

Decolonizing Knowledge

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**Decolonizing Knowledge
and the Question of the
Archive**

**The university as we
knew it is dead.**

(?)

Colonization is an intellectual enterprise

Mbembe's aim: to end colonization *intellectually* and
institutionally.

A universalist critique

Mbembe's project is in principle deeply universalist.

The aim: a **common space for all**.

***There are a number of
clear-cut political and
moral issues – which are
also issues of fairness
and decency – many of us
can easily agree upon.***

Decolonizing the university & the critique of whiteness

1. The critique is not of white people as such, but specifically of those who "men who were convinced that to be black is a liability."
2. In other words, the critique is of "whiteness" as a practice of racism.

Actually existing white people in South Africa, Mbembe notes, are not going anywhere, as they are

Whiteness as false universal

"Human history is about the future. Whiteness is about entrapment."

"Whiteness is at its best when it turns into a myth. It is the most corrosive and the most lethal when it makes us believe that it is everywhere; that everything originates from it and it has no outside."

Demythologizing whiteness

We are therefore 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. (3)

Feeling at home

But when we say access, we are also talking about the creation of those conditions that will allow black staff and students to say of the university: “This is my home. I am not an outsider here. I do not have to beg or to apologize to be here. I belong here”. (5)

Critique of obsolete teaching

Another site of decolonization is the university classroom. We cannot keep teaching the way we have always taught. Number of our institutions are teaching obsolete forms of knowledge with obsolete pedagogies. Just as we decommission statues, we should decommission a lot of what passes for knowledge in our teaching. (6)

New classrooms

(...) the student-teacher relationship has to change.

In order to set our institutions firmly on the path of future knowledges, we need to reinvent a classroom without walls in which we are all co-learners; a university that is capable of convening various publics in new forms of assemblies that become points of convergence of and platforms for the redistribution of different kinds of knowledges. (6)

Quantified life

An enormous amount of faculty time and energy are expended in the fulfillment of administrative demands for ongoing assessment and reviews of programs and in the compilation of extensive files demonstrating, preferably in statistical terms, their productivity – the number of publications, the number of conference papers presented, the number of committees served on, the number of courses taught, the number of students processed...

Excellence itself has been reduced to statistical accountancy.

We have to change this if we want to break the cycle that tends to turn students into customers and consumers. (7-8)

A critique of the dominant Eurocentric academic model

...The endless production of theories that are based on European traditions; are produced nearly always by Europeans or Euro-American men who are the only ones accepted as capable of reaching universality; 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. (18)

Apartheid higher education?

The brutality of this competition is such that it has opened a new era of global Apartheid in higher education. In this new era, winners will graduate to the status of “world class” universities and losers will be relegated and confined to the category of global bush colleges.

Debt education

Global bush colleges will keep churning out masses of semi-qualified students saddled with massive debts and destined to join the growing ranks of the low-income workers, of the unemployed and of the growing number of people expelled from the core social and economic orders of our times.

Posthumanism

Finally we can no longer think about “the human” in the same terms we were used to until quite recently.

Environmental catastrophe

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 particularly in the context of the Earth's geological history - this is arguably the most important question facing the humanity since at stake is the very possibility of its extinction. (25)

New racisms?

In a contemporary neoliberal order that claims to have gone beyond the racial, the struggle for racial justice must take new forms. (28)