



## Decolonization of knowledge, epistemicide, participatory research and higher education

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### Abstract

This article raises questions about what the word 'knowledge' refers to. Drawn from some 40 years of collaborative work on knowledge democracy, the authors suggest that higher education institutions today are working with a very small part of the extensive and diverse knowledge systems in the world. Following from de Sousa Santos, they illustrate how Western knowledge has been engaged in epistemicide, or the killing of other knowledge systems. Community-based participatory research is about knowledge as an action strategy for change and about the rendering visible of the excluded knowledges of our remarkable planet. Knowledge stories, theoretical dimensions of knowledge democracy and the evolution of community-based participatory research partnerships are highlighted.

**Keywords:** decolonization of knowledge; epistemicide; community-based participatory research; knowledge democracy

### Key messages

- Epistemicide refers to the killing of knowledge systems.
- The concept of knowledge democracy acknowledges the importance of multiple knowledge systems, such as organic, spiritual and land-based systems, frameworks arising from social movements and the knowledge of the marginalized or excluded. It is about open access for the sharing of knowledge, making it a powerful tool for taking action in social movements to deepen democracy and to struggle for a fairer and healthier world.
- Higher education institutions today exclude many of the diverse knowledge systems in the world, including those of Indigenous peoples and excluded racial groups, and those excluded on the basis of gender, class or sexuality.

### Introduction

The authors have been working together on issues of knowledge democracy and the decolonization of knowledge since 1978, when we founded the International Participatory Research Network. And while we have taken on various roles in global civil society and the university world over the years, we have kept a focus on the role of knowledge and the co-creation of knowledge in the deepening of democracy in social movements, communities, civil society organizations and universities themselves. Over

the past four years, under the aegis of the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) Chair that we share (and as a Southern civil society leader and a Northern university scholar), we have been carrying out a series of global research studies on institutionalization and capacity-building in community-based research. Over the years, we have also sought to deepen the conceptual and theoretical understanding of what we have referred to as knowledge democracy. We are pleased to share some of our reflections with readers in the hope that this may stimulate further reflection and learning. Our current focus is on building capacities for students and community activists to learn how to do participatory research. We are particularly concerned with reinvigorating the practices of participatory research that originated in the global South some 40 to 50 years ago, but that seem to have been forgotten as the location of theory development in community-based or engaged research seems to have shifted to the global North. And even in the global North, it is forgotten that participatory research came most powerfully from the Indigenous communities, from women working against violence and injection drug users, all doing their own research.

The argument that we are advancing in this article is that what is generally understood as knowledge in the universities of our world represents a very small proportion of the global treasury of knowledge. University knowledge systems in nearly every part of the world are derivations of the Western canon, the knowledge system created some 500 to 550 years ago in Europe by white male scientists. The contemporary university is often characterized as working with colonized knowledge, hence the increasing calls for the decolonization of our universities. The epistemologies of most peoples of the world, whether Indigenous, or excluded on the basis of race, gender or sexuality are missing. But evidence of other epistemologies and other ways of representing knowledge exist. Without a much deeper analysis of whose knowledge, how that knowledge was gathered and how transformative change is encouraged through deeper attention to knowledge democracy, public engagement in knowledge sharing simply reinforces the existing colonized relations of knowledge power.

But we want to begin by sharing some knowledge stories with you. We want to speak of past and continuing cultural genocide, linguicide and epistemicide. We want to speak about the complicity of the modern university in maintaining unequal knowledge hierarchies, but also to provide evidence of a possible turning in the world of higher education.

## Dispossession and knowledge

The geographer David Harvey has elaborated the concept of accumulation through dispossession to explain how capital, the basis of our dominant economic system, began to be accumulated (Harvey, 2004). He suggests that the dispossession of people of access to their land lies at the heart of early capital accumulation. The history of Budd Hall's own family was shaped by the dispossession of the lands of the Halalt First Nations on their island. Harvey draws attention to the processes in fourteenth- to seventeenth-century England, which removed people from their land through what have become known as enclosures. He tells us of wealthy landowners who used force and even arms to transform the traditional open fields and communal pastures into private property for their own profit. A similar process affected the clans of Scotland, and this was so widespread that their dispossessions were known as the clearances. Each of these acts of dispossession left the majority of people without access to land, and allowed for wealth to accumulate to those who were now known as private

landowners. New categories of people were defined: the landed gentry, the workers in the estates and the land and those who were landless.

These acts did not go unnoticed, as we can see from the words of an English rhyme from the period:

The law condemns the woman or man  
 Who steals the goose from off the common  
 But leaves the greater felon loose  
 Who steals the common from the goose

What does this have to do with higher education and knowledge? Both the authors have had the opportunity to spend a few days in one of the colleges of the University of Oxford, a college that was created at the same time as the enclosures. We could use any of the European medieval universities as an example, but we chose Oxford because it is the place where the links between Harvey's concept of the dispossession of land and the dispossession of knowledge occurred to us. One enters the college in question through a low doorway, only accessible to students and fellows and their guests. The college is walled in and only accessible through one or two guarded entryways. While staying in the college, the connection between the enclosing of previously common land for private purposes and the creation of walled places for learning became disturbingly apparent. The act of creating Oxford and the other medieval universities was an act of enclosing knowledge, limiting access to knowledge, exerting a form of control over knowledge and providing a means for a small elite to acquire this knowledge for the purposes of leadership of a spiritual, governance or cultural nature. Those within the walls became knowers; those outside the walls became non-knowers. Knowledge was removed from the land and from the relationships of those sharing the land. The enclosing of the academy dispossessed the vast majority of knowledge keepers, forever relegating their knowledge to witchcraft, tradition, superstition, folkways or, at best, some form of common sense. We can see this separation of 'university knowledge' from other forms of knowledge in all of our communities to this day. The contemporary debate about private higher education institutions takes the idea of knowledge as a commodity to be bought and sold to another level.

These new academies came into being at the time of the rise of European science. Through improvements in navigational aids, and the wealth generated by the enclosures and the exploitation of silver and gold from Latin America, the hegemony of mostly white Eurocentric knowledge spread around the world. Just as colonial political practices carved up the globe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, knowledge, the intellectual energy by which humans operate, became colonized as well. The process of dispossession of other knowledge is a process that Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2007), a Portuguese sociologist, has called epistemicide, or the killing of knowledge systems. We will come back to how epistemicide, linguicide and cultural genocide have been a product of Western modern higher education, but first we want to continue our remarks with some stories about knowledge.

## Knowledge stories

### PRIA

In the late 1970s, one of the authors of this article, a young Indian academician called Rajesh Tandon, educated in the elite universities of India and the USA found himself deep in rural Rajasthan, working as a researcher with Tribal farmers on rural development

issues. On every issue of rural development that he encountered, he found that the unschooled women and men in rural Rajasthan were more knowledgeable than he, and not marginally, but deeply so. A few years later, when he had the opportunity, he created the non-governmental research organization that today is known as PRIA, the Society for Participatory Research in Asia, with the aim of supporting the development of grass-roots knowledge with the urban and rural poor for social change.

### **Honey Bee Knowledge Network**

In the late 1980s, in the state of Gujarat in India, a knowledge network was created dedicated to countering what the founders noted as a pernicious culture of knowledge asymmetry. Knowledge asymmetry occurs when the people who provide knowledge do not benefit from the gathering and organizing of that knowledge. Knowledge, they said:

has been extracted, documented without any acknowledgement to the source. The documented knowledge has not been communicated to the knowledge holder for feedback. These practices have not only impoverished the knowledge holders by pushing them further down in the oblivion, but also have hampered the growth of an informal knowledge system, that is robust in nurturing creativity.

(Honey Bee, n.d.)

They called their project the Honey Bee Knowledge Network, based on the metaphor of the honey bee, which does two things that scholars often do not do: the bee collects pollen from the flowers without exploiting them, and it connects flower to flower through pollination, so that in the end life itself continues. The Honey Bee Knowledge Network shares knowledge about agricultural and animal husbandry practices generated by women and men farmers themselves.

### **Mpambo Afrikan Multiversity**

In the late 1990s, a Ugandan intellectual and civil society activist, Paulo Wangoola, returned home to the Kingdom of Busoga after 25 years of work in various parts of Africa and abroad to report on the state of the world as he had experienced it. His message to his Elders was this:

You sent me out, one of the lesser young people of my generation, to gain Western knowledge and to work in the structures and organisations of the Western world. I have been to their universities, have worked with their governments, have created Western style organisations here in Africa and now I have come home to share what I have learned. I have come to tell you that we, the children of Busoga Kingdom, the children of Afrika will never realize our full potential as people in our communities and as contributors to the global treasury of knowledge if we continue to depend wholly on the content and ways of knowledge of the European peoples. Our way forward must be linked to the recovery, replenishment and revitalization of our thousands of years old Indigenous knowledge.

(Wangoola, 2005)

With those words, Wangoola made a decision to withdraw from the economic structures of the Western world, to return to a subsistence lifestyle and to dedicate himself to the creation of a village-based institution of higher education and research that is today

known as the Mpambo Afrikan Multiversity, a place for the support of mother-tongue scholars of Afrikan Indigenous knowledge.

### **Mpumalanga Traditional Knowledge Commons**

Early in the twenty-first century, 80 traditional healers living in Mpumalanga province in South Africa, women and men whose health and medical knowledge has been learned through traditional apprenticeships, created a biocultural knowledge commons for the systematic sharing of their knowledge among one another for the purpose of better serving the health needs of the people living in their province. In doing so they described knowledge as, 'An outcome of virtuous relationships with the land, the plants and the animals. It is not property to be bought and sold. It is simultaneously cultural and spiritual and its movement and application promotes a kind of virtuous cohesiveness' (Abrell *et al.*, 2009: 12).

### **University of Abahlali baseMjondolo**

In 2005 in Durban, South Africa, some of the inhabitants of the tin-roofed shacks of the city created a blockade on Kennedy Road to protest the sale of land originally promised to the poor for house building, to an industrialist for commercial purposes. This movement of those living in these shacks has grown into Abahlali baseMjondolo, the shack-dwellers movement. What is unique to this social movement is that they have created their own University of Abahlali baseMjondolo, a space for the creation of knowledge about survival, hope and transformation where the shack dwellers themselves are the scholars, the professors and the teachers. They create and share knowledge through song, 'live action debates' and discussions, and document the knowledge in a web-based archive.

### **Languages of the land**

Our final story begins with a young Indigenous woman from the Lil'wat First Nation in British Columbia. In the 1960s, she was chosen by her community to work as a research guide for a non-Indigenous linguist who had expressed an interest in working on the development of an alphabet for the St'át'imcets language. She was successful in this challenge and her people have made use of this alphabet since that time.

This woman, Dr Lorna Williams, is now a leading authority on Indigenous language revitalization in Canada. The fate of the language of her community, and the fate of most of the Indigenous languages of Canada, have not fared well. The impact of colonial domination of Western language traditions has resulted in linguicide, the death or near-death of these carriers of our global cultural heritage.

### **Knowledge is the star**

In each of these stories, knowledge is central. Knowledge is the star of each drama. Knowledge is dynamic, active, engaged and linked to social, political, cultural or sustainable changes. PRIA's co-constructed knowledge is linked to a variety of social movements in India. Mpambo's mother-tongue scholars are stimulating an unprecedented reawakening of Afrikan spiritual knowledge and sharing in Uganda. The shack dwellers of Durban and beyond have boldly taken the word 'university' as their own and turned the knowledge hierarchies upside down in the service of justice for the poor. The Indigenous language champions working with the First Peoples' Cultural Council in British Columbia have staked a claim to epistemological privilege

over the Western-trained non-Indigenous linguists. The healers from South Africa have staked their claims to knowledge superiority, not to settle any epistemological scores with Western science, but in their commitment to better serve the health needs of their people. These knowledge innovators have all facilitated various means of creating, sharing and accessing knowledge that is not part of what is often called the Western canon. For a variety of justice, cultural, spiritual, environmental and health reasons, in each one of these stories, the application of knowledge from the Western canon was seen as insufficient. In each story, the contexts, conditions, values, uses and politics of knowledge called for an opening outwards of our comfortable assumptions about whose knowledge counts and what the relationship between knowledge and life might be.

## The four epistemicides of the long sixteenth century

We are grateful to the work of Grosfoguel (2013) and Dussel (1993) who, in addition to de Sousa Santos, have helped us to understand how the ideas of white men from just a few countries (Italy, France, England, Germany and the USA) came to dominate the world of knowledge. How and when were the colonial structures of knowledge created? How have we arrived at the situation where any of us could be parachuted into any university in the world, settled into a social science lecture and be at home with the authors and ideas being discussed?

To answer that, we have to look at what Grosfoguel has called the 'four genocides/epistemicides of the long 16th century' (Grosfoguel, 2013: 73). It seems that the story of dispossessing the people from ownership of their ideas in the new medieval universities, which brought ecclesiastical power to those institutions, was just the start of our knowledge story. Grosfoguel pulls together four distinct stories of epistemicide, stories that are almost always treated as separate historical processes. Through making these connections, we learn in a powerful manner how intellectual colonization has emerged. The four epistemicides are: (1) the conquest of Al-Andalus, and the expulsion of Muslims and Jews from Europe, (2) the conquest of the Indigenous Peoples of the Americas started by the Spanish, continued by the French and the English and still underway today, (3) the creation of the slave trade that resulted in millions being killed in Africa and at sea, and more being totally dehumanized by enslavement in the Americas and (4) the killing of millions of Indo-European women, mostly through burning at the stake as witches because their knowledge practices were not controlled by men. These conquests transformed Europe from being at the periphery of an earlier dominant Islamic centre of intellectual power to being centre stage. But in a historic irony, Spain and Portugal, the leading military and intellectual powers of the fifteenth century, have been shut out of the post-sixteenth-century Northern European monopoly of knowledge.

What is important for us to understand is that these four conquests were both military and epistemological/ideological. At the height of the Al-Andalus Empire in Europe, the city of Cordoba had a library of 500,000 books. This was at a time when other intellectual centres in Europe would have had libraries of between 5,000 and 10,000 books. The Spanish burned the library in Cordoba, and libraries elsewhere. They destroyed most of the codices in the Mayan, Inca and Aztec empires as well. Women's knowledge, which was largely oral, was simply silenced, as was the knowledge of Africa. African slaves were portrayed as non-humans, incapable of Western-style thought. Hegel, for example, in commenting on Africans, says, 'Among negroes it is the case that consciousness has not attained even the intuition of any sort of objectivity ... the

negro is the man as beast' (Lectures, 218, quoted in Dussel, 1993: 70). The continued linguicide of Indigenous languages in North America and throughout the world today is evidence that the patterns established through conquest in the sixteenth century is still deeply entrenched in our own minds, and most certainly in our higher education institutions.

There are so very many examples of how the Western monopoly of knowledge has distorted our higher education institutions that we could take a look at each and every university in Canada, starting with the University of Victoria, where Budd Hall works, and carry on for days. But simply for illustrative purposes, let us share some thoughts from several African scholars about how they see the situation. Lebakeng, Phalane, Dalindjebo (South Africa), Odara-Hoppers (South Africa–Uganda), Wangoola (Uganda) and Ezeanya (Rwanda) have worked and written extensively on the importance of the recovery of the intellectual traditions of the continent: 'Institutions of higher education in South Africa were (and still are) copycats whose primary function was (and still is) to serve and promote colonial Western values' (Lebakeng *et al.*, 2006: 72). Similarly, Ezeanya adds: 'In Africa, the research agenda, curriculum and "given" conceptual frameworks should be continuously re-examined ... with the aim of eschewing all manifestations of new-colonial underpinnings and emphasizing indigenous ideas' (Ezeanya, 2011: 10).

## Ecologies of knowledge and cognitive justice

Boaventura de Sousa Santos has a narrative that begins with his observation that in the realm of knowledge we have created an intellectual abyss, which hinders human progress. Abyssal thinking, he notes, 'consists in granting to modern science the monopoly of the universal distinction between true and false to the detriment of ... alternative bodies of knowledge' (2007: 47). The global dividing line to which he refers is the one that separates the visible constituents of knowledge and power from those that are invisible. Popular, lay, plebeian, peasant, indigenous knowledge, the knowledge of the disabled and more, cannot be fitted into any of the ways of knowing on 'this side of the line'. They exist on the other side of the 'abyss', the other side of the line. And because of this invisibility they are beyond truth or falsehood. The 'other side of the line' is the realm of beliefs, opinions, and intuitive or subjective understandings, which at best may become 'objects or raw material for scientific inquiry' (52). De Sousa Santos makes a tight link between values and aspiration in saying, 'Global social injustice is therefore intimately linked to global cognitive injustice. The struggle for global social justice will, therefore, be a struggle for cognitive justice as well' (63).

Shiv Visvanathan contributes to this discourse by expanding the concept of 'cognitive justice'. He notes:

The idea of cognitive justice ... sensitizes us not only to forms of knowledge but [also] to the diverse communities of problem solving. What one offers then is a democratic imagination with a non-market, non-competitive view of the world, where conversation, reciprocity, translation create knowledge not as an expert, almost zero-sum view of the world but as a collaboration of memories, legacies, heritages, a manifold heuristics of problem solving, where a citizen takes both power and knowledge into his [or her] own hands.

(Visvanathan, 2009)

These forms of knowledge, especially the ideas of complexity, represent new forms of power sharing and problem-solving that go beyond the limits of voice and resistance. They are empowering because they transcend the standard cartographies of power and innovation, which are hegemonic. By incorporating the dynamics of knowledge into democracy, we reframe the axiomatics of knowledge based on hospitality, community, non-violence, humility and a multiple idea of time, where the citizen as trustee and inventor visualizes and creates a new self-reflexive idea of democracy around actual communities of practice (Visvanathan, 2009).

The problem that arises from the domination of the Western knowledge system is not only that the ways of knowing, the cultures and the stories of the majority of people of the world are excluded, but that, given the Western knowledge narrative that links some forms of knowledge with progress, science and the future, it looks as though colonialism has disabled the global North from learning in non-colonial terms. Is the global North stuck in a rut in the path of history that does not allow for the existence of histories other than the universal history of the West?

## Knowledge democracy

Knowledge democracy refers to an interrelationship of phenomena. First, it acknowledges the importance of the existence of multiple epistemologies, or ways of knowing, such as organic, spiritual and land-based systems, frameworks arising from our social movements, and the knowledge of the marginalized or excluded everywhere, or what is sometimes referred to as subaltern knowledge. Second, it affirms that knowledge is both created and represented in multiple forms, including text, image, numbers, story, music, drama, poetry, ceremony and meditation. Third, and fundamental to our thinking about knowledge democracy, is understanding that knowledge is a powerful tool for taking action in social movements and elsewhere to deepen democracy and to struggle for a fairer and healthier world. And, finally, knowledge democracy is about open access for the sharing of knowledge, so that everyone who needs knowledge will have access to it. Knowledge democracy is about intentionally linking values of justice, fairness and action to the process of using knowledge.

## Knowledge democracy in action: Stories of the turning in higher education?

There are those who say that we are in the midst of a great turning. David Korten speaks of such in his book, *The Great Turning: From empire to Earth community* (2006). The evidence can be seen in the emergence of the Occupy Movement, the Canadian Idle No More Movement and the growth of the anti-austerity movements in Europe, as well as in the extensive research on inequality from Thomas Piketty (2014), Oxfam (Hardoon, 2015), Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) and the International Monetary Fund (Dabla-Norris et al., 2015). And, surprisingly, we have a pope who has described global capitalism as the 'dung of the devil' and calls for a turn towards a communitarian economy. When do we look to the world of higher education for evidence of such a turning?

Marta Gregorčič has drawn our attention to the concept of *potencias*, the knowledge-creating power of revolutionary movements of historically subjugated peoples. *Potencias* can be seen at the heart of self-determining communities engaged in creating new social economies and other means of community development outside

the dominant political structures of their locations and times. She gives examples from the Zapatistas in Mexico, the Caracazo in Venezuela, the Chhattisgarh Liberation Front of the 1970s and 1980s in India and the *empobrecitos* of Bolivia. The solidarity economies at the centre of these struggles offer concrete ideas about alternatives to global capitalism. She adds that 'scientists or experts for the sake of objectivity and neutrality of our work, we should not and cannot – or will not – exempt ourselves any more' (Gregorčič, 2015: 164).

It is time for those of us working in higher education to move beyond our already strong ability to reflect and critique; we are so very skilled in those first two stages of intellectual work. But we must now make the move from reflection and criticism to creation. We can create in our own lives in terms of what we choose to read and share with others. We can create in the organization of new types of courses. We can create new research and learning partnerships with community activists and social movements. We may have a chance to create new academic programmes. Some of us may create new higher education structures. As we move towards creation we will find much to draw inspiration from.

## Emergence of new higher education narratives

### Global University Network for Innovation (GUNi)

The Barcelona-based network Global University Network for Innovation (GUNi) is supported by UNESCO and the United Nations University. It has produced a series of world reports on higher education. In 2014, it brought out its latest report, called *Higher Education in the World 5: Knowledge, engagement and higher education: Contributing to social change* (GUNi, 2014). What was unique about this report was that it framed the challenges to higher education within the context of deep global issues, such as the destruction of the planet, inequality and violence against women. It called for a new approach to the creation and understanding of knowledge, a turn towards knowledge democracy. This report was launched in 34 locations around the world, and contained examples of promising practices from 70 nations written by 60 authors. It is the first attempt to create a new global narrative for a higher education based on communitarian values rather than market priorities.

### Multiworld Network

The Multiworld Network, based in India under the leadership of Claude Alveres of India and with support from Professor Dzulkifli Abdulrazak of Malaysia, is a growing association of people from Asia, Africa and South America, joined together with a common objective to restore the diversity of learning that existed from time immemorial. Multiworld welcomes people infected with a similar spirit and conviction to join this enterprise and to fight to restore a world in which many worlds are once again warmly embraced. The issue of 'decolonizing' academic curricula and ridding them of Eurocentric biases has occupied centre stage in six international conferences organized by the Multiworld Network, in which scholars from diverse countries located in Asia, Africa and South America have been involved (<http://multiworldindia.org>). The work of this network has received support from the Ministry of Education in Malaysia. *Decolonising the University: The emerging quest for non-Eurocentric paradigms* is one of the texts emerging from this active and inspiring network (Alveres and Farugi, 2012).

## Decolonization in established universities

There are elements of a knowledge-democracy discourse and a decolonizing practice emerging in most of our universities, at least in some small ways. The voices of students in South Africa, the UK, India and Canada calling for decolonizing the curriculum of higher education have been gaining more attention.

### University of Victoria

At the University of Victoria, we have seen a steady growth in efforts to either indigenize or decolonize the university. A First Peoples House has been built in the centre of the Victoria campus. Indigenous community leaders and Indigenous faculty and staff at the university jointly manage this house. They have created a position as Director of Indigenous Academics and Community Engagement. But perhaps the most powerful contributions have been in the creation of Indigenous academic programmes in law, social work, education, nursing, governance, humanities, Indigenous counselling, and linguistics. The most recent programmes that have been created are BA and MA degrees in Indigenous language revitalization. Along with the development of Indigenous academic programming, there has been a deepening of relations between the University of Victoria and the surrounding Indigenous communities in our part of Vancouver Island.

### Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento (UNGS)

The Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento (UNGS) is a small-size public university created in 1992 to meet local and regional education needs that were not covered by traditional academic offerings. Its main campus is in Malvinas Argentina, a locality in the Province of Buenos Aires marked by high levels of poverty and other related conditions. Since its inception, the UNGS has facilitated the convergence of research, teaching and community services to contribute to the socio-economic development of the local communities. The relationship with the local context is a key component of the UNGS identity, and has determined its origin, strategic project, institutional design and ongoing development (see [www.ungs.edu.ar/ms\\_ungs/](http://www.ungs.edu.ar/ms_ungs/)).

In order to promote research partnerships and engagements, the UNGS has established the Community Services Centre to manage, promote and disseminate local and regional development projects that connect students, faculty members and a variety of stakeholders (governments, private firms and civil society organizations) in an institutionalized manner (see [www.ungs.edu.ar/ms\\_centro\\_servicios](http://www.ungs.edu.ar/ms_centro_servicios)). This unit integrates the service learning and outreach initiatives developed by UNGS professors that have an impact on key academic functions. Thus, the three principles that structure the institutional identity of the UNGS (that is, research, teaching and community services) are embodied in the development of training courses and diplomas for non-academic stakeholders, external consulting services, basic and applied research, and local development projects that contribute to the strengthening of science and technology. These community services are offered to achieve two critical goals: (1) to provide solutions to problems identified by civil society actors and (2) to improve the entire process of knowledge production and the existing training and teaching practices within the UNGS.

## Creation of alternative universities/social movement partnerships

### **Te Whare Wananga O Awanuiarangi – Aotearoa**

Te Whare Wananga O Awanuiarangi – Aotearoa is a Maori university headed by Sir Hingangaroa Smith, a distinguished Maori scholar. The mission statement of this visionary institution is:

We commit ourselves to explore and define the depths of knowledge in Aotearoa, to enable us to re-enrich ourselves, to know whom we are, to know where we came from and to claim our place in the future. We take this journey of discovery, of reclamation of sovereignty, establishing the equality of Māori intellectual tradition alongside the knowledge base of others. Thus, we can stand proudly together with all people of the world. This is in part the dream and vision of Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi. (Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi, n.d.)

### **Dayalbagh Educational Institute, Agra, India**

Associated with the Radhasoami Sect of Hinduism, Dayalbagh Educational Institute (DEI) is located in Agra, India within the heart of a colony of 3,000 followers of the Radhasoami faith. The colony provides a space for living together irrespective of caste, creed or colour, and the following of a devotional life integrating meditative practices, collective labour in the farm and dairy, use of solar power for electricity, cooking in a collective kitchen, rain-water harvesting and free medical services in both allopathic and Indian systems of medicine. The DEI is a values-based and holistic education institution that combines work-related vocational and crafts teaching with leading-edge scientific programmes. It is an institution where the holistic values-based teachings of Radhasoami Hinduism live in respectful harmony with Western scientific knowledge. In Dayalbagh, we see an attempt to establish a new order where women and men live and work in harmony for the service of humanity (Dayalbagh Educational Institute, n.d.).

### **The Committee of Entities in the Struggle Against Hunger and for a Full Life (COEP)**

The Committee of Entities in the Struggle against Hunger and for a Full Life (COEP) is a national social mobilization network established in Rio de Janeiro in 1993 to mobilize institutional and public action in support of the popular movement against hunger and poverty. The network's membership now includes more than a thousand member organizations, including public enterprises, non-government organizations, private-sector firms and government departments. COEP was created by a small group of activists led by sociologist Herbert de Souza, known as 'Betinho'. Together with Luis Pinguelli Rosa of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, and André Spitz of Furnas, the electricity utility, Betinho invited the presidents of the major public entities to discuss their integration into the 'struggle against hunger and misery'. Soon, over 30 enterprises, representing sectors such as banking, energy, telecommunications, health, agriculture and education, declared their membership.

Each year, COEP focuses on a specific theme for social development at a national level, aiming for collective impact at the community level throughout Brazil. Currently, major themes throughout the networks are climate change and poverty. An agenda

concerned with both preventing and addressing the effects of climate change has been constructed, with the intention of informing dialogue and public policy as well as implementing specific initiatives (Tremblay *et al.*, 2015).

## Community–university engagement (CUE) and Community-based research (CBR)

We suggest that the community–university engagement (CUE) and community-based research (CBR) developments of the past 15 years are another critical component of the emerging knowledge-democracy movement. CUE refers to a combination of practices that are having an impact on many of our higher education institutions, our own scholars and on our students. CUE refers to new approaches to the co-construction of knowledge that link community activists to university researchers, and to the engagement of students in community action projects or movements. New structures, such as the Institute for Study and Innovation in Community University at the University of Victoria, and similar community–university research partnership arrangements in other parts of Canada, Europe, Asia and Latin America have much transformative potential. Our students are demanding a new way: transformative and real-world learning opportunities that value community and alternative knowledge, and CUE, grounded in principles of CBR that provide an important space to create how we want to be together. The very practice of listening and understanding our differences is decolonizing the institutions that have long been closed. As Dr Crystal Tremblay of the University of Victoria notes:

Transformation happens, I believe, when you realize your potential and act on it in an authentic way. Methods such as CBR [community-based research], PAR [participatory action research] and other CUE [community–university engagement] approaches often inspire these types of inner discovery, and mutual learning – changing the way we see oneself and each other, and in the end value other knowledge.

(Tremblay, 2015)

## Starting with ourselves

We believe that critical reflections need to begin with taking a look at our own identities and practices. Questions with which we begin include:

1. How do we 'decolonize', 'deracialize', 'demasculinize' and 'degender' our inherited 'intellectual spaces'?
2. How do we support the opening up of spaces for the flowering of epistemologies, ontologies, theories, methodologies, objects and questions other than those that have long been hegemonic, and that have exercised dominance over (perhaps have even suffocated) intellectual and scholarly thought and writing?
3. How do we contribute to the building of new academic cultures and, more widely, new inclusive institutional cultures that genuinely respect and appreciate difference and diversity – whether differences are of class, gender, nationality, language, religious belief or sexual orientation, or are epistemological or methodological in nature?
4. How do we become a part of creating the new architecture of knowledge that allows co-construction of knowledge between intellectuals in academia and intellectuals located in community settings?

## Poets and idealists

In closing, we draw from the Indian Nobel Prize-winning poet and founder of his own decolonizing university, Rabindranath Tagore. As you read this, take into account that it was written in 1916:

I know what a risk one runs ... to be styled an idealist in these days ... when the sound that drowns all voices is the noise of the market-place. Yet ... I feel that the sky and the earth and the lyrics of the dawn and the dayfall are with the poets and the idealists and not with the marketmen.

(Tagore, 1917: 92)

## Notes on the contributors

Budd L. Hall, a Professor of Community Development at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada shares the UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education with Rajesh Tandon. He worked for 20 years with the NGO the International Council for Adult Education before joining a university. His writings have focused on participatory research, social movement learning and community–university research partnerships. He is also a poet.

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