Response by Ton Dietz, Emeritus Professor of African Development and former Director of the African Studies Centre Leiden, to the keynote speech given by Lungisile Ntsebeza at the conference 'Africa: 60 years of independence' on 30 January 2020.

Professor Lungisile Ntsebeza and I know each other from meetings during European Conferences on African Studies, meetings in Leiden and meetings in Cape Town. I remember how devastated and shocked Lungisile was when a photo exposition that he had helped organize in Cape Town about the Rhodes Must Fall movement was hijacked and violated by LGBT+ activists, who felt ignored by that movement. I also heard him speak with horror about the destruction that took place during some of the violent encounters on campus, when also a famous painting by an anti-apartheid activist was attacked because it was mistakenly regarded as an icon of oppression, by activists who had no idea about its background and meaning. The same had happened to precious old law books when rioting students in UKZN in 2016 had set fire to the university law library in Durban, while both at the Mafikeng campus of Northwest University and at the University of Johannesburg fire was used by campaigning students to erase the symbols of a hated system, even if these were computer rooms, auditoriums, science rooms, and study rooms. And in a lot of press reports about the activists in 2016 the violence and the use of fire was strongly condemned, and even compared with Nazi terror in the 1930s. Radical demands are often uneasy bedfellows with brutal violence, and sophisticated intellectual and philosophical foundations can easily be overshadowed by very crude and counterproductive forms of destruction.

This is not something that only happened in South Africa as part of the Fall Movements. It is part of a world-wide history of contestation. And a sad truth seems to be that often those in power are more afraid of violence and anarchy, than of the power of words and ideas. Panicking rulers either respond with counter violence, or they give in, and make room for new ways of doing things. For us as intellectuals, who are also interested in the impact of radical demands, this link between ideas and violence is an uneasy one. The same is true for another element in the radical demands of the decolonization movement in academia, both in South Africa and elsewhere, most visibly in the UK, the USA and in Ghana. That element is upside-down racism. The ZED Press book that has just been published about the Fall Movement in Oxford talks about the struggle to decolonize the racist heart of Empire, but a lot of the language in that book is steeped in racial terms: authors talk about 'black bodies' that are out of place in higher education, and about 'institutionalized whiteness'. Slogans are being discussed such as 'why is my curriculum white?' or 'why isn't my professor black?'. And for me a disturbing discussion happened in Ghana, where the Fall movement was translated in an anti-Gandhi movement (the statue of Gandhi had to fall there) because he was portrayed as a pro-Indo-Aryan and anti-black activist, in the words of the Ghanaian activists. And although it is obviously a fact of life in many social environments in many places on earth that something that is called racial micro-aggression exists and can be very oppressive, putting everything under the umbrella of race is easily becoming racism itself. Currently a lot of the debate is about intersectionality: lack of access, open and hidden forms of exclusion, and discrimination are often a combination of race, class, gender, sexual

orientation, age, and so on. Focusing on race may be historically understandable from a South African perspective, real decolonization and emancipation must go beyond race.

I personally welcomed the Fall movement in South Africa, after my experiences as part of the staff of SANPAD, the South Africa Netherlands Programme of Alternatives in Development, and after many discussions with African and other PhD students in the Dutch research school CERES. Already in the 1990s I asked these PhD students to do positionality studies of the most important books and scientific articles they had used during their studies, and I continued by asking them to do the same for scientific papers they had written or were in the process of writing themselves. Positionality studies are meant to do a systematic analysis of the authors used in bibliographies, and of the publishing houses or journals where these people had published their work. For many of these students, who were doing research in and about Africa it came as a shock to discover how few of these cited authors were actually born and raised in Africa, how few papers had been published in Africa itself, and how a lot of the knowledge that was referred to was in fact based on foundations in the UK, Canada, Australia and often very much the USA, and sometimes a bit on France and the Netherlands. Language also obviously was an issue: in UK and USA-based scholarly work, even on African countries where English is not the official language, bibliographies often only contain English-language publications, let alone publications in local languages. The other way around, French-language work about often French-speaking African countries very often only used French-language sources, and predominantly written by authors based in France.

Many scholars from Europe who call themselves Africanists, like myself, have one area on the continent, which they regard as their reference area, often the area where they have done their PhD research. For me that is West Pokot in Northwest Kenya. I am in the process of systematically studying everything that has ever been written about that area, and to see who in those publications is referring to whom. I can tell you: the results are already quite shocking. Among more than a thousand publications so far, hardly any publication was written by someone from the area. It is very much about the Pokot and not by or with the Pokot. And in the course of 120 years of written knowledge production about this area you can clearly see waves of authors with certain national backgrounds and waves of topics, which often do say more about spikes of attention, or hypes, in the UK, the USA, Japan, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, and currently Kenya, but that often do not have much to do with what happened in the area itself. And with the exception of a few classics, the network of references is often very much restricted to people in the same national-scholarly tribe, and often with a myopic attention for their own academic discipline. My attempts to develop participatory forms of knowledge development and local assessments of development and change started in this area in the early 2000s, and it became very obvious to me that local people, and especially the poor ones, were very surprised that they were being seen as co-researchers, and not only as subjects of research, or in exceptional cases only as language interpreters. For me that became the basis for developing the PADev research method in Ghana and Burkina Faso later. Also there it became obvious that global and national hierarchies in knowledge production and knowledge dissemination very much

dominated the curriculums of universities, and in fact the whole knowledge system, from primary school upwards.

Decolonising knowledge production, and making universities more inclusive is a massive challenge, as it also challenges many other hierarchies as well, and the ones based on class, nationality, and gender stereotypes and forms of exclusion maybe even more important than the ones based on the colour of one's skin. Big steps are needed, but small steps are important as well. For instance: the library of the African Studies Centre in Leiden for many years has as its standard practice to acquire at least half of its books and journals from Africa, also by systematically visiting African book fairs. In Leiden, we encourage our students to make use of that local material and to be aware of the biases in their literature lists, and make additional, compensating choices. We encourage our staff to co-publish with researchers based in Africa. We invite visiting fellows from Africa and we do so since a long time, and we started appointing staff coming from Africa, encouraging them to connect these worlds of knowledge. With our Country Portal we try to connect to a great number of sources of information about all African countries and with a special emphasis on sources from Africa itself. And we invite people with a diaspora background, also from beyond the scientific community, to engage in our seminars and country meetings. But we know, it takes more to tackle the deep-seated, structural forms of institutionalized bias and exclusion, and like many institutions in which one is enveloped, one is often deaf and blind for how they structure and focus your attention and how they form your biases and opinions. One often needs a shock to realize the cocoon one is in, and the Fall movement was that type of shock for many in South Africa and beyond.

Let me end with three brief final points.

1) You all received our new thematic map "Africa at 60". The title alone shows an external gaze and that is deliberate. We see it as legitimate that there are African Studies Centres in Europe and of course they have that external gaze.
2) Please have a look at the website www.africaknows.eu about our conference in December 2020, which uses as its motto: "it's time to decolonize minds".
3) I am so proud that Leiden University will honour Professor Lungisile Ntsebeza as doctor honoris causa at the dies ceremony next week Friday!