Inclusive higher education learning outcomes for rural and township youth: Developing a multi-dimensional capabilities-based higher education index.

DECOLONIZATION AND KNOWLEDGE INEQUALITIES

MIRATHO WORKING PAPER 2017/4

Carmen Martinez Vargas
martinezvargas.carmen@gmail.com

Decolonization and Knowledge Inequalities:
Towards a pluriversity[1] of approaches, including
participatory research

Carmen Martinez Vargas

INTRODUCTION

Modern universities today are complex and diverse institutions. They have to date managed

to bring together to a great extent, diverse groups of people to work together and generate

knowledge. While this has been successful at times, it is a process that needs constant iteration

to make it even better. In my own case, I am a female and white international doctoral

candidate from Europe, Spain in particular, studying and reading for my doctoral degree in

South Africa. My institution is itself a unique and fast changing one— historically the

institution served predominantly white South Africans and taught classes in Afrikaans but

now has a majority of black students who do not wish to learn in Afrikaans. There is a growing

presence of English as medium of instruction, confirmed by recent changes to the language

policy. The academic staff composition is itself changing, albeit more slowly, but is now more

---

[1] Puriversity (Mbembe, 2015; Boidin, Cohen & Grosfoguel, 2012) refers to the intellectual project of transforming the current university into a pluriversity able to embrace other knowledge systems, as part of the decolonization project. 'Pluriversalism would involve a radical re-founding of our ways of thinking and a transcendence of our disciplinary divisions' (Boidin, Cohen & Grosfoguel, 2012:3) And Mbembe says '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' (Mbembe, 2015:19). Mignolo (2007) use the terminology as 'pluriversality', which refers to the global intellectual project of de-linking from past universalism to a pluriverse of multi-realities. And Dussel, names transmodernity as a way to achieve this pluriverse of comsovisions (Boidin, Cohen & Grosfoguel, 2012).

diverse, and includes some international staff from Africa and elsewhere [2] . These circumstances challenge the ways in which we think about colonization or neo-colonialism and how knowledge is produced. While old systems prevail, new and more complex processes also develop, demanding that we rethink our universities; the recent emergence of student demands for decolonization of universities and the curriculum is one indicator of changing times. Decolonization therefore, has taken the form of a multiplicity of strategies. I want to argue that the multiplicity of strategies for knowledge creation is set in the right direction when it comes to dealing with knowledge inequalities, especially when it comes to an individual researcher's attempt to make a small but concerted contribution to this endeavor.

FORMAL EDUCATION AND UNIVERSITIES: FORWARDS, BACKWARDS OR BOTH?

The university has historically been a space of contradiction and struggle at the same time as an agent of change and promoter of counterhegemonic discourses (Castells, 2001). Especially in neo-colonial contexts, the debate about what universities should teach, how, by which scholars and under which epistemological systems, is a demanding issue currently in South Africa, but not limited to it (De Sousa Santos, 2006b; 2012; Hall & Tandon, 2017). The past year has shown how South African higher education institutions are a space of decolonial struggle in form and content, which has achieved its maximum expression in different students' movements: #FeesMustFall, highlighting the commodification of universities thanks to a more market-instrumental understanding of education, together with the perpetuation of colonial inequalities; and, #RhodesMustFall as a direct critique of symbols, attitudes, formal and informal culture and curriculum that still shape the higher education sector (Naicker, 2016; Bosch, 2017, Becker, 2016, Luescher, Loader & Mugume, 2016). Thus, Kovach (2012) states that 'the decolonization of the African Academy remains one of the biggest challenges, not only in terms of the curriculum, teaching strategies, and text books, but also in terms of the democratization of knowledge, and the regeneration and adaptation of old epistemologies to suit new post-colonial realities' (Kovack, 2012 cited in Emeagwali &

[2] For more information see Institutional Audit Repost July 2016 'Towards the next phase of transformation at the University of the Free State: The Academic and Human project as drivers of transformation'

Dei, 2014:4). Therefore, decolonizing the academy not only relates to curriculum change but beyond that, the reconsideration of the very pillars of the academic institution and its hegemonic onto-epistemology[3], which claims a unique reality - universal and detached from humans - and a rigid construction of knowledge creation, not validating other knowledge systems (De Sousa Santos, 2006b). Shizha (2014) claims that even today South Africa possesses a Colonial-European educational system, which is in nature different from the cultural capital of the majority of students; it promotes identity problems, emotional distress and educational failure. Colonial educational systems for Shizha (2014) alienate students and teachers from their cultural background and this becomes even more accentuated when they access higher education institutions.

Obiokor (2014) highlights that Nigerian education has ended up blaming the students for their inability to transform themselves into another culture through endless individualized examinations; for Obiokor (2014) it is a western education system, which is disconnected from autochthonous knowledge, culture and values. Wa Thiong'o (1994) conceptualizes the western educational system as a racial space with a hierarchical structure, which promotes an ideological apartheid with the university being its apex. Dei (2014) states that curriculum formally and informally negates and omits Africans roots, and that the decolonization process should start with a will to explore indigenous knowledge. For Dei (2014) a possible solution is to support indigenous knowledge in formal education systems from school to universities, as for instance, the creation of research centres in indigenous knowledge and African languages. Shiza (2014) supports equally, a pedagogical space, which is able to value what students bring to school and engage in dialogues with teachers, investigating pedagogical practices and learning together. For Shiza (2014) knowledge should be context specific, serve communities and societies and allow student cultures, languages, values and worldviews to

---

[3] Onto-epistemology refers to the combination of ontology and epistemology. Barad (2007) states that 'The separation of epistemology from ontology is a reverberation of a metaphysics that assumes an inherent difference between human and nonhuman, subject and object, mind and body, matter and discourse. Onto-epistemology, the study of practices of knowing in being- is probably a better way to think about the kind of understandings that we need to come to terms with how specific intra-actions matter' (2007:185).

be integrated in the way of learning. Not creating a new system of exclusion for other knowledge systems, but as an integration in the formal curriculum, initiating the learning process from local knowledges and connecting them in knowledge networks internationally as well.

However, it is easy to fall into the trap of oversimplification or into an antagonist positionality. The complexity of the educational space should not be essentialized as a homogenous system, neither should it develop a blindness advocacy, assuming that all is apposite, pertinent and right; or by contrast, a blindness opposition, stating that all the system is undesirable, misplaced or inadequate. Formal education systems are spaces of contradictions (Castells, 2001). Therefore, the aim of this paper is to highlight the complexities and potentialities to create a pluriversity able to embrace the onto-epistemological diversity of the world, flexibilizing the borders of science and society as large. To do so, I will explore briefly key points within colonialism, modernism and capitalism, as well as the role of science, knowledge and truth, to better understand what decolonization debates claim and how a suitable rhetoric about decoloniality might look.

COLONIALISM, MODERNISM AND CAPITALISM

Since the fifteen century, colonialism and imperialism have played a major role in the western[4] conquest of other nations and the West's power expansion across the world (Parra-Romero, 2016). Indeed, it is obvious for postcolonial scholars that this phenomenon goes beyond the conquest of territory; it is framed, equally, as a political and intellectual invasion and exploitation (Chilisa, 2012; Wa Tiong'o, 1994). Chilisa (2012: 29) states that colonialism was 'a brutal process through which two thirds of the world experienced invasion and loss of territory accompanied by the distribution of political, social, and economic systems, leading to external political control and economic dependence on the West'. For Chilisa, this power over territories accelerated not only the loss of territory, but the loss of local knowledge systems, cosmovisions and beliefs. Wa Tiong'o (1994) supports a similar perspective stating

---

[4] Western civilization is, in this paper, linked to the North Atlantic block. It is a European-American composition and structure, that it is resituated from the west to the North Atlantic (Mignolo, 2000).

that it was a psychic and mental conquest, appropriating the wealth of those societies including territories and goods but equally, establishing a colonized universe, imposing a culture, institutions, languages and social and political systems as a unique and hegemonic world paradigm. For Anzaldua (1987) the colonization process does not differ from her African counterparts, claiming the bleeding of colonial contexts due to the traumatic imposition of identities through Eurocentric-consciousness.

In this Western-Eurocentric conquest, the formation of the 'other' played a crucial role. The 'other' was a construction by Europeans to designate local peoples as inferior (Chilisa, 2012) framed as an object through a European lens (Semali & Kincheloe, 2002). Colonies were understood to be inhabited by savages under an irrational, unorganized and unhuman world, opposite to the modern world, developed Europe (Fanon, 2007). It was the integration with nature and the absence of an alphabet that led the conquerors to think that they were savages. Situating the colonized in a state of nature would later be used by other European writers to sustain their superiority. Bartolome de las Casas reflected on native inhabitants as 'innocent children', who needed to learn and be converted to Christianity because their own spiritual beliefs were inferior (Mignolo 2007). Furthermore, understanding people as lesser forms of humanity enabled the justification to situate the colonized under European law, creating a lawless threshold, and allowing the colonizers to kill without committing a crime (Mbembe, 2011; Zibechi, 2015). Because as Zibechi (2015) states it established a threshold between those recognized as humans and those who were not, a 'being zone' and a 'not-being zone' (Zibechi, 2015:19).

The combination and accumulation of all these interpretations created a 'monolithic and static-romanticized other', just in the moment when Europe was embarking on the modernism phase, claiming reason over tradition (Ranger, 1997; Parra-Romero, 2016). However, for Dussel (2007) modernity started not in the XVIII century, with the Illustration [5] period, as some authors have sustained, but in the end of the VX century with the discovery

---

[5] Dussel (1994) refers to the illustration period in the S.XVIII century as late modernism. It is a philosophical movement catapulted by the European industrial revolution and the definitive establishment of Europe as hegemonic system, intellectually, economically and politically. However, Dussel (2007) highlights that the illustration period is more than British empiricism. It arises from large industrial areas composed by an industrial ideological bourgeoisie, which started to replace authority by reason and empiric methods.

of America. In this historical moment four phenomenon were articulated for Dussel: modernity, European empires, colonialism and the capitalism system. Dussel (2000) exposes that modernity is eurocentric, due to the internal events that are considered the precursor of modernity within Europe, but equally states that it is its universalist pretention what converted it into a Eurocentric hegemony. That is why Mignolo (2007) states that Modernity, instead of being a step beyond the European Middle Ages, it was actually constructed as a reaction against tradition, represented 'externally' by the colonies. Thus all those contexts which did not fit into the modern mind-set styles and regulations were considered as 'barbarians' and backward in terms of modern evolution (Lander, 2000; Castro-Gomez, 2000).

These logics and rhetoric were maintained for centuries, imposing a master-servant relationship between the colonizer and the colonized (Ranger, 1997), allowing slavery and human trading as a logical and legitimate practice. That is indeed the chain of justifications, which allowed Europeans to commit morally deplorable acts against inhabitants in Africa with the collusion of local Africans (Mbembe, 2011; Zibechi, 2015). As Cameroff and Cameroff (1997) state, contemporary European thinkers from the enlightenment such as Hume or Rousseau, promoted such ideas, writing about the intellectual superiority of the white over the black mind (Rousseau), or Hume, claiming that territories composed by black populations were rarely civilized. However, exclusion was not only related to skin colour but also people's proximity to nature and tradition, opposite to the reasoned cultivation and urban lifestyle of European modernism (Mignolo, 2007).

Mbembe (2011) has exposed the same problematic, focusing on race and colonialism using a Foucaultian approach, deconstructing racism as a way to classify populations under subgroups, which are biologically provided by natural sciences. The biopower concept from Foucault helps Mbembe to understand race under the shadow of occidental social class struggle, due to the construction of the 'other' and its structures of domination. For Mbembe, as for many postcolonial scholars, this recognizes the logic underlying the European enlightenment and modernism through a claim of universal laws and the conceptualization of an external reality, which is permanent and separate from human beings, and therefore objective and universal.

However, is colonialism a question of the past or a present challenge? For postcolonial scholars, the colonial question remains a present and urgent issue. Wa Thiong'o (1994; 2010) has named 'neo-colonies', referring to the actual situation of domination over the periphery that still perpetuates the interpretation and definition of the 'others' under European logics and perpetuates injustices through cultural and political impositions such as colonial language and identity formation. On the other hand, Mbembe (1992) named it 'postcolony', referring to present colonial space, which still sustains identity assimilation and covers a 'regime of violence' (1992:3) under a veil of ignorance. For Mbembe (1992), it is a process of internal colonization, represented as a colonized consciousness. The colonized internalize the structures of oppression and follow the institutionalized system without questioning. Appiah (1993) as well as Wa Thiong'o use the terminology of neocolonial territory, where alter-identities are constructed through the codes of the colonizer, using their languages and admiring the historical figures as a unique and valid history, while, living the negation and stigmatization of their own person as an inferior entity. Dei (2014) as well, uses the terminology of neo-colonial territories, visualizing the colonial issue as ongoing from a Fanonist perspective. For Dei (2014) it is essential to analyze critically the construction of the past and what persists in the present to enable us to initiate a change.

For a few scholars, what is mostly problematic, it is the imposition of a universal-unique worldview. The modern construction was inspired by the Cartesian ontological rift, which separated the world from reason and humans from nature. It gave a compendium of laws that organized nature and other human beings under knowledge that was objectified and detached from body and context, claiming universality and objectivity (Dussel, 2007, Lander, 2000; Castro-Gomez, 2000). But not only that, it established a linear logic of evolution, traced by their own Eurocentric interpretation of reality. This linear logic gave positionalities to the objects and subjects, classifying them as more or less advanced in terms of their own colonial understandings of progress and evolution (Lander, 2000). That is why Mignolo (2007) provides the progression "Christianity-Civilisation-Modernity-Market Democracy", in a colonial/imperial lineal transition of 'progress' which provides an explicit improvement from one to another. In this space, Mignolo (2007) considers the Enlightenment period as the foci of universality. Mignolo (2007) states that the Enlightenment bourgeoisie, who wanted to be

secular from Christianity and free from the Monarchy, claimed and achieved their freedom to inquire without dogmas. However, they also established and maintained a new dogmatic system that prevails until today, with the same pretensions of universalism and dogmatism. That is why for Mignolo (2007) colonialism and modernism are not separate but developed one to another until the neoliberal component had taken over its modernist discourse, reshaped the borders of the planet as economic development, dividing once again but with a different rhetoric of developed/underdeveloped.

In this new redistribution of the world, neoliberalism is the alpha system, which, activated by colonial and modern machinery provided the perfect growth for capitalism, mainly benefiting powerful countries (Dussel, 2007). It dictated new logics, which have commodified all goods and living entities as the unique way to advance 'progress' and 'development', leading to a really narrow understanding (Lander, 2000; Brown, 2015). It has evolved in a global competition towards a unique understanding of development, as 'economic growth' (Lander, 2000), and therefore, it has transformed the old colonial/modern system into an alternative rhetoric of dominance, however, under the same universal logics (Wa Tiong'o, 1994). Nonetheless, where does knowledge stand in this complex system?

KNOWLEDGE AND MODERNISM

Some academics have paid special attention to the politics of knowledge and knowledge inequalities in different aspects. Whitt (2009) states that historians of science have allowed the rise of a counter-hegemonic discourse highlighting cultural and economic domination through natural science. He (2009, xiii-xiv) claims that 'the conduct of imperial science by nation-states during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and its effect upon other nation-states, has led historians of science to conclude that the issue is no longer science in imperial history but science as imperial history'. Whitt highlights the inequalities regarding the access of indigenous knowledge to the mainstream market of knowledge production, and names 'biocolonialism', which combined the capitalist system and the new imperial science.

However, another perspective taken by scholars is not the imposition and power over other epistemologies and ontologies but the historical appropriation of knowledge by Europeans.

These scholars perceive a need to deconstruct the history of European science, knowledge and culture as composed from (but not acknowledged) other civilizations, including its blackness (Diop, 2010; Appiah, 2010). Smith (1999) from an indigenous perspectives states that Europe not only imposed a unique system but also stole and appropriated knowledge from other civilizations and/or communities and continues doing it into the present, taking it locally and bringing it back to Europe as new knowledge without recognizing its indigeneity. Similarly, Semali and Kincheloe (2002), Diop (2010) and Appiah (2010), question the European-white-male-adult origin of western civilization, culture and knowledge. They all share the argument that white western civilization negates its black origins, from our common homo sapiens-sapiens biological chain or from the blackness of Egypt and the construction of Greece from Egyptian knowledge (Diop, 2010). For Diop (2010) it is not only the acceptance of a black history, it is the persistent negation of an African history, the history of the 'others' promoting the invisibility of a common ground. Appiah (2010) from a slightly different thesis than Diop, claims a similar argument that it seems that for western civilization that Africa has never contributed in any way to the universal history of the world.

However, such static divisions and perfectly lineal transitions seem difficult to maintain, due to our globalized context and the continued interrelation between different cultures, knowledges and cosmovisions. These complexities have been exposed by several authors. De Sousa Santos (2006a) explains that South and North do not represent a static nor a well delimited territory, it represents logics which give sense to the way we live and our ontological and epistemological assumptions. Therefore, it is referred to as a geopolitical space, which makes possible a north in the south, and it can be found equally as a south in the north (De Sousa Santos, 2015).

On the other hand, Whitt (2009) exposes his concerns with western/indigenous, north/south, scientific/traditional divisions. But like De Sousa Santos (2006a), Whitt (2009, xvi) claims a 'dominant knowledge system'. He states, 'I have in mind a fairly specific but enormously influential strain of the western intellectual heritage. Referred to as "positivism" in its earliest incarnation, I am more concerned here with its current "neopositivist" manifestation. Although, purportedly dead as a movement, the spirit of positivism continues to haunt much of western science and philosophy'. For Whitt (2009) the indigenous category includes all

those civilizations which were invaded, negated and exploited during centuries and those who still suffer the consequences of imperialism and colonialism in the present.

Soldatenko (2015) explains that the question does not lies in discrediting western knowledge but critiquing its European-male-white construction and imposition on the rest of the world as a unique and universal knowledge, which Castro-Gomez named as 'zero point', which refers to 'the imaginary position of those who claim neutral objectivity for themselves, an unseen position that presumes to see all' (Soldatenko, 2015:140). It is a knowledge-colonized system that is established as a unique valid form to know, as a technic-scientific rationality (Parra-Romero, 2016). This is considered the only legitimate way to know and institutes a dominant political system of truth, invalidating other knowledge systems which have not been recognized or corroborated by the established procedure (Smith, 1999; Lander, 2000). These logics not only narrow the richness of human knowledge and wisdom but also obscure and ignore other knowledge systems (Zibechi, 2015). It is through this frame that European modernism has defined the 'other' from the objectifying approach of the individuals measuring and valuing other cultures according to that surrealistic 'zero point' (Nnameka, 2004), proclaiming modernity over the 'others', whichever they are and whichever positionalities they support (Semali & Kincheloe, 2002). Hleta (2016) has described this process as 'epistemological blindness', which within the educational systems means the perpetuation of ignorance over other cosmovisions, as for instance in the continent of Africa or South America (Hleta, 2016). De Sousa Santos describes 'epistemicide', which refers to the 'murder of knowledge' (De Sousa Santos, 2015:149). It is the destruction of other knowledge systems, together with social practices and the individuals who follow that knowledge, promoting a dominant western epistemological canon (De Sousa Santos, 2015).

Highlighting Spivak's ideas, Hleta (2016), exposes the complexities of colonial subjectification determined by imperial epistemology, so that the colonized come to believe that they do not have anything to contribute to European modernity and that 'their only option is to blindly follow the "enlightened" colonizers, learn from them, adopt their worldviews and fit into the periphery of the world as second-class citizens' (Hleta, 2016:4). That is why Shiva (2000) explains that, based on arbitrary criteria, a western ontology was imposed on the rest of the world, as global as the only civilized knowledge, rejecting the

multiple historical contributions to sciences from other cultures and other indigenous people (Shiva, 2000). The irony, according to Smith (1999), is that 'this form of global knowledge is generally referred to as universal knowledge, available to all and not really "owned" by anyone' (Smith, 1999:63).

In this argument, there is no pretension to fully support these visions, but to highlight their contribution to the main discourses regarding science as neutral and universal within the politics of truth (Girei, 2017; Escobar, 2007). From a western perspective, in its logics and practices, positivism, 'rationality' and 'science' are considered the aims to achieve social progress or success, but equally are established as a system of political truth (Girei, 2017; Foucault, 1982, 2002; Derrida, 2003; Soldatenko, 2015; Lander, 2000). However, centuries of hegemony have shown little attention by modern European thinking, together with its neo-liberal counterpart, about redistribution, equity or justice beyond the theoretical space (Emeagwali & Dei, 2014), but equally, ignoring ontological and epistemological factual justice[6].

That is why for Mignolo (2007) it is imperative to stop thinking that all knowledge is created by the imperial consciousness, replicating the superior discourse of universality under the modern understanding of reason and its 'irrational myth', as "la pensee unique", therefore,

> The point should be to avoid the 'modern expectation' that there is a world that carries the true meaning of the things instead of the form of consciousness and the universe of meaning in which the world means. Meaning is not a 'true value' but a reflection of cognitive (epistemic and hermeneutic) force and import within particular geo-political designs (Mignolo, 2007:476).

In this sense, reality and truth are related to social power (Girei, 2017). Thus, uni-versal formulas will fail in accounting for the complexity of reality as has happened with some imposed ideologies and doctrines[7], which pretended to be universal and hegemonic (Mignolo, 2007). In this claim for diversity and not uni-versality is where much of the decolonization

---

[6] I refer to ontological and epistemological factual justice as the practical achievement of onto-epistemological justice beyond its theoretical claim.
[7] Mignolo (2007) gives emphasis to Christianity, Islamism, Marxism and Liberalism.

rhetoric is rooted. It accounts for diversification and multiple understandings of the reality-world, which is pluriversal, and it is a pluriversality in the direction of a global project (Mignolo, 2007). It does not unify in a 'uni-versal' project, but intends to diversify the comovisions and knowledges towards a pluri-verse (Bridin, Cohen & Grosfoguel, 2012).

DECOLONIZATION AND EPISTEMOLOGIES OTHERWISE

In light of the complex colonial historical context in knowledge production highlighted above decolonization discourses focus on the need to eradicate the domination and perpetuation of onto-epistemological injustices due to the hegemonic imposition of a unique cosmovision as universal and universally accepted, without accounting for the human pluriverse of knowledges and realities. However, this vision is interpreted with different nuances and at various levels, depending on what is the main focus of the scholar's argument. For instance, Dei (2014) argues for implementation of decolonization from an individual perspective. He identifies the individual as the responsible entity for the interrogation of her/his own colonial codes, ways of thinking and participation in institutions. On the other hand, the most widely supported approach does not provide a clear actor responsible for implementing decolonization but rather asks what exactly needs to be decolonized and, if so, to challenge it. Diop (2010) talks about eradicating 'cultural aggression', for Cesaire (2000, cited in Hleta, 2016) the need is rooted in decolonizing consciousness and the negation of an imposed cosmovision, values, customs and norms. And Emeagwali and Dei (2014), provide a process of five steps to achieve decolonization from an identification phase to a final action phase.

One of the most relevant arguments within decolonization relates to the diversification of dominant discourses, building an equal space for indigenous [8]/border-hegemony knowledge

---

[8] To clarify regarding what falls under the category of indigenous knowledge, Emeagwali and Dei (2014) define indigenous knowledge as 'the cumulative body of strategies, practices, techniques, tools, intellectual resources, explanations, beliefs, and values accumulated over time in a particular locality, without interference and impositions of external hegemonic forces' (Emeagwali & Dei, 2014:1). However, as the authors affirm IK is not a static entity nor a romantization of traditional knowledge. Nevertheless, the indigenous category mostly alienates other movements and cosmovisions that not being per se indigenous, they situate themselves into the 'borders' of the hegemonic thinking. This idea is proposed by Dussel (2007), which encompasses all groups/individuals excluded by their differences, they are all the victims of a colonial, capitalist, sexist-patriarchal, racist, heteronormative system, not

systems. In the indigenous argumentative line, these scholars highlight how indigenous knowledge has been appropriated by western science without being recognized as the property of indigenous knowledge (Smith, 1999). For this group of scholars, the inclusion of indigenous knowledge is a gain per se, due to the limitations of western science in recognizing its ontological, epistemological, political and spiritual blindness (Dei, 2014). Indigenous knowledge is intrinsically valuable in its powerful critique of politics of knowledge and how 'Cartesian-Newtonian epistemological foundationalism' (Semali & Kincheloe, 2002:17) came to provide a unique truth, excluding other realities and knowledge systems. And all these ideas are visible, when providing scientific proofs of ecological crisis, which indigenous/border knowledges are able to embrace through the inclusion of nature as an end and not a means to achieve human flourishing [9].

On the other hand, the 'border' systems as an external geopolitical space proposed by Dussel (2007) can be inclusive of an indigenous perspective without simplifying exclusions from the universal western project. It is a subjectivity of intersubjectivities, being positioned into a social, cultural and epistemological non-hierarchical scale. Dussel (2007) not only highlights the hegemonic space of western uni-versal cosmovision, but also includes the complexity and coexistence of other totalitarian cultures trying to become 'the unique'. In this space, he highlights the contribution of the 'borders' in the past and present history enhancing the injustices and promotion of solidarities to become relevant and dignified human beings. These cosmovisions, are not essentialized but are in progress, creating in the process due to the new challenges of colonial/modernity/neoliberalism (Dussel, 2007). Nevertheless, this vision does not unify all the 'borders' into one but preserves them as plural and diverse.

being physically situated out of the hegemony but ideologically external, representing the border-hegemonic movements in a geopolitical space.

[9]From a dominant Eurocentric understanding of development and human progress, resources are being used as instruments, due to the conquest of humankind over nature. However, as highlighted previously, the ecological crisis has helped to clarify the limitations within this perspective; while the global North is still busy trying to convince super-power-nations to accept ecological protocols, in the global south, measures represent ontological perspectives as in the case of Ecuador, which has included in its Constitution a section focused on the rights of nature (Zaffaroni, 2012). The Ecuadorian Constitution is an example of how other philosophies, as the 'Buen Vivir' represent an ontological turn for human-nature, providing alternative living-modes and relationally with nature as the insurgent movement 'Zapatistas' also does. As Sousa Santos states this idea from a western-Cartesian perspective 'is juridically and ontologically absurd, a true aberration entis' (De Sousa Santos, 2006a:43-44)

However, vehement critiques should not foster 'extremist' positionalities, as Dussel (2007) supports, by not being able to recognize the value per se of western science, culture and 'border' promotion. The point is neither to advocate under the pessimism of no-solution from a western perspective, nor the generalization that all acts, practices and thinking from the North constitute a colonization attempt. As Maldonado-Torres (2016) expresses it, there is no single way, not another dominant positionality, imposing again a new hegemony. Equally, in this matter, Mbembe, Wa Tiong'o (cited in Hleta, 2016) and De Sousa Santos (2006a) are really concise. There is a need to intrinsically highlight the onto-epistemological inequalities, however, the solution does not pretend to be another form of supremacy, but to balance the introduction of alter/border knowledge,

> Keeping distance does not mean discarding the rich Eurocentric critical tradition and throwing it into the dustbin in history, thereby ignoring the historical possibilities of social emancipation in Western modernity. It means, rather, including it in a much broader landscape of epistemological and political possibilities. It means exercising a hermeneutics of suspicion regarding its 'foundational truths' by uncovering what lies below their 'face value'. It means giving special attention to the suppressed or marginalized smaller traditions within the big Western tradition. (De Sousa Santos, 2006a:73-74)

This perspective is equally supported by Mignolo (2007), who states that indeed, it is actually right to pursue a particular cosmovision. He exposes that the problem lies when this regional/local cosmovision is imposed on the rest of the world, in the name of God or under any other superior argument as 'reason' pretending a universalism. Therefore, for Mignolo (2007) the decolonization questions ought to build towards alternatives to neo-liberalism and modernity. And trans-modernity is the terminology used, not only by him (Dussel, 2007, Boidin, Cohen & Grosfoguel, 2012), to propose a border orientation to decolonization, to build under the co-existence of world views towards a pluriverse (Boidin, Cohen & Grosfoguel, 2012; Dussel, 2007). Thus, this way cannot be constructed by 'one ethic group', It needs to be combined with other perspective to provide alter-solutions. Furthermore, judgments of suitability must be under the space of democracy as a dialogue of partial-knowing positions, avoiding a relativist positionality where knowledge can be understood

locally but equally glocally. Moreover, in these democratic dialogues, participatory approaches offer a rich and unconventional research space towards an ecology of knowledges (De Sousa Santos, 2006a). Alternative participatory methodologies, methods and research processes advance the diversity required in decolonial times towards a pluriverse of different knowledge and realities.

ALTERNATIVE PARTICIPATORY METHODOLOGIES, METHODS AND
RESEARCH PROCESSES TOWARDS DECOLONIZATION

Academia has expanded the form of varieties of inquiry that not only observe but equally translate into practice ideas, challenging traditional Cartesian dual distinctions between theory and practice, mind and body or world and reason (Lander, 2000). These ideas contribute to discarding the hegemonic discourse of a unique-universal-objective way of producing knowledge, criticizing the 'positivist' understanding of social science, and introducing alternative paradigms. Thus, nowadays we are in a space of 'paradigmatic controversies and contradictions' where 'inquiry methodology can no longer be treated as a set of universally applicable rules or abstractions' (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011:97). In this contradictory space, academic inquiry seems to enjoy certain kind of freedom to move around the conventional limits of the Eurocentric-academy not, however, without challenges (Girei, 2017). On one hand, there can be found a strand coming from postcolonial thinking generally from the global South, which in its more radical perspective proposes constructing methodologies and research processes from an indigenous perspective, providing a particular typology of indigenous research. On the other hand, the action research strand born initially in the global North, nonetheless takes a more radical positionality when proposed in the South as a variant of Participatory Research (PR) or Participatory Action research (PAR), providing similar arguments as indigenous research.

To provide a better account of these typologies, their supporters and perspectives, in the African strands, the debates focus on designing and rethinking inquiry under local cultures, values, beliefs and worldviews. For instance, Dei (2014) proposes indigenous research, which uses specific methodologies that are African-centered; it is a kind of indigenous African

research. Shizha (2014) exposes the usefulness of knowledge created by indigenous traditional research in helping people in South Africa and Botswana where western healthcare is too expensive and not affordable. Emeagwali and Dei (2014) consider that the decolonization of the African academy needs to take account of epistemological justice, providing a counter-hegemonic system through the democratization of knowledge. Therefore, indigenous research can set up methods and methodologies to achieve epistemic justice, removing the unquestionable 'Eurocentric dogma' (Emeagwali & Dei, 2014:2). For Smith (1999) the focus lies in decolonizing methodologies, ways in which researchers interact with the researched, the way in which issues are framed, and who decides the research topics. For Smith, talking from a Maori community research perspective in New Zealand, the respect and understanding of other epistemologies is necessary to effect just inquiry processes, not denying western scholarship but providing the space to provoke an epistemic dialogue horizontally.

However, although indigenous research and indigenous methodologies are the most visible practices within the decolonization discourse, other methodologies, research methods and inquiry processes have initiated their way within academia, as mentioned before under the name of action research for a more just ontological and epistemological space. I personally prefer to classify them under the name of 'participatory approaches' which encompass more adequately their differences as methods, methodologies and research processes and the diverse grades of participation within practices.

Participatory approaches are also one of the scholarly research lines that from the 1960's has been challenging Cartesian assumptions of universality and objectivity. However, the very beginning of action research is slightly complex, transforming itself historically through endless versions, which are attached to diverse ideological and theoretical influences. I identify three main research lines, which are not pure but interwoven: industrial, development and educational on which I now elaborate.

Action research is mostly known as initiating participatory practices within scholarly knowledge. The terminology was coined by Kurt Lewin [10] (Adelman, 1993), however, his understanding of the methodology was based on pragmatism and efficiency. Working as an industrial psychologist, Lewin explored how to change habits and how social change was produced; and ended up researching how to improve absenteeism within factories for productivity gains (Greenwood & Levin, 2007; Krisitiansen & Blosch-Poulsen, 2016). Lewin thus started an era of industrial action research which continues until today (Rappaport, 2017), although his practices at the end of his career show a strong intention to democratize knowledge, in the sense of including voiceless actors into the scientific creation of knowledge (Adelamn, 1993).

A second group of scholars flourished in Latin America, Africa and India, giving birth to the terminology of participatory action research or participatory research in the line of development-educational practices. In this tradition, there is no agreement of who created the terminology but two authors are considered their precursors: Fals Borda mainly with the terminology of participatory research (Thiollent & Colette, 2017) and Marja-Liisa Swartz (Nyemba & Mayer, 2017) with participatory action research in her work in Tanzania. She specially refers to the Jipemoyo project as her first PAR project from 1975-1979, which aimed to incentivize inhabitants of Jipemoyo in Tanzania to resolve their problems with their own resources (Nyemba & Meyer, 2017).

Secondly, Fals-Borda is recognized as the initiator of Participatory Action Research (PAR) or Participatory Research (PR) in Colombia, which was influenced by a Freirean ideology (Hall, 1997 cited in Brydon-Miller, 2001). These interventions were characterized by aiming for radical social change and emancipation (Kindon, Pain & Kesby, 2007). Participatory Research was a practice focused on oppressed groups and classes as a liberation practice, unlocking injustices produced by the politics of knowledge (Fals Borda & Rahman, 1991). He highlighted the relevance of 'empathetic engagement' in understanding participants and researchers as 'sentipensantes' (thinking-feeling persons). The principal aim of PR was the

---

[10] Even though, Lewin is within the literature the person who coined the term action research, some authors (Gazda et al., 1997; Dash, 1999) refer to Moreno as the methodological inventor. J.L. Moreno was a group psychotherapist in 1914 and he applied action-oriented interventions for groups and inter-group therapies.

combination of different knowledges, supporting excluded groups or communities through investigative techniques (Rappaport, 2017). According to Rappaport (2017), Fals Borda combined rigorous data collection with the participatory process, inviting the community or group to determine the agenda and making them the ultimate owners of the research outcomes as a political tool. The process was thought of as a 'dialogo de saberes' (knowledge dialogue), a communal self-reflection process, combining 'academic and grassroots notions of research' (Rappaport, 2017:147). Rapport states that Vasco Uribe, another contemporary PAR practitioner, thought about the process differently, bringing to the centre ideas and thinking as a research process. For Uribe, it was not necessary to collect data and systematically analyze it and give it back to the community, for him the process of thinking together was a border-hegemonic way of non-academic research.

In the educational context, action research was able to create a particular research area under the name of EAR (Educational Action Research). This typology embraces a diversity of practices that have adopted specific terminologies to differentiate themselves from others (Feldman, 2017). Within this strand, research is focused on the improvement of professional practices, mainly pedagogical practices of teachers in primary and secondary education, helping them to improve their teaching and learning through AR processes (Noffke & Somekh, 2009). However, it is equally found in some combined interventions, situating the critical space of school and its relation to the external academic world, as in the case of CPAR [11] or PALAR[12] (Kemmis, Mc Taggart & Retallick, 2004; Zuber-Skerritt, Fletcher & Kearney, 2015), or giving the space to youth to decide over their own endeavours as YPAR practices in the middle of the way between development and educational participatory studies (Mirra & Rogers, 2016).

Therefore, all these typologies and approaches to research present different features from orthodox practices of research - from a thin involvement of the participants, to an integral participation in the research process - boldly exceeding and challenging what is considered acceptable as research within academia.

---

[11] Critical Participatory Action Research
[12] Participatory Action Learning and Action Research

Action research practices, including those typologies that I did not explicitly mention in this paper, are diverse and heterogeneous. This heterogeneity contributes towards the pluriverse project in different ways. Firstly, it brings to the center the decolonial question and onto-epistemological injustices, providing a practical if 'imperfect solution' to the decolonial question methodologically. Secondly, it seeks to not only highlight onto-epistemological injustices and the modern project of politics of truth, but to signify our own understanding of 'research', what is research for and for whom, in our plural contexts, spaces and time. Thirdly, within a prevalent 'hegemonic space', referring to the higher education sector, it is able to cohabit with other research process and even fuse itself as a way of becoming context specific, providing a diversification of conventional methodologies. Fourthly, this family of approaches represents a set of values, key for the democratization of knowledge and the promotion of ecologies of knowledge through the inclusion of the research participants as co-researchers. That is why, I argue that the decolonial project in the direction of a pluriverse, require the inclusion of participatory approaches as a way to diversify the scientific field that is in a paradigmatic time where, statics, universal and inflexible methodologies are no longer adequate (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011).

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have set out discourses of decoloniality and how they relate to knowledge inequalities. I acknowledged the challenges of colonialism, modernism and capitalism, which according to the literature, highlights a unique reality being imposed through imperialism on the rest of the world as universal and detached from the subject through a Colonial/Eurocentric modernist project. The main discourses have shown that onto-epistemological injustices are in the spotlight of neocolonial rhetoric, providing evidence of the historical blindness towards other cosmovisions and epistemological systems. Different authors have supported the positionality of technic-scientific knowledge as a dominant hegemony with a pretension of universality, noting that universality relates to a dominant system mediated by politics of power and truth. I have proposed this traditional uni-verse to be transformed into a pluri-verse, as a global project. In the sense of, including other cosmovisions and epistemologies as valid and horizontal to the validated/established ones,

and not perpetuating the hegemony by the substitution of a new doctrine or dogmatic system. I concluded that participatory approaches represent imperfect practices, albeit heterogeneous ones towards ecology of knowledges and democratization of knowledge, essential for our paradigmatic times, which claims to us complex solutions for 'glocal' challenges in an interconnected world. The pluriversal project is not an easy one, however, it represents a possible alternative to achieve decolonization imperfectly, from a construction of an incomplete ontological space to embracing and validating other cosmovisions and knowledges towards onto-epistemological justice.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

REFERENCES

Adelman, C. (1993). Kurt Lewin and the origins of action research. Educational action research, 1(1), 7-24.

Anzaldúa, G. (1987). Borderlands: la frontera (Vol. 3). San Francisco: Aunt Lute.

Appiah, K. A. (1993). In my father's house: Africa in the philosophy of culture. OUP USA.

Appiah, K. (2010). Europe Upside Down. Perspectives on Africa: A reader in culture, history and representation, 48.

Barad, K. (2007). Meeting the universe halfway: Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning. duke university Press.

Becker, H. (2016). South Africa's May 1968. Decolonising Institutions and Minds.

Bradbury, H. (Ed.). (2015). The Sage handbook of action research. Sage.

Brown, W. (2015). Undoing the demos: Neoliberalism's stealth revolution. MIT Press.

Boidin, C., Cohen, J., & Grosfoguel, R. (2012). Introduction: From university to pluriversity: A decolonial approach to the present crisis of western universities. Human Architecture, 10(1), 1.

Bosch, T. (2017). Twitter activism and youth in South Africa: The case of# RhodesMustFall. Information, Communication & Society, 20(2), 221-232.

Brydon-Miller, M. (2001). Education, Research, and Action Theory and Methods of Participatory. From subjects to subjectivities: A handbook of interpretive and participatory methods, 76.

Castells, M. (2001). Challenges of globalisation: South African debates with Manuel Castells (Vol. 4). J. Muller, N.

Castro-Gómez, S. (2000). Ciencias sociales, violencia epistémica y el problema de la'invención del otro'en La colonialidad del saber: Eurocentrismo y Ciencias Sociales. Perspectivas latinoamericanas. Buenos Aires: CLACSO.

Césaire, A. (2000). Discourse on colonialism. NYU Press.

Comaroff, J., & Comaroff, J. (1997). Africa observed: Discourses of the imperial imagination. Perspectives on Africa: A reader in culture, history, and representation, 689-703.

Chilisa, B. (2011). Indigenous research methodologies. Sage Publications.

Dash, D. P. (1999). Current debates in action research. Systemic Practice and Action Research, 12(5), 457-492

Dei, G. J. S. (2014). Indigenizing the School Curriculum. In African indigenous knowledge and the disciplines (pp. 165-180). SensePublishers.

De Sousa Santos, B. (2006a). Conocer desde el Sur: Para una cultura política emancipatoria. Fondo Editorial de la Facultad de Ciencias Sociales, UNMSM.

De Sousa Santos, B. (2006b). La universidad popular del siglo XXI. Lima: Fondo Editorial de la Facultad de Ciencias Sociales-UNMSM.

De Sousa Santos, B. (2012). The university at a crossroads. Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge, 10(1), 3.

De Sousa Santos, B. (2015). Epistemologies of the South: Justice against epistemicide. Routledge.

Derrida, J. (2003). Márgenes de la filosofía, trad. Carmen González Marín (Madrid: Cátedra, 1998), 177.Diop, C. A. (2010). The meaning of our work. Perspectives on Africa,, 44-47.

Diop, C. A. (2010). The meaning of our work. Perspectives on Africa,, 44-47.

Dussel, E. (1994). Historia de la filosofía y filosofía de la liberación. Editorial Nueva América.

Dussel, E. (2000). Europa, modernidad y eurocentrismo. En libro: La colonialidad del saber: eurocentrismo y ciencias sociales. Perspectivas Latinoamericanas. Edgardo Lander (Comp.) CLACSO, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Dussel, E. D. (2007). Materiales para una política de la liberación. Plaza y Valdés España.

Emeagwali, G., & Dei, G. J. S. (2014). African indigenous knowledge and the disciplines. Springer.

Escobar, A. (2007). Worlds and knowledges otherwise 1: The Latin American modernity/coloniality research program. Cultural studies, 21(2-3), 179-210.

Fanon, F. (2007). The wretched of the earth. Grove/Atlantic, Inc..

Fals-Borda, O., & Rahman, M. A. (1991). Action and knowledge: breaking the monopoly with participatory action-research.[Excerpts].

Feldman, A. (2017). An Emergent History of Educational Action Research in the English-Speaking World. In The Palgrave International Handbook of Action Research (pp. 125-145). Palgrave Macmillan US.

Foucault, M. (1982). The subject and power. Critical inquiry, 8(4), 777-795.

Foucault, M. (2002). The order of things: An archaeology of the human sciences. Psychology Press.

Gazda, G. M., Kipper, D. A., and Treadwell, T. W. (1997). A message from the executive editors. Int. J. Act. Methods Psychodrama Skill Train. Role Play. 50(1),3.

Girei, E. (2017). Decolonising management knowledge: A reflexive journey as practitioner and researcher in Uganda. Management Learning, 1350507617697867.

Greenwood, D. J., & Levin, M. (2007). Introduction to action research: Social research for social change. SAGE publications.

Gutmann, M. C., Rodríguez, F. V., Stephen, L., & Zavella, P. (Eds.). (2008). Perspectives on Las Americas: A Reader in Culture, History, & Representation. John Wiley & Sons.

Hall, B.L. and Tandon, R. (2017). 'Decolonization of knowledge, epistemicide, participatory research and higher education'. Research for all 1 (1). 6-19. DOI 10, 18546/RFA, 01.1.02.

Hlela, Z. (2016). Learning through the action of research: reflections on an Afrocentric research design. Community Development Journal.

Kemmis, S., McTaggart, R., & Retallick, J. (2004). The action research planner.

Kindon, S., Pain, R., & Kesby, M. (Eds.). (2007). Participatory action research approaches and methods: Connecting people, participation and place. Routledge.

Kristiansen, M., & Bloch-Poulsen, J. (2016). Participatory hierarchies: A challenge in organisational Action Research. International Journal of Action Research, 12(2).

Lander, E. (2000). Ciencias sociales: saberes coloniales y eurocéntricos. Lecturas de metodología de las ciencias sociales, 38.

Lincoln, Y. S., Lynham, S. A., & Guba, E. G. (2011). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences, revisited. The Sage handbook of qualitative research, 4, 97-128.

Luescher, T., Loader, L., & Mugume, T. (2016). # FeesMustFall: An Internet-Age Student Movement in South Africa and the Case of the University of the Free State. Politikon, 1-15.

Maldonado-Torres, N. (2016). Outline the Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality.

Mirra, N., & Rogers, J. (2016). Institutional participation and social transformation: considering the goals and tensions of university-initiated YPAR projects with K-12 youth. International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 29(10), 1255-1268.

Mbembe, A. (1992). Provisional notes on the postcolony. Africa, 62(01), 3-37.

Mbembe, A. (2011). Necropolítica: seguido de Sobre el gobierno privado indirecto. E. F. Archambault (Ed.). Melusina.

Mbembe, A. (2015). Decolonizing knowledge and the question of the archive. Aula magistral proferida.

Mignolo, W. D. (2000). La colonialidad a lo largo ya lo ancho: el hemisferio occidental en el horizonte colonial de la modernidad.

Mignolo, W. D. (2007). DELINKING: The rhetoric of modernity, the logic of coloniality and the grammar of de-coloniality 1. Cultural studies, 21(2-3), 449-514.

Naicker, C. (2016). From Marikana to# feesmustfall: the praxis of popular politics in South Africa. Urbanisation, 1(1), 53-61.

Noffke, S. E., & Somekh, B. (Eds.). (2009). The SAGE handbook of educational action research. Sage.

Nnaemeka, O. (2004). Nego-feminism: Theorizing, practicing, and pruning Africa's way. Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 29(2), 357-385.

Nyemba, F., & Mayer, M. (2017). Exploring the roots of participatory action research: An interview with Dr Marja-Liisa Swantz. Action Research, 1476750316684003.

Obiokor, P. (2014). Art Education. In African Indigenous Knowledge and the Disciplines (pp. 99-111). SensePublishers.

Parra-Romero, A. (2016). ¿Por que pensar un giro decolonial en el analisis de los conflictos socioambientales en America Latina?. Ecologia politica: Cuadernos de debate internacional. Ecologia politica en America Latina. 15-20.

Ranger, T. (1997). The invention of tradition in colonial Africa. Perspectives on Africa: A reader in culture, history, and representation.

Rappaport, J. (2017). Participation and the Work of the Imagination: A Colombia n Retrospective. In The Palgrave International Handbook of Action Research (pp. 147-159). Palgrave Macmillan US.

Shizha, E. (2014). Indigenous knowledge systems and the curriculum. In African indigenous knowledge and the disciplines (pp. 113-129). SensePublishers.

Shiva, V. (2000). Foreword: Cultural diversity and the politics of knowledge. Indigenous knowledges in global contexts: Multiple readings of our world.

Semali, L. M., & Kincheloe, J. L. (2002). What is indigenous knowledge?: Voices from the academy. Routledge.

Soldatenko, G. (2015). A Contribution toward the Decolonization of Philosophy: Asserting the Coloniality of Power in the Study of Non-Western Philosophical Traditions. Comparative and Continental Philosophy, 7(2), 138-156.

Smith, L. T. (1999). Decolonising methodologies. Research and Indigenous Peoples London: Zed Books Ltd.

Vaughn, L. M., Jacquez, F., Lindquist-Grantz, R., Parsons, A., & Melink, K. (2016). Immigrants as Research Partners: A Review of Immigrants in Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR). Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health, 1-12.

Wa Thiong'o, N. (1994). Decolonising the mind: The politics of language in African literature. East African Publishers.

Wa Thiong'o, N. (2010). Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary. Perspectives on Africa: a reader in culture, history and representation. John Wiley & Sons

Whitt, L. (2009). Science, colonialism, and indigenous peoples: The cultural politics of law and knowledge. Cambridge University Press.

Zaffaroni, E. R. (2012). La Pachamama y el humano. O. Bayer (Ed.). Buenos Aires: Ediciones Madres de Plaza de Mayo.

Zibechi, R. (2015). Descolonizar el pensamiento crítico y las prácticas emancipatorias. Ediciones Desde Abajo.

Zuber-Skerritt, O., Fletcher, M., & Kearney, J. (2015). Professional learning in higher education and communities: Towards a new vision for action research. Springer.