as a technology of power within the enterprise of conversion, Mbembe (2001:227-228) argues the following:

At the beginning and at the end of conversion we always find language. Language first appears in preaching – that is, in a way of using the power of persuasion. But since no way of speaking can exist without a speaker, it is evident that the gap between preachers' words, signs, and metaphors, and their referents goes beyond the general problem of what is intelligible and comprehensible within a certain rationality.

My analysis of the third chapter of the Gospel of John is done within the 1826 Setswana catechism, as translated by Robert Moffat. I locate the entire catechism within the 19<sup>th</sup>-century literature underpinned by the translator's ideological, theological, social location, and epistemic location, as part of the missionary and colonial enterprise. As a colonial subject, I locate myself within a decolonial thought. I engage with the translated text as a text informed by the geo-theo-politics and epistemic privilege that constructed epistemic hegemony, making it possible for those who considered themselves racially superior and civilised to ignore and to render the religio-cultural/indigenous knowledge systems absent or disavow their epistemic location of the receptor culture. In other words, translations are neither ahistorical nor apolitical. For that reason, my analysis of the 1826 third chapter of the Gospel of John by Moffat cannot be disconnected from the fact that I am a colonial subject, a Black Motswana. I continue to be haunted by his theological outlook of the Batswana (Africans) and the imagination of the divine duty of the West to colonise, civilise, and convert the Batswana.

Put succinctly, my analysis of such texts aims to highlight the modalities/ideologies/strategies and the technologies of power used by missionaries to convert, civilise, and colonise the indigenous people, leading to the erosion of the receptor culture's linguistic heritage. In this regard, Mojola (2004:101) argues:

Postcolonial approaches to translation are primarily concerned with the links between translation and empire or translation and power as well as the role of translation in processes of cultural domination and subordination, colonization and decolonization, indoctrination and control and hybridization and creolization of cultures and languages.

In his book, West (2016) provides a mosaic picture of the theological outlook of the translator of the Bible into Setswana. According to West (2016:170), the translator perceived the translation of the Bible as “a theological project” that required discipline. In the context of the Setswana translation, thus, the acquisition of the language becomes the genesis of the standardisation and colonisation of the receptor language (Setswana). In his letter, dated 5 August 1822, to Rev. G. Burger, director of the London Missionary Society, Moffat informs him that he has translated Dr William Brown’s children’s catechism. In doing so, Moffat draws Rev. Burger’s attention to the source text. Immediately, we can observe that the translator is taking a certain posture, namely that his audience is viewed as children who ought to be provided with a children’s catechism that consists of questions and answers. In this letter, Moffat states the following:

While we are acquiring the language good is done, while it furnishes means for future usefulness. The peculiar construction of the language renders it a task of much labour, especially when we consider the very imperfect means of acquiring it. There is no interpreter who can give proper meaning of a single sentence. From the influx of business I have been obliged to unavoidably attend to this for some time past, I have not been able to make the proficiency I would have wished, and which might have been reasonably expected. After much hard labour, my situation is such as to enable me this summer to devote a suitable portion of time each day for the acquisition of so important an object. I have translated Dr. William Brown’s catechism in his ‘Christian Instructions’. The catechism being originally intended for children, I have made a few alterations and additions. It is the most suitable I ever met with, is used, and well understood. I have also translated a great variety of other little pieces, and I trust soon to be enabled to speak to the Bootchuanas mouth to mouth (Moffat & Moffat 1951:53).

In this text, we can observe the performance of power, epistemic privilege, epistemicide and pneumacide or spiritualcide on the religio-cultural practices of the Batswana. Such a performance is premised on the notion that the interpreters first had no clue of what they were interpreting. In his letter, Moffat states that the interpreters do not have any form of theological insight. As such, they could not attach meaning to a single sentence. Put differently, they were “misinterpreting” him, even though his preaching was Eurocentric and informed by both his social and epistemic location. In other words, his own frame of reference could not have been the same as that of the interpreter. The notion that they knew nothing or understood nothing, I would argue, was informed by his own epistemic location. The above letter presents us with the translational strategies and

ideologies of the receptor culture. He identifies the catechism as a suitable text to translate, based on the following notions. First, the catechism was originally intended for children; thus, the neophytes are perceived to be children who need a text that appears to be at their epistemic level. In other words, in his view, there is no other text in terms of Christian formation that is most suitable than this.

Secondly, it appears that a thought process led him to come to such a conclusion. It is my contention that the above extract from the letter begins with the justification of such a decision. He does so by locating the interpreters as those who do not have any form of Western theological insights. Although he concedes that the acquisition of the language is somewhat difficult, yet, in the letter, he claims that he has translated the catechism into Setswana. He expressed his desire to learn the language of the Batswana so that he can converse with them. In my view, this is a contradiction because he was still acquiring the language and yet he claims to have translated the catechism, the third chapter of the Gospel of John, the Lord's prayer, and other biblical passages. This is further demonstrated in Moffat's letter, dated 25 February 1822, to his brother six months earlier:

It is now time to turn your attention to a subject of more importance – the language. To you, who I should suppose has never studied a barbarous tongue, no idea can be formed of the labour and difficulty attendant on its acquisition, especially through a very difficult imperfect interpreter. It is only within these few months that I have been in possession of means, though very imperfect, of acquiring it. In the course of time, I have been collecting words, idioms, and phrases. The language, which is barren and barbarous enough, and which of course is perfectly consonant to their ideas, will hardly admit of a shade of Theology ... Seeing that this, I have for the present resolved comparatively to neglect these and persevere till I am master of the language (Schapera 1951:57-58).

In the above citations, we are confronted with the notion that points to translation as a political and epistemic exercise. As Mojola rightly argued, in translation we can observe the intersectionality of cultural domination and subordination, colonisation, indoctrination, and control. The notion of cultural domination is expressed in his view of having identified a suitable catechism. The idea of indoctrination is in the technology of using a particular biblical text linked to the catechism, in order to achieve certain outcomes, namely conversion. Put differently, they point to the performance of epistemic privilege. Such a privilege must be analysed within the colonial matrix of power and as a form of White privilege.

White privilege is a form of domination; hence it is a *relational* concept. It positions one person or group over another person or group. It is a concept of racial domination that enables us to see this relationship from the perspective of those who benefit from such domination (Amico 2017:2).

The labelling of the Batswana as barbaric is one of the indicators of the performance of power informed by the writer's epistemic location. In other words, for Moffat, any other language outside of the Eurocentric paradigm cannot be intelligible language. This is also informed by the idea that, at some point, he will become the master of the language, a language outside of him. In other words, in terms of its social and epistemic locations that are informed by the religio-cultural practices, it is my contention that Moffat could not become a master of a language that is underpinned by the indigenous knowledge system upon which he frowned and into which he was not born. Furthermore, what is observable, borrowing from Foucault, is that, in his letter, the idea of binary and/or a bipolar field of sacred and profane, licit and illicit, religious and blasphemous can be identified in the way in which he distinguishes and labels the language as barbarous and barren. Linking what Moffat states in his letter and Amico's definition of White privilege, it can be argued that Moffat is performing whiteness through his use of terms such as "barbarous" and "barren" in "othering" what he identifies to be outside of Europe.

I have argued elsewhere that the use of biblical texts and Western theological terms became the basis on which Africa and its languages were not only "othered", but also classified and portrayed as indistinguishable and absent, while Western lingua (whiteness) was manifest/exhibit/visible/or present (see Mothoagae 2022:5). The categorisation of the Setswana language as barren must be understood within the broader framework of image ontology applied within the colonial matrix of power (see Mothoagae 2022). Scholars such as Mignolo (2007:455) and Quijano (2000:345) have located such an approach within what they refer to as "the colonial matrix of power". They rightly argue that we need to understand the colonial matrix of power within the specification of what the phrase "colonial world" means – both at the local structural level and within its historical transformation.

In a letter, dated 20 August 1822, Moffat (1951:64) wrote the following to his in-laws James and Mary Smith:

These, with fifty, I may say a hundred, difficulties which I cannot now mention, combine to try the faith and exercise all the graces of the spirit in the soul. But we cannot, we dare not, leave them, till we have at the very least acquired the language and conversed

with them mouth to mouth on the things of God. Hitherto we have laboured under great difficulties, having always been obliged to address them through an interpreter who understood neither language well, and [was] still more ignorant as it regarded the subjects interpreted. During the time I have been here, it has been impossible to attend to the acquiring of the language as I could have wished. For the first six months I had no means acquiring words or sentences, and of course only picked up by the ear any word that I could catch. Latterly I had an interpreter, though a very poor one, and, could I have been enabled to have attended to it two days out of seven, I should have made some proficiency, but considering the peculiar construction of the language, and the means of acquiring it, I have not laboured in vain. I have translated into it a very excellent and suitable catechism about 120 questions, now in use, also the lord's Prayer, and a great variety of other things for my own use. Having got into a comfortable dwelling house this summer will afford me considerable time, in which I promise myself things.

The above citation simultaneously presents the political and ideological intentions of the translator as well as some contradictions. In the three letters, he refers to his endeavours to acquire the language, including the challenges thereof. At the same time, in the two letters to the director and to his in-laws, Moffat informs them that he has translated the catechism. The common denominator in these letters is the reference to the interpreter, on whom he appears to be reliant, even though he nonetheless casts aspersion on the interpreter. Bassnett and Trivedi (1999) argue that it is imperative to locate translation within what decolonial scholars refer to as the colonial matrix of power, as translations do not take place in a vacuum, but rather in a continuance.

In other words, to understand and delineate the strategies of the translator, the social location and the epistemic location of the translator should form part of the analysis of the translation. Thus, translation is not an isolated act; rather, it is an extension of the process of intercultural transfer. Bassnett and Trivedi (1999:2) further argue:

Moreover, translation is a highly manipulative activity that involves all kinds of stages in that process of transfer across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Translation is not an innocent, transparent activity but is highly charged with significance at every stage; it rarely, if ever, involves a relationship of equality between texts, authors or systems.

I would argue that the translation of the catechism into Setswana needs to be analysed from the perspective of the theological outlook of the translator. Furthermore, the insertion of the third chapter of the Gospel of John and the Lord's Prayer points to the act of translation as a form of manipulation and rewriting. In addition, the translation functioned as a vehicle to necessitate and accelerate the conversion of the Batswana into the colonial Christian belief system. I would argue that such a translation did not only aim to convert; rather, it also performed an epistemic and ethnocentric of violence of the linguistic heritage of the Batswana. Mignolo (2012:25-26) argues that "decolonizing epistemology means, in the long run, liberating thinking from sacralized texts, whether religious or secular". He further states that "[t]he first task of decolonizing epistemology [and I will say more about 'epistemology' below] consists in learning to unlearn to relearn and to rebuild" (Mignolo 2012:26).

This article aims to argue that, as a colonial subject when analysing the third chapter of the Gospel of John, which forms the second section<sup>1</sup> of the 1826 catechism as translated by Moffat and the 19<sup>th</sup>-century literature, I ought to understand, analyse, and ascertain how to de-link from the coloniality of power. Thus, in such an analysis, applying a decolonial lens entails what Mignolo (2012:19) refers to as "decolonising epistemologies" and "de-linking the colonial subject". To de-link and move forward, decolonial epistemologies are needed. Put differently, it is the task of the colonial subject to critique the epistemological privilege and the coloniality of power in these literary works by using alternative epistemologies. It does not entail halting what cannot be halted:

[B]ut how to move away, to be in and out, to de-link, from the colonial matrix that will continue to be in place, flexible as it is to adapt to changing circumstances (Mignolo 2012:41).

The following section analyses the third chapter of the Gospel of John, as translated by Moffat. I will argue that, in inserting the third chapter of the Gospel of John, we can deduce that such a text functioned as technology of conversion. It can also be argued that the extraction of the chapter from the entire gospel demonstrates the intensions of the translator. The analysis of this pericope considers the theological interpretation within New Testament scholarship.

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1 The cover of the 1826 Setswana catechism states the following: A Bechuana Catechism with translation of the third chapter of the Gospel of John, The Lord's Prayer, and other passages of scripture, etc. in that language.

## 2. A DECOLONIAL READING OF THE THIRD CHAPTER OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN, AS TRANSLATED BY ROBERT MOFFAT

In the previous section, I contextualised the translation of the catechism and the insertion of the third chapter of the Gospel of John. I argued that, in reading the chapter, it is imperative to locate the social location and epistemic location of the translator. Thus, re-reading the 1826 translation of the third Gospel of John within such a context provides us with the theological intentions of the translator and gives us a clearer picture of the intentions to translate.

Prior to translating the 1840 English-Setswana New Testament, Moffat had already attempted the strategies of translation by translating the 1826 Third Chapter of the Gospel of John four years prior to translating the Gospel of Luke in 1830. In his translation of the 1840 English-Setswana New Testament, Moffat relies on the 1611 King James as his source text because he had no knowledge of Greek and opted to use the 1611 King James as his text. It can therefore be hypothesised that in his translation of the Third Chapter of the Gospel of John, he applied the same method of relying on the 1611 King James Bible. Hermanson (2002:7) rightly observes that Hebrew, Greek, and Latin did not apply for Moffat, simply because the key function was to preach and fulfil the missionary role of the LMS. Taking the concept of translation as not only an act of rewriting, appropriating, and manipulation, but also as a form of transmitting certain norms, ideals, social hierarchies, and linguistic heritage of the source text, the analysis of the 1826 third chapter of the Gospel of John becomes critical as the source text was the 1611 King James Bible.

Hermans (2009) argues that Lefevere's conceptualisation of translation as "rewriting" and as technology of manipulation of literary genre is essential in understanding the intentions and ideologies of the translator. In other words, an exercise of rereading such a text requires that I become cognisant of the adaptation of such a text as a text intended for a particular audience with a certain outcome. In this case, the notion of conversation. The source text for such a translation is the 1611 King James Bible.<sup>2</sup> It is within this context that I analyse the translation of the third chapter of the Gospel of John.

The third chapter of the Gospel of John presents a conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus. Such a conversation, according to the story, is depicted to have taken place at night. The story begins with him

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2 In the various articles, I have shown that Moffat used the 1611 King James Bible as source text.



stating the following: “We know that you are the teacher ...”. Even though he presents himself in a collective, the notion of “we” can be interpreted as though he was speaking on behalf of a collective. However, Wiarda (2004) argues that Nicodemus must be understood as an individual who was acting on his own and not on behalf of the Jews’ group of leaders. Thus, perceiving him as representing a collective would be an allegorical reading. Ford (2013) maintains that the conversation between the two men shows that Nicodemus is exposed as a person with a huge religious dilemma who knows but cannot comprehend God’s ways and is willing to engage in a conversation rather than confrontation with Jesus. I re-read John 3:1-36 within this context, particularly the theological significance and its implication to the Batswana converts. The following theme will be explored: spiritual rebirth/conversion/born again, informed by the key questions: Why did he choose to translate such a text? Why John 3:1-36? How should we understand the notion of conversation?

### 3. CONVERSION AS A THEATRE OF SUBMISSION AND PERFORMANCE OF POWER

In his book, Wa Thiong’o (2018:16) argues that

[t]he biggest weapon wielded and actually daily unleashed by imperialism against that collective defiance [of the colonised] is the cultural bomb. The effect of a bomb is to annihilate a people’s belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves.

Against the setting of this citation, the notion of the annihilation of people’s beliefs is commensurate with what Butchart (1998:75) calls “abolition of savage customs in the name of civilisation”. Butchart’s argument becomes exigent in analysing the performance of subterfuge, employed by missionaries through translations such as John 3:1-36 functioning also as a form of persuasion that the “other” needed to abandon their own cultural belief system. I would argue that John 3:1-36 functions as a perversive form of annihilation. In this regard, the denunciation of one’s own religio-cultural practices to access salvation rendered these religio-cultural practices as savagery customs that must be replaced by a Western form of religio-cultural practices and norms. It can be argued that this form of power can be labelled as pastoral power, as it functioned as a technology of purification. In other words, purification of the “Other”

traditional beliefs. Mothoagae (2014:153) argues that anything that was not surveyed by the European eye was devoid of society and history, waiting to be watered and tilled by evangelical effort. Mothoagae also maintains that missionary enterprise was premised on the idea that the West had a divine responsibility to spread Christianity. This form of power can be categorised in Foucauldian terms as pastoral power. He defines pastoral power as a form of power whose apogee is to guarantee individual salvation in the eschaton; it is not merely a form of power; “it must also be prepared to sacrifice itself for the life of the flock”; it does not look at the entire community but focuses on a person during his/her earthly life; pastoral power as technology cannot be exercised outside of epistemic power. “It implies a knowledge of the conscience and the ability to direct it” (Foucault 1982:783). The contextualisation of the missionary enterprise and the zeal to “convert” the so-called “heathen” must be analysed within the notion of pastoral power. As such, the demonisation of the African religio-cultural practices must be understood as a form of pastoral power. Kebede (2004:37) rightly argues that,

[i]n view of the admittance of failure, only the rudeness of arrogance delayed the salutary shift from the wrong method of emptying the Bantu mind so as to stuff Western beliefs into it to the practice of a critical regeneration of Bantu belief.

It is my contention that the translation of John 3:1-36 was aimed at emptying the Black mind of who they are and stuffing it with Western beliefs. I would argue that such an image functioned as a cultural bomb that becomes an important metaphor in understanding the impact of the cutting of the umbilical cord. Therefore, the image of the superiority of Christian beliefs and the inferiority of African religio-cultural practices indicates the role of pastoral power within the colonial matrix of power. Put succinctly, the space of the wretched becomes an inhabitable space; it becomes a theatre of nothingness and annihilation. Thus, conversion to the higher stage can only take place if one cuts the cord, and eradicates that which makes them who they are, disassociating with the Black self.

#### 4. SPIRITUAL REBIRTH: BAPTISM AS A THEATRE OF POWER

Mbembe (2001:228) reminds us:

To convert the other is to incite him or her to give up what she or he believed. Theoretically, the passage from one belief system to another ought to entail the submission of the convert to the institution and the authority in charge of proclaiming the new belief. In actuality, every conversion has always been, if only covertly, an operation of selection, has always required, on the part of the convert, an active exercise of judgment.

In the story, Nicodemus refers to Jesus, a teacher “Rabbi” from God, because of the signs and wonders he has witnessed Jesus performing. According to Barrett (1947), his referral to Jesus as Rabbi was the highest possible praise for Jesus. One of the central themes Jesus introduces in the Nicodemus story is the concept of spiritual rebirth or being “born again”, which was incomprehensible to Nicodemus (Barrett 1947; Beasley-Murray 1986). Jesus tells Nicodemus: “Truly, truly, I say to you unless one is γεννηθῆ ἄνωθεν (‘born again’), he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3, ESV). Nicodemus is initially confused, interpreting Jesus’ words literally and questioning the possibility of being born again as a physical rebirth (Despotis 2018). The confusion can be justifiable since the word γεννηθῆ may also mean being born in a physical sense from a mother. Nicodemus’ confusion is the word ἄνωθεν, which means “again”, in a temporal sense, and “from above”, in a spatial sense. This led him to picture a grown man going back into his mother’s womb (John 3:4) (Gasdia 2014; Koester 2014). Koester (2014) further suggests that Nicodemus’ claim to “know” is incorrect since he is unable to understand what Jesus meant.

Jesus explains that this rebirth is not a physical one but a spiritual transformation, a renewal, and a recreation of the inner person through the work of the Holy Spirit (Beasley-Murray 1986). Jesus emphasises the distinction between physical birth and spiritual birth. Physical birth is the result of natural human processes, whereas spiritual birth is the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a person; it enables one to transcend beyond the flesh and partake in eternal life (Despotis 2018). The process of spiritual rebirth involves a profound change in one’s inner being, brought about by the work of the Holy Spirit. It is a transformation from a state of spiritual deadness and separation from God to a state of spiritual life and union with God (Despotis 2018).

The notion of γεννηθῆναι ἄνωθεν (“born again”), within the context of the 1826 translation of the catechism, must be understood and analysed within the above citation by Mbembe. The idea of born again or rebirth was a technology of necessitating a religio-cultural drift, the cutting of the umbilical cord. Thus, the key word is the notion of being born again, the notion of conversion. This insertion in the Gospel exposes us to Moffat’s intentions. The text was not simply translated for the sake of translating. It was meant to convert and maintain the status of the neophyte in relation to the concept of *metanoia*. Furthermore, it can be argued that reading the text in conjunction with the catechism, the primary goal is to urge the readers to convert and be baptised. Thus, the image of “conversion” becomes fundamental in piecing together the strategy of the translator. John 3:1-36 becomes an important text to illustrate the depth of the damage caused by the missionaries, in prescribing a complete stripping down to the skin of one’s own cultural belonging. Mackenzie’s (1884) concept of cultural revolution speaks to the idea of Wa Thiong’o on cultural bomb in the previous section of this article.

Baptism functioned as a form of power. Borrowing from Butchart’s (1998) notion of “theatre”, I maintain that baptism operated as a “theatre of submission of the body” to a god based on the regimes of truth and codes. Put differently, for the missionaries to obtain baptism, the aspirant converts had to strip themselves of their identity. Thus, baptism necessitated a move and/or shift from the familiar to defamiliarisation and disorientation from one’s sense of belonging to the unfamiliar. Thus, the metaphor of monotheism cannot be separated from the concept of submission. This is emanating from baptism as a demonstration of the convert’s willingness to submit him-/herself to the norms and precepts of Western colonial Christianity. Thus, such a central image in this passage is that of baptism; a decolonial reading would propel the reader to analyse baptism as a “theatre of submission”. Borrowing from Mbembe (2001:214), the imperative concepts of “primacy”, “totalization”, and “monopoly” are used to analyse the metaphor and/or the theatre of baptism. Mbembe (2001:228) surmises the notion of conversion/*metanoia*:

it is also assumed that the person who is converted agrees to accept, in everyday life, the practical consequences of this submission and of this transfer of allegiance. By this definition, every conversion ought therefore to entail, at least in theory, a fundamental change in modes of thought and conduct on the part of the convert. From this point of view, it is implicit that the act of conversion should be accompanied by the abandonment of familiar landmarks, cultural and symbolic. This act means, therefore, stripping down to the skin.

In John 3:5, there is a condition to access the kingdom of God. I would argue that, with this condition, the translator aimed to convey the prerequisite. Therefore, baptism as condition functioned as a technology of power and as a theatre of submission. For any Motswana who contemplated being a Christian, it functioned as an admission of the primacy of the Western colonial Christian God. In other words, by accepting to be baptised, the neophyte acknowledged the *primacy* and supremacy of the Western colonial Christian God, namely that nothing can be substituted for Him. Put differently, the neophyte abandons the indigenous conceptualisation of the divine and assimilates the new concepts of the divine. The religio-cultural practices are forbidden based on the notion of “totalisation”. The convert exclusively practices the codes and doctrinal precepts of Western colonial Christianity, as articulated in the catechism. This is amplified in the notion of a “monopoly” that entails the suppression of one’s own cultural belief system and religiosity. The cultural spirituality becomes a forbidden form of worship, thus facilitating spiritualcide/pneumacide. Put succinctly, baptism, as a theatre of submission within the zone of non-being, is performed as a form of domination over the colonial subject, thus implying the subjectification of the non-being into a state of beingness. Such a state of beingness is informed by a divine that surveys, through the performance of pastoral power infused in the three concepts of “primacy”, “totalisation”, and “monopoly”.

The performance of surveillance by the divine and/or the Western colonial Christian God is based on adhering to the tenets and precepts of the Western colonial Christian doctrinal belief system, as expressed in John 3. By implication, the neophyte is to practise the belief in a *monotheistic divine*, including the abandonment of the Batswana religio-cultural practices. This is based on the discourse of Mbembe (2001:214) as the “radicality is what gives the single god part of his jealous, possessive, wrathful, violent, and unconditional character”. As argued in the preceding paragraph, to access baptism entailed a complete rejection of the indigenous religio-cultural belief system. The politics of conversion/*metanoia* is based on the idea of expansion and universalisation of the divine. Thus, John 3:1-36 functioned as a perfect text for cementing and necessitating the notion of the universalisation of the divine (Christian God). Within the context of John 3:1-36, conversion thus functions as a technology of disciplinary power in Foucauldian (1975) terms.

By divesting himself or herself of previous beliefs, the neophyte is supposed to have shifted his or her centre of gravity. A test or ordeal of de-familiarization and disorientation, conversion distances the convert from family, relatives, language, customs, even from geographical environment and social contacts – that is, from various forms of inscription in a genealogy and an imaginary. This distancing is supposed to allow the neophyte to situate himself or herself within an absolutely different horizon, a horizon that paganism, in its horror, can no longer attain or recuperate (Mbembe 2001:228-229).

Within the 1826 translation of the catechism, John 3:1-36 indicates the intentions of why the translator chose to manipulate the biblical text towards a particular outcome. Complete conversion functions as a metaphor of cutting the umbilical cord. Such an image shows the interconnectedness of the politics of translation and conversion. This is highlighted eloquently by Mbembe's argument above in relation to the notion of divesting, defamiliarisation, and disorientation. These three concepts summarise conversion and baptism as theatres of submission and their consequence to the deformation and erosion of the indigenous religio-cultural belief system of the receptor language. Wa Thiong'o (1981:6) argues that

the effect of a bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and in themselves.

[t]he more missionaries relegated African religions, superstition witchcraft, the higher, they thought, the place of Christianity became. Their insensibility to the anti-Christian nature of their approach was caused by belief painting the disparagement of African beliefs as an exaltation of Christianity (Kebede 2004:36).

Thus, decolonisation becomes an important theoretical tool within the toolbox. Mignolo (2012:25-26) reminds us that

decolonizing epistemology means, in the long run, liberating thinking from sacralized texts, whether religious or secular ... The first task of decolonizing epistemology consists in learning to unlearn in order to relearn and to rebuild.

In the following section, I will briefly engage the implications of the demonisation of the indigenous belief systems.

In summary, in this article, I focused on the second section of the notion of 1826 Setswana catechism. In this article, I argued that translation does not happen in a vacuum; rather it is also fundamentally informed by the theological/metaphysical/ideological/epistemological, and social

location of the translator. I argued that through the translated texts, Moffat performs a technology of power by eroding and dislocating the epistemic and spiritual heritage of the Batswana people. A decolonial re-reading of the notion of γεννηθῆ ἄνωθεν (“born again”) points to the intersectionality of conversion, baptism, assimilation as tools of power become evident. Thus, providing the reader with the window into why such a text and/or why choose such a text. Furthermore, the addition of the third chapter of the Gospel of John and the Lord’s prayer points to the interconnectedness of baptism and conversion as theatres of submission leading the status of biculturality. Such a state of being illustrates what Bell (1996:96) refers to as “a dynamic epistemological mode of critical inquiry”. In other words, the denial of oneself and the erosion of the indigenous religio-cultural belief system have created a dualistic nature of being in the world for an African. I argued that such a state has led to epistemicide and spiritualcide. Decoloniality, as epistemological and philosophical, equips an individual to analyse the impact of this transmogrification and provides us with a lens to analyse the impact of this violence. This process requires the intentionality to learning to unlearn for the purposes of redefining and reconstructing the pieces of glass scattered (indigenous religio-cultural belief system). The notion of delinking becomes an integral technology in challenging the double consciousness constructed by Western colonial Christianity. Mignolo (2007:459) reminds us that

delinking means to change the terms of the conversation, and above all, of the hegemonic ideas of what knowledge and understanding are.

Put differently, for the African to break the chain of bi-religiosity, biculturality, and the hegemony of knowledge, it requires a form of border thinking (Mignolo 2007:498). Soja (2010:1) reminds us that historical [(in) justice] has consequential geography. He argues that the consequences of geographical injustice not only pertain to geographies of physical and political boundaries, but also involve the geographical mappings of ideas, images, and normative structures. Thus, pluriversality as strategy challenges the assumption of universality, resulting in the opening of the domains of epistemic dismantling of the colonial matrix of power (Mignolo 2012:25).

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