

REVIEW

***Decolonizing the University* edited by Gurminder K. Bhabra, Dalia Gebrial, and Kerem Nişancıoğlu**

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Decolonizing the University is a timely volume in the current climate of higher education in the global North, where the terms “diversity” and “decolonization” have been rampantly deployed, often without careful conceptualization. Recent work in critical university studies has confronted the neoliberalization of the university (Giroux 2014; Hyatt, Shear, and Wright 2015) and the university’s role in the reproduction of cultural imperialism, colonialism, and race, gender, and class inequities (Chatterjee and Maira 2014; Harper and Patton 2008). Within anthropology, the concepts of “decolonization” and “diversity” are certainly not new. The call for “decolonizing anthropology” (Harrison 1997) has been a long-standing critique of colonially-informed methodology and theorization (see also Allen and Jobson 2016; Ribeiro and Escobar 2006; Smith 1999).

The essays in *Decolonizing the University* join these ongoing scholarly conversations and offer interdisciplinary assessments of colonial academic knowledge production in the global North. The authors, some of whom were graduate students at the time of the publication, also shine light on the elephant in the room – the terms “decolonization” and “diversity” themselves. Their clear conceptualizations of these terms are drawn from their efforts to decolonize their institutions.

The book is organized in three parts that address the following points: why it is urgent to call for the decolonizing of the university in the global North; what strategies are useful for decolonization; and where we can go from here. The first part, “Contexts: Historical and Disciplinary,” includes four case diagnostics of particular historical and/or institutional contexts that epitomize the coloniality of academia: higher education in the UK and the US (Holmwood); the British academy (Shilliam); the University of Oxford (Gebrial); and Western academic philosophy (Maldonado-Torres et al.). The authors’ common assertion is that “decolonization” is not a synonym of “diversity.” Instead, decolonization is about recognizing the university as a sector of the colonial empire. The purpose of “diversity” is not fulfilled otherwise, even if the university appears demographically diverse. As Holmwood highlights, the establishment of public universities in the US was a settler colonial project. In the UK, the university maintained

and reinforced the empire's power over its dominions. The colonial presence is still evident in "iconography, curriculum, and representation" (Gebrial, 20) in Oxford, in the "whiteness of elite cultural reproduction" (Shilliam, 59) manifest in the denigration of Black public intellectuals in the British academy, and in the perpetual (re)production of Eurocentric white heteronormative knowledge in Western philosophy (Maldonado-Torres et al.).

The second part, "Institutional Initiatives," illuminates concrete suggestions for institutional decolonial practices that must happen away from power hierarchies: the Asylum University initiative in the Netherlands (Aparna and Kramersch); the Diversity Discussion Circles at the University of Amsterdam (Icaza and Vázquez); establishment of Black Studies at Birmingham City University in the UK (Andrews); and the development of Massive Open Online Courses (Lockley). Following the assertion delineated in the first part about the university as a continuum of the larger social structure, the authors offer key concepts to destabilize the geographically and socially circumscribed "academic" space. For instance, "the idea of Black Studies as a movement" (Andrews, 132) arose from the "Blackness in Britain" conference – held outside of the university walls – and ushered the path to the establishment of Black Studies as an academic discipline. Similarly, the "asylum university lens" (Aparna and Kramersch, 93) brings in voices from the margins and draws attention to the need to decolonize already established assumptions about "the university." With these key concepts, the authors effectively elucidate decolonial equitable processes as diligent collective brainstorming steps and solidarity building across and/or beyond the university, in spaces where knowledge production centers around non-normative voices.

The final part of the volume is packed with theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical interventions: storytelling as a decolonial research methodology (Pete); pedagogical strategies as political action for decolonization (Dennis); solidarity and collaboration building across disciplines and nation-state borders to refuse and transform existing hierarchies of knowledge and practice (Last); and political disruption of Eurocentric epistemic practices and spaces (Richardson). These authors speak directly from their various positionalities to reflect on the coloniality of academia. Unlike the previous parts, which focus on the continuity between the university and larger social structures, the reflections in this section extend the focus to individual roles in quotidian moments of decolonial knowledge production. Pedagogical interventions thus include practicing non-Western/Eurocentric ways of "being, thinking, knowing, sensing, feeling, doing and living" (Dennis, 199). Learning from Indigenous tradition, storytelling as a decolonial qualitative research method requires "deeply spiritual, emotional, mindful and physical responses in the listener" (Pete 174).

Together the complementary essays make methodological, contextual, theoretical, pedagogical, and political cases for the urgent need for decolonizing the university. They also collectively untangle "decolonization" from "diversity," deconstruct the coloniality of

the academy, and spell out what decolonizing means. The volume is a vital addition to critical university studies and should be read alongside work by Ahmed (2012) and Ferguson (2012) that provide detailed analyses of power dynamics surrounding issues of diversity, multiculturalism, and identities in higher education and that draw attention to the way paradoxes of inclusion and the politics of recognition ironically strengthen institutional racism and whiteness.

An ethnographic lens would further inform these authors' arguments. For example, Gebrial emphasizes the ineffectiveness of the "preoccupation with individual trauma and grievances" (33) for structural changes. I suggest that deep-seated colonial habits can be brought forward by such individual expressions, and ultimately those who enable the structural inequity can be held accountable. Decolonizing the university indeed requires institutional changes, and I argue that this process starts on the individual level. Grievances may sound like mere grumbles, but they are ethnographic accounts that illustrate structural inequity. Furthermore, I argue that ethnographic accounts can spotlight forces resisting decolonial programs like the ones discussed in this volume. From my work, everyday interpersonal moments often become the biggest obstacle to decolonization, and ethnographically grounded strategies are needed in these moments.

Nevertheless, I suggest that anthropology could take some lessons from this volume for a larger mobilization to decolonize the discipline and the university. Dennis's list of "ten defining pedagogic approaches to decolonizing education" (202) and Holmwood's notion of "racial implications of neoliberal privatization" (38) are informative for reorienting anthropological teaching, mentorship, and investigation of neoliberal universities. The chapter on decolonizing philosophy (Maldonado-Torres et al.) is particularly relevant to anthropology, as anthropology's graduate curriculum incorporates a significant amount of Euro-American philosophy. Decolonizing anthropology must involve yielding the foundation of anthropological knowledge to those with positionalities historically subjected to the Eurocentric colonial order (see also Aparna and Kramsch, Pete, and Dennis). As crystalized in Richardson's powerful analysis of "undone science" (232), "other" knowledges have been nullified in Eurocentric epistemics. This nullification is far more damaging than exclusion and cannot be reversed with ostentatious "inclusivity" and "diversification." The question we anthropologists may ask, then, is whether it does justice to historically marginalized knowledges to be "included" in anthropology's Euro-American-centric tradition. I suggest that this volume pushes us to seriously consider how to decenter anthropology from the Euro-American canon, theoretically, methodologically, and politically.

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