

BOOK REVIEW

Amrita Pande, Ruchi Chaturvedi, and Shari Daya, eds. *Epistemic Justice and the Post-Colonial University*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2023. 264 pp. ZAR 370.00. ISBN: 9781776147847.

At the height of the ongoing debate across the Global South on decoloniality, two fundamental conceptual and methodological questions are raised: (1) How has the enduring legacy of colonialism shaped knowledge production processes within the University of Cape Town (UCT); and (2) How can the postcolonial UCT be decolonized? One caters for the past and the other for the future. In response, a book titled *Epistemic Justice and the Post-Colonial University* that brings together a plurality of scholarly contributions, compelling insights, historical experiences, and decolonial perspectives from alumni and established scholars based at the institution is born. Anchored in interdisciplinary approaches combining history, arts, political science, gender, geography, and philosophy, the nexus between power and knowledge within the institution is historicized, conceptualized, problematized, and interrogated. Collectively identified by the authors as epistemic violence, the book sets off to rescue UCT from the shackles of coloniality by contextualizing and aligning the discussions within the liberation lens of decoloniality. It critiques how African local and indigenous knowledge has been systematically marginalized, dismissed, or misrepresented at the institution.


In ten chapters, the authors surgically examine and navigate the historical conception and institutionalization of racial inequality, epistemological violence, and prejudice over time, and how this has since entrenched and perpetuated epistemic injustice in postcolonial UCT. Authors are preoccupied with the critical issue of how to write “our selves” back into history as they wrestle and tackle head-on the significant problem of decolonizing knowledge at UCT amidst the prevailing power contestations and historical epistemic injustice. The first part (“Aesthetics, Politics and Language”) constitutes four chapters, which form the conceptual and methodological framing of the book. This part de-reifies the university environment as a small silo incapable of producing a plurality of lived experiences. Part Two (“Justice, Curriculum and the Classroom”) delves into the theoretical limitations of the Eurocentric lens in explaining and understanding the South African context and experience (and the African continent in general). Drawing on theories from the disciplines of psychology, law, and the conventional set-up of the classroom, the authors expose the glaring difference between theory and practice intrinsic to the curricula offered at UCT. Part Three (“Contested Histories and Ethical Spaces”) provides us with a vivid image of deep-rooted and institutionalized racism, power contestations/dynamics and

the politics of exclusion that was entrenched at UCT at the height of apartheid South Africa, and during the postapartheid era. Historical memories and experiences told and retold not only enliven the deep-seated nature of racial segregation and discrimination at the institution over time but also expose coloniality as a myopic venture that hinders the celebration of talent, creativity, and diversity. The authors also undertake an internal diagnosis of UCT to understand whether decolonization can occur without objectively reflecting on the internal contradictions within an institution/group. This bold move helps explain that decoloniality deals with internal tensions and complexities and thus demands hard work, sacrifice, self-examination, and commitment. In essence, decoloniality disentangles and de-reifies contestations between people and dynamics. This helps eliminate the risk of going native/defensive or romanticizing experiences/contexts.

This book enormously contributes to decoloniality in many ways. Outstanding of these is the indigenization of languages to understand Africa. This is evidenced in Athambile Masola's work (85–86, 102) as she addresses the gender gap in South African history. This shift in thinking avails us a viable methodological approach that not only accommodates the imaginations of the precolonial era but also helps capture and conceptualize the silences lost and buried in translation by Eurocentric epistemologies. Indigeneity also avails a firm foundation to deconstruct Eurocentric concepts and binaries (especially those that worked hand in hand with colonialism) such as patriarchy, custom, state, violence, and so on. It reaffirms that decoloniality is a method (see Nomusa Makhubu, Rike Sitas, and Shari Daya). Secondly, the book identifies that decolonial efforts must be part of a larger issue by highlighting the deep connection between the modern state of South Africa and the University (159). Issues of political sovereignty, democracy, neo-liberalism, and institutionalized racism and their impact on the internal operations of the institution feature prominently throughout the book (8–9, 186–87, 206). Notable of these is Professor Lungisile Ntsebeza's interview (181–98), whose historical trajectory and first-hand experiences/memories at UCT bring to light the varying power contestations and dynamics between the state and the university over time. Thirdly, the book accommodates a plurality of methodology, creativity, and imagination in understanding the African context. Every chapter not only draws from the African context but also challenges the dominant Eurocentric narratives and views. The shift in thinking is indeed plausible. The other strength is the book's interdisciplinary nature that celebrates decoloniality by defying fidelity to academic discipline. This approach ultimately affords a penetrative analysis of the issues at hand, privileges critical thinking through diverse lenses, and eliminates the tyranny of borrowed disciplinary paradigms.

By undertaking the noble cause of studying and understanding the world from the vantage point of Africa, the book extensively discusses, diagnoses, and grapples with the various epistemological complexities, challenges, and emerging issues within the context of UCT. As a way forward, it proposes new theoretical approaches, knowledge creation processes, and transformative approaches/endeavors alive to this age and context that are necessary for any African university to subsist and endure coloniality. It is an important

methodological book that anyone studying the complexities and dynamics of the (South) African context, and its struggles, complexities, and dynamics should read.

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