

Book Review
*Decolonising the university: The challenge of
deep cognitive justice*

Azimeh Takrimi
Farhangian University

Decolonising the university: The challenge of deep cognitive justice (2017) by Boaventura de Sousa Santos (Cambridge Scholars Press.) 457 pages. ISBN: 978-1527500037 Price: \$109.34 CAD

Understanding *Decolonising the university: The challenge of deep cognitive justice* would be difficult for someone unfamiliar with Santos's principles of emancipation and regulation. He successfully targets the idea of cognitive justice through these two lenses while exploring the possibility of alternative sciences and the right of non-Western cultures to express their contribution to the present status of knowledge in universities and to modernity with its philosophical, political and intellectual aspects. Discussing the epistemology and sociology of knowledge, Santos argues for the university as a post-colonial all-embracing source of producing and circulating knowledge in modern society. His arguments demonstrate his commitment to the principles of socialism and Marxism, although he acknowledges the limits of Marxism in bringing about such transformations.

Santos' book is organized in three parts containing seven unevenly distributed chapters. Part one presents philosophical, historical, and political arguments on the current epistemology of knowledge, questioning the Western modernity for its equation of modern solutions for modern problems. Santos believes the university has failed to link the past to the future, so innovation, liberating movements, and profit-free knowledge has developed from outside. He views the university as an additional problem rather than a solution for societal problems, due to its subservience to capitalism, and dismissal of non-Western voices.

Chapter one critiques scientific knowledge. Santos expresses disappointment with the collapse of emancipation into regulation due to "the reconstruction management of the excesses and deficits of Western-centric modernity" (p.4). He critiques modern sciences for distrusting commonsense knowledge and being too dependent on mathematics, certifying "to know means to quantify" (p.22). He argues, unlike the

positivist natural sciences, social phenomena should be investigated qualitatively where attitudes and meanings are ascribed to people's actions.

Using an anti-Western rhetoric regarding modern sciences, relativism and ethnocentrism, Santos contends that representations of Western modernity are unfinished and the emergence of industrial society could not solve man's problem of subject-object and culture-nature boycotting the anti-functionalism and anti-instrumentalism theoretically emerging from emancipatory knowledge (p.137). He recommends building new epistemology-politics relationships with the social sciences undergoing radical changes.

Chapter two illustrates alternative critical traditions marginalized by the Eurocentrism: the knowledge emerging from social and political struggles of the South or "the sociology of absences" (p.145), announcing these knowledges are not thought, but lived as the legacy of the South. Moreover, scientific knowledge, superior economic and military power of the North have promoted its domination and self-estrangement, alienation and subordination of the intellectual potentials of non-Western epistemologies.

Part II presents a historical overview of the university, where governments' thoughts have converted universities into capitalist enterprises. Chapter 3 challenges mercantile views of universities, demanding criteria for more practical alternatives. Santos identifies three crises challenging the 21st century university: hegemony, legitimacy, and institutional, where due to the university's inability to fulfil the capitalist economic and societal demands, other research institutions gained control of research production, leaving it mispositioned between remaining autonomous and yielding to productivity demands. Santos highlights the public university priority as a public good, arguing, for financial and economic problems or neoliberalisation globalization, social policies like education and health have been de-prioritized.

Santos describes how the public university in the center (Europe and the United States) managed to survive in competition with the private sector by increasing tuitions or seeking funding from various foundations while unaffluent countries in the periphery (Africa or Brazil) have invested their limited financial resources on primary/secondary education instead, ultimately legitimizing the expansion of the university market, reducing cost per student, and elimination free public instruction (p. 187). Santos argues for transforming university into *pluriversity knowledge* where society is the subject that questions science not its object of enquiry (p.203).

Chapter four portrays the university's uncertain future, raising paradigmatic questions regarding its present status: refounding missions, global and non-global relationships, jobs and qualifications generated by universities, retaining its specificity and autonomy faced with market demands. He doubts that European universities can keep their serenity facing present financial, environmental, and migration crises.

Detailing the Bologna Process, Santos describes optimistically what has been achieved recently: reforming the European university; providing frameworks for innovative professors; developing positive discrimination mechanisms for university cooperation and fair competition; offering the universities a broader conception of society, women, unemployed, migrant workers; promoting interculturality, heterodoxy, and scientific pluralism.

Part three tackles historical pitfalls of Eurocentric social scientists in ignoring non-Western influential precursors viewing, following Weber, modern science a Western specificity (p.281). Introducing Ibn-Khaldun as the social sciences unacknowledged founder, Santos provides a historical overview of neglects by North Atlantic scientists and the West's appealing to rationalism, progress, universalism and modern capitalism. He defines decolonization as valuing "other knowledges developed in other space and time contexts" (p.292), and treating the understanding in the underdeveloped countries more fairly. He maintains, African, Asian, or Latin American people are prohibited to represent or transmit the world according to their own ideologies or specifications because of the Eurocentric social sciences sent to the university.

Chapter six explains how the articulation between capitalism and colonialism affects the university system. Santos illustrates Africa's post-independence period where universities initiated formulating national projects, implementing development and training civil servants (p.324). He demonstrates features of decolonization of the university, presenting two interventions: decolonizing history (Islam's contributions to the Western Culture, the concept of college, and scholastic methods, falsely understood as European); decolonizing epistemology: (recognizing the epistemological diversity of the world, to enlarge and deepen world experience and conversation) (p.354).

Chapter seven portrays a post-colonial comprehensive alternative, a *pluriversity*, with fundamental differences from the present university. It is committed (struggles for social justice, preserves critical distance without being neutral) and polyphonic (values voices, justifies its uniqueness and institutional creativity). He demonstrates institutional forms, operations, and organization of the *pluriversity*, with two recently-created public errant universities in Argentina and Brazil, and their workshops (2007-2016).

This text provides arguments supplemented by footnotes and anecdotes, offering the reader examples of the epistemology of the social sciences and enlightening proposals about the future of the university. References to social scientists offer unique understanding to students and educators interested in critical thinking and decolonization.

Address for Correspondence**Azimeh Takrimi**

Farhangian University

Email: takrimi18@yahoo.com