This document was deliberately written as a spoken text. It forms the basis of a series of public lectures given at the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WISER), University of the Witwatersrand (Johannesburg), at conversations with the Rhodes Must Fall Movement at the University of Cape Town and the Indexing the Human Project, Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Stellenbosch. The nature of the events unfolding in South Africa, the type of audience that attended the lectures, the nature of the political and intellectual questions at stake required an entirely different mode of address – one that could speak both to reason and to affect.

Twenty one years after freedom, we have now fully entered what looks like a *negative moment*. This is a moment most African postcolonial societies have experienced. Like theirs in the late 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, ours is gray and almost murky. It lacks clarity.

Today many want to finally bring white supremacy to its knees. But the same seem to go missing when it comes to publically condemning the extra-judicial executions of fellow Africans on the streets of our cities and in our townships. As Fanon intimated, they see no contradiction between wanting to topple white supremacy and being anti-racist while succumbing to the sirens of isolationism and national-chauvinism.

Many still consider whites as "settlers" who, once in a while, will attempt to masquerade as "natives." And yet, with the advent of democracy and the new constitutional State, there are no longer settlers or natives. There are only citizens. If we repudiate democracy, what will we replace it with?

Our white compatriots might be fencing off their privileges. They might be "enclaving" them and "off-shoring" them but they are certainly going nowhere.

And yet they cannot keep living in our midst with whiteness' old clothes. Fencing off one's privileges, off-shoring them, living in enclaves does not in itself secure full recognition and survival.

Meanwhile, "blackness" is fracturing. "Black consciousness" today is more and more thought of in *fractions*.

A negative moment is a moment when new antagonisms emerge while old ones remain unresolved.

It is a moment when contradictory forces - inchoate, fractured, fragmented – are at work but what might come out of their interaction is anything but certain.

It is also a moment when multiple old and recent unresolved crises seem to be on the path towards a collision.

Such a collision might happen - or maybe not. It might take the form of outbursts that end up petering out. Whether the collision actually happens or not, the age of innocence and complacency is over.

When it comes to questions concerning the decolonization of the university - and of knowledge - in South Africa now, 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.

Demythologizing whiteness

One such issue has just been dealt with – and successfully - at the University of Cape Town.

To those who are still in denial, it might be worth reiterating that Cecil Rhodes belonged to the race of men who were convinced that to be black is a liability.

During his time and life in Southern Africa, he used his considerable power – political and financial - to make black people all over Southern Africa pay a bloody price for his beliefs.

His statue – and those of countless others who shared the same conviction - has no place on a public university campus 20 years after freedom.

The debate therefore should have never been about whether or not it should be brought down. All along, the debate should have been about why did it take so long to do so.

To bring Rhodes' statue down is far from erasing history, and nobody should be asking us to be eternally indebted to Rhodes for having "donated" his money and for having bequeathed "his" land to the University. If anything, we should be asking how did he acquire the land in the first instance?

Arguably other options were available and could have been considered, including that which was put forward late in the process by retired Judge Albie Sachs, who proposed a transformative reworking instead of removal and whose contribution to the symbolic remaking of what is today Constitution Hill is well recognized.

But bringing Rhodes' statue down is one of the many legitimate ways in which we can, today in South Africa, *demythologize that history and put it to rest* – which is precisely the work memory properly understood is supposed to accomplish.

For memory to fulfill this function long after the Truth and Reconciliation paradigm has run out of steam, the demythologizing of certain versions of history must go hand in hand with *the demythologizing of whiteness*.

This is not because whiteness is the same as history. Human history, by definition, is history beyond whiteness.

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.

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.

In other words, those versions of whiteness that produced men like Rhodes must be *recalled and de-commissioned* if we have to put history to rest, free ourselves from our own entrapment in white mythologies and open a future for all here and now.

It might then be that the statue of Rhodes and the statues of countless men of his ilk that are littering the South African landscape properly belong to a museum - an institution that, with few exceptions, has hardly been subjected to the kind of thorough critique required by these times of ours in South Africa.

Yet, a museum properly understood is not a dumping place. It is not a place where we recycle history's waste. It is first and foremost an epistemic space.

A stronger option would therefore be the creation of a new kind of institution, partly a park and partly a graveyard, where statues of people who spent most of their lives defacing everything the name "black" stood for would be put to rest. Putting them to rest in those new places would in turn allow us to move on and recreate the kind of new public spaces required by our new democratic project.

Architecture, public spaces and the common

Now, many may ask: "What does bringing down the statue of a late 19th century privateer have to do with decolonizing a 21st century university?" Or, as many have in fact been asking: "Why are we so addicted to the past"?

Are we simply, as Ferial Haffajee, the editor of the weekly *City Press* argues, fighting over the past because of our inability to build a future which, in her eyes, is mostly about each of us turning into an entrepreneur, making lots of money and becoming a good consumer?

Is this the only future left to aspire to – one in which every human being becomes a market actor; every field of activity is seen as a market; every entity (whether public or private, whether person, business, state or corporation) is governed as a firm; people themselves are cast as human capital and are subjected to market metrics (ratings, rankings) and their value is determined speculatively in a futures market?

Decolonizing the university starts with the de-privatization and rehabilitation of public space – the rearrangement of spatial relations Fanon spoke so eloquently about in the first chapter of The *Wretched of the Earth*.

It starts with a redefinition of what is public, *i.e.,* what pertains to the realm of *the common* and as such, does not belong to anyone in particular because it must be equally shared between equals.

The *decolonization of buildings and of public spaces* is therefore not a frivolous issue, especially in a country that, for many centuries, has defined itself as not of Africa, but as an

outpost of European imperialism in the Dark Continent; and in which 70% of the land is still firmly in the hands of 13% of the population.

The decolonization of buildings and of public spaces is inseparable from the *democratization of access.*

When we say access, we are naturally thinking about a wide opening of the doors of higher learning to all South Africans. For this to happen, SA must invest in its universities. For the time being, it spends 0.6% of its GDP on higher education. The percentage of the national wealth invested in higher education must be increased.

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".

Such a right to belong, such a rightful sense of ownership, has nothing to do with charity or hospitality.

It has nothing to do with the liberal notion of 'tolerance'.

It has nothing to do with me having to assimilate into a culture that is not mine as a precondition of my participating in the public life of the institution.

It has everything to do with ownership of a space that is a public, common good.

It has to do with an expansive sense of citizenship itself indispensable for the project of democracy, which itself means nothing without a deep commitment to some idea of public-ness.

Furthermore – especially for black staff and students - it has to do with creating a set of mental dispositions. We need to reconcile *a logic of indictment* and *a logic of self-affirmation, interruption and occupation*.

This requires the conscious constitution of a substantial amount of mental capital and the development of a set of pedagogies we should call *pedagogies of presence.*

Black students and staff have to invent a set of creative practices that ultimately make it impossible for official structures to ignore them and not recognize them, to pretend that they are not there; to pretend that they do not see them; or to pretend that their voice does not count.

The decolonization of buildings and public spaces includes a change of those colonial names, iconography, *i.e.,* the economy of symbols whose function, all along, has been to induce and normalize particular states of humiliation based on white supremacist presuppositions.

Such names, images and symbols have no place on the walls of a public university campus more than 20 years after Apartheid.

Classrooms without walls and different forms of intelligence

Another site of decolonization is *the university classroom*. We cannot keep teaching the way we have always taught.

A 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.

In an age that more than ever valorizes different forms of intelligence, 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*.

The quantified subject

Universities have always been organizational structures with certified and required programs of study, grading system, methods for the legitimate accumulation of credits and acceptable and non acceptable standards of achievement.

Since the start of the 20th century, they have been undergoing internal changes in their organizational structure.

Today, they are *large systems of authoritative control*, standardization, gradation, accountancy, classification, credits and penalties.

We need to decolonize the systems of management insofar as they have turned higher education into a marketable product bought and sold by standard units.

We might never entirely get rid of measurement, counting, and rating. We nevertheless have to ask whether each form of measurement, counting and rating must necessarily lead to the reduction of everything to staple equivalence.

We have to ask whether there might be other ways of measuring, counting and rating which escape the trap of everything having to become a numerical standard or unit.

We have to create alternative systems of management because the current ones, dominated by statistical reason and the mania for assessment, are deterring students and teachers from a free pursuit of knowledge. They are substituting this goal of free pursuit of knowledge for another, the pursuit of credits.

The system of business principles and statistical accountancy has resulted in an obsessive concern with the periodic and quantitative assessment of every facet of university functioning.

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 in those courses - quantitative measures of teaching excellence.

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*.

We have to change this – and many other sites - if the aim of higher education is to be, once again, to redistribute as equally as possible a capacity of a special type – the capacity to make disciplined inquiries into those things we need to know, but do not know yet; the capacity to make systematic forays beyond our current knowledge horizons.

The philosophical challenge

Let me now move to the most important part of this lecture. While preparing it, it became clear to me that the questions we face are of a profoundly intellectual nature.

They are also colossal. And if we do not foreground them intellectually in the first instance; if we do not develop a complex understanding of the nature of what we are actually facing, we will end up with the same old techno-bureaucratic fixes that have led us, in the first place, to the current *cul-de-sac*.

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

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

We all agree that there is something anachronistic, something fundamentally wrong, with a number of institutions of higher learning in South Africa.

There is something fundamentally cynical when institutions whose character is profoundly ethno-provincial keep masquerading as replicas of Oxford and Cambridge without demonstrating the same productivity as the original places they are mimicking.

There is something profoundly wrong when, for instance, syllabi designed to meet the needs of colonialism and Apartheid continue well into the post-Apartheid era.

We also agree that part of what is wrong with our institutions of higher learning is that they are "Westernized."

But what does it mean "they are westernized"?

They are indeed "Westernized" if all that they aspire to is to become local instantiations of a dominant academic model based on a Eurocentric epistemic canon.

But what is a Eurocentric canon?

A Eurocentric canon is a canon that attributes truth only to the Western way of knowledge production.

It is a canon that disregards other epistemic traditions.

It is a canon that tries to portray colonialism as a normal form of social relations between human beings rather than a system of exploitation and oppression.

Furthermore, Western epistemic traditions are traditions that claim detachment of the known from the knower.

They rest on a division between mind and world, or between reason and nature, as an ontological a priori.

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

The problem – because there is a problem indeed – with this tradition is that it has become hegemonic.

This hegemonic notion of knowledge production has generated discursive scientific practices and has set up interpretive frames that make it difficult to think outside of these frames. But this is not all.

This hegemonic tradition has not only become hegemonic. It also actively represses anything that actually is articulated, thought and envisioned from outside of these frames.

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

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

Is 'decolonization' the same thing as 'Africanization'?

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

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

First, he did not believe that "nation-building" could be achieved by those he called "the national middle class" or the "national bourgeoisie".

Fanon did not trust the African postcolonial middle class at all.

He thought the African postcolonial middle class was lazy, unscrupulous, parasitic and above all lacking spiritual depth precisely because it had "totally assimilated colonialist thought in its most corrupt form."

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

He also thought that in the aftermath of colonialism, the middle class manipulated the overall claim to self-determination as a way of preventing the formation of an authentic national consciousness.

In order to preserve its own interests, the middle class turned the national project into an "an empty shell, a crude and fragile travesty of what might have been." In this context, the discourse of "Africanization" mostly performed ideological work. "Africanization" was the ideology masking what fundamentally was a "racketeering" or predatory project – what we call today "looting."

More ominously, Fanon took a certain discourse of "Africanization" to be akin to something he called "retrogression" – retrogression is when "the nation is passed over for the race, and the tribe is preferred to the state."

"Retrogression" too is when, behind a so-called nationalist rhetoric, lurks the hideous face of chauvinism – the "heart breaking return of chauvinism in its most bitter and detestable form," he writes.

In the aftermath of independence, Fanon witnessed events similar to what we in South Africa call "xenophobic" or "Afrophobic" attacks against fellow Africans. He witnessed similar events in the Ivory Coast, in Senegal, in the Congo where those we call "foreigners," in the South African lexicon, controlled the greater part of the petty trade.

These Africans of other nations were rounded up and commanded to leave. Their shops were burned and their street stalls were wrecked.

Fanon was ill at ease with calls for "Africanization" because calls for "Africanization" are, in most instances, always haunted by the dark desire *to get rid of the foreigner* - a dark desire which, Fanon confesses, made him "furious and sick at heart."

It made him furious and sick at heart because the foreigner to be gotten rid of was almost always a fellow African from another nation.

And because the objective target of "Africanization" was a fellow African from another nation, he saw in "Africanization" the name of an inverted racism – *self-racism* if you like.

As far as I know, Fanon's is the most trenchant critique of the "decolonization-as-Africanization" paradigm.

His is its most trenchant critique 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."

In other words, we topple Cecil Rhodes statue only to replace it with the statue of Hitler.

Difference and repetition

Now, if Africanization and decolonization are not the same thing, what then is the true meaning of decolonization?

For Fanon, struggles for decolonization are first and foremost about self-ownership. They are struggles to repossess, to take back - if necessary by force - that which is ours unconditionally and, as such, belongs to us.

As a theory of self-ownership, decolonization is therefore relational, always a bundle of innate rights, capabilities and claims made against others, taken back from others and to be protected against others – once again, by force if necessary.

In his eyes, self-ownership is a precondition, a necessary step towards the *creation of new forms of life* that could genuinely be characterized as fully human.

Becoming human does not only happen "in" time, but through, by means of, almost by virtue of time. And time, properly speaking, is creation and self-creation – the creation of new forms of life. And if there is something we could call a Fanonian theory of decolonization, that is where it is, in the dialectic of time, life and creation – which for him is the same as self-appropriation.

Decolonization is not about design, tinkering with the margins. It is about reshaping, turning human beings once again into craftsmen and craftswomen who, in reshaping matters and forms, need not to look at the pre-existing models and need not use them as paradigms.

Thus his rejection of "imitation" and "mimicry." Thus his call to "provincialize" Europe; to turn our backs on Europe; to not take Europe as a model – and this for all sorts of reasons:

[1] The first was that "the European game has finally ended; we must find something different"; that "We today can do everything, so long as we do not imitate Europe …" (*WoE*, 312); or "today we are present at the stasis of Europe" (314);

[2] The second was that "It is a question of the Third World starting a new history of Man" (315); we must "try to set afoot a new man" (316).

The time of decolonization had a double character. It was the time of closure as well as the time of possibility. As such it required a politics of difference as opposed to a politics of imitation and repetition.

It is not very difficult to understand why for Fanon, decolonization came to be so closely associated with these fundamental facts about being, time and self-creation, and ultimately difference as opposed to repetition.

The reason is that colonization itself was a fundamental *negation of time*.

[1] Negation of time in the sense that, from the colonial point of view, natives were not simply people without history. They were people radically located *outside of time*; or whose time was radically out of joint.

[2] Negation of time also in the sense that that essential category of time we call "the future" – that essential human quality we call the disposition towards the future and the capacity for futurity – all of these were the monopoly of Europe and had to be brought to the natives from outside, as a magnanimous gift of civilization – a gift that turned colonial violence and plunder into a benevolent act supposed to absolve those such as Rhodes who engaged in it.

[3] Thirdly, negation of time in the sense that, in the colonial mind, the native was ontologically incapable of change and therefore of creation. The native would always and forever be a native. It was the belief that if she or he were to change, the ways in which this change would occur and the forms that this change would take or would bring about – all of this would always end in a catastrophe.

In other words, the "native principle" was about repetition - *repetition without difference*. Native time was sheer repetition - not of events as such, but the instantiation of the very law of repetition.

Fanon understands decolonization as precisely a subversion of the law of repetition. In order for this to happen, decolonization had to be:

[1] An event that could radically redefine native being and open it up to the possibility of becoming a human form rather than a thing;

[2] An historical event in the sense that it could radically redefine native time as the permanent possibility of the emergence of the not yet.

[3] To the colonial framework of pre-determination, decolonization opposes the framework of possibility – possibility of a different type of being, a different type of time, a different type of creation, different forms of life, a different humanity – the possibility to reconstitute the human after humanism's complicity with colonial racism.

 "Decolonization, he says, is always a violent phenomenon" whose goal is "the replacing of a certain '*species*' of men by another '*species*' of men" (35).

The Latin term '*species*' derives from a root signifying "to look", "to see". It means "appearance", or "vision." It can also mean "aspect." The same root is found in the term '*speculum*', which means 'mirror'; or '*spectrum*', which means 'image'; in '*specimen*' which means 'sign', and '*spectaculum*' which refers to 'spectacle.'

When Fanon uses the term 'a new species of men,' what does he have in mind?

A new species of men is a new category of "men" who are no longer limited or predetermined by their appearance, and whose essence coincides with their image – their image not as something separate from them; not as something that does not belong to them; but insofar as there is no gap between this image and the recognition of oneself, the property of oneself.

A new species of men is also a category of men who can create new forms of life, free from the shock realization that the image through which they have emerged into visibility (race) is not their essence.

Decolonization is *the elimination of this gap between image and essence*. It is about the "restitution" of the essence to the image so that that which exists can exist in itself and not in something other than itself - something distorted, clumsy, debased and unworthy.

Seeing oneself clearly

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

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

It is also part of a larger search - the search for what he calls "a liberating perspective."

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

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

question of relationality (a trope very present in various other traditions of Black thought, in particular Glissant).

We are called upon to see ourselves clearly, not as an act of secession from the rest of humanity, but in relation to ourselves and to other selves with whom we share the universe.

And the term "other selves" is open-ended enough to include, in this Age of the Anthropocene, all sorts of living species and objects, including the biosphere itself.

Let me add that Ngugi is, more than Fanon, directly interested in questions of writing and teaching – writing oneself, teaching oneself.

He believes that decolonization is not an end point. It is the beginning of an entirely new struggle. It is a struggle over what is to be taught; it is about the terms under which we should be teaching what - not to some generic figure of the student, but to the African "child," a figure that is very much central to his politics and to his creative work.

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

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

If "we are to do anything about our individual and collective being today", Ngugi argues, "then we have to coldly and consciously look at what imperialism has been doing to us and to our view of ourselves in the universe" (88).

In Ngugi's terms, "decolonization" is *a project of "re-centering."* It is about rejecting the assumption that the modern West is the central root of Africa's consciousness and cultural heritage. It is about rejecting the notion that Africa is merely an extension of the West.

Indeed it is not. The West as such is but a recent moment of our long history. Long before our encounter with the West in the 15th century under the sign of capital, we were relational, worldly beings.

Our geographical imagination extended far beyond the territorial limits of this colossal Continent. It encompassed the trans-Saharian vast expanses and the Indian Ocean shores. It reached the Arabian Peninsula and China Seas.

Decolonizing (*à la* Ngugi) is not about closing the door to European or other traditions. It is about defining clearly *what the centre is*.

And for Ngugi, Africa has to be placed at the centre.

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

I have spent this amount of time on Ngugi because he is arguably the African writer who has most popularized the concept of "decolonizing" we are today relying upon to foster the project of a future university in South Africa. Ngugi drew practical implications from his considerations and we might be wise to look into some of these as we grapple with what it might possibly mean to decolonize our own institutions. Most of these implications had to do with the content and extent of what was to be taught (curriculum reform).

Crucial in this regard was the need to teach African languages. *A decolonized university in Africa should put African languages at the center of its teaching and learning project*.

Colonialism rhymes with mono-lingualism.

The African university of tomorrow will be multilingual.

It will teach (in) Swahili, isiZulu, isiXhosa, Shona, Yoruba, Hausa, Lingala, Gikuyu and it will teach all those other African languages French, Portuguese or Arabic have become while making a space for Chinese, Hindu etc. It will turn these languages into a creative repository of concepts originating from the four corners of the Earth.

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

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

A lot could be said here in view of the segregationist and isolationist histories of South Africa.

Recent scholarship on the many versions of black internationalism and its intersections with various other forms of internationalisms could help in rethinking the spatial politics of decolonization in so far as true decolonization, as Dubois intimated in 1919, necessarily centers on "the destiny of humankind" and not of one race, color or *ethnos*.

Decolonizing in the future tense
Today, the decolonizing project is back on the agenda worldwide.

It has two sides. The first is a critique of the dominant Eurocentric academic model – the fight against what Latin Americans in particular call "epistemic coloniality," that is, the endless production of theories that are based on European traditions; 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.

The second is an attempt at imagining what the alternative to this model could look like.

This is where a lot remains to be done. Whatever the case, there is a recognition of the exhaustion of the present academic model with its origins in the universalism of the Enlightenment. Boaventura de Sousa Santos or Enrique Dussel for instance make it clear that *knowledge can only be thought of as universal if it is by definition pluriversal.*

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

What is a pluriversity?

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

By pluriversity, many understand a process of knowledge production that is open to epistemic diversity.

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

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

The problem of course is whether the university can be reformed or whether it is too late.

The age of global Apartheid

We need not to be blind to the limits of the various approaches I have just sketched.

As I said at the start of this talk, my fear is that we might be fighting battles of the present and the future with outdated tools.

A more profound understanding of the situation we find ourselves in today is required if we are to better rethink the university of tomorrow.

There are a number of things we can do alone. For instance, turning our universities into safe spaces for black students and staff has an economic cost.

We can keep toppling the statues of those who were firmly convinced that to be black is a liability and, to a certain extent, we must.

We can change the names of infamous buildings, remake the iconography of their interiors, reform the curriculum, de-segregate the dormitories. *But transformation will not happen without a recapitalization of our institutions of higher learning.*

To better design the higher education landscape of tomorrow, we also need to pay close attention to deeper, systemic global dynamics.

We cannot lose sight of the political economy of knowledge production in the contemporary world of higher education and pretend to decolonize either the university or knowledge itself, for that matter.

The flows and linkages in the production, distribution and consumption of knowledge are global. They are not global in the same way everywhere, but they are definitely global and the world of higher education itself is made up of different forms of geo-political stratifications.

The university as we knew it is dead.

Unaware of this fact, many countries might elect to keep living in the midst of its ruins for a long time to come.

Spearheaded by global markets, notably speculation-driven finance and a push for hyper-profits, the global restructuring of higher education initiated at the beginning of the 20th century in America has now reached its final stage.

Late orthodoxy has it that universities are too expensive, too fragmented and too nation-state-centric at a time when economic integration at a planetary level must become the new norm.

The urgency, we are told, is to move towards a post-national or partially denationalized higher education space that will increase the availability of a skilled labor force and foster the transferability and compatibility of skills across boundaries while helping to set up intensive research collaborations between universities and transnational corporations.

Within this paradigm, the new mission assigned to universities is to produce innovations that are necessary for the interests of transnationally mobile capital.

To this end, a small number of elite universities must train tomorrow's creative classes.

These are people whose economic interests will be globally linked; whose bonds as citizens of a particular nation-state will be weakened while those resting on being the member of a transnational class will be strengthened. They are destined to share similar lifestyles and consumption habits.

The rescaling of the university is meant to achieve one single goal - to turn it into a springboard for global markets in an economy that is increasingly knowledge and innovation-based and therefore requires specialized knowledge in advanced mathematics, complex systems and technologies and intricate organizational formats.

A consequence of the denationalization and transnationalisation has been the de-funding of major public institutions in the West and the intensification of the competition among universities throughout the world.

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.

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.

This is what is called zoning or warehousing.

Zoning is fuelled by the tremendous expansion of higher education on a global scale.

The latter has opened the way to an unprecedented era of student mobility and educational migration.

China alone had a staggering 419,000 students pursuing higher education outside the country's borders in 2008. Today, Africans constitute 7% of the international student body in Chinese universities. They are present in virtually every province. According to the World Trade Organization, outward student mobility is increasing faster from Africa than from any other continent.

Why is China comparatively well positioned to attract African students?

Well, partly because of its moderate tuition fees, low living costs, welcoming visa policies as compared to most Western destinations and, more and more, South Africa. At Wits, non-national African students pay more than 700% what South African students pay annually. The other factor is the extent to which African students in China are able to combine studies with business activities, especially engaging in trade.

In SA, contrary to the United States, a non-national staff member with tenure is not guaranteed a permanent work permit. His or her work permit must not only be subjected to renewal periodically, but whenever he moves from one institution to another, he must reapply for an entirely new work permit. Furthermore, there is no correlation between permanent job tenure and access to permanent residence.

The paradigm of the "world class university" has become attractive to many countries, especially in Asia where national governments are copying the Anglo-American based model in order to restructure their higher education sector.

The world's largest and most populous nations outside the Western world such as China, India, Brazil, Indonesia and Pakistan are educating large skilled workforces. Malaysia, the Gulf States, and Singapore are increasingly supporting the development of regional

institutions while establishing themselves as major hubs for new waves of globalized higher education.

The developments sketched above partly explain why universities have become large systems of authoritative control and standardization.

Indeed higher education has been turned into a marketable product. The free pursuit of knowledge has been replaced by the free pursuit of credits. Worldwide not much differentiates students from customers and consumers.

Can we and should we fight against this trend? Are there aspects of this process of denationalization that can be maximized for our own objectives?

If the university has been effectively turned into a springboard for global markets, what do terms such as "decolonizing knowledge" possibly mean?

Can we compete with China in attracting African students to our shores?

Yes, if we fully embrace our own location in the African continent and stop thinking in South-Africa-centric terms.

Yes, if we entirely redesign our curricula and our tuition systems, revamp our immigration policy and open new paths to citizenship for those who are willing to tie their fate with ours.

Of all African nations, we are in the best position to set up diasporic knowledge networks which would enable scholars of African descent in the rest of the world to transfer their skills and expertise to our students without necessarily settling here permanently.

This is what China has done through its 111 program whose aim is to recruit overseas Chinese intellectuals to mainland universities on a periodic basis.

We are also in the best position to set up study in African programs for our students and to foster new intra-continental academic networks through various connectivity schemes. This is how we will maximize the benefits of brain circulation.

The speed, scale and volume of the phenomenon of transnational talent mobility will only increase and with it, the emergence of the new reality of *knowledge diasporas*. The constitution of these knowledge diasporas is encouraged, supported and necessitated by globalization.

We need to take this phenomenon seriously and stop thinking about it in terms of theories of migration. The complexity of the current motion defies the labels of brain drain and brain gain. We live in an age in which most relations between academics are increasingly de-territorialized.

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

We will foster a process of decolonization of our universities if we invest in these diasporic intellectual networks and if we take seriously these spaces of transnational engagement, with the goal of harnessing for South Africa and Africa the floating resources freed by the process of globalised talent mobility. In order to achieve such a goal, we cannot afford to think exclusively in South-African-centric terms.

There will be no decolonization of our universities without a better understanding of the complex dynamics of global movement to which we must respond through Africa-centered, pro-active projects.

The aim of higher education in emerging democracies is to redistribute as equally as possible the capacity to make disciplined inquiries into those things we need to know, but do not know yet.

Our capacity to make systematic forays beyond our current knowledge horizons will be severely hampered if we rely exclusively on those aspects of the Western archive that disregard other epistemic traditions.

Yet the Western archive is singularly complex. It contains within itself the resources of its own refutation. It is neither monolithic, nor the exclusive property of the West. Africa and its diaspora decisively contributed to its making and should legitimately make foundational claims on it.

Decolonizing knowledge is therefore not simply about de-Westernization.

As writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o reminds us, it mostly means developing a perspective which can allow us to see ourselves clearly, but always in relationship to ourselves and to other selves in the universe, non-humans included.

Deep time

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

At the start of this new century, three processes force us to think the human in entirely new ways.

The first is the recognition of the fact that an epoch-scale boundary has been crossed within the last two centuries of human life on Earth and that we have, as a consequence, entered an entirely new deep, geological time, that of the *Anthropocene*.

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

The scale, magnitude and significance of this environmental change – in other words the future evolution of the biosphere and of Earth's environmental life support systems

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

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

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

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

The first is that humans are part of *a very long, deep history that is not simply theirs*; that history is vastly older than the very existence of the human race which, in fact, is very recent. And they share this deep history with various forms of other living entities and species.

Our history is therefore one of entanglement with multiple other species. And this being the case, *the dualistic partitions of minds from bodies, meaning and matter or nature from culture can no longer hold*.

The second – and this is crucial for the renewed dialogue the humanities must have with life and natural sciences - is that matter has morphogenetic capacities of its own and does not need to be commanded into generating form.

It is not an inert receptacle for forms that come from the outside imposed by an exterior agency.

This being the case, the concept of agency and power must be extended to non-human nature and conventional understandings of life must be called into question.

The third is that to be a subject is no longer to act autonomously in front of an objective background, but *to share agency* with other subjects that have also lost their autonomy.

We therefore have to shift away from the dreams of mastery.

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

The human no longer constitutes a special category that is other than that of the objects. Objects are not a pole opposed to humans.

At the heart of the efforts at reframing the human is the growing realization of our precariousness as a species in the face of ecological threats and the outright possibility of human extinction opened up by climate change.

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

Our world is populated by a variety of nonhuman actors. They are unleashed in the world as autonomous actors in their own right, irreducible to representations and freed from any constant reference to the human.

Conclusion

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

Worldwide, we witness a renewed interest in terms of the identification of biological differences.

Fundamental to ongoing re-articulations of race and recoding of racism are developments in the life sciences, and in particular in genomics, in our understanding of the cell, in neuroscience and in synthetic biology.

This process has been rendered even more powerful by its convergence with two parallel developments.

The first is the digital technologies of the information age and the second is the financialization of the economy.

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

This in turn has revitalized fantasies of omnipotence – the Second Creation (vs Apocalypse).

A second set of consequences has to do with the new work capital is doing under contemporary conditions.

Thanks to the work of capital, we are no longer fundamentally different from things. We turn them into persons. We fall in love with them. We are no longer only persons or we have never been only persons.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In order to invigorate anti-racist thought and praxis and to reanimate the project of a non-racial university, we particularly need to explore the emerging nexus between biology, genes, technologies and their articulations with new forms of human destitution.

But simply looking into past and present local and global re-articulations of race will not suffice.

To tease out alternative possibilities for thinking life and human futures in this age of neoliberal individualism, we need to connect in entirely new ways the project of non-racialism to that of human mutuality.

In the last instance, a non-racial university is truly about radical sharing and universal inclusion.

It is about humankind ruling in common for a common which includes the non-humans, which is the proper name for democracy.

To reopen the future of our planet to all who inhabit it, we will have to learn how to share it again amongst the humans, but also between the humans and the non-humans.

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