

## **OPTING FOR A WALK WITHOUT LIMBS: THE AVOIDANCE OF STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY TO BE AN AFRICAN UNIVERSITY**

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### **INTRODUCTION:**

This presentation entitled: opting for a walk without limbs: the avoidance of Stellenbosch University (SU) to be an African University aimed at reawakening SU on how it is undermining its own capabilities by resisting and ignoring to take its rightful position of being an African University.

According to Mamdani, institutions of higher learning in Africa has opted to be European Western outreach programmes rather than focusing in developing partnerships with local communities in co-creation of knowledge for the advancement of African scholarship and civilization.

Mamdani further argues that:

The central question facing higher education in Africa today is what it means to teach in the current historical context and, in particular, in the post-colonial African context. What does it mean to teach for example humanities and social sciences in a location where the dominant intellectual paradigms are products not of Africa's own experience, but of a particular Western experience? Where dominant paradigms theorize a specific Western history and are concerned in large part as how to exonerate the virtues of that history.

Mamdani's question is to whether these Enlightenment texts are worth reading and teaching: for him, they unquestionably are. The question or rather, concern is whether such texts are an adequate foundation on which to ground a contemporary African University, which, he argues, they are not. For Mamdani, 'if the Enlightenment is said to be an exclusively European phenomenon, then the story of the Enlightenment is one that excludes Africa which is commonly described as the dark continent by people of that land. Mamdani calls for the development of frameworks that are properly of Africa, in languages and traditions of thought.

Existing universities in South Africa, are not as yet African Universities but universities in Africa – **hence** the postcolonial university discourse in particular the area of research and ethics should include the readiness of the university in Africa to go through the process of **invention** not of **recuperation**.

Fortunately/unfortunately in South Africa and many other African countries the areas where a majority of African peoples reside were left untouched and as painful as it is to face this past these areas due to being neglected have remained being the best areas to draw African knowledge systems from especially when going through this phase of invention and decolonisation as they are the reservoirs of African knowledges. It is within this thinking that I would encourage Stellenbosch University first to declare itself as an African indigenous knowledge University and secondly to focus drawing knowledges for its invention from African indigenous knowledge systems.

**Unfortunately there has been a general disregard of IKS amongst academics and Scientists:** For a long time, the value of primary knowledge was strategically rejected among academics while even those who were aware of the benefits and superiority of indigenous techniques in certain areas, they remarked that they were afraid to admit an interest on this sphere of knowledge – basing this on fear of being ridiculed by Western peers.

Research and community engagement requires contextualised research processes that are relevant to the challenges of indigenous communities and contribute to their development, using acceptable indigenous research methods and appropriate indigenous theories. Decolonizing and indigenous theories and research methods should be employed in higher education research, particularly with research done with (rather than on) indigenous communities. Such research should be responsive to the needs and priorities of indigenous communities. Relevant emergent and evolving indigenous decolonising and anti-colonising theories suitable to our own African contexts include Ubuntu, Afrocentrism (Asante, 2003), Research as Resistance (Brown & Strega, 2005), Research as Ceremony and celebration of being Africans (Wilson, 2008), Decolonising Methodologies (Smith, 2001), among others.

**This is where Stellenbosch University will draw its limbs.** For example indigenous peoples perceive that broken relationships cause sickness. We must first all agree that the recent research that has emerged from Stellenbosch University did break relationships and as a result assisted to bring out the sickness that has been fermenting for years at Stellenbosch University. Indigenous scholars believe that by the time you see outward illness – inward sickness has been fermenting for ages. The question is how Stellenbosch University will take this forward. There might be a need for close examination of organs such as health and research units with regard to the lens they use in scrutinising manuscripts prior to approval. If this lens is a colonised lens that is blinded by the hunger for whiteness – these trusted committees will read certain manuscripts with bias not being aware that they are continuing to entrap SU in internal sickness of the past and its crumbling empire.

Some scholars have argued that the legacy of colonialism should be recognized more clearly within the available literature as a social determinant of health as well as a factor in bioethical research, and that

this legacy and its practical consequences need further and more detailed investigation within contemporary bioethics. Relevant bioethical concerns include providing ethically defensible approaches to developing initiatives on treating and preventing infectious diseases, such as tuberculosis and Ebola, and HIV AIDs violence and endemic poverty including implementing and managing international research initiatives such as health systems research.

Two main types of reasons tend to be presented in support of this line of argument: (i) Western intellectual traditions have historically dominated biomedical sciences and related ethics research, which has resulted in a neglect of diverse indigenous philosophical traditions and values; (ii) Western modes of discourse and values are still being imposed on the citizens of former colonies, by means of education, training, clinical practices, funding approaches and sources, and research programs operating in such locations.

An important contribution to this debate by Heather Widdows is the definition of the concept of moral neocolonialism in terms of the process of converting others to one's own values. Widdows argues that what is new about this form of colonialism is that it is covert, rather than overt: instead of directly presenting one's values as superior to those of inferior indigenous values as part of a sustained conversion effort, moral neocolonialists present their values as universal, and then work to demand the "recognition of universal values". Those who fail to accept these values as universal, or who challenge the universality of the relevant values, run a not insignificant risk of censure within the international research community.

Another challenging problem is related to the field of ethics developing a level of awareness in an interdisciplinary field of inquiry such as bioethics, in which one dialogue with scholars and clinicians trained in a range of other disciplines in the sciences, social sciences, and medical humanities, and in which what is meant by 'sufficient epistemic warrant' can sometimes be unclear across disciplinary cultures. We all had to agree that there is a need to take bioethical neocolonialism seriously; whereby African bioethics need to resist bioethical neocolonialism by focusing in addressing the ethical injustices of the past and epistemological ravage of modernity and capitalism.

Present discourses on African ethics or the proper relations between people always return to the idea that there is reason to consider the interconnectedness of people as authored in some communal value or defence of such communal values (Metz 2014). These values either speak to the common identity of the people or express some unavoidable value about how people ought to relate in order to be successful as individuals who promote some common good. This could be the value that socialists were searching for in their humanist discourse. This is the value that modern communitarians are probably searching for as well. I suggest that

this is a value that is worthy retrieving, though we should be careful how we seek to retrieve it and for what use. Drawing from the indigenous scholar Tinky –Penny who speaks of a backward and forward movement in creating a post- modern and a post humanistic era; Tinky Penney's suggestion: Stellenbosch University during her invention era as an African University might require to do this backward movement to link with these indigenous scholars for her forward movement.