

“Against Diversity and Inclusion”
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I was born and raised in a colonial territory. My education was also colonial, meaning that it took the colonial relation as a given. When I was in school, I exhibited some talent with math and was invited to join another school that focused on the math and sciences. I also joined a special program for high school students with promise in STEM fields in a local university. The future seemed sealed and when it came the time to apply to college I applied and was admitted to an engineering program.

Being admitted into a professional program like engineering was something to celebrate for anyone, particularly to someone from the almost poor working class. However, I had found something more critical without which I did not think that I could find a decent degree of fulfillment in life, and it did not have to do with social mobility. At the point when I was graduating from high school, I felt completely incompetent to address the conditions of coloniality in which I lived and I had a large number of broad questions.

The problem was the following: nothing in my exposure to the math and sciences in school or in the special program for promising students in STEM fields in which I participated gave me confidence that I could learn anything about that there. Looking back and after having learned about the important work of broadly trained scientists and mathematicians I have concluded that it didn't have to be like that. But it was like the established academic math and science had isolated and detached themselves from anything other than what they perceived as technical sophistication and advancement.

I thought that I would find a place where to address my concerns in the humanities and the social sciences. To some extent I did, but I gradually recognized that they had also developed

practices and ways of approaching knowledge that failed to generate questions that addressed the vast impact of colonization and racialization in the modern and contemporary world. Even considerations about the value of multiculturalism, which in most cases fail to capture the gravity of coloniality, proved too threatening for many in the academy.

STEM fields seemed largely unchallenged by calls for multiculturalism because of the perception that, unlike culture, science is objective. Therefore, the predominant grammar to address matters that relate to colonialism and racialization in STEM fields has been that of diversity and inclusion. The question is how to motivate and facilitate the entry and participation of students and faculty of color in STEM fields. However, there is little consideration to the extent to which the grammar of diversity and inclusion is compatible with coloniality.

Calls for diversity open a net so broad that they do away with the specificity of the problem of systemic racism, antiblackness, coloniality, and related issues. Consider a recent tweet posted by Penn State's College of Liberal Arts addressing its "inclusive and supportive environment" that included a line directed to "conservative students" telling them that "Your viewpoints are important" alongside a message to "Black students" telling them that "Your lives matter" and Latinx students telling them that "You will not find walls here"

(https://www.collegian.psu.edu/news/campus/article_4d1ccfd4-b4d8-11ea-8550-179461a14c51.html). As one student stated in a response: "Conservatives in the United States do not live in a system that was built from the blood and trauma of their ancestors—a system that continues to put down people who look like [their ancestors] every day."

The grammar of diversity and inclusion ultimately collapses in the affirmation that "All lives matter," something that also becomes apparent in the tweet, which concludes with the lines: "Dear ALL students, We are here to support and learn from one another." The tweet starts with a

message to Black students telling them that their lives matter and concludes with a message to “ALL” students, effectively mistranslating the questions and challenges that emerged once more after the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery.

The grammar of diversity and inclusion fails to capture the specificity of systemic racism and it is often used to undermine its also specific claims. Sometimes “inclusion” is depicted as more critical than diversity, but this fails to acknowledge the multiple ways in which the grammar of inclusion easily maintains positions of authority and privilege: the one who includes sets the terms of inclusion, which is why many times it is difficult to distinguish inclusion from expected assimilation. It is even worse when ill-conceived “inclusive” practices are listed as legitimate reasons for epistemological and disciplinary policing that also reproduce practices of exclusion: “we tried helping this person, but their work belongs to this other field, not to ours...” There are many versions of this discursive logic and practice.

I wished that we would think about knowledge afresh, problematizing many of the historical divisions between questions and forms of enquiry, and considering the extent to which universities are part and parcel of the grand project of modern Western global expansion and the racial organization of people in the planet. I wished that we would consider indigenous people co-participants and leaders in explorations about the meaning of what we have grown accustomed to conceptualize as “nature,” “subject,” “object,” “objectivity,” “knowledge,” “society,” etc. These concepts are presupposed by a wide variety of academic fields, including STEM areas. I wished that we took a long time in trying to understand why saying “Black lives matter” in the twenty-first century is so significant, and why it is offensive that we ask anyone, much less a colonial subject, for inclusion into institutions and disciplines that avoid confronting the dehumanizing effects of the colonial relation.

