



Towards the Decolonised University in Africa: A Perspective from the Philosophy of Liberation

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Abstract

This article deploys the philosophy of liberation perspective as a lens to flesh out an image of the decolonised university in Africa. The observation is that the Euro-American model of the university is currently hegemonic in Africa, and this Westernised, colonial system of higher education needs to be decolonised. This article begins by explaining the use of the philosophy of liberation perspective as a lens, then delves into the current Euro-American model of the university, which is a Westernised university in Africa rather than an African university. Finally, the paper presents a vision of the decolonised university in Africa, which would be multilingual, boast of human and epistemic diversity, and include inclusive architecture and infrastructures as part of its landscapes and spaces. In this decolonised university in Africa, knowledge and knowledge production would be treated as public goods and services rather than commodities in the marketplace. This university would be rooted in Africa while also being globally relevant and present. It would marry local relevance with international excellence. This decolonised university in Africa would be a planetary university of the Global South, where the planet and everything on it – all of nature and life – are valued. This idea might sound idealistic and utopian precisely because liberation itself, and the futures it seeks to imagine and enact, belong to utopia.

Keywords: Decolonised university in Africa, philosophy of liberation, westernised university in Africa, Global South, planetary university

Résumé

Cet article mobilise la perspective de la philosophie de la libération comme cadre d'analyse pour esquisser une image de l'université décolonisée en Afrique. Il observe que le modèle euro-américain de l'université est actuellement hégémonique en Afrique, et que ce système d'enseignement

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supérieur occidental et hérité de la colonisation doit être décolonisé. L'article commence par expliquer l'usage de la philosophie de la libération comme grille de lecture, puis examine le modèle euro-américain actuel de l'université, qui constitue une université occidentalisée en Afrique plutôt qu'une véritable université africaine. Enfin, il propose une vision de l'université décolonisée en Afrique, qui serait multilingue, caractérisée par une diversité humaine et épistémique, et dotée d'une architecture et d'infrastructures inclusives intégrées dans ses espaces et environnements. Dans cette université décolonisée en Afrique, le savoir et la production de connaissances seraient considérés comme des biens et services publics plutôt que comme des marchandises sur le marché. Cette université serait enracinée en Afrique tout en étant pertinente et présente à l'échelle mondiale. Elle concilierait pertinence locale et excellence internationale. Cette université décolonisée en Afrique serait une université planétaire du Sud global, où la planète et tout ce qu'elle contient – l'ensemble de la nature et du vivant – seraient valorisés. Cette idée peut sembler idéaliste et utopique précisément parce que la libération elle-même, ainsi que les futurs qu'elle cherche à imaginer et à concrétiser, relèvent de l'utopie.

Mots-clés : université décolonisée en Afrique, philosophie de la libération, université occidentalisée en Afrique, Sud global, université planétaire

Introduction

This essay delves into a critical imagination of the decolonised university in Africa, and more generally in the Global South, from the perspective of the philosophy of liberation as adumbrated by Enrique Dussel (1985). The philosophy of liberation entertains decolonial fantasies of liberation; it critiques conquest and condemns the coloniality of knowledge, power and being in the Global South. The idea that the university in Africa – and specifically the university in the Global South – must be decolonised stems from the fact that the present hegemonic model is a Euro-American one imbricated with coloniality and a structure of knowledge that is fundamentally imperialist and colonial (Grosfoguel 2013). While there were other models of the university in Africa, the model of higher education that has become normalised is the westernised Euro-American one that comes with cultural imperialism and coloniality of knowledge. In his examination of the 'giant challenge of higher education in Africa', Paul Zeleza (2018) observes how the university in Africa has been afflicted by such challenges as the corporatisation of management; the casualisation of faculty members that are employed on fragile part-time contracts; the commercialisation of learning and the commodification of knowledge, which should be a public good, has been reduced to a product sold in the market place. Students have

been reduced to consumers who 'buy' learning. At the same time, academics and intellectuals have been turned into 'scholars in the marketplace' (Mamdani 2007) who sell their intellectual and academic labour for wages and no longer pursue knowledge production and circulation as the public goods and services that they should be. Zeleza (2018) notes how the Westernised university in Africa has often been nationalist when it has pretended to advanced nation-building aspirations; developmental when it has aspired to advance national development; and neoliberal in the way in which it has attempted to respond to market aspirations and pressures of the neoliberal era of African politics and economies. In all these systemic pretensions, Zeleza concludes, the university has remained a Western institution and system on African soil, not an African university. Zeleza (2018) describes how this university suffers pressures of market control, global inequalities and immense political control that make academic and intellectual freedom difficult at best and impossible at worst.

In the case of South African universities, Robert Kriger (2016) describes how they were founded as university colleges of Euro-American universities, with the motto 'for the education of the sons of Empire' as their mantra. These universities were intended to produce young White male 'champions of Empire' and as such, they were an instrument of colonialism and a facility of Empire as their mantra. The attempt to decolonise and repurpose the university in postcolonial Africa has faced challenges: the universities were few and small in scale; there has been a shortage of financial and human resources and of committed faculty staff; the research output was low, and there was a lack of progressive leadership (Zeleza 2018). Zeleza concludes that the university in Africa faces the challenge of postcoloniality in the sense that it carries the burdens of state institutions and processes that have not yet fully recovered from the colonial systems and experiences. Grosfoguel (2013) refers to this model as the 'westernised university' in the Global South because it carries an imbrication of the Euro-American colonial and imperial project that viewed the colonised territories and peoples as objects and not subjects of history. Nyamnjoh (2012) described the students and staff as 'potted plants in greenhouses' because they are captive to the university's disciplining systems that are fundamentally colonial and colonising inasmuch as they are alien and alienating. The education in these universities is for conquest and domination, rather than for critical consciousness and liberation, or what Paulo Freire (2020) terms the 'pedagogy of the oppressed'. For Freire (2021) education for critical consciousness is as much a process of unlearning internalised inferiority and domination by the colonial culture and its accompanying institutions

of education. The university of the Global South in the postcolonial era should, therefore, be a site for unlearning and undoing coloniality of knowledge and an awakening to liberation. This essay begins by fleshing out the philosophy of liberation, as adumbrated by Enrique Dussel, and then moves on to describe the colonial university in Africa. Thereafter, it delves into the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall movements, which became telling struggles for the decolonisation of the westernised university in Africa, and finally presents a vision of what a decolonised university in Africa might look like.

The Philosophy of Liberation Perspective

This section briefly examines the philosophy of liberation, as adumbrated by Dussel, Freire and others. The philosophy of liberation emanates from the experiences and thoughts of the oppressed people in the Global South and its territories, which include Africa, parts of Asia, and Latin America. It is, in my view, the philosophical standpoint from which to imagine a future African university.

Paulo Freire (2020) argues that liberated and liberating education will only emanate from the experiences, histories and insights of the oppressed of the Global South, not from their enslavers and colonisers. Dussel (1985), on the other hand, postulates that the philosophy of liberation springs from the periphery, even as it deploys the language and epistemic tools of the centre in Europe and North America. Dussel justifies the deployment of the linguistic and epistemic tools of Empire by arguing that when the enslaved revolted, they used the language of the master, and when oppressed women rebelled, they used macho language. The youth of the world, the oppressed of the Earth, and the condemned of world history must use the philosophy of liberation to critique their conquest and domination (Dussel 1985).

Dussel explains that the cultural, economic, and military domination of poor countries by the West was justified on the basis of European philosophies, which were presented as rational, universal truths, while peripheral people were non-beings and their philosophies were portrayed as chaotic and irrational. Dussel notes that:

Philosophy, when it is really philosophy and not sophistry or ideology, does not ponder philosophy texts, except as a pedagogical propaedeutic to provide itself with interpretive categories. Philosophy ponders the non-philosophical; the reality. But because it involves reflection on its own reality, it sets out from what already is, from its own world, its own system, its own space. The philosophy that has emerged from a periphery has always done so in response to a need to situate itself with regard to a centre – in total exteriority (Dussel 1985: 3).

The philosophy of liberation is not a disciplinary and academic philosophy, but it takes political activism and social justice seriously. The colonised, enslaved, and those who are on the receiving end of conquest and domination have no time for 'philosophy as the love of wisdom', but have all the time and energy for 'philosophy as the wisdom of love for liberation from conquest' and the dominations and exploitations that come with it. The philosophy of liberation is the body of ideas from people on the periphery who look at the centre from their locations as people whose humanity and freedoms have been denied (Dussel 1985). The philosophers of liberation are those called upon to unmask conquest and domination because they cannot do otherwise, as people who have suffered them (Dussel 1985). As such, the philosophy of liberation is not an academic discipline; it is a vocation for liberation from conquest and the exploitations that accompany it.

The philosophy of liberation is, therefore, a fitting lens through which to imagine a decolonised university in Africa, replacing the current Euro-American model that has become hegemonic in the Global South, which encompasses Africa. At an epistemic level, the philosophy of liberation enters into critical conversation with Euro-American philosophy and argues for the humanity, dignity, and liberation of the victims of conquest, imperialism, colonialism, and domination. It constitutes the insurrection of the subjugated thoughts, ideas and feelings of the oppressed who have, as their life vocation, the struggle against conquest and colonality: 'What is at stake is neocolonial liberation from the last and most advanced degree of imperialism, North American imperialism, the imperialism that weighs down part of Asia and almost all of Africa and Latin America' (Dussel 1985: 14).

Pitted against this Euro-American philosophy, which Dussel calls the philosophy of conquest and domination, is the philosophy of liberation, wielded by the oppressed, who do not think from any position of privilege, but from the darkness of the conquered and dominated peripheries of the world:

Against the classical ontology of the center, from Hegel to Marcuse – to name the most brilliant from Europe and North America – a philosophy of liberation is rising from the periphery, from the oppressed, from the shadow that the light of being has not been able to illumine. Our thought sets out from non-being, nothingness, otherness, exteriority, the mystery of no-sense. It is, then, 'barbarian' philosophy (Dussel 1985: 14).

The philosophy of liberation is an argument against conquest by those peoples of the Global South whose thoughts have been denied by Euro-American thought and who have been called non-beings, barbarians and primitives. These people are speaking back to Empire with a philosophy of liberation shaped by their experiences of conquest and domination.

Paulo Freire (2020) writes that the philosophy of liberation is the power emanating from the oppressed who can imagine the liberation of both the oppressed and their oppressors. From their powerlessness, the oppressed can imagine liberation, which their oppressors cannot do because oppression and domination capture and blind the oppressors and render them incapable of imagining another world outside the one of power and privilege. The philosophy of liberation, therefore, is a potent epistemic tool of the oppressed in their struggle against domination and the violence that accompanies it. What Quinn (2017) celebrates is Frantz Fanon's assertion that thinkers of the Global South should not imitate Euro-American thought but should develop their own ideas and activism, which might actually constitute a philosophy of liberation that presents itself as a radical alternative to embedded Euro-American thought. The philosophy of liberation erected by the activists of the Global South may be 'the will to live' that opposes what Friedrich Nietzsche mounted as 'the will to power' of conquerors, who know nothing except power and conquest (Dussel 2020). Much like Ubuntu, Black Consciousness, Afrikology and Afrocentricity, the philosophy of liberation imagines a world that is centred on the histories, experiences and knowledges of the peoples of the Global South.

Pursuantly, the philosophy of liberation is deployed here to imagine a decolonised university in Africa, freed from the imbrications of the colonality of knowledge, which Lewis R Gordon (2014) calls disciplinary decadence, where knowledge is weaponised by power for purposes of domination and subjugation of the hearts and minds of the colonised. The philosophy of liberation is undisciplinary in that it contests the disciplining and dominating effects of the knowledge as it is produced and circulated in the Euro-American model of the university, which maintains a colonial, racist and imperialist structure of knowledge that valorises White men as the thinkers and knowers for the entire planet, to the exclusion of indigenous knowledge producers of the Global South (Grosfoguel 2013). As a result, a Euro-American monologue is maintained at the expense of human and epistemic diversity in the academy. To oppose this epistemic monologue, Dussel (2013) argues for South-to-South and South-to-North dialogue in the university, leading to creative and productive epistemic friction that would unmask Eurocentrism as the racism and the colonality of knowledge that it is. In this way, Dussel imagines an academy in the Global South that boasts human and epistemic diversity, critical dialogue, multilingualism, and the pursuit of knowledge as a public good rather than a commodity in the marketplace. The philosophy of liberation envisions an academy that is awake to conquest and domination, and valorises decolonial epistemic

reparations. Because the philosophy of liberation emanates from people who have been positioned on the 'darker side' of Western modernity – and the subjection that comes with it (Mignolo 2011) – it will always be a philosophy against war (Maldonado-Torres 2008) and one that can be utilised to imagine alternative economies, politics and academies of the Global South. In other words, humanisation of the peoples and places of the Global South is the call of the decolonised university in Africa.

The Westernised University in Africa

The Euro-American model of the university has its origins in the theosophical age of the Ancient Western world. As Immanuel Wallerstein (2004) observes, at that time only religious authorities had a claim to knowledge production and circulation, and to preach was to teach. The era of the Enlightenment eroded this model by dethroning much of religiosity and instituting a knowledge system based on reason and science (Wallerstein 2004). This was also when ideas of freedom were born alongside ideas of conquest, as explorers and travellers from the West toured and 'discover' new lands for Empire, and academic disciplines acquired their genealogies and provenances. In what Immanuel Wallerstein (2004) calls the 'divorce', the humanities and the arts were separated from the sciences, and both were further split into various disciplines that remain in circulation within the Euro-American model of the university today.

In the westernised university in the Global South, the 'structure of knowledge' remains White, male, Euro-American-centric, and in many ways alien (Grosfoguel 2013). Black people, women and 'others' circulate in this model of the university as the perpetual students of the Euro-American men, who are privileged with legitimisation as knowledge sources and canonised as authorities and fathers of the academic disciplines. For the peoples of the Global South, Paulo Freire (2020) argued, higher education should not just be neutral education – it should be relevant and reparative; that is, it must respond to their history of conquest, colonisation, enslavement and domination.

In the westernised or colonial model of the university, the education system and structure of knowledge commit what are called epistemicides, a term coined by Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2015) to describe the systematic destruction or devaluing of indigenous languages and knowledge systems. Santos (2015) observes that knowledges of the Global South and the indigenous languages that carry them are dismissed in the westernised and colonial university model as not knowledge but rather myths and superstitions that should not be taken seriously. He argues for the

resurrection and legitimisation of ‘epistemologies of the South’ and ‘justice against epistemicides’; decolonising higher education involves giving these knowledges the respect, recognition, and legitimation they deserve. Santos (2018) notes that Euro-American knowledges in the westernised university constitute a ‘cognitive empire’ that forbids and prohibits the legitimation of knowledges and languages of the Global South. This cognitive empire, he argues, must be ended through decolonisation and by legitimating the knowledges and languages of the Global South in the universities of the South. Santos (2012) insists that currently the colonial university is a ‘university at the crossroads’, which continues to further coloniality rather than advance much-needed decolonisation and liberation.

Responding to Santos’s argument, Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) argues that the ‘cognitive empire’ of Euro-American knowledges in the westernised university in Africa forbids ‘epistemic freedom’ of Africans who are mentally and intellectually captured and dominated by Euro-American languages and knowledges. The westernised university imposes Euro-American thinkers as the only legitimate and credible thinkers on whom Africans can rely for knowledge, methods, theories and philosophies. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) notes that Euro-American knowledges are legitimated as scientific while African knowledges and languages are systemically excluded as superstitions, myths and non-knowledges. Even what are purported to be African studies in the westernised university in Africa are not relevant African studies. Mahmood Mamdani (1989) argues that African studies in colonial universities in Africa are ‘African studies made in the USA’ because Africa is studied and understood through Euro-American theories and perspectives that distort rather than reveal African realities. Mamdani (1998) insists that African studies in this context are merely another version of ‘Bantu education’, which was designed by the apartheid regime to subjugate Black people and make them only literate enough to serve the apartheid system and not to liberate themselves.

This imposition of Euro-American knowledges led Ali Mazrui (2003) to observe that intellectualism had been killed in the African postcolonial era. Mazrui noted that the dominance of Western epistemologies created African intellectual dependency on the Euro-American empire, which continued to exercise indirect control of African polities and economies after the dethronement of juridical colonialism in Africa. In the view of Walter Rodney (2018), one of the ways in which Europe underdeveloped Africa was by drowning Africans in schools and universities in Euro- American knowledges and languages that educated them away from Africa and exported their imagination to Western places and interests inimical to African

liberation. As a result, Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o (1998) argued that Africans needed to decolonise their minds and hearts because the education systems and languages used in African schools and universities were colonising and alienating for Africans. According to Mazrui (2003), African universities were not African and needed to be Africanised if Africans were to begin to imagine their own liberation. The universities purporting to be African are, according to Grosfoguel (2013), actually westernised universities on the soil of the Global South. When Kwame Nkrumah (1970) philosophised about the decolonisation of Africa in his book *Consciencism*, he concluded that westernised education in African universities and the education of African elites in Europe and America were the cause of Africans not thinking straight about the liberation and unity of their continent. Westernised education alienated Africans from Africa and turned them into agents of Euro-American coloniality and cultural imperialism.

That Africa is the continent with the most natural resources but host to the poorest people under the sun is, according to Andrews and Okpanachi (2012), because Africans and African leaders are epistemically oppressed and continue to live intellectually dependent on their former colonisers. Continents and countries develop and modernise based on the science and knowledge of their people. Africa's continued underdevelopment, according to Pauline Hountondji (1990), is the result of Africa's scientific dependency on Europe and America, whose epistemologies were never designed to free but rather to capture and dominate Africans. Africans cannot imagine possibilities beyond those framed for them by the Empire. Before Africans can attain political and economic liberation, they should imagine and attain epistemic freedom (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018), which Westernised, colonial universities in Africa fail to provide.

#RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall Movements in the Westernised Universities in Africa

In 2016, South African university students spontaneously launched the #RhodesMustFall movement, which successfully protested the removal of the statue of Cecil John Rhodes from the University of Cape Town (UCT) campus. That students in a South African university could no longer stand passing by the statue of an empire builder is a telling gesture. The students, argues Amit Chaudhuri (2016), sought to clear the university and themselves of the memory of the Empire that conquered their ancestral lands. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) insists that the students' struggle was a struggle for epistemic freedom. The statue of Rhodes was also a metaphor for the Euro-American memory and epistemology that had affixed its signature

in the university system in Africa, and the students could no longer bear it. The real reason behind the protest for the removal of the statue was decolonisation, as Rhodes was an empire builder and symbolised colonisation and subjugation. After the symbolic gesture of a student who poured faeces on the statue, the student protests spread, even as far as Oxford University in the United Kingdom, the home of Cecil John Rhodes and the Empire whose face and front he became. Silence in the face of the provocative and irritating statue of an Empire builder on the campus would itself have been negligence and violence, argues Suntosh Pillay (2016). Although symbolic and possibly ceremonial, the removal of the statue represented the struggle of the students in South Africa, specifically, and Africa generally, against the alienating effects of the westernised university in Africa (Nyamnjoh 2017). The struggle was an expression of what Choudhury (2021) calls 'Black pain' at the sight of symbols and epistemologies of Empire that continue to haunt the university spaces of what are supposed to be African universities in Africa, not westernised universities in Africa.

Following the #RhodesMustFall protests, in October 2015 students at the University of the Witwatersrand started the #FeesMustFall movement and the protests quickly spread to other universities. #FeesMustFall was the students' response to exorbitant university fees, according to Langa Malose (2017). The real reason behind the protests was that education in the colonial universities in South Africa and Africa has increasingly become a commodity that is sold to those who can afford it, and Black students and the poor majority are excluded from it. The commoditisation of education and marketisation of knowledge are a huge part of the coloniality of the westernised university in Africa and the Global South. The westernised university in South Africa was founded 'to educate the sons of Empire', and had to be liberated by African students who were descendants of those who had been conquered and dominated by the Empire. As such, both of these 'Fallist' movements were engaged in liberation struggles that were inspired by a philosophy of liberation. Dussel (1985) insists that the philosophy of liberation is a weapon of oppressed Blacks, students, women, and workers of the Global South who have been on the receiving end of Empire and its desires and fears. Godsell, Chikane and Mpofu-Walsh (2016) argue that the #FeesMustFall movement was a revolt against coloniality in the African postcolonial academy. Beyond epistemic freedom, the students demanded material and economic freedom; they demanded an end to the commodification and marketisation of education, which should be a public good. In other words, they demanded a decolonised university in Africa, liberated from colonial

memories, capitalist fees, and the Euro-American epistemologies that enveloped the university on African soil. Robert Kriger (2016) documents how the westernised university in South Africa, in particular, and Africa in general, was actualised through financing from the private sector. It is conceivable that the decolonised university in Africa may benefit from the political will of African polities and from private-sector funding. But what would the decolonised university in Africa look like? The following section of the present essay delves into an imagination of the decolonised university in Africa from the perspective of the philosophy of liberation.

The Decolonised University in Africa

The decolonisation of African countries, which began in earnest in the 1960s, focused on political independence and somewhat neglected the important project of decolonising cultures and education systems that remained colonial and westernised. Francis Nyamnjoh (2019) observes that universities made an effort to Africanise their staff but did not Africanise their curricula, pedagogical structures or epistemologies. As a result, the decolonisation of the university in Africa and the de-westernisation of curricula remain the ‘unfinished business’ of decolonisation and liberation (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2019). Mbembe (2016) observes that the decolonisation of the university, together with the liberation of curricula and syllabi, is feasible, except for resistance from the beneficiaries of coloniality that erect arguments about ‘international standards and grading systems’.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2019) posits that the decolonised university would recognise Africa as a legitimate site of knowledge production and Africans as competent knowledge producers. According to Mahmood Mamdani (2019), this would be a university that marries excellence with relevance to African communities; in other words, it would be one shaped by the values of the philosophy of liberation and its aspirations for an empowered Africa and a liberated Global South.

Perhaps the first quality of a decolonised university in Africa would be its multilingualism. African languages should be brought in to co-exist with Euro-American languages that have been made dominant and hegemonic as languages of education and science in the westernised university in Africa. Madiba (2018) notes that multilingualism would be normalised and naturalised in the decolonised university that legitimates African cultures and histories in knowledge production and circulation. Antia (2015) states that multilingualism should not be a cosmetic option

but a political necessity, that must be backed by robust language policies and regulations that allow students to choose to conduct their research and write their research outputs in African languages. Languages are part of a people's being and belonging, so Africans should be enabled to study in their own languages rather than in colonial languages that are alienating. Brian Sibanda (2024) draws on the work of Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o to defend African languages as potent instruments of teaching and learning in African universities, which should be equipped with translation technologies and services that would permit the translation of students' research outputs into multiple languages for wider circulation and cultural exchange. Wa Thiong'o (2012) insists that there should be no excuse for not integrating African languages into African higher education systems, because translation remains the language of languages, enabling people speaking different languages to engage in dialogue and exchange ideas. The feasibility of multilingualism in the decolonised university would be based on the establishment of translation departments that ensure academic and scholarly works written in indigenous languages are translated into other indigenous and colonial languages, thereby allowing for intellectual dialogue and exchange in the academy (Prah 2022). Further to multilingualism, the decolonised university should be a site of human diversity. Peoples from different geographies, cultures and biographies should populate the university to legitimise inclusivity. May (2012) states that staff, students and university management should come from different races, cultures, nationalities and positionalities to enrich the university's diversity and inclusivity in Africa. This diverse and inclusive university would be the opposite of the current colonial university, which Ramon Grosfoguel (2013) has critiqued as the domain of Western men who have systemically dominated thinking as the only legitimate knowledge producers and teachers in the university.

The decolonised university in Africa should also be epistemically diverse and inclusive. People from different races, biographies, genders, and positionalities should bring with them diverse epistemologies and intellectual sensibilities. Unlike the westernised and colonial university, the decolonised university in Africa should normalise, naturalise and legitimate epistemic exchanges and dialogues. Epistemic diversity should, according to Rolin (2019), be a significant quality and character of the decolonised university of the Global South. Cognitive justice demands that there should be epistemic diversity and inclusivity and a break with the colonial monologues (Sikimic 2023). There should be epistemic diversity, multidisciplinary, multi-perspectivity and cross-cultural comparative research in the university of the Global South (Xu 2022).

This epistemic diversity should make the decolonised university a site of creative and productive intellectual exchange that sees the world from different scientific and philosophical loci.

Over and above human and epistemic diversity, the university space and architecture should be accessible and inclusive of different needs and enable easy access to those living with different disabilities. The campus should also accommodate mental and emotional differences. African students and staff should not have to be exposed to statues and monuments that memorialise conquerors and enslavers like Cecil John Rhodes. This also applies to ceremonies and rituals that invoke memories of conquest, Empire and coloniality. In the decolonised university, Wong (2014) argues, there should also be decolonised architecture and built environments that have no physical and emotional barriers for the diverse students and staff. The built environment should promote a sense of belonging to the university of diverse human beings and the epistemologies and sensibilities they embody. There should be no part of the university space that should be haunting or alienating for anybody (Shuayb 2020). University spaces and locations should be reparative in the argument of Ariana Stokas (2023), in the sense that they must be cognitive of the emotional and affective wounds of those who have histories of enslavement, colonisation and domination.

What Paul Tiyambe Zeleza (2018) calls the ‘giant challenge of higher education in Africa’ is the ‘consumerisation of students’, the ‘marketisation of the university’ and the ‘commodification of knowledge’. The student protests of the #FeesMustFall movement were intended to free the universities from this market-driven approach and the commodification of knowledge. One hallmark of the decolonised university must be its treatment of knowledge and knowledge production as public goods and services. Knowledge should not be seen merely as an academic artefact or intellectual output; it should also facilitate social justice and serve the interests of humans, the planet, and the environments that constitute it. This is what Achille Mbembe (2021) refers to as ‘thoughts on the planetary’, that is, knowledge that goes beyond the anthropocentric interests of humans to the interests of the planet and the preservation, health and balance of all aspects of the environment. The decolonised university in Africa should acknowledge that it is the university of peoples and places that have suffered conquest and know the violence of Empire and its capitalist extractivism, which reduced nature to natural resources to be exploited at the expense of ecological balance, resulting in environmental catastrophes that are explained away as natural disasters. As such, the

decolonised university in Africa will be home not only to academics and scholars but also to public intellectuals, activists, and others concerned with environmental issues and global interests.

Frequently, when decolonisation of the university is discussed, the questions of the future of quality education and international standards arise. These questions, however well-meant, arise from an unfortunate space in which African people and their communities are not trusted to provide quality education, conduct rigorous research, and uphold international standards. People forget that quality and standards are not exactly products but processes that any academic, intellectual, or student can be capable of mastering. As Mahmood Mamdani (2016) postulates, the decolonised university in Africa should combine local relevance with international excellence and competitiveness – it should be locally rooted in Africa and internationally relevant and present. From a philosophy of liberation perspective, human and epistemic diversity, inclusive infrastructure, and reparative spaces are to be part of quality and standards, not their substitutes or replacements. It is a colonial and racist myth that when the westernised university is decolonised, quality education and international standards will automatically be expelled. In fact, it is the colonial university model, with its exclusion of indigenous languages and knowledges, that lacks some fundamental qualities and standards that liberation demands. In the decolonised university in Africa, the knowledges, languages and histories of African peoples should be central to the university.

Conclusion

The Euro-American model of the university has been made hegemonic in the Global South in general, and it must be decolonised if the African university is to be realised. This essay has deployed the philosophy of liberation perspective to critique the Westernised university in Africa and flesh out an image of a decolonised university that would be locally rooted and globally relevant. This decolonised university would answer to local relevance and international excellence in multilingualism, human and epistemic diversity, and inclusive architecture and infrastructures. It would be reparative in the sense that its spaces, locations and landscapes would take cognisance of the wounds of those whose histories include experiences of conquest, enslavement and domination. In this university, knowledge and knowledge production will be restored to their status as public goods and services that protect our ecosystems and contribute to the peace, security, and well-being of all living things on our planet – in other words, the decolonised university in Africa will be a planetary university.

The planetary university is what philosophers of liberation and decolonial theorists have called the pluriversity, grounded in the plurality of human identities and knowledges, and in diversity. The decolonised university in Africa would be an academy that provides answers to the difficult political, economic, cultural and philosophical questions and dilemmas imposed on Africa.

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