

Decolonizing the university: New directions

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Arts & Humanities in Higher Education

2016, Vol. 15(1) 29–45

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DOI: 10.1177/1474022215618513

ahh.sagepub.com



Abstract

What are the limits placed on the ‘decolonization’ project by the forces of neoliberalism? How are the latter affecting the future of the university? Is ‘decolonization’ the same as ‘Africanization’?

Keywords

Decolonization, institutions, knowledge, neoliberalism, university

I.

I wanted to be as practical, as programmatic and as concrete as possible.

There are a number of issues for which it is easy to cut through the cheese.

For instance, Rhodes’ statue has nothing to do on a public university campus. Then we are told that he donated his land and his money to build the university. How did he get the land in the first instance? How did he get the money? Who ultimately paid for the land and the money? Furthermore, a great donor is one who is discreet; who gives without reserve, in anticipation for nothing. A great donor is not one who is trying to manufacture wholesale debts, especially debts in regards to future generations who are then required to be eternally grateful.

Another example: it does not take nine months to change the names of buildings, to change the iconography, the economy of symbols whose force is to create or induce particular states of humiliation; pictures or images that mentally harass Black students on an everyday basis because these students know whom these images represent. And the figures they represent are figures of people who have

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tormented and violated all that which the name 'Black' stands for while they were alive. The figures they represent are figures of people who truly believed that to be Black was a liability, and if this was not clear enough, then it had to be made so.

Then some say, but what about history? Should we be erasing history? History is not the same thing as memory. Memory is the way in which we put history to rest, especially histories of suffering, trauma and victimization.

Another example is *access* – or precisely the *democratization of access*. The doors of higher learning should be widely opened. For this to happen, South Africa must invest in its universities. For the time being, it spends 0.6% of its Gross Domestic Product on higher education. This is an embarrassment.

But when we say access, we are not simply thinking in demographic terms, although these are crucial. When we say access, we are also saying the possibility to inhabit a space to the extent that one can say, 'This is my home. I am not a foreigner. I belong here'. This is not hospitality. It is not charity.

So, the decolonization of *buildings* is not a frivolous issue. To some extent, a good university education is impossible without an extensive material infrastructure/architecture. Intellectual life can be dependent on the sort of buildings in which conversations take place. Apartheid architecture – which prevails in most of our higher learning institutions – is not conducive to breathing. A proper campus bookstore providing more than textbooks, sweatshirts and drinking mugs.

Another example is *the university classroom* – the aim of higher education is to encourage students to develop their own intellectual and moral lives as independent individuals; to redistribute as equally as possible a capacity of a special type – the capacity to make disciplined inquiries into those things we need to know, but do not know yet (Appadurai); the capacity to make systematic forays beyond our current knowledge horizons. Does the emerging system prevent the realization of this goal? Or is it that the overall outcome of the system of business principles and statistical accountancy applied to university education is the creation of a student body lacking any desire or capacity for enlightenment and taught, in turn, by a faculty increasingly divested by the bureaucratic regime of any incentives to the preservation of the intellect and advancement of the life of the mind?

Yet another example: universities today are *large systems of authoritative control*, standardization, gradation, accountancy, classification, credits and penalties. We need to decolonize the systems of access and management insofar as they have turned higher education into a marketable product, rated, bought and sold by standard units, measured, counted and reduced to staple equivalence by impersonal, mechanical tests and therefore readily subject to statistical consistency, with numerical standards and units. We have to decolonize this because it is deterring students and teachers from a free pursuit of knowledge. It is substituting this goal of free pursuit of knowledge for another, the pursuit of credits. It is replacing scientific capacity and addiction to study and inquiry by salesman-like proficiency.

Universities are also organizational structures with certified and required programs of study, grading systems, methods for the legitimate accumulation of credits and acceptable and non acceptable standards of achievement.

Since the start of the 20th century, they have been undergoing internal changes in their organizational structure. First has been the growth of bureaucratic methods in higher education. To decolonize means to reverse this tide of bureaucratization. Unfortunately this is not what is happening.

Rather, a surprisingly large number of Faculty members now seek a refuge from the increasingly routinized duties of teaching and scholarship and strive for the rewards of higher status and income, which come with upward mobility within the university. The lowest bureaucrats and administrative staff carry greater pay and prestige than the rank of some senior lecturer.

Then there is *the mania for assessment*. The system of business principles and statistical accountancy has resulted in an obsessive concern with the periodic and quantitative assessment of every facet of university functioning. Assessment has become a professional specialty with its own typical procedures, arcane language and attendant mentality. An enormous amount of faculty time and energy are expended in the fulfillment of administrative demands for ongoing assessment and reviews of programs.

Methods of evaluation of faculty include the compilation of extensive files demonstrating, preferably in statistical terms, his or her productivity – numbers of publications, number of conference papers presented, numbers of committees served on, numbers of courses taught, numbers of students processed in those courses, numbers of advisees, quantitative measures of teaching excellence etc. . . , student evaluations of teaching measured by a series of scaled questions concerning various facets of teaching, an overall set of numerical scores, which serve as a summary statistical measure of the faculty member's alleged teaching ability, with excellence in teaching reduced to statistical accountancy. The same goes with hiring practices.

Finally, to decolonize implies breaking *the cycle that tends to turn students into customers and consumers*. These tendencies are inherent in an institution run in accordance with business principles: the students have become interested less and less in study and knowledge for its own sake and more and more in the material payoff, or utility, which their studies and degree have on the open market. In this system, the student becomes the consumer of vendible educational commodities, primarily courses credits, certifications and degrees. The task of the university from then on is to make them happy as customers.

2.

But while preparing this, it became clear to me that the questions we face are of a profoundly intellectual nature. They are also colossal. And if we do not foreground them intellectually in the first instance; if we do not develop a complex understanding of the nature of what we are actually facing, we will end up with the same old

techno-bureaucratic fixes that have led us, in the first place, to the current *cul-de-sac*.

To be perfectly frank, I have to add that our task is rendered all the more complex because there is hardly any agreement as to the meaning, and even less so the future, of what goes by the name 'the university' in our world today.

The harder I tried to make sense of the idea of 'decolonization' that has become the rallying cry for those trying to undo the racist legacies of the past, the more I kept asking myself to what extent we might be fighting a complexly mutating entity with concepts inherited from an entirely different age and epoch. Is today's Beast the same as yesterday's or are we confronting an entirely different *apparatus*, an entirely different rationality – both of which require us to produce radically new concepts?

Rhodes Must Fall was an important and necessary moment. The movement has won a tactical battle. But the struggle is only starting. It has revealed numerous lines of fracture within South African society and has brought back on the agenda the question of the de-racialization of this country's institutions and public culture.

That this movement has been dovetailed by the hunting and extrajudicial executions of Black Africans on the streets and townships of South Africa are deeply troubling, and I will say a few words about this later.

Let me simply add that the terms under which the next phase of the struggle should be fought are entirely uncertain.

We all seem to agree that there is something anachronistic, something entirely is wrong with a number of institutions of higher learning in South Africa. There is something profoundly wrong when, for instance, syllabuses designed to meet the needs of colonialism and Apartheid should continue well into the liberation era. There is something not only wrong, but profoundly demeaning, when we are asked to bow in deference before the statues of those who did not consider us as human and who deployed every single mean in their power to remind us of our supposed worthlessness. There is something perverse to engage in this ritual of self-humiliation and self-debasement every time we happen to find ourselves in such an environment.

So, today the consensus is that part of what is wrong with our institutions of higher learning is that they are 'Westernized'.

What does it mean 'they are Westernized'? They are 'Westernized' in the sense that they are local instantiations of a dominant academic model based on a Eurocentric epistemic canon. A Eurocentric canon is a canon that attributes truth only to the Western way of knowledge production. It is a canon that disregards other epistemic traditions. It is a canon that tries to portray colonialism as a normal form of social relations between human beings rather than a system of exploitation and oppression.

Furthermore, Western epistemic traditions are traditions that claim detachment of the known from the knower. They rest on a division between mind and world, or between reason and nature as an ontological *a priori*. They are traditions in which

the knowing subject is enclosed in itself and peeks out at a world of objects and produces supposedly objective knowledge of those objects. The knowing subject is thus able to know the world without being part of that world and he or she is by all accounts able to produce knowledge that is supposed to be universal and independent of context.

The problem – because there is a problem indeed – with this tradition is that it has become hegemonic. This hegemonic notion of knowledge production has generated discursive scientific practices and has set up interpretive frames that make it difficult to think outside of these frames. But this is not all. This hegemonic tradition also actively represses anything that actually is articulated, thought and envisioned from outside of these frames.

For these reasons, the emerging consensus is that our institutions must undergo a process of *decolonization* both of knowledge and of the university as an institution.

The task before us is to give content to this call – which requires that we be clear about what we are talking about.

3.

Calls to ‘decolonize’ are not new. Nor have they gone uncontested whenever they have been made. We all have in mind African postcolonial experiments in the 1960s and 1970s. Then, ‘to decolonize’ was the same thing as ‘to Africanize’. To decolonize was part of a nation-building project.

Frantz Fanon was extremely critical of the project of ‘Africanization’. His critique of ‘Africanization’ (*The Wretched of the Earth*, chapter 3) was entirely political.

First, he did not believe that ‘nation-building’ could be achieved by those he called ‘the national middle class’ or the ‘national bourgeoisie’. Fanon did not trust the African postcolonial middle class at all. He thought it was lazy, unscrupulous, parasitic and above all lacking spiritual depth precisely because it had ‘totally assimilated colonialist thought in its most corrupt form’.

Not engaged in production, nor in invention, nor building, nor labour, its innermost vocation, he thought, was not to transform the nation. It was merely to ‘keep in the running and be part of the racket’. For instance, it constantly demanded the ‘nationalization of the economy’ and of the trading sectors. But nationalization quite simply meant ‘the transfer into native hands of those unfair advantages which were a legacy of the colonial past’.

He thought that in the aftermath of colonialism, the middle class manipulated the overall claim to self-determination as a way of preventing the formation of an authentic national consciousness. In order to preserve its own interests, the middle class turned the national project into an ‘an empty shell, a crude and fragile travesty of what might have been’. In this context, the discourse of ‘Africanization’ mostly performed an ideological work. ‘Africanization’ was the ideology masking

what fundamentally was a ‘racketeering’ or predatory project – what we call today ‘looting’.

More ominously, Fanon took a certain discourse of ‘Africanization’ to be akin to something he called ‘retrogression’ – retrogression when ‘the nation is passed over for the race, and the tribe is preferred to the state’. ‘Retrogression’ too when, behind a so-called nationalist rhetoric, lurks the hideous face of chauvinism – the ‘heart breaking return of chauvinism in its most bitter and detestable form’, he writes. In the aftermath of independence, Fanon witnessed events similar to what we in South Africa call ‘xenophobic’ or ‘Afrophobic’ attacks against fellow Africans. He witnessed similar events in the Ivory Coast, in Senegal, in the Congo where those we call, in the South African lexicon ‘foreigners’ (or *makwer-ekweres*) controlled the greater part of the petty trade. These Africans of other nations were rounded up and commanded to leave. Their shops were burned and their street stalls were wrecked.

Fanon was ill at ease with calls for ‘Africanization’ because calls for ‘Africanization’ are, if not always then in most instances, haunted by the dark desire *to get rid of the foreigner* – a dark desire which, Fanon confesses, made him ‘furious and sick at heart’. It made him furious and sick at heart because the foreigner to be gotten rid of was almost always a fellow African from another nation. And because the objective target of ‘Africanization’ was a fellow African from another nation, he saw in ‘Africanization’ the name of an inverted racism – *self-racism* if you like.

As far as I know, Fanon’s is the most trenchant critique of the ‘decolonization-as-Africanization’ paradigm. He is its most trenchant critic because of his conviction that very often, especially when the ‘wrong’ social class is in charge, there is a shortcut from nationalism ‘to chauvinism, and finally to racism’.

4.

Now, let us invoke another tradition represented by Ngugi wa Thiong’o (*Decolonizing the Mind*, 1981) for whom to ‘Africanize’ has a slightly different meaning.

For Ngugi, to ‘Africanize’ is part of a larger politics – not the politics of racketeering and looting, but the *politics of language* – or has he himself puts it, of ‘the mother tongue’.

It is also part of a larger search – the search for what he calls ‘a liberating perspective’.

What does he mean by this expression? He mainly means a perspective that can allow us ‘to see ourselves clearly in relationship to ourselves and to other selves in the universe’ (p. 87). It is worth noting that Ngugi does not use the term ‘Africanization’. He uses the term ‘decolonizing’ – by which he means not an event that happens once for all at a given time and place, but an ongoing process of ‘seeing ourselves clearly’; emerging out of a state of either blindness or dizziness.

We should note, too, the length to which Ngugi goes in tying up the process of ‘seeing ourselves clearly’ (which in his mind is probably the same as ‘seeing for

ourselves') to the question of relationality (a trope so present in various other traditions of Black thought, in particular Glissant). We are called upon to see ourselves clearly in relation to ourselves and to other selves with whom we share the universe. And the term 'other selves' is open ended enough to include, in this Age of the Anthropocene, all sorts of living species and objects.

Let me add that Ngugi is, more than Fanon, directly interested in questions of writing and teaching – writing oneself, teaching oneself. He believes that decolonization is not an end point. It is the beginning of an entirely new struggle. It is a struggle over what is to be taught; it is about the terms under which we should be teaching what – not to some generic figure of the student, but to the African 'child', a figure that is very much central to his politics and to his creative work.

Let me briefly recall the core questions Ngugi is grappling with, and it is pretty obvious that they are also ours.

What should we do with the inherited colonial education system and the consciousness it necessarily inculcated in the African mind? What directions should an education system take in an Africa wishing to break with neo-colonialism? How does it want the "New Africans" to view themselves and their universe and from what base, Afrocentric or Eurocentric? What then are the materials they should be exposed to, and in what order and perspective? Who should be interpreting that material to them, an African or non-African? If African, what kind of African? One who has internalized the colonial world outlook or one attempting to break free from the inherited slave consciousness?

If 'we are to do anything about our individual and collective being today', Ngugi argues, 'then we have to coldly and consciously look at what imperialism has been doing to us and to our view of ourselves in the universe' (p. 88). In Ngugi's terms, the call for 'Africanization' is *a project of 're-centering'*. It is about rejecting the assumption that the modern West is the central root of Africa's consciousness and cultural heritage. It is about rejecting the notion that Africa is merely an extension of the West. It is not about closing the door to European or other traditions. It is about defining clearly what the centre is.

And for Ngugi, Africa has to be placed in the centre. 'Education is a means of knowledge about ourselves. . . . After we have examined ourselves, we radiate outwards and discover peoples and worlds around us. With Africa at the centre of things, not existing as an appendix or a satellite of other countries and literatures, things must be seen from the African perspective'. 'All other things are to be considered in their relevance to our situation and their contribution towards understanding ourselves. In suggesting this we are not rejecting other streams, especially the western stream. We are only clearly mapping out the directions and perspectives the study of culture and literature will inevitably take in an African university'.

I have spent this amount of time on Ngugi because he is arguably the African writer who has the most popularized the concept of 'decolonizing' we are today

relying upon to foster the project of a future university in South Africa. Ngugi drew practical implications from his considerations and we might be wise to look into some of these as we grapple with what it might possibly mean to decolonize our own institutions. Most of these implications had to do with the content and extent of what was to be taught (curriculum reform).

Crucial in this regard was the need to teach African languages. *A decolonized university in Africa should put African languages at the center of its teaching and learning project.* Colonialism rhymes with monolingualism. *The African university of tomorrow will be multilingual.* It will teach (in) Swahili, isiZulu, isiXhosa, Shona, Yoruba, Hausa, Lingala, Gikuyu and it will teach all those other African languages French, Portuguese or Arabic have become, while making a space for Chinese, Hindi etc.

A second implication: Ngugi's Africa expands well beyond the geographical limits of the Continent. He wanted 'to pursue the African connection to the four corners of the Earth' – to the West Indies, to Afro-America.

The lesson is clear. Decolonizing an African university requires a *geographical imagination that extends well beyond the confines of the nation-state.*

A lot could be said here in view of the segregationist and isolationist histories of South Africa. Recent scholarship on the many versions of Black internationalism and their intersections with various other forms of internationalisms could help in rethinking the spatial politics of decolonization in so far as true decolonization, as Dubois intimated in 1919, necessarily centers on 'the destiny of humankind' and not of one race, color or *ethnos*.

5.

Today, the decolonizing project is back on the agenda worldwide. It has two sides. The first is a critique of the dominant Eurocentric academic model – the fight against what Latin Americans in particular call 'epistemic coloniality', that is, the endless production of theories that are based on European traditions. These are produced nearly always by Europeans or Euro-American men who are the only ones accepted as capable of reaching universality; they involve a particular anthropological knowledge, which is a process of knowing about Others – but a process that never fully acknowledges these Others as thinking and knowledge-producing subjects.

The second is an attempt at imagining what the alternative to this model could look like. This is where a lot remains to be done. Whatever the case, there is a recognition of the exhaustion of the present academic model with its origins in the universalism of the Enlightenment. Boaventura de Sousa or Enrique Dussel for instance makes it clear that knowledge can only be thought of as universal if it is pluriversal.

They have also made it clear that at the end of the decolonizing process, we will no longer have a university. We will have a pluriversity. What is a pluriversity?

A pluriversity is not merely the extension throughout the world of a Eurocentric model presumed to be universal and now being reproduced almost everywhere thanks to commercial internationalism.

By pluriversity, many understand a process of knowledge production that is open to epistemic diversity. It is a process that does not necessarily abandon the notion of universal knowledge for humanity, but which embraces it via *a horizontal strategy of openness to dialogue among different epistemic traditions*.

To decolonize the university is to therefore to reform it with the aim of creating a less provincial and more open critical cosmopolitan pluriversalism – a task that involves the radical *refounding* of our ways of thinking and a transcendence of our disciplinary divisions.

The problem of course is whether the university is reformable or whether it is too late? What university?

6.

We need not to be blind to the limits of the various approaches I have just sketched. As I said at the start, my fear is that we might be fighting battles of the present and the future with outdated tools. We have to stay with the game and not come late because staying ahead of the game is the new rule.

We need more profound understanding of the situation we find ourselves in today if we are to better rethink the university of tomorrow.

A new political economy and a new imaginary of the university

A global restructuring of higher education is taking place. This restructuring is closely related to the dynamics of global capitalism (in any case the most transnationalized segments of capital).

It is also closely related to the transnationalization of elites and the reproduction of their hegemonic power. Global elites are not only invested in accelerating the shift from the university as we knew it to a new form of institution suited to privileged groups who are able to use aspects of globalization to reproduce, and fence off power and privilege. They are busy trying to stay ahead of the game.

It is considered that higher education is too fragmented. It is too nation state-centric at a time when economic integration at a planetary level is the new norm.

The need, today, is for a postnational or partially denationalized education space that would help to increase the availability of a skilled labour force; that would foster the transferability and compatibility of its skills across boundaries as well as intensive research collaborations between universities and transnational corporations – the goal being to produce innovations more effectively – innovations that are once again necessary for the structural interests of transnationally mobile capital.

So, we are witnessing a crucial moment, a double moment of *refounding and rescaling* – an entirely new moment when nationally specific higher education systems are being denationalized.

Interestingly enough, this process of denationalization is linked to what is nowadays called the ‘fifth freedom’ in Europe. The fifth freedom is *the freedom*

of movement of knowledge – knowledge in motion. This process is also a precondition for the promotion of intensive linkages between transnational industry and university.

To put it somewhat crudely – The university is being refounded and is being rescaled with the purpose of better turning it into a springboard for global markets in an economy that is knowledge based, innovation based.

Can we fight against this? How? What would be the terms of the fight? Are there aspects of this process of denationalization that can be turned against the overall objective, that of turning the university into a springboard for global markets? Is the term ‘decolonization’ the most appropriate for this kind of antagonism?

This new era of denationalization or transnationalization is also an era of *open global competition*. Competition has become a normal and widely accepted phenomenon among universities throughout the world today.

With competition comes something we should call *zoning*. Zoning is what happens to the losers in the unfolding global competition. For a university to be ‘zoned’ is like being parked in a reserve – to become what we used to call here a bush university. An entirely new era, that of global Apartheid in higher education, is unfolding.

But the terms of the competition are defined by the West. Can we change the terms of the competition? Should we be competing at all? What does it mean to win or to lose?

We cannot be oblivious to the power relations in global higher education and the interplay between core and peripheral nations in higher education. The paradigm around which competition today is organized and rankings are made and zoning unfolds are the idea or image of ‘world class’.

It is a paradigm that originated from Anglo-America and it is a paradigm that has become attractive to many countries, especially in Asia where they are trying to learn and even copy the Western-based world class model in order to restructure their higher education sector.

How is all of this refracted here in South Africa? Some of our universities are attracted to this model. But I do not think that we have been that busy establishing world class universities as a matter of policy – which would imply changing university governance and organizational culture and behaviours so as to respond to global dynamics. A world class image is like a resource.

The demand by middle classes for higher education of their children is more and more combined with their reluctance to support it with higher taxes; the interest of students in the degree as a ticket to upward career mobility; the increasingly enhanced status of the administrative role and the consolidation of a distinctively administrative mentality which values quantitative assessment as the path to academic excellence; the decreasing status of the faculty role with the increasing administrative burdens on faculty; the impact of outside institutions such as the textbook trade on the university classroom.

The tremendous expansion of higher education on a global scale has opened the way to an unprecedented era of student mobility and educational migration.

For instance, China alone had a staggering 419,000 students pursuing higher education outside the country's borders in 2008. Africans constitute 5% of the international student body in Chinese universities. They are not only found in Guangdong or Zhejiang. They are present in virtually every province. And according to the World Trade Organization, outward student mobility is increasing faster from Africa than from any other continent. China is comparatively well positioned to attract African students because of moderate tuition fees, low living costs, welcoming visa policies as compared to most Western destinations and, more and more, South Africa. The other factor is the extent to which African students in China are able to combine studies with business activities, especially to engage in trade.

This goes with a shift in the gravity of innovation from West to East. The world's largest and most populous nations outside the Western world such as China, India, Brazil, Indonesia and Pakistan are educating large skilled workforces. Following a period in which students from Asian countries have migrated to the West, these countries are increasingly supporting the development of regional institutions. This goes for China and India, as well as for the Gulf States, and Malaysia and Singapore. The latter has particularly been established as a major hub, a hot spot for new waves of globalized higher education.

These factors raise the desirability of uncoupling higher education from national education policy framework, from the nation in the age of denationalization. I am not saying that nation states have lost their importance and relevance. But is it still entirely plausible to speak of national university systems, although nation states, or in our case the South African state, are still an important resource providers?

Where it still matters, the university is perceived as a crucial part of national innovation systems, a source of economically valuable knowledge and, consequently, a key factor of production in globalizing knowledge capitalism.

This is a trend one could already observe, especially in the US, in the first decades of the 20th century. See Veblen's diagnosis *The Higher Learning in America. A Memorandum on the Conduct of Universities by Businessmen* (1918). He was already able then to identify a set of symptoms of an educational condition dominated by business principles. Today, global markets are in many ways shaping university reforms worldwide. Contemporary changes in higher education are based on the deepening of functional linkages between higher education and knowledge capitalism at a time when capitalism has become thoroughly transnational and ruling classes worldwide have become partially denationalized.

The aim is to train people whose economic interests are globally linked; who tend to hold outward-oriented global perspectives on all kinds of issues; who think of themselves as world citizens with local roots; who tend to share similar lifestyles and consumption habits. This weakens of bonds that rest on being the citizens of a particular nation state, while the bonds resting on being the member of a transnational class strengthen.

Such neoliberal globalization involves an entirely new governing rationality through which everything is 'economized'. It is economized in a very specific way in the sense that human beings become market actors and nothing but; every field of

activity is seen as a market; and every entity (whether public or private, whether person, business, state or corporation) is governed as a firm. It is not simply that commodification and monetization have been extended everywhere. Even non-wealth-generating spheres – as learning, dating, exercising, breathing – are now construed in market terms; are submitted to market metrics; are governed with market techniques and practices. People themselves are cast as human capital and must accordingly tend to their own present and future value. They are an integral aspect of future markets. And with financialization, value itself is determined speculatively while ratings and rankings are supposed to shape its future.

The consequences of this governing rationality-cum-economic policy are to generate and legitimize extreme inequalities of access, of wealth and life conditions. It leads to increasingly precarious and disposable and superfluous populations. It produces an unprecedented intimacy between capital (especially finance capital) and states, and thus permits domination of political life by capital. It generates unethical commercialization of things rightly protected from markets and privatizes public goods and thus eliminates shared and egalitarian access to them.

Even more so, it does profound damage to democratic practices, cultures and institutions and imaginaries. It switches the meaning of democratic values from a political to an economic register. Liberty is disconnected from either political participation or existential freedom and is reduced to market freedom unimpeded by regulation or any form of government restriction. Equality as a matter of legal standing and of participation in shared rule is replaced with the idea of an equal right to compete in a world where there are always winners and losers.

Knowledge has become a commodity. Recent decades have witnessed the rise of networks and practices that have introduced direct market behaviours, the profit motive and market ethos more directly into universities, at least in the United States. These are new ways, therefore, in which markets, states and higher education have become interrelated, with new implications of blurring the boundaries between these spheres.

We must not lose sight of the political economy of knowledge production in the contemporary world of higher education – by which one should understand the flows and linkages in the production, distribution and consumption of education. What we should call the food chain of higher education is global. It is not global in the same way everywhere, but it is definitely global. Our universities are linked to transnational flows and channeled routes in the world of higher education. The world of higher education itself is made up of different forms of geopolitical stratifications.

Knowledge futures/Knowledge pasts

The rhetoric of the knowledge society/knowledge economy is the ideological force of globalization. The idea of a knowledge society is far from the neutral condition it is assumed to be. It is best understood as one of the strongest constituents of contemporary hegemony, directly linked to key arguments in classic capitalist and human capital theories. In itself, it is in fact a social imaginary for future

supremacy. Higher education is essentially if not solely regarded as a key target for growth strategies. It is organized around the commodity paradigm. Who gets to be taught, what, where and how and for what purpose is an aspect of a global trading in knowledge, in intellectual assets and cultural capital. The belief is that knowledge, competence, creativity, talent and abilities are all free for anyone to acquire, accumulate and use in an interchangeable market and meritocracy. How do we try and counter the narrow ethnocentric, ideological and technocratic understandings of knowledge futures as a techno-political fix and replace them by alternative interpretations of transnational flows of higher education?

Reconceptualizing diasporic intellectual networks

The speed, scale and volume of transnational talent mobility are remarkable, producing the phenomenon of knowledge diasporas. The constitution of these knowledge diasporas is encouraged, supported and necessitated by globalization. We need to take this phenomenon seriously and stop thinking about it in terms of theories of migration. The complexity of the current motion defies the labels of brain drain, brain gain or even brain circulation. We live in an age in which most relations between academics are deterritorialized.

Let us do like other countries. Take, for instance, China. In 2010, Chinese scholars in the USA represented 25.6% of all the international scholars. In China itself, they are regarded as knowledge carriers and producers and as cultural mediators capable of interrogating the global through the local, in-between spaces not bound by nation states.

We will foster a process of decolonization of our universities if we manage to build new diasporic intellectual networks and if we take seriously these new spaces of transnational engagement and harness the floating resources freed by the process of globalized talent mobility.

In order to achieve such a goal, a number of obsolete articles of faith have to be revisited or discarded. For instance, we cannot afford to think exclusively in a South-African-centric way. Concerns for national economic growth are important. But the notion that human capital translates into economic capital that translates into national economic growth and competitiveness must be revisited. We no longer live in an age of one-way flows of qualified human resources and capital. We therefore need to reconfigure our understanding of our own situatedness in Africa and the world and stop thinking in South-African-centric terms. We are in a better position than many to set up diasporic knowledge networks, which enable scholars of African descent in the rest of the world to transfer their skills and expertise without necessarily settling here permanently.

This is what China has done through its 111 program, whose aim is to recruit overseas Chinese intellectuals to mainland universities on a periodic basis. Anyway, there can be no decolonization of our universities without a better understanding of the complex dynamics of global movement to which we can only respond through active projects of 'moving ideas'.

Our universities also have to set up *study in Africa programs* for our students. The Continent is not a terra nullius. It is full of proliferating resources. Let us use them to foster new intra-continental academic networks through various connectivity schemes. This is how we will maximize the benefits of brain circulation.

Deep time

We can no longer think about ‘the human’ in the same terms we were used to until quite recently. At the start of this new century, we are forced to think the human in entirely new ways. One element in this is the recognition of the fact that an epoch-scale boundary has been crossed within the last two centuries of human life on Earth and that we have, as a consequence, entered an entirely new deep, geological time, that of the *Anthropocene*.

The concept of the Anthropocene itself denotes a new geological epoch characterized by human-induced massive and accelerated changes to the Earth’s climate, land, oceans and biosphere.

The scale, magnitude and significance of this environmental change – in other words the future evolution of the biosphere and of Earth’s environmental life support systems – is arguably the most important question facing humanity, since at stake is the very possibility of *its extinction*.

We therefore have to *rethink the human not from the perspective of its mastery of the Creation as we used to, but from the perspective of its finitude and its possible extinction*.

This kind of rethinking, to be sure, has been under way for some time now. The problem is that we seem to have entirely avoided it in Africa in spite of the existence of a rich archive in this regard.

This rethinking of the human has unfolded along several lines and has yielded a number of preliminary conclusions I would like to summarize.

The first is that humans are part of *a very long, deep history that is not simply theirs*; that history is vastly older than the very existence of the human race which, in fact, is very recent. And they share this deep history with various forms of other living entities and species. Our history is therefore one of entanglement with multiple other species. And this being the case, *the dualistic partitions of minds from bodies, meaning and matter or nature from culture can no longer hold*.

The second is that matter has morphogenetic capacities of its own and does not need to be commanded into generating form. It is not an inert receptacle for forms that come from the outside imposed by an exterior agency. This being the case, the concept of agency and power must be extended to non-human nature and conventional understandings of life must be called into question.

To be a subject is no longer to act autonomously in front of an objective background, but to share agency with other subjects that have also lost their autonomy. We have to shift away from the dreams of mastery.

In other words, a new understanding of ontology, epistemology, ethics and politics has to be achieved. It can only be achieved by *overcoming anthropocentrism and humanism*, the split between nature and culture.

The entanglement of matter and meaning calls into question the set of dualisms that places nature on one side and culture on the other, and which separates matters of fact from matters of concern and matters of care. The division of labor is such that the natural sciences are assigned matters of fact (and nature) and the humanities matters of concern (and values, meaning and culture). The cordoning off of concerns into separate domains elides the resonances and dissonances that make up diffraction patterns that make the entanglements visible.

The call is therefore to think the being of objects unshackled from the gaze of humans, in their being-for-themselves.

What we get is a redrawing of distinctions and a decentering of the human. The point is not that we should think objects rather than humans. The human does not constitute a special category that is other than that of the objects. Objects are not a pole opposed to humans. Humans are objects among the various types of objects that exist or populate the world, each with their own specific powers and capacities.

The project is not to exclude humans, but to treat them as a particular type of object. It is to indicate non-human objects without treating them as vehicles for human contents. It is not a call to pay attention to objects rather than subjects. It is to transform the subject into one object among many others, undermining its privileged, central or foundational place within philosophy and ontology. Subjects are objects among objects.

Our world is populated by a variety of nonhuman actors. They are unleashed in the world as autonomous actors in their own right, irreducible to representations and freed from any constant reference to the human. This marks the end of a dual ontology based on the nature–culture split and a shift to an object-oriented philosophy.

Race

Race has once again re-entered the domain of biological truth, viewed now through a molecular gaze. A new molecular deployment of race has emerged out of genomic thinking.

Worldwide, we witness a renewed interest in the identification of biological differences. Genomics, for instance, has produced new complexity into the figure of humanity. And yet the core racial typology of the 19th century still provides a dominant mould through which this new genetic knowledge of human difference is taking shape and entering medical and lay conceptions of human variation.

Moreover, these developments open up the multiple affinities between humans and other creatures or species. We can no longer assume that there are incommensurable differences between us, tool makers, sign makers, language speakers and other animals, or between social history and natural history.

Fundamental to ongoing re-articulations of race and recoding of racism are developments in the life sciences, and in particular in genomics, in our understanding of the cell, in neuroscience and in synthetic biology. The last quarter of the 20th century has seen the 'rise of a molecular and neuromolecular style of thought that analyses all living processes in body and brain in terms of the material properties of cellular

components such as DNA bases, ion channels, membrane potentials and the like'. This process started during the first half of the century and gathered momentum during the last quarter of the last century and the start of the twenty-first century.

Through its convergence with two parallel developments – the digital technologies of the information age and the financialization of the economy – this process has led to two sets of consequences. On the one hand is a renewed preoccupation with the future of life itself. The corporeal is no longer construed as the mystery it has been for a very long time. It is now read as a molecular mechanism. This being the case, organisms – including human organisms – seem 'amenable to optimization by reverse engineering and reconfiguration'. In other words, life defined as a molecular process is understood as amenable to intervention.

The other set of consequences has to do with the new work capital is doing under contemporary conditions. Thanks to the work of capital, we are no longer fundamentally different from things. We turn them into persons. We fall in love with them. We have sex with them precisely because they are not persons and we are no longer fundamentally different from them. We are no longer only persons or we have never been only persons.

We now realize that there is probably more to race than we ever imagined.

New configurations of racism are emerging worldwide. Because race thinking increasingly entails profound questions about the nature of species in general, the need to rethink the politics of racialization and the terms under which the struggle for racial justice unfolds here and elsewhere in the world today has become ever more urgent.

Racism here and elsewhere is still acting as a constitutive supplement to nationalism. How do we create a world beyond nationalism?

Behind the veil of neutrality and impartiality, racial power still structurally depends on various legal regimes for its reproduction. How do we radically transform the law?

Even more ominously, race politics is taking a genomic turn.

At stake in the contemporary reconfigurations and mutations of race and racism is the splitting of humanity itself into separate species and subspecies as a result of market libertarianism and genetic technology.

At stake are also, once again, the old questions of who is whom, who can make what kinds of claims on whom and on what grounds, and who is to own whom and what. In a contemporary neoliberal order that claims to have gone beyond the racial, the struggle for racial justice must take new forms.

In order to invigorate anti-racist thought and praxis and to reanimate the project of non-racialism, we particularly need to explore the emerging nexus between biology, genes, technologies and their articulations with new forms of human destitution. Simply looking into past and present local and global re-articulations of race will not suffice. To tease out alternative possibilities for thinking life and human futures in this age of neoliberal individualism, we need to connect in entirely new ways the project of non-racialism to that of human mutuality.

In the last instance, non-racialism is truly about radical sharing and universal inclusion. It is about humankind ruling in common for a common which includes the non-humans, which is the proper name for democracy.

In this sense, non-racialism is the antithesis of the rule of the market. The domination of politics by capital has resulted in the waste of countless human lives and the production in every corner of the globe of vast stretches of dead water and dead land. To reopen the future of our planet to all who inhabit it, we will have to learn how to share it again amongst the humans, but also between the humans and the non-humans.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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