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# DECOLONIZING THE UNIVERSITY

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## Introduction

All over the world, the university is facing many challenges, a topic I have addressed in various moments (Santos 2017, 2018). Due to the increasing impact of certain global phenomena on universities worldwide, it seems that the diversity of the past can no longer guarantee the diversity of the future. Even though these challenges are common and widespread, the truth is that universities in various regions of the world are not all equally prepared to respond to them. Such asymmetry is due in part to the uneven and combined ways in which the three main forms of modern domination (capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy) have been operating since the sixteenth century in different regions of the world. In this chapter, I focus on the impact of the articulations between capitalism and colonialism on the university system.[1] During the last 30 or 40 years, two apparently contradictory movements have taken place. The first, a bottom-up movement, has involved the social struggles for the right to a university education. As the struggles advanced, it became clear that the university's elitism was a main symbol of class, race, and gender discrimination in the culture at large. Regarding the three major crises of the modern university (the institutional crisis in general, as well as the crisis of hegemony and the crisis of legitimacy), the aforementioned struggles mainly put in question the legitimacy of the university. To the extent that these struggles were successful, access to the university increased, and new social strata were allowed entrance, thus increasing social heterogeneity and the cultural diversity of the student body. There were, however, no corresponding changes affecting either the faculty or the curricula and syllabi. As a result, other features of racial, ethnocultural, religious, epistemic, and sexual discrimination became visible. Thus broader

access, while responding somewhat to the legitimacy crisis, brought to light other critical dimensions.

The other movement, a top-down movement, concerns the increasing global pressure on the university to adjust and submit to the relevance and efficacy criteria of global capitalism. Such a movement deepens the capitalist dimension of the modern Eurocentric university which can be designated as university capitalism. By university capitalism I mean the phenomenon that aims at turning the university into a capitalist enterprise, one that therefore functions according to criteria proper to capitalism. Thus, the university is capitalist not because it is at the service of the reproduction of a capitalist society (this has always been the case, at least in the non-communist world), but because it has become a business corporation producing a commodity whose market value derives from its capacity to create other market values (e.g., diplomas that give access to highly paid jobs).

The financial crisis of the university, however real, works as an ideal excuse to bring about the university's adjustment and submission to the increasing demands of global capitalism. The logic of this movement tends to worsen the hegemony crisis of the university, as the university faces the proliferation of other institutions that produce knowledge with market value. But it ends up contributing to worsen the legitimacy crisis as well. The ways in which the university is submitting to the demands of capitalism (financial constraints and selective cuts, new hierarchies among disciplines and among departments, managerial changes, etc.) clearly show that its elitism and concurrent exclusions are not only economic, but also, racial, ethnocultural, epistemic, religious, and sexual. As the university becomes more and more compromised with capitalism, its compromise with colonialism and patriarchy becomes increasingly more visible as well. Thus, the expectations created by the said bottom-up movement end up being no more than a great frustration. Dissatisfaction with the university on the part of such social groups that only recently had access to it tends to lead to new social struggles for the right to a non-discriminatory education. University capitalism thus contributes to a deeper perception of university colonialism. By university colonialism I mean the fact that the criteria defining the curricula, the faculty, and the student body are based on an ideology that justifies the superiority of the culture upholding it on the following fallacy: the (presumed) superiority of the said culture, though based on ethnic-racial and epistemic criteria, is presented as ineluctable because the culture supporting it is (supposedly) the only true one. Thus, the imposition of one culture upon another appears totally justified. Colonialism is thus a far larger phenomenon than the foreign occupation of a given territory.

Although it is prominent in the modern university system as a whole, the mutual intermingling of capitalism and colonialism is particularly visible in the global South. The pressures of global capitalism, while compelling the university to question its future, bring about a counter-movement that challenges the university to confront its colonial past. The university thus faces two mirrors, both of them disquieting,

one of them reflecting the image of a very uncertain future, the other reflecting the image of a very problematic past. The two mirrors are actually one and the same. This means that the construction of an emancipatory future for the university involves reckoning with a past that demands reparation. In other words, the struggle against the capitalist university is the other side of the struggle against the colonialist university. These are relatively autonomous struggles, but the success of each of them depends on the success of the other. Bearing this in mind, in this chapter, I intend to identify the main features of the decolonization of the university.

The decolonization of the university must be carried out both in the global South and in the global North, even though the tasks and processes in question may be different in each case. Here I am only referring to the decolonization of the Western-centric university, that is to say, the Western or Westernized university. One more caveat: focusing on the articulation between capitalism and colonialism must not make us forget that these modes of domination work in tandem with others besides patriarchy; for example, political and religious authoritarianism. Authoritarianism is today affecting the public university worldwide.[2] It assumes different forms, some of them subtler, others far more brutal, but its presence is felt everywhere, even in the nations where academic freedom was supposedly originated. By authoritarianism in this context I mean the suppression of dissident knowledge and the exclusion of dissident scholars on the basis of non-democratic, political decisions, or on the basis of religious orthodoxy. Dictatorial regimes and religious states have been notorious for suppressing academic freedom. In democratic states, the aggressive pressure toward the marketization of knowledge and academic life in the last decades has led to self-inflicted authoritarianism and, above all, to a sentiment of the irrelevance of academic freedom faced with the imperatives of the market, evaluators, rankings, referees, consultancies, and their terms of reference.

## Dimensions of Decolonizing

The processes of decolonization are complex. The following areas of decolonizing intervention can be identified: access to the university (for students) and access to a university career (for faculty); research and teaching contents; disciplines of knowledge, curricula, and syllabi; teaching/learning methods; institutional structure and university governance; and relations between the university and society at large. In my view, a successful decolonizing process must involve all these dimensions and all of them must be approached according to the following core ideas.

1. *Decolonizing interventions must always be aware of the impact they may have on capitalist and patriarchal domination.* Since the relations between the different modes of domination are not always straightforward, partial interventions, if not carefully measured, may well generate perverse results. For instance, some decolonizing intervention regarding history or philosophy may neglect the discrimination against women thereby contributing to reinforcing patriarchy.

2. *Decolonizing the university is a task to be conceived of in articulation with other processes of decolonizing social and cultural relations prevalent in society.* I have in mind, for example, employment and consumption; employee recruitment for public administration; health policies; family and community relations; the media; secular public spaces; and churches.

3. *Decolonizing interventions must not resort to the methods of colonialism, not even inverted colonialism.* Mere inversion would make impossible the notion of the unequal co-creation of colonialism, that is to say, that not only the colonizer, but also the colonized must be the object of decolonization, though the methods used will be different in each case. This is also the reason why I maintain that the epistemologies of the South are not the inverse of the epistemologies of the North.[3] A bad metaphor does not get better by being inverted. Moreover, the magnitude of the decolonizing tasks in question requires alliances among different social groups. It is more important to know on which side of the decolonizing struggle people are and what risks they are ready to run than to focus on their identity such as it presents itself naturalized by the dominant social relations.

4. *Decolonizing interventions in the university always occur in the midst of some turbulence and conflict.* On the one hand, they destabilize institutional inertias. On the other, they reflect long-term social conflicts occurring either covertly or overtly in other sectors of society. These conflicts, in some cases, may turn into university conflicts.[4] It is not to be expected, therefore, that the argumentative serenity of Habermas's (1984) communicative reason would prevail in such conditions. Actually, from the point of view of the epistemologies of the South, it will surely not prevail in any condition riddled with the contradictions dividing societies today.

5. *The revision of history is central regarding any area of intervention.* It is only possible to denaturalize the present and sustain non-conformity and indignation vis-à-vis current affairs if the past is viewed as the result of processes of struggle and historical contingencies. I begin precisely with history by resorting to an example that elucidates the topics of knowledge, methods of teaching/learning, and institutional creations.

### Decolonizing History, an Illustration: The Case of Islam's Participation in and the Making of the Western University

To understand European universities in the medieval period, from the eleventh century onwards, the most relevant historical fact is the decisive Islamic influence, both as regards knowledge and teaching methods as well as the institutional forms that prevailed. Although they can be seen as an institutional novelty by reason of the autonomous juridical personality they adopted—a corporation—, universities were often preceded by colleges founded by benefactors, a phenomenon

with deep roots in the Islamic world. In a remarkable book on the birth of colleges both in the Islamic world and in the Western Christian world, George Makdisi shows to what extent Islamic colleges may have influenced the colleges that would appear in Europe a century or two later. According to Makdisi,

> The Islamic college, whether of the masjid or madrasa variety, was based on the Islamic waqf, or charitable trust... The term college, from the Latin term collegium, implies incorporation; the incorporated college does not come into being until more than half a century later (XIII century). Until then, the colleges were simple eleemosynary institutions, based on what has come to be known as the charitable trust. (1981: 226)[5]

But Islamic influence is even more determinative at the levels concerning ways of knowing and teaching methods. Regarding the latter, since the tenth century, the scholastic method has been considered a specificity of medieval Europe directly inspired by Greek philosophy, itself understood as exclusively European and thus stripped of its Egyptian and Persian roots. Actually, one of the basic features of the scholastic method, *disputatio*, that is to say, the dialectical confrontation of two opposite positions and the argumentation against and in favor of each one of them, whether reaching a synthesis or not, has clear roots in the teaching methods prevailing in Baghdad from the eleventh century onwards. The method known as *Sic et non* (the title of a famous work by Abelard), that is to say, yes and no, pros and cons, consecrated by Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa theologica*, was in vogue in eastern Islam a century earlier and precisely under the name of "antithesis of ijma '-khilaf, consensus-disagreement, sic et non." Makdisi cites a telling passage by an author of this period:

> Ibn 'Aqil, who used the method of disputation in writing his *Wadih fi usul al-fiqh*, describes his method at the end of the monumental three-volume work [...]:
>
> In writing this work I followed a method whereby first I presented in logical order the theses [madhhab, pl. madhahib], then the arguments [hujja, pl. hujaj], then the objections [su'al, pl. as'ila], then the replies to the objections [jawab, pl. ajwiba], then the pseudo-arguments (of the opponents for the counter theses) [shubha, pl. shubah, shubuhat], then the replies [in rebuttal of these pseudo-arguments] [jawab, pl. ajwiba]—[all of this] *for the purpose of teaching beginners the method of disputation* [tariqat an-nazar]. (1981: 117)

As regards knowledge, both eastern and western Arabic Islamic influence in the production and transmission of knowledge in the European medieval age is well documented, not excluding Greek philosophy, later considered to be the

direct antecedent of European philosophy, which by then had already seen the crucial Islamic intermediation erased. As far as western Islam is concerned, the strongest link in its intermediation was Toledo, conquered from the Arabs in 1085 by Alfonso VI of Léon. From then on, and especially when it was under the patronage of Bishop Raymond (1126–1153), Toledo was the center of translation from Arabic to Latin. Today, it is difficult to imagine the centrality then held by Arabic and Islamic culture, a fact that was actually bitterly resented by Christian authors. Makdisi quotes the Mozarab Alvaro de Cordova, who, in the tenth century, writes in his book *Indiculo luminoso*:

> My fellow-Christians delight in the poems and romances of the Arabs; they study the works of Muslim theologians and philosophers, not in order to refute them, but to acquire a correct and elegant Arabic style. Where today can a layman be found who reads the Latin commentaries on Holy Scriptures? Who is there that studies the Gospels, the Prophets, the Apostles? Alas! The young Christians who are most conspicuous for their talents have no knowledge of any literature or language save the Arabic; they read and study with avidity Arabian books; they amass whole libraries of them at a vast cost, and they everywhere sing the praises of Arabian lore. On the other hand, at the mention of Christian books they disdainfully protest that such works are unworthy of their notice. The pity of it! Christians have forgotten their own tongue and scarce one in a thousand can be found able to compose in fair Latin a letter to a friend! But when it comes to writing Arabic, how many there are who can express themselves in that language with the greatest elegance, and even compose verses which surpass in formal correctness those of the Arabs themselves!. (1981: 240)

The surprise provoked today by these statements should be cause for reflection. They display an example among many others of the surprises with which decolonizing research and pedagogy may enrich and diversify the university and render it far more polyphonic.

## Decolonizing Epistemology

Decolonizing knowledge represents a gigantic task because it must take place on different levels and because the decolonizing processes must be different, not only according to the contexts in question, but also according to the kinds of knowledge to be decolonized. As regards the different levels, the epistemological, theoretical, analytical, and methodological levels must be distinguished. Here I focus mainly on the epistemological level. As to the contexts of decolonization, it is important to distinguish between contexts in which the cognitive processes resulted from the endogenous or organic needs of the

societies in which they occurred, on the one hand, and contexts in which such processes were the epistemic dimension of political violence, invasion, plunder, and destruction, on the other. Regarding kinds of knowledge, multiple distinctions are in order as well. The most important one may well be the distinction between knowledges whose decolonization entails their elimination, and knowledges that may be refounded, reconfigured, and reconstructed in such a way that they may be put at the service of anticapitalist, anticolonial, and antipatriarchal struggles. In the latter case, then, we are talking of knowledges that may have counter-hegemonic uses, including ones that boost the processes of decolonization of other knowledges.

Amílcar Cabral formulates this distinction better than anyone else. Far from rejecting the European, colonialist culture entirely, or as a question of principle, Cabral submits it to a hermeneutics of suspicion aimed at taking from it whatever might be useful to fight effectively against colonialism and go on to build a new society. In the Seminar of Members of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC), in November 1969—one of the best manuals of popular insurgent education I know—Cabral has this to say about the struggle against colonial culture:

> We must work hard, comrades, to banish from our heads colonial culture. Whether we like it or not, in the city or in the jungle, colonialism stuck many things in our heads. Our work must be to get rid of what is rubbish and leave what is good. Because colonialism does not have only things that are no good. We must be capable of fighting colonial culture while keeping in our heads those aspects of human and scientific culture that the tugas [derogative name for the Portuguese colonialists] brought to our land and went into our heads as well. (1969: 2)

If modern Western science has been a key instrument in expanding and consolidating modern domination, interrogating it from the perspective of the epistemologies of the South involves questioning both its colonial character (producing and hiding the abyssal line that creates zones of non-being) and its capitalist character (global commodification of life through the exploitation of two non-commodities, labor power and nature), as well as its patriarchal character (devaluation of the lives and social labor of women on the basis of their devalued social being). Therefore, decolonizing the social sciences makes little sense if it does not involve de-commodifying and depatriarchalizing as well. Focusing specifically on the colonial character of the social sciences may be justified, however, in order to highlight the false universality at the root of the multifaceted epistemicide[6] committed by modern science.

I have been arguing that the theories produced by Eurocentric social sciences are ethno-theories characterized by producing and reproducing abyssal lines between metropolitan sociability and colonial sociability, and by making

them invisible at the same time (Santos 2014, 2018). What is the analytical value of such theories, and whom do they benefit? Specifically concerning the social sciences, the epistemologies of the South call for a theoretical and methodological work having both a negative and a positive dimension. The negative dimension consists of a deconstructive unveiling of the Eurocentric roots of the modern social sciences on the basis of which the sociology of absences can be conducted. The positive dimension is twofold: on the one hand, it implies the production of scientific knowledge ready to engage with other kinds of knowledge in the ecologies of knowledges required by the social struggles; on the other, it calls for the identification, reconstruction, and validation of the non-scientific, artisanal knowledges emerging from or utilized in the struggles against domination. Both positive tasks aim at building the ground for the sociology of emergences.

Decolonial theories, for example, have been successful in accomplishing the negative, deconstructive work. Because it has been carried out inside Eurocentric epistemic communities and research institutions, this work has enjoyed some visibility. The epistemologies of the South are mainly concerned with the positive, constructive work that is much harder to carry out. To begin with, such work must be carried out both inside conventional research institutions and outside them, in the very social fields in which the resistance against capitalist, colonialist, and patriarchal domination is taking place. To the extent that it is carried out in conventional research institutions, it is bound to be looked upon with suspicion, considered a non-rigorous, politically motivated and therefore unreliable kind of research. At a time when the old common sense of research institutions, based on curiosity and disinterest, is being replaced by the new common sense of the relevance of knowledge measured by the latter's market value (usefulness for solvent social demands), the positive tasks called for by the epistemologies of the South will be either fiercely resisted or utterly discarded as "not belonging." Indeed, the post-abyssal researcher is at the antipodes of the consultant. The latter is someone whose knowledge has a specific utility with a price tag and for which there is a solvent demand. The post-abyssal researcher is someone for whose knowledge there is a huge and urgent, but non-marketable, demand; his or her knowledge is useful for social groups that either cannot imagine having to pay for it or, if they should, cannot afford it.[7]

As I have been arguing, the hegemony of the epistemologies of the North cannot be explained as a mere result of the triumph of one epistemological option among others. It is, rather, both the product and a crucial component of the global expansion of Western-centric capitalism and colonialism, as well as of patriarchy as reconfigured by capitalism. If so, is the hegemony of the epistemologies of the North linearly tied up with the fate of Western-led global capitalism? Is the visible erosion of such hegemony an irreversible historical process? Is it a symptom of inertia? Or rather of anticipation? Is it a cycle or a mere wave? What might be the epistemological impact of the dislocation of the dynamism

of global capitalism to the East, as seems to be the case nowadays with the rise of Asia? Could modern science, the ultimate icon of the epistemologies of the North, consort with cultural imperatives that, perceived from the point of view of Eurocentric culture, cannot but be seen as unacceptable levels of instrumentalization and loss of rigor? Are, indeed, the new forms of instrumentalization all that different from the ones typical of the Eurocentric culture with which science has always cohabited? Is Freud's unconscious, widely recognized today as a scientific breakthrough, less arbitrary than the divine inspiration to which Khaldun (1958), writing in the fourteenth century, ascribes the discovery of the new science in *Muqaddimah*?

Just as the hegemony of the epistemologies of the North cannot be analyzed in isolation from global capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy, the epistemologies of the South must likewise be intimately linked to the social struggles against capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy, which for the last century have been gradually putting in question the cultural assumptions and the conceptual and theoretical patterns underlying the epistemologies of the North. Many of the cultural premises and political agendas emerging from such struggles in different regions of the world include ways of conceiving of the relations between society and nature, the individual and the community, and immanence and transcendence that are foreign to those held by the epistemologies of the North.

The historical process of epistemological decolonization, besides being a long-term process, is also unequal and asymmetrical regarding both fields of knowledge and world regions. The work of epistemological decolonization implies distinct social and cultural processes in the regions that were the victims of historical colonialism, on the one hand, and in the regions that were responsible for colonization, on the other. In the regions subjected to European colonialism, the epistemologies of the North, as well as Eurocentric culture in general, started out by being an imposition that gradually, partially, and unevenly was endogenized by means of different forms of appropriation, selective and creative borrowing, hybridization, etc. Such processes permitted the counter-hegemonic use of Western-centric knowledges, as witness the contributions of modern science, Marxism, and Western philosophy to the national liberation movements of Africa and Asia, as well as, more recently, the use of alternative conceptions of democracy, human rights, and constitutionalism. The limitations of such counter-hegemonic applications (both state- and grassroots-centered) aimed at generating alternatives to capitalism, colonialism, or patriarchy are more evident today than ever before.[8] The results are not brilliant, to say the least, as global domination is today more aggressive than ever. Neoliberalism, the monocultural economic logic fueling the articulation between capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy, seems to no longer fear enemies, if for no other reason than because it is today capable of resorting to the monotony of war whenever the "monotony of economic relations," as Marx puts it, does not suffice. The counter-hegemonic use of Western-centric ideas

is delivering less and less promise and energy to social groups in their struggles against domination.

This is, however, only one side of the story. As I mentioned above, in the past half-century, the geopolitical displacements regarding the dynamics of the social struggles against capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy have been increasingly corroding the hegemony of the epistemologies of the North. New or previously suppressed problematics have permeated political, scientific, and educational communities spirited by a variety of anti-Western, east-centric, south-centric, indigenous-centric repertoires of social and individual life, nature, spirituality, and good living. The innermost *Geist* of Western-centric power structures in our time is probably this strange combination of a sense of undisputed power and raw domination with a sense of the irreversible erosion of intellectual and moral authority and hegemony.

In Europe and North America (the latter, once cleared of indigenous people and their worldviews), the hegemony of the epistemologies of the North has deeper cultural roots. However, the struggles for the recognition of cultural diversity have been gradually destabilizing the epistemological and monocultural hegemony by introducing new problematics and new kinds of epistemological approaches. This process has been reinforced by the migratory fluxes that have immediately followed the independences and which are today the result of neoliberal economics, war, and climate change. The reaction has been swift. The censorial tools take many different forms: ranking educational institutions according to capitalist criteria of excellence; the positivistic and monocultural formatting of syllabi and scientific and professional careers; disciplining and silencing rebel scientists; books aimed at fostering awareness in the young banned for ideological reasons, whether religious or other; the control of scientific creativity by means of invoking strict criteria based on economic utility or academic performance (for instance, publications evaluated according to so-called "impact factors" rather than their innovative character).

The subjective and objective difficulties regarding the process of decolonizing knowledge are, therefore, particularly relevant in the global North. The hegemony of the epistemologies of the North is here more deeply entrenched and the interests in preventing its erosion are more organized. Moreover, the global North is where there is a greater convergence between the epistemologies of the North and dominant Eurocentric culture and where wider social groups benefit directly or indirectly from capitalist, colonialist, and patriarchal domination. Accordingly, forgetfulness or the suppression of subaltern knowledges based on premises other than those underlying the epistemologies of the North are more radical.

Last century, Carl Jung was, after Joseph Needham (1954), the European intellectual who best tried to understand Eastern thought and the one who best illustrates the difficulty in decolonizing Eurocentric thinking in the

global North. This is how Jung expresses the difficulties he encountered in trying to fully understand the Chinese text entitled *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, which he and the sinologist Richard Wilhelm had published and commented upon. A long citation is in order:

> A thorough Westerner in feeling, I cannot but be profoundly impressed by the strangeness of this Chinese text. It is true that some knowledge of Eastern religions and philosophies helps my intellect and my intuition to understand these things up to a point, just as I can understand the paradoxes of primitive beliefs in terms of "ethnology" or "comparative religion." This is of course the Western way of hiding one's heart under the cloak of so-called scientific understanding. We do it partly because the misérable vanité des savants fears and rejects with horror any sign of living sympathy, and partly because sympathetic understanding might transform contact with an alien spirit into an experience that has to be taken seriously. (Jung 1999: 82)

The limits of a potentially decolonizing gesture are quite patent in Jung's proposition. Confronted with what is at stake, Jung feels the need to revisit the specificity of Western culture before opening himself to diversity:

> It is not for us to imitate what is foreign to our organism or to play the missionary; our task is to build up our Western civilization, which sickens with a thousand ills. This has to be done on the spot, and by the European just as he is, with all his Western ordinariness, his marriage problems, his neuroses, his social and political delusions, and his whole philosophical disorientation. (1999: 83–84)

> Therefore, it is sad indeed when the European departs from his own nature and imitates the East or 'affects' it in any way. The possibilities open to him would be so much greater if he would remain true to himself and evolve out of his own nature all that the East has brought forth in the course of the millennia. (Jung 1999: 84)

The difficulties are such that they neither allow for direct access to nor imitation of what is culturally strange. Jung's explicitly Eurocentric proposal—unabashedly Eurocentric since it is quite sure of what it means to be "genuinely European"—is totally unaware of the arrogance involved in claiming European authenticity by turning other cultures into raw material. With the advent of colonialism, the loyalty of the West to itself was nothing more than its arrogance in creating victims cavalierly, hurting efficiently, and appropriating everything that is strange to itself, that is subject to its power, and that may be made use of. The other side of such an orgy of arrogance and

power is the difficulty in acknowledging the other, in deeply listening to and learning with and from the other, in recognizing the unknown as a challenge even before knowing it, and in risking a certain defamiliarization with one's own ways (one's comfort zone) for the sake of a wider familiarity with the world's diversity.

Given the hegemony still enjoyed by the epistemologies of the North and the Eurocentric culture associated with them, the greatest challenge facing the epistemologies of the South is to render credible and urgent the need to recognize the epistemological diversity of the world in order to enlarge and deepen world experience and conversation. If it is clear that the north-centric/ Western-centric hegemony is wearing out, it is equally clear that this is taking place in a slow, non-linear manner. We are facing long-term historical processes. Moreover, there is the danger that the narcissism that characterizes the way the epistemologies of the North look down on other epistemologies end up being confronted by the inverted and rival narcissism of the epistemologies of the South. To break the vicious circle of such a dualism is at the core of the epistemological work involved in decolonizing the university. I would like to conceive of this epistemological task as corresponding to the task undertaken, at another level, by Fanon as he defines it at the beginning of *Black Skin, White Masks*:

> The white man is sealed in his whiteness. The black man in his blackness. We shall seek to ascertain the directions of this dual narcissism and the motivations that inspire it […]. Concern with the elimination of a vicious circle has been the only guideline for my efforts. (1967b: 11–12).

## Contexts of Decolonization

Since the South of the epistemologies of the South is epistemic rather than geographical, it is imperative to decolonize the teaching materials and methods in every society in which socioeconomic inequalities combine with racial, ethnocultural, and sexual inequalities. The neoliberal transnationalization of the university and the parallel conversion of higher education into a commodity are creating a highly segmented and unequal, global university system. Inequality and segmentation are clearly apparent not only if you compare universities in different countries, but also in the same country. To be sure, inequality and segmentation have always existed, but they are now far more visible, more rigid, and better organized. In this section, I deal with the modes of articulation between capitalism and colonialism in today's university system.

As I have been insisting, university capitalism is the main driving force behind the global university system, but it always operates in articulation with university colonialism. However, the articulations between university

capitalism and university colonialism vary according to regions of the world. Concerning the highest-ranking universities of the global North, university capitalism is a new development in a long historical continuity. Since these universities have always been closely associated with the formation of political and economic elites, university capitalism appears to be just an intensification of the aforesaid association. That is why they were so swiftly mobilized to be at the forefront of this new development. On the contrary, in the case of the lower-ranking universities, and particularly universities of the global South, the new university capitalism represents a significant break with the past and, as regards the future, almost a death foretold.

Modern European university colonialism started at the beginning of European expansion in the fifteenth century and was first significantly established in the universities created in Spanish America from the mid-sixteenth century onwards. It went on assuming different forms in the following centuries. Being articulated with global capitalism under imperialism, it ended up being a presence even in societies that were not long subjected to historical European colonialism. In such societies, university colonialism took the form of Eurocentrism or Western-centrism; in this case, its influence had more to do with teaching materials and methods rather than discrimination regarding student access or faculty recruitment. I am referring to societies where non-Eurocentric cultures are paramount, but where, nonetheless, the Eurocentric or Western-centric university dominates. The dynamics between university capitalism and university colonialism gain in this case a very specific outlook. In eastern Asia, for example, the expansion of university capitalism may coexist with a deeper critique of university colonialism in the form of a critique of Eurocentrism. There are, among many other examples, interesting proposals to decolonize the university presented in Malaysia and Singapore (Alatas 2006; Alvares 2012).

In the societies that were subjected to European colonialism, political independence changed the operative modes of university colonialism, although it survived, albeit under disguised or mitigated forms. In such societies, the expansion of university capitalism tends to go along with increasing or more visible university colonialism. This particular articulation renders university conflicts and student protests far more dramatic and capable of upsetting university inertias.

The epistemic South has been gradually emerging in European and North American universities. University conflicts, mainly student protests, have been occurring in different countries, with greater visibility in the USA, Canada, the UK, and the Netherlands. To what extent can one see these conflicts and protests as movements toward the decolonization of the university? The relations between university capitalism and university colonialism have varied over time. In the USA, the student struggles of the 1960s and 1970s had a strong decolonizing component, assuming two main forms. On the one hand, there was affirmative action aimed at fighting racial discrimination in university access; on the other, curriculum changes

to offer areas of study reflecting the social and cultural interests of racialized minorities (indigenous peoples, afro-descendants, children of immigrants).

Thirty or forty years later, many of the aforementioned new areas of study, as well as affirmative action itself, are being threatened for financial reasons (university capitalism) and by the return of epistemic and political conservatism, a threat that generally affects the social sciences and the humanities as a whole. Regarding this latest development, as the decolonizing practices of the previous period are eliminated or marginalized, a reinforced university capitalism carries with itself a reinforced university colonialism. Referring to the specific case of the humanities (which are part of the social sciences in its broadest sense), Maldonado-Torres maintains that,

> contrary to the desire of self-preservation, it seems to me that what the humanities can better do is to expand their analytical vision well beyond the opposition between liberal education as public good and neoliberalism, recognize the racial logic operating in the context of increasing apartheid, and take emancipatory and decolonial epistemological projects more seriously, even to the point of considering a transition from the emphasis on liberal arts training to the cultivation of emancipatory and decolonial acting and thinking. (2016b: 47)

In Africa, the contexts of decolonizing education in general, and university education in particular, vary widely, even if we restrict ourselves to sub-Saharan Africa. Many factors account for such diversity, from the differences among societies prior to European colonialism, to the different colonialisms and different processes and struggles of liberation from occupation colonialism. One factor is common virtually to all of them: the recent liberation from foreign-occupation colonialism and, in the case of South Africa, of the most explicit form of internal colonialism, the apartheid. This timeframe raises the crucial issue of continuities and discontinuities, and especially the issue of continuities reproducing themselves inside the processes of discontinuity. In light of this common factor, the most plausible hypothesis is that the processes of decolonizing the university cannot but be in their first stages.

More than in any other region of the world, in Africa, it is imperative to bring into the picture the colonial education that existed 50 years ago. The most remarkable diagnosis was made by Julius Nyerere in 1967:

> It [colonial education] was not designed to prepare young people for the service of their own country; instead, it was motivated by a desire to inculcate the values of the colonial society and to train individuals for the service of their colonial state. In these countries, the state interest in education therefore stemmed from the need for local clerks and junior officials; on top of that, various groups were interested in spreading literacy and other education as part of their evangelical work.

This statement of fact is not given as a criticism of the many individuals who worked hard, often under difficult conditions, in teaching and in organizing educational work. Nor does it imply that all the values these people transmitted in the schools were wrong or inappropriate. What it does mean, however, is that the educational system introduced into Tanzania by the colonialists was modeled on the British system, but with even heavier emphasis on subservient attitudes and on white-collar skills. Inevitably too, it was based on the assumptions of a colonialist and capitalist society. It emphasized and encouraged their individualistic instincts of mankind, instead of his cooperative instincts. It led to the possession of individual material wealth being the major criterion of social merit and worth.

> This means that colonial education induced attitudes of human inequality and in practice underpinned the domination of the weak by the strong, especially in the economic field. Colonial education in this country was therefore not transmitting the values and knowledge of Tanzanian society from one generation to the next; it was a deliberate attempt to change those values and to replace traditional knowledge by the knowledge from a different society. It was thus a part of a deliberate attempt to effect a revolution in the society to make it into a colonial society which accepted its status and which was an efficient adjunct to the governing power. (Nyerere 1967: 2–3)

Given this most lucid diagnosis, any thinking, planning, or organizing for the decolonization of the university in sub-Saharan Africa today must confront two core questions. How much has the university changed since political independence? Considering that, in Nyerere's own terms, the evaluation of colonial education "does not imply that all the values these people transmitted in the schools were wrong or inappropriate," which were the right and appropriate values and which were the wrong and inappropriate ones?

Twenty years later, and in spite of all the transformations the continent had undergone in the meantime, Ngugi wa Thiong'o interrogated the education in Africa with questions that echoed those asked by Nyerere:

> 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?. (Thiong'o 1986: 101–102)

Since 2015, South Africa became one of the most visible and most polarized contexts for decolonizing the university. Both the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall movements illustrate in dramatic ways how intimately university capitalism and university colonialism are today intertwined in the crisis of the university. In the South African case, strengthening university capitalism gives so much more visibility to university colonialism that the latter becomes an autonomous cause for student struggles, which include both access and recruitment issues and curricula, syllabi, and teaching/learning methods issues. More than any other, the South African case shows that it is not possible to decolonize the university without demercantilizing it.

Because of the close articulation between university capitalism and university colonialism, diagnoses stressing one or the other as the cause of university unrest are equally plausible. All agree, however, on the need to confront both of them, even though there may be divergences concerning the definition of the policies called for to face the crisis. In a recent essay on the university in South Africa, Achille Mbembe underscores the centrality of university capitalism to the outbreak of the crisis and shows how the decolonization of the university must take into account the new global context of university capitalism and try to avoid "fighting a complexly mutating entity with concepts inherited from an entirely different age and epoch" (2016: 32). It is worthwhile to quote Mbembe at some length:

> We all seem to agree that there is something anachronistic, something entirely 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. [...].
>
> 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. (2016: 32)

According to Mbembe, the process of decolonizing the university must avoid the risk of an identitarian temptation, that is to say, the risk of conceiving of decolonization as merely Africanization, and thereby failing to take into account the changes that took place in Africa during the last decades and/or the global context into which the continent is integrated nowadays. The said global context is particularly important in the case of South Africa, a country of intermediate development with resources to fight for a position of some prominence in the global university system. To support his argument, Mbembe reminds his readers that Frantz Fanon had already warned against the danger of identitarian reductionism: "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'" (2016: 34). According to Mbembe, decolonizing the university nowadays requires, on the one hand, a geographic imagination to conceive of the university beyond the limits of the state and, on the other, an epistemological imagination to open the university to the epistemological diversity of the world. Together, these two imaginative exercises will transform the university into a pluriversity. Mbembe concludes:

> To decolonize the university is 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. (Mbembe 2016: 37)

Nelson Maldonado-Torres gives particular attention to university colonialism in his analysis, though he is also aware of the new context of university capitalism in which the crisis takes place. He focuses on the rebellious students and the reactions their rebellion causes in society and the university, "particularly if the youth in question are part of social groups whose lands have been taken and whose forms of subjectivity are vilified" (2016a: 2). According to him,

> students' actions that include calls for the creation of a Third World College in the late 1960s (USA), to more recent calls for a university of color (the Netherlands) and a "free and decolonized university" (South Africa), among many of such projects, represent the attempt to complete the process of formal desegregation of higher education and to participate in a project of social, economic, and cognitive decolonization. Liberal states should have predicted this: formal desegregation was only the first step in a process that would follow with continued demands for a concrete and real desegregation and for decolonization. Desegregation is simply incomplete without decolonization.
>
> It is equally predictable that the struggles for a "free and decolonized education" are bound to increase when segregation returns in the guise of fee increases that seek to socialize youth into a reality where the continued patterns of exclusion are justified with reference to the zero-sum game of state costs, a heightened individualism, and neoliberal criteria. That state

leaders and leaders of liberal institutions are surprised by these developments simply shows how inadequate the dominant conceptions of social and political dynamics as well as of higher learning and the hegemonic criteria of excellence are. This inadequacy is what students around the globe are trying to address with analyses that take coloniality and decoloniality seriously. (Maldonado-Torres 2016a: 4–5)

Both Mbembe and Maldonado-Torres find support in Fanon.[9] Says Maldonado-Torres:

> The movements for "free and decolonized education" are simultaneously addressing the coloniality of being, power, and knowledge. Many of their actions reflect the idea that just like the damnés cannot conform themselves with asking questions, the struggle for the decolonization of the university cannot be disconnected from the larger struggle to decolonize society. This means that the struggle to decolonize knowledge cannot be disconnected from the struggle to end the outsourcing of jobs, just like it cannot be disconnected from the struggle to change the ways in which land and resources are distributed. (Maldonado-Torres 2016a: 31)

Mbembe's and Maldonado-Torres's stances exemplify two different ways of viewing the relation between university capitalism and university colonialism, and evidently imply different politics, including university policies. It is important to acknowledge, however, that both scholars agree on the need to relate university capitalism to university colonialism, and that both highlight the idea that the university will be decolonized to the extent that it opens itself to epistemic diversity and cognitive justice. In spite of their differences, their conclusions coincide on the need to orient the decolonization of the university by means of ideas that actually preside over the epistemologies of the South.

## Decolonizing the Curriculum: The Ecologies of Knowledges

The possibility of the mutual enrichment of different knowledges and cultures is the *raison d'être* of the epistemologies of the South. The point is not to search for completeness or universality, but rather to strive for a higher consciousness of incompleteness and pluriversality. The aim is not to dilute time-spaces into some abstract, cosmopolitan non-identity, without space or time, and without history or memory. It is rather to render different ways of knowing more porous and more aware of differences through intercultural translation. In the process, new time-spaces may be created that bring about subaltern, partial, emergent, and insurgent cosmopolitanisms emerging from cross-fertilization. Rather than an undifferentiated contemporaneity, it becomes possible to think of multiple forms of being

contemporaneous. The flatness or uni-layeredness of simultaneity may thus be articulated with thickness or the multi-layeredness of contemporaneity.

What would a curriculum look like as defined along the lines proposed by the epistemologies of the South? The social, political, and cultural contexts of decolonization will determine the specificities of the curriculum. At the general level, only broad guidelines or orientations are in place. It would be oriented to identify the abyssal line drawn and then made invisible by the epistemologies of the North, the line that since the beginning of the modern period divides metropolitan ways of sociability, being, and knowing from colonial ways of sociability, being, and knowing. The abyssal line would be made visible, denounced, and superceded through the ecologies of knowledges, the co-presence of different knowledges, each one validated by its own criteria, brought together and jointly discussed in light of the pragmatic needs of social struggles aimed at post-capitalist, post-colonial, and post-patriarchal futures. No single body of knowledge, no matter how ample or sophisticated, can by itself guarantee the success of any relevant social struggle, given the complex interweaving of the different modes of domination, the different time-spaces in which they operate, and the different histories-memories through which they frame individual and collective subjectivities.

Building mutual intelligibility among different knowledges would be the central task of the learning process, and it would be carried out by resorting to procedures of intercultural translation. Two pedagogies would be pursued together, the pedagogy (of the sociology) of absences and the pedagogy (of the sociology) of emergences. The first one is geared to show the measure of epistemicide caused by northern epistemologies and their monopoly on valid and rigorous knowledge, and the waste of social experience thereby produced. The learning process would identify the absences in our societies (the ways of knowing and being that are considered irrelevant, residual, ignorant, backwards, lazy) and how such absences are actively produced. The pedagogy of emergences would be oriented to amplify the meaning of latent and potentially liberating sociabilities, the not-yets of hope, existing on the "other side" of the abyssal line, the colonial side, where absences are actively produced so that domination may go on undisturbed.

Two final issues must be mentioned at this juncture: the issue of language and the issue of the ecologies of knowledges. In the case of the global South, decolonizing the curriculum calls for a new relationship between the national languages and the language introduced by colonialism (the extent to which it remains, after decades or centuries, a "colonial language" being a theme of debate). Among others, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (1986: 4–33) has cautioned against monolingualism in Africa while emphasizing the importance of recognizing the epistemological, cultural, and political relevance of plurilingualism.[10]

As I have suggested, at the core of the epistemologies of the South is a pedagogy guided by the idea of ecologies of knowledges.[11] The goal is, on the one hand, to explore alternative conceptions that are internal to scientific knowledge and have become visible through the pluralist epistemologies of science and, on the other,

to advance the interdependence between scientific knowledges and other, non-scientific (vernacular, artisanal) knowledges born in struggle against domination. The ecologies of knowledges are the theoretical and methodological instrument that connects the goal of decolonizing the modern university to the larger movement toward global social justice. The overall premise underlying such movement is the idea that there is no global social justice without global cognitive justice.

## Notes

1 I refer to colonialism in its broadest sense, as a social and economic structure, a culture, and a power form based on the abyssal inequality between human beings; in other words, inequality that presupposes the sub-human nature of one of the parties involved in the particular social relation. As I argue elsewhere (Santos 2018), colonialism did not end with the independence of the European colonies throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It continued under new forms. Colonialism and decolonization is thus a long, far from finished historical process.

2 The types and contexts of authoritarianism vary widely. However, religious and political authoritarianism are increasingly operating together, probably one of the most telling symptoms that we may be entering a post-secular age.

3 See Santos (2014, 2018).

4 On the relation between social and student movements, on the one hand, and university reforms, on the other, see, for the case of Spain, the study by Buey (2009).

5 Alatas takes Makdisi even further and argues that the university as a degree-granting institution (and even the term baccalaureate) has its origin in Islamic educational institutions (2006: 112–132).

6 See Santos (2014: 188–211).

7 On the key concepts of the epistemologies of the South, see Santos (2018).

8 Early on, Fanon called our attention to such limits: "In the colonies, the economic infrastructure is also a superstructure. The cause is effect: You are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich. This is why a Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched when it comes to addressing the colonial issue" (1967a: 39).

9 Whereas for Mbembe, Fanon is important because he managed to avoid, while living in a period of extreme colonial violence, the identitarian reductionism that could have made him lose sight of the big picture of capitalism and end up repeating racism ad infinitum, for Maldonado-Torres, Fanon's relevance consists of his having defended a radical conception of decolonization on the basis of the experience of humiliation and destruction to which racialized bodies are subjected.

10 In Latin America, the Constitutions of Ecuador (2008) and of Bolivia (2009) conceive of the recognition of the indigenous languages as national languages as part of the process of decolonizing the state and society.

11 See Santos (2018).

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