

The Decolonisation Debate in South Africa and its Wider Significance for Education

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HUMAN SCIENCES RESEARCH COUNCIL

South Africa

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DECOLONIAL TURN

1. Context
2. What is agreed upon?
3. What is the disagreement?
4. The significance of the disagreement – how to work with the idea of Europe?
5. Education by detachment
6. Education by enlargement
7. Education by excavation
8. Education by deconstruction





The statue of Cecil John Rhodes on the campus of the university of Cape Town, while being removed.
(David Harrison, M&G)



DECOLONISE
AFRICA
NOW!!

EDUCATION
IS NOT A
PRIVILEGE









Agreement in the decolonial turn

1. Agreement about the need for re-centring enquiry and the making of knowledge in higher education around the full historical and cosmological experience of Africa in response to Eurocentricism.
2. Agreement that Eurocentricism had produced and was being expressed through the epistemological displacement, subjugation, delegitimation and ultimately erasure of all other forms of knowing of the world.



The Agreement

- A rejection of the marginalisation of the African voice,
- A rejection of the positioning of Africa as a 'place to learn about and not from' (Hendricks & Leibowitz, 2016: para 7) and
- A rejection of the objectification of Africa as a site for Western scrutiny (Garuba, 2015: para 12 and see also Kamanzi, 2016: para 8).



The Agreement

The discursive frame holding Eurocentricism together argued Achille Mbembe (c.2016:3) was that of racism – the racism that gave whiteness its cosmological hubris and its resultant blindness: “we are ... calling for the demythologization of whiteness because democracy in South Africa will either be built on the ruins of those versions of whiteness that produced Rhodes or it will fail... 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”.





New Black Consciousness

Many positions in the argument – old and new.

In current period, two distinct positions in play. The first is *New Black Consciousness* (NBC) and the second *New Humanism* (NH).

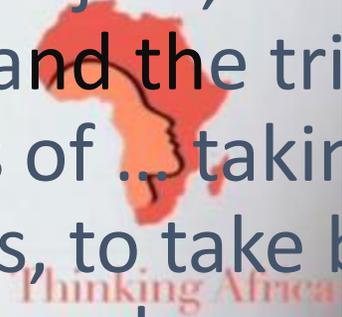
Blackness is privileged in the first. In the second it is the interest in an exploration of the limits of being human that activates the discussion.

Both positions are complex and have within them a variety of nuances.

New Humanism

Mbembe – “(We are in) a ‘racketeering’ or predatory project, a moment when ‘the nation is passed over for the race, and the tribe is preferred over the state. (Needed, instead, is a process of ... taking back of our humanity.... They are struggles to repossess, to take back, if necessary by force that which is ours unconditionally and, as such, belongs to us”.

Mbembe went a great deal further in beginning to generate a description of the ‘us’. Pursuing his critique of the racialisation of popular analysis he began to make an argument for the democratisation of the world beyond anthropocentric understandings of life. His framing of the issues and the problems sought to include life in all of its variety and complexity.



Value of the Debate

Emphasized the significance of the social –
question of how to understand what is going on
in the everyday experience of South Africa.

What conceptual tools should be used to explain
the nature of the social?

Value of the Debate

Critical opening up the epistemological resources that could be used to manage the education of where we are as a people. What resources are important?

So, what's the issue?

Is decoloniality “fundamentally an epistemological shift, or (there also) some merit in seeing it in terms of a subversive project of epistemological appropriation?”

Ways Forward

1. Education by detachment
2. Education by critical appropriation
3. Education by enlargement
4. Education by excavation

Education by detachment

The whole corpus of European thinking about the social – about human beings and their relationships with and to one another – is irremediably tainted by its historical provenance and its spatial location. Required is a complete break from it.

It cannot explain the black condition. Related to but not the same as Samir Amin's 'delinking'.



STEVE BIKO

One should not waste time here dealing with manifestations of material want of the black people. A vast literature has been written on this problem. Possibly a little should be said about spiritual poverty. What makes the black man fail to tick? Is he convinced of his own accord of his inabilities? Does he lack in his genetic make-up that rare quality that makes a man willing to die for the realisation of his aspirations? Or is he simply a defeated person?.... To a large extent the evil-doers have succeeded in producing at the output end of their machine a kind of black man who is man only in form.

DEATH
TO
WHITE-SUPREMACY
Biko
LIVES
IN US

Education by detachment



Colonial
certainty

doubt, is the condition in which possibility is encrusted by negative probabilistic self-determinations. Critical here, as a direct product of apartheid, is how people whose bodies have been constituted by society as black, experience and so come to understand their bodies in the worlds they inhabit. It is here that the pain is. Now need forms of education that take us beyond this.

education produces **white**
and **black doubt**. Doubt, self-

Education by critical appropriation

Centre for Humanities Research, UWC

Biopolitics commits us to a reading of the intensification of the conflation of subject and institution, giving us the form of a racial order that provided a case study in the limits of liberalism, and the encounter with that limit that turned the subject of governmentality into an entrepreneur of the self – into human capital. But what Foucault obscures in the rendering of the problem of neo-liberalism is that history, in so far as it is understood as a project that rhymed with historiography and that promised to free the subject from the inevitable cataclysm that waited it, *worked to further block desire by leaving race to be dealt with by the agency of reason – if you like by university discourse. Not only was this a refusal to think about history in South Africa as ultimately a battle about historiography, but also a refusal to analyse the return of the repressed in the historical account of the becoming post-apartheid of South Africa*

Education by Critical Appropriation

At the core of the questioning is, and this is the major contribution of the CHR, the racial remainder, the extraordinary ways in which 'race' remains even as dominance seeks to disavow its own power. The value of the critique is the recognition of insistent multiplicity and its currency for looking at the past, the present and the future.

This bears directly on the decolonial discussion – its danger of recuperating the terms of imperialism's social - and the suggestion that there are other vantage points from which to think about what it means to be human. It has raised, in particular, the space and place of the post-apartheid.



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Education by Critical Appropriation

At issue were the constitutive and founding exclusions of universal categories: "... while one can acknowledge, without seeking revenge, what one owes to Europe, one can at the same time also investigate the histories that provided the grounds on which European thought was situated and translated in our pasts." The contribution of the CHR is to do precisely this but more. It is to explore the possibility of explanations that are yet to come. They are beyond 'race'.

Education by Enlargement

Catherine Odora Hoppers and the Centre for Development Education, UNISA:

- what is needed is not so much to rewrite the Western script that African universities are using but to enlarge it so that Africa too has a voice.... The Western package... is inadequate to the task of bringing up children who have other frames of reference. The system as we have it is too limited for the drama that confronts a growing African child... No one has complete answers.... (The problem with Eurocentric knowledge was that) it bites a little piece of what is possible; it spits out and ignores the rest. (SARCHI Chair, c.2009b: no page numbers)

Education by Enlargement

“No one has complete answers. It’s about how your one-tenth of the solution can link with that one-tenth and that two-fifths and so on” (ibid). This requires, Odora Hoppers argues, a hospitality to all knowledge forms, critically, the knowledges of so-called high Western modernity, quantum physics, and those of “the rural child, barefoot and in tattered clothes who has a botanical garden coming right to her doorstep. She is naturally evolving inside a system that is integrated with nature, with a grounding in plant, weather and soil systems. Western science needs to build on the knowledge the African child already has by linking up with the child’s lived world” (ibid). The methodology for this is transdisciplinarity. Transdisciplinarity is here, however, more than the disciplines of the Western archive. It includes the full repertoire of critical thought available to human beings: “The deeper you specialise in a specific discipline, the deeper you dig yourself into the silo.... Unless you dig sideways, you lose the capability to converse with other disciplines” (ibid)

Education by Enlargement

- **Transformation by enlargement** in all its work, is that all key concepts and ideas driving or anchoring policy and the academy are revisited with a view to expanding their understanding to include ways of seeing that had been previously excluded:
- The result is that **new theoretical and conceptual advances are introduced** which in turn help to provide **more nuanced conceptions and interpretations of hitherto poorly understood dimensions of livelihood in the African context.** These include expanding the understanding of innovation from only scientific laboratories and the related economic parameters, to notions such as ‘social innovations’, ‘cultural capital’, innovative practices in relation to livelihoods’, ‘innovations from below’, the ‘social good’ and the ‘commons’. It calls for revolutions not only in technology, **but also in the way we THINK about issues.** It furthermore enables the introduction of dynamic conceptual reversals that give dignity to rural people.

Education by Excavation

Andre Keet, Centre for Critical Studies in Higher Education
Transformation, Nelson Mandela University

The social structure of the university is constitutive – creates distinct forms and senses of self.

The critical university is plastic – it is able to renounce itself, self-transform. The key methodology for the plastic university is about uncovering – excavating – that which has been covered over. The covered-over knowledges, ideas of self, need to be brought to the surface. Decoloniality is about developing a critical ontology of ourselves. Need new methodologies for this.

The significance of the decolonial turn

Placed the politics of being human in a racialized world into the centre of the debate.

Re-opened the discussion in fresh ways about 'race' and racial ways of seeing.

But what does it say to the rest of the world?

Certainly is asking Europe to 'rethink' itself, its story about itself.

Asking us to be much more open to knowledges and ways of seeing that are both forgotten and which remain all over the world.

Asking us to move beyond ethnocentric relationships which we may have with knowledge.

Asking us to develop a sense of hospitality to difference.

But it is critically, more importantly, returning us to the idea of critical thinking.