Meanings and Implications of Decolonization for Higher Education in South Africa

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Presentation outline

- Towards understanding decolonization?
- Three dimensions of decolonization
- Defining decolonization
- Changing idea of the university
- Essence and impact of colonial education
- Nationalist developmental university
- Africanization/decolonization initiatives
- African higher education and its descent into crisis
- Rise of corporate university
- Current debates on decolonization
- Current expressions of decolonization
- Way Forward (1): Decolonizing knowledge/curriculum
- Way Forward (2): Decolonizing pedagogies
- Way Forward (3): Envisioning another university
- Conclusions
Towards Understanding Decolonization

1. The episodic school of colonialism & decolonization
   • Colonialism was a mere episode & event
   • It did not last beyond 75 years (1884-1960s)
   • Decolonization was delivered by the 20th century
   • We today live in a postcolonial world and even postracial world (election of Barack Obama)
   • To talk about decolonization today is to dwell on the past—we have to move on—beyond victimhood and stop blaming colonialism for Africa failures and failings.
   • After all colonialism bequeathed some positives on Africa (Helen Zille).

2. The epic school of colonialism and decolonization
   • Colonialism was a system of power and a radical intervention on Africa.
   a. Aime Cesaire: a decivilizing, dehumanizing, and thingfying process.
   b. Frantz Fanon: colonialism works on the ‘past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it.’
   c. Peter Eke: ‘colonialism’ is a ‘social movement of epochal dimensions whose enduring significance’ lives beyond the ‘life-span of the colonial situation.’
   d. Ali Mazrui: ‘a revolution of epic proportions:’ ‘What Africa knows about itself, what different parts of Africa know about each other, have been profoundly influenced by the West.’
   e. Anibal Quijano: modernity/coloniality: colonialism/coloniality as the underside of modernity.
   f. Ramon Grosfoguel: myths of decolonization—from colonialism to global coloniality.
   g. Walter D. Mignolo: coloniality is not over, but is all over.
Three Dimensions of Decolonization

• **Physical empire**: direct colonialism: *political decolonization*: seeking ye the political kingdom and all else will be added onto it (Kwame Nkrumah).

• **Commercial-military-non-territorial empire**: neo-colonialism/global coloniality: *economic decolonization*: demand for new international economic order (NEIO), Bandung Conference, Lagos Plan of Action, NEPAD etc.

• **Metaphysical empire**: invasion of the mental universe of the colonised people: theft of history, epistemicides, linguicides, cultural imperialism, alienation: *epistemological decolonization*.

• It is this epistemological decolonization that is today rocking institutions of higher education and that we must understand and assess its implications for the very idea of the university in the first instance.
Defining Decolonization

• **Ngugi wa Thiong’o**: ‘The search for a liberating perspective within which to see our selves clearly in relationship to ourselves and to others in the universe.’

• ‘A quest for relevance.’

• Base/locus of enunciation: ‘How we see a thing—even with our eyes—is very much dependent on where we stand in relationship to it.’

• ‘How we view ourselves, our environment even, is very much dependent on where we stand in relationship to imperialism in its colonial and neo-colonial stages; that if we are to do anything about our individual and collective being today, then *we have to coldly and consciously look at what imperialism has been doing to us and to our view of our selves in the universe.*’

• **Frantz Fanon**: to set afoot a new humanism.
Changing Idea of the University

• **The Western Model:** *(Kantian Model (Reason) and Humboltian-Newmanian Model (Culture)).

• **Pre-colonial African/Arabic/Muslim/ Alexandria Model:** University of Qarawlyine/Karawiyyin in Fes in Morocco (AD 859) and the University of Al Azhar in Cairo in Egypt (A 972).

• **The pre-colonial Mali/Songhai/Ghana/Timbuktu Model:** Sankore University in Timbuktu in Mali traceable to the 12th century

• **The Colonial Model:** Westernization, colonization of the mind & cultural imperialism.

• **The Yusuf Model/African Developmental University:** Africanization, African-self-definition, liberation from pitfalls of consciousness, reinvention of African identity, supportive of the national project, catching-up & development)

• **The Neo-Liberal-Bureaucratic-Corporate-Managerial Model** (commodification, innovation, technology & entrepreneurship)
Essence and Impact of Colonial Education

• **Psychological violence**: ‘Berlin of 1884 was affected through the sword and the bullet. But the night of the sword and the bullet was followed by the morning of the chalk and the blackboard. The physical violence of the battlefield was followed by the psychological violence of the classroom.’

• **Desocialization**: mission boarding schools to separate children from parents and home.

• **Distortion of consciousness**: ‘The coercive element of physical force may bend the body, but an even more coercive element of mental force may compel a distorted consciousness of the reality of their actual relationship.’

• **Alienation**: ‘Thus language and literature were taking us further and further from ourselves to other selves, from our world to other worlds.’
Essence and Impact of Colonial Education

- **Invasion of mental universe:** ‘But its most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonized, the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world.’

- **Emptying the hard disk of previous memory:** ‘Get a few natives, empty their hard disk of previous memory, and download into them a software of European memory.’

- **Cultural bomb.** ‘The effect of a cultural 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. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland. It makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves; for instance, with other peoples’ languages rather than their own. It makes them identify with that which is decadent and reactionary, all those forces which would stop their own springs of life. It even plants serious doubts about the moral rightness of struggle. Possibilities of triumph or victory are seen as remote, ridiculous dreams. The intended results are despair, despondency and a collective death-wish. Amidst this wasteland which it created, imperialism presents itself as the cure.’
Essence and Impact of Colonial Education

- **Mental dislocation:** ‘The colonial process dislocates the traveller's mind from the place he or she already knows to a foreign starting point even with the body still remaining in his or her home-land. It is a process of continuous alienation from the base, a continuous process of looking at oneself from the outside of self or with the lenses of a stranger. One may end up identifying with the foreign base as the starting point toward self, that is from another self toward one self, rather than the local being the starting point, from self to other selves.’

- **Bodiless heads and headless bodies (separation of the mind from the body):** ‘Colonial alienation takes two interlinked forms: an active (or passive) distancing of oneself from the reality around; and an active (or passive) identification with that which is most external to one’s environment. It starts with a deliberate disassociation of the language of conceptualization, of thinking, of formal education, of mental development, from the language of daily interaction in the home and in the community. It is like separating the mind from the body so that they are occupying two unrelated linguistic spheres in the same person. On a larger scale it is like producing a society of bodiless heads and headless bodies.’
Nationalism and Decolonization

- Decolonization: as deracialization of personnel/Africanization as increasing access
- **One-country-one university**: opening the doors of learning
- African national project & Africanization: **emancipation of education system from the Western model.**
- Need for a new philosophy of education: **production of new Africans with African consciousness.**
- No deep reflection on: (i) **institutional form/idea of the university** (ii) **epistemology and curriculum**
- **Challenge**: ‘There are two possible dangers facing a university in a developing nation: the danger of blindly adoring mythical ‘international standards’ which may cast a shadow on national development objectives, and the danger of forcing our university to look inwards and isolate itself from the world’ (Julius Nyerere 1963)
- **Three crucial relationships**: ‘A university has to be politically distant from the state; secondly, a university has also to be culturally close to society; and thirdly, a university has to be intellectually linked to wider scholarly and scientific values of the world of learning’ (Ali Mazrui 2003).
African Developmental University

• Imperatives of universalism vs. nationalist imperatives.
• Relation between state and the university
• Relationship of the university and society
• Five expectations of African nationalist leaders:
  a. Nation-building (forging of the nation out of people of diverse identities)
  b. Socio-economic development
  c. Promotion of African national consciousness
  d. Pan-Africanism
  e. Loyalty
• The campuses were vibrant site of debates on fundamental issues of the time: nationalism, socialism, democracy, development, one-party state, and role of intellectuals in what was understood as ‘the African revolution.’
Africanization/Decolonization Initiatives

- Re-wrote history from an African-centred perspective.
- Produced history in the service of the nation (nationalist historiography).
- Introduced oral tradition as a new methodology of in the writing of African history.
- Effectively countered Eurocentric/colonial historiography,
- Laid strong foundation of long-duree of African history prior to colonialism.
- Introduced what became known as the ‘African factor’/ African agency in history.
- Shifted emphasis from stories of African conquest and domination to African resistance.
- The History Curriculum in particular was fundamentally Africanized.
Africanization/Decolonization Initiatives

- The Association of African Universities (AAU) was formed in 1967—to continue struggles to Africanize universities into ‘truly African universities.’
- 1969 First Conference- ‘The University and Development.’
- Against ivory tower institution as a home of a minority of elite ‘indifferent to the prevailing poverty and squalor that surround them.’
- ‘The truly African university must be one that draws its inspiration from its environment, not a transplanted tree, but growing from a seed that is planted and natured in the African soil.’
- What defined their idea of the university was its contribution to development: practical knowledge; manpower development; and pan-African unity.
Africanization/Decolonization Initiatives

- The Council of Development of African Social Science in Africa (CODESRIA) was born 1973.
- New space for forging African research and intellectual agenda (*intellectual sovereignty and epistemic freedom*)
- CODESRIA exist as *non-disciplinary space* although one can easily detect the privileging of the *political economy approaches*.
- CODESRIA is a pan-African research formation.
- Dominated by African public intellectuals.
- Centre for public intellectual debates: Samir Amin, Claude Ake, Wamba-dia-Wamba, Mahmood Mamdani among many others.
- Home for those scholars exiled by their governments such as Archie Mafeje and Thandika Mkandawire.
- Some of the key decolonization of knowledge debates and publications on the models of university in Africa have cascaded from CODESRIA.
Public Intellectuals Versus Scholars/Academics?

- **Public intellectuals**: organic to the anti-colonial struggle, integral to the nationalist movement and beneficiaries of the success of the nationalist movement, supportive of the state and its agendas.

- Deep engagement with wider society, producing relevant knowledge, close to the state and highly ideological, and pushing for epistemic freedom.

- **Scholar**: Fascinated by ideas, distant and critical of power, not beholden to government for meteoric rise, aspiring for excellence in scholarship measured by so-called ‘international standards,’ and strong defender of academic freedom.

- **African leaders**: use of foreign experts, deaf to local voices, ignored local debates, expected subservience and sycophancy; allegiance to the state and community; universities as centres of anti-government.
African Higher Education and Its Descent into Crisis

- Rising political Authoritarianism
- Declining academic freedom
- Cold War coloniality
- Decline of African economies

**Kenya:** was pro-West—being socialist or left-wing intellectual became a political hazard.

**Tanzania:** Intellectualism was slow to die because Nyerere was an intellectual but enthusiasm for socialism intimidated those who were against it.

**Uganda:** Town Hall of Kampala was a site of debates—Mazrui was able to disagree in public with Milton Obote and debated openly with Akena Adoko (Head of Intelligence) and survived. But the military coup of 1971 that brought Idi Amin to power introduced abduction of academics that silenced intellectualism.
Decline of Universities (1980s & 1990s)

- The decline of African economies meant lack of funding for higher education.
- Brain drain
- Washington Consensus & Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs): marginalization of Africa in global affairs, renewal of dependency, and closure of policy space.
- Role of academics and their stature diminished in society.
- Academia lost its attraction as a profession
- Academic work was abandoned as the remaining academics concentrated on survival.
- World Bank came up with the idea of importance of secondary education over higher education.
Rise of Corporate University

- Idea of self-funding universities—entrepreneurial universities.
- Invasion of universities by business models.
- Rise of antipathy to love of ideas and critical thinking
- Rise of ‘academic managerial class’ using corporate practices to govern universities.
- University was turned into a ‘marketplace’ as education became commodified.
- Evaluation of scholarship assumed the quantification model and endless reports.
- Education underwent instrumentalization as more and more people sought certificates, diplomas and degrees without any concern for knowledge itself (pass examinations, then throw away the books & seek remunerative occupations)
- Student approached as customers.
- Obsession with internationalization at the expense of indigenization.
Current Debates on Decolonization

- Fanonian decolonization and Black consciousness: ideological resources.
- Shifting decolonial struggles from political to economic to the present epistemological (discursive).
- The decolonization struggle is aimed at rearticulating and repositioning the university in society.
- At the centre of decolonization is reclaiming the university as a public institution free from coloniality of markets.
- The decolonial turn has been made possible by the definitive entry of the descendants of the dehumanized into the academy only to find alienation, epistemicides, linguicides, and cultural imperialism.
- At the centre of the decolonial turn is the question of re-humanizing the dehumanized.
- The starting point is to accept that all human beings were and are born into valid and legitimate knowledge system.
- Rectification of epistemic crimes such as: theft of history; epistemicides, linguicides, culturecides and alienations.
Current Expressions of Decolonization

• **Iconography**: decommissioning of offensive colonial/apartheid symbols, statues, and names.

• **Funding of education**: access to free, quality and relevant education

• **Indigenous languages**: use of indigenous African languages in learning, research and teaching

• **Institutional cultures**: changing of patriarchal, sexist and racist alienating cultures

• **Knowledge & curriculum**: dealing with the problem of Eurocentrism in knowledge and enhancement of relevance of education: rethinking what is taught, who is teaching, how is the teaching done, and what is the value and relevance of what is taught.

• **Outsourcing of labour**: Insourcing of workers as part of re-humanization of causalized labour and dealing with the perennial questions of inequality and poverty.

• **Decolonizing the very idea of the university**: shifting from a ‘university in Africa’ to an ‘African university.’
Way Forward (1)
Decolonizing knowledge/Curriculum

• Provincializing Europe and deprovincialising Africa: moving the centre (geographically & biographically) and re-centering Africa in knowledge generation
• Reviewing our disciplines: their constitutive formation, fitness for purpose, relevance so as to escape the current problem of ‘disciplinary decadence.’
• Systematic critique of dominant knowledge and reviewing of reading material so to avoid the tendency to remove and replace (shift from one fundamentalism to another—Eurocentrism to Afrocentrism)
• Decolonizing the normative foundations of critical theory (progress, social evolution, emancipation, and development) and changing the dominant philosophies and ideas of human history.
• Rethinking thinking itself so as to break out of the current epistemic and systemic crisis.
• Learning to unlearn in order to re-learn: deliberate forgetting of what was meant for colonization and privileging what is meant for liberation and freedom--a process of removal of the hard disk of coloniality and its software.
• Privileging of ecologies of knowledges
Way Forward (2)
Decolonizing Pedagogies

• Changing consciousness of teachers so as to appreciate the value of what students from diverse background brings to the academy.
• Reviewing philosophy of education to that which recognizes indigenous knowledges.
• Academic democracy: underscores students’ rights to participate in the teaching-learning process as co-creators of knowledge not empty vessels to be filled.
• Reviewing assessment beyond fault-finding traditions that dehumanizes to new forms that affirm and empower.
• De-hierarchization and democratization of supervisor-student relationship to enhance through-put.
• Building communities of practice through such means as cohort supervision and formal mentorship.
Way Forward (3)
Envisioning Another University

• A site of multilingualism: African indigenous, languages, cosmologies and ontologies become central part of its identity and soul.
• A site of cognitive justice/social justice: full embracement of the idea that all human beings are born into valid, useful, relevant and legitimate knowledge systems.
• A site of ‘ecologies of knowledges’: various knowledges compete and reinforce each other.
• A socially responsive institution that is intolerant of epistemicides, linguicides, and cultural imperialism.
• A re-capitalized and accessible institution open to all who seek education.
• A home for everyone where racism, sexism, tribalism, classism, xenophobia, and patriarchy do not exist.
• A relevant institution that is grounding on the South Africa/African soil and climate.
Conclusions

- To decolonize any institution, it is important to understand how it was constituted in the first place.
- We are today dealing with the long-term effects of colonialism and apartheid on knowledge and education.
- What are the lessons from the other parts of the continent? (distinguish Africanization from decolonization)
- In doing decolonization in South Africa, we must be consistently away of burden of the possibility of making the situation worse.
- Decolonization is properly done has to produce socially and historically grounded institutions of higher learning that delivers relevant education, culturally (values) and practically (skills).
- The implications of decolonization include reorganization of knowledge; rethinking of disciplines, reformulations of curriculum, and transforming of pedagogies—all this impinges on quality assurance and certification.