The Urgency of Decolonisation from an African Student's Perspective

Berrington Ntombela
ORCID iD: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8099-402X

Abstract

Student uprising in South Africa has been associated mostly with dissatisfaction in the educational system in general. The Soweto uprising of 1976 was resistance against the imposition of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in schools. In 2015, University students protested on the continued display of Cecil John Rhodes statue at a prominent place of the University of Cape Town. This led to the now famous #RhodesMustFall campaign. In the same year, the #FeesMustFall campaign followed, responding to the subtle exclusionist practice of exorbitant fees by top universities barring access for the majority of Africans who often come from families that cannot afford such fees. These campaigns were underscored by calls to decolonise education. However, academics and intellectual elites hijacked the decolonisation calls by appealing to intellectual debates that excluded student voices and their experiences. The call for decolonisation has been reinterpreted from the elitist academic theorisation perspective. This paper contextualises the call for decolonisation from the actual experiences of an African student studying under the exclusionist university system. Through the tradition of ethnographic thick description the paper studies the case of one postgraduate student highlighting the maltreatment that students suffer and how this continues to dehumanise African students. Such an exposition is necessary to put into perspective possible policy and institutional remedies in order to liberate students from a colonised system. The paper therefore underscores the alienation of African students, caused by persisting neo-colonial tendencies of a university system and suggests ways in which academics can decolonise their contribution to student experiences

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1 Introduction

The renewed calls for decolonisation of education in South Africa have come interestingly from the side of students. Students are not new to political revolution – the Soweto uprising of 1976 is a case in point. Here the students protested against the imposition of Afrikaans as the sole medium of instruction in schools, which was met with police brutality that resulted in the deaths of many learners. Harrison (1992) suggests 176 casualties with estimates going up to 700 and the number of wounded exceeding a thousand. Recently, in 2015, students protested the continued display of Cecil Rhodes' statue at the University of Cape Town campus, which led to its removal, and acted as a catalyst to the #FeesMustFall campaign that eventually resulted in the slashing of fees for deserving students. Prior to the 2015 student protests, 'decolonisation had never been a prominent or sustained component of the struggle discourse under or after apartheid' (Jansen 2019:1). These protests, as Jansen (2019:1) attests, brought decolonisation into the discourse of university conferences, seminars, and committees 'to determine meanings and methods for changing universities – their complexions, cultures and curricular'.

This article, drawing from the discourses of decolonisation, approaches the problem from the viewpoint of the colonial hierarchical relationship between the lecturer and the student (Jansen 2017). It punctuates the experiences of students in a similar way that led to the protests reported above, but this time emanating from the frustrations of being helpless under the settled hierarchical academic administrative system. This system serves as an accumulation of distaste that would surely explode in the unpredictable future if gone unchecked. Furthermore, such a system has implications of what it means to decolonise education from an African student perspective.

The article draws from a qualitative paradigm utilising ethnography as a methodological approach (Silverman 2011). It uses a singular case of a student from a historically black university (HBU) with a principal aim of giving voice to the student's experiences (see Blaxter *et al.* 2006; Scott & Usher 2004). Data therefore are extracted from the student's experiences and represented in the tradition of ethnographic thick description (Scott & Morrison 2007). This has enabled the researcher to situate the student's experiences within the broad colonial and neo-colonial tendencies that necessitate the urgency of institutional decolonisation. The following discussion contextualises the study within the broader framework of decolonisation.

2 Decolonisation in Higher Education

Jansen (2019) argued that the vocabulary of decolonisation came to dominate university conferences, seminars, and curriculum committees after the 2015-2016 #Rhodes Must Fall campaigns and #FeesMustFall protests. In fact, as Mamdani (2016) recounts, the petition that ultimately led to the University of Cape Town Council vote that saw the removal of Cecil Rhodes' statue indicated that such a demand was the first step towards decolonisation of the university. In other words, the removal of Cecil Rhodes' statue was read as an act of decolonisation to which Mbembe (2015) asks a relevant question of why it took so long.

Notwithstanding Mbembe's pertinent question, others such as Jansen (2017) and Schmahmann (2019) see it differently. On the one hand, Jansen (2017) believes that the mere removal of commemorative statues shifts the direction of decolonisation from curriculum issues, to which questions of whose knowledge is privileged, what claims do such knowledge make, and which knowledge is left out, are left unattended. On the other hand, Schmahmann (2019) would have wished that Cecil Rhodes statue was never removed but instead interrogated in ways similar to the University of Free State, University of Johannesburg (especially the former RAU campus), and Stellenbosch Universit'sy commemorative statues. In these different, notably historically white universities; Schmahmann (2019) demonstrates how artists conversed with the difficult historical representations of these statues in a manner that did not warrant an undignified removal that was suffered by Cecil Rhodes statue. The forms of conversing were 'through dialogical monuments introduced in their vicinity, such as Boshoff's *Kring van Kennis* at the University of Johannesburg, temporary adaptations to sculptures such as those undertaken by Cigdem Aydemir at the University of Free State, or by being incorporated into class projects, as in the case of the *Intersection* initiative organised by Ledelle Moe at Stellenbosch University' (Schmahman 2019: 198). She goes on to argue that even the removal of Cecil Rhodes artefacts by Rhodes University was a way of hiding their transformational deception by placing that act as a mere façade.

Similarly, Jansen (2017) seems fixated on decolonisation as solely consisting of the politics of knowledge. This could be influenced by his tenure in academia as a distinguished Professor of Education in which, for him, universities should be concerned largely with knowledge. For him, the protests waged by students would not resonate with an intellectual tradition that follows

defined discursive norms. Because students demanded the removal of the statue without engaging the epistemic stakeholders of the university 'intellectually', Jansen would find such an act tantamount to vulgarisation of a university system that is grounded on academic argumentative protocols.

Similarly, Schmahmann (2019), being a professor and holder of the South African Research Chair in South African Art and Visual Culture at the University of Johannesburg, sees Cecil Rhodes statue from the perspective of her discipline. For her the statue represents a piece of art that must be engaged through the tradition of art criticism, which in a nutshell tolerates multiple perspectives and interpretations that would not warrant its removal. Students obviously did not move in the direction legitimated by such academics, which explains why the whole decolonisation drive was 'stolen' from them in order to be baptised in academic theorisation. But there is also another way of explaining the trappings that these academics seem to have fallen into.

According to Tuck and Yang (2012), when decolonisation does not address the plight of the colonised by reversing their situation to what it ought to have been, it is simply reduced to a metaphor. It can be argued that students' demand for the removal of Cecil Rhodes statue which they smeared with human excrement as a demonstration of the degree of 'unwantedness', was meant to reverse the mockery that the statue represented, which mockery should be understood against Cecil Rhodes' vision of building 'the University out of the kaffir's stomach' (Mzileni & Mkhize 2020: 5). On the other hand, the academics were content with intellectually engaging this work of art to the extent that Schmahmann (2019) criticises the removal of the statue especially because it was sculptured by a woman. To her, this was another perpetuation of gender inequality. It should not be seen as a surprise therefore that academics have taken the project of decolonisation as simply gravitating towards the issues of the curriculum (Le Grange 2016), methodologies (Keane *et al.* 2017), knowledge (Mbembe 2015), and so forth. These are not likely to produce the sort of reversal that was accomplished by students within a short space of time. In fact, these exemplify decolonisation as a metaphor. Tack and Yang (2017) are on point in arguing that the metaphorisation of decolonisation serves the purpose of assuaging the guilt of the coloniser who is not willing to give up the privileges gained through colonisation.

In the university system, the scales are tilted in favour of the academics where students are viewed as novices who must be inducted into disciplinary traditions. In that respect, academics are likely to act or react the same way

colonisers would in safeguarding their privileged positions. Jansen (2019: 9) confirms this by saying '[i]f teachers in schools cannot be instructed to adopt a decolonised curriculum, then professors in universities are certainly not going to give up their autonomy to follow a radical script for teaching their students'. This echoes Sayed *et al.* (2019: 170) 's findings in the interviews they conducted among lecturers in some Western and Eastern Cape Universities in South Africa where 'not one interviewee planned to change her or his curriculum in direct response to student activism'. It is evident that if students had waited for the academics to think through whether Cecil Rhodes statue should remain or be removed, the statue would still be standing today.

Another form of resistance that counters the decolonisation project is reflected in the continual denial of the centrality of language. In the South African context, and in many African nations, colonial languages continue to dominate knowledge production in higher education and in many other sectors such as the judiciary, media, and commerce. For example, Goldberg (2014), in his response to Prah's (2017) lecture about the promotion of African languages as a means of responding to the subjugation of Africans, relegates such a proposition into impossibility by misreading Prah's thesis as entailing a singular African language for all South Africans. This fixation on monolingualism is a western ethos where countries are conceived as organised around a singular language which becomes a unifying factor. Unfortunately, this ethos is responsible for the suppression of other languages in a multilingual environment. As such, a multilingual ethos characterises the worldview of Africans in general. Growing and speaking diverse languages has never been conceived negatively in Africa nor has it ever been thought of as problematic. In fact, individual multilingualism is generally marked as indicative of linguistic intelligence anywhere in the world, including Europe. Unfortunately, when it comes to education, only the colonial languages are thought to be viable, which is pedagogically responsible for the stupidification of the majority of African learners across the length and breadth of the continent (Ntombela 2020).

Most notably, Goldberg's dismissal of Prah's thesis is born from his colonial or neocolonial groundings (Prah 2017). This is despite the fact that Goldberg was arrested alongside struggle stalwarts at Liliesleaf (Prah 2017). In this case, colonialism and neocolonialism seem to have found a fertile ground through the ideological lineages to liberalism and neoliberalism (Prah

2017). In these ideologies, the white man becomes the touchstone for human development in economics and culture. It is therefore anathema in such an arrangement that a black person would rise to a total independence of the white man's influence. In other words, in this ideology, a black person must depend continuously on white man's language if advancement is to be attained. The undoing of this colonial linguistic dependence is not in the interest of a white man which is why a colonial language must be advanced perpetually at the expense of an African language. This situation is also true for academics who must hold on to their autonomy even if it means the continual subjugation of students. The strength of the minority in society who carve a way continuously for the majority through 'culturecide', linguicide, and epistemicide finds its replication in a university system where the student majority is suppressed by the minority university academics.

Mzileni and Mkhize (2020) shift our focus of decolonisation from epistemological concerns to spatial location of institutions which they argue is responsible for continual accommodation deprivation of predominantly black students. They observe rightly that most protests of historically black university students have featured accommodation crisis resulting from the fact that these institutions have never been able to catch up with historically white universities infrastructurally (Mzileni & Mkhize 2020). Even though historically white universities have developed infrastructure, black students continue to be treated unequally when it comes to on-campus accommodation (Mzileni & Mkhize 2020). At the University of Cape Town in particular, the exclusionary white suburb where the university is located, acts in complicit with the apartheid arrangement of moving black working class away from the city centre to the townships of Khayelitsha and Gugulethu (Mzileni & Mkhize 2020). For this reason, accommodating black students within the exclusively white suburb goes against the interests of the white community. This highlights the urgency of decolonisation for black students, most of whom come from a rural background.

These experiences depicted in the reviewed literature impact students to a large extent. It explains why calls for decolonisation had to come from students. It also explains why the project of decolonisation remains urgent for deprived students, especially from a rural background, to which the next section of this paper focuses.

3 The Study

Blaxter *et al*. (2006: 72) assert that a case study focuses 'on just one example, or perhaps two or three [which] might be the researcher's place of work, … or organisation with which they have a connection'. This study is therefore located in the historically black university which is the researcher's workplace. The protagonist in the research is a postgraduate student in the same university. There is therefore a connection between the researcher and the research site. The advantage of such an arrangement is that it minimises complexities associated with gaining access to the research site as an outsider (Silverman 2011).

This study, located within the qualitative paradigm, is conducted through 'institutional ethnography [that] seeks to link what happens to individuals to larger frameworks of institutional practices' (Silverman 2011: 126). Attention is therefore paid to a postgraduate student whose experiences are linked to the institution's practices that bring to the fore the urgency of institutional decolonisation.

The experiences of this student were visible to the researcher who interacted with her in the capacity of lecturer-student relationship. As these experiences unfolded, they emerged as a typical case of student repression under a system that had the shape of coloniality and neo-colonialiasm. In order to interrogate such experiences and represent them as they are, it was incumbent upon the researcher to navigate carefully the ethical terrain by seeking informed consent from the student to retell these experiences.

Assurances of anonymity and confidentiality were given to the student alongside explanations that her experiences would be used solely for research purposes and for giving voice to her without exposing her to any prejudice or harm of any sort. The student consented. After the researcher had put together the student's experiences in the tradition of ethnographic thick description (Canagarajah 1999), the student was given that version so she could satisfy herself of accurate representation. Although the student approved the description as representative of her experiences, she was uncomfortable that the name of the department where she was registered was mentioned. She also did not want the name of the programme she was registered for to be mentioned. The researcher had to remove these details in the description after which the student gave full consent for her experiences to be told.

4 The Student Experiences

The experiences of the main participant in this study are presented in the tradition of ethnographic thick description. We shall call this participant Gloria (a pseudonym). Gloria is a South African female currently employed by the Department of Basic Education where she works as a high school English Educator. She first enrolled for her junior degree at one historically black university (HBU) in 1998 where she majored in English. She came back to the same university in 2015 to register for an honours degree.

The department where Gloria was registered had a multinational and multiracial academic staff profile. The nations represented in the department were Zambia, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, and South Africa. The racial categories were Black African, Indian, Coloured, and White.

The honours degree that she registered for in 2015 had five papers including a compulsory research paper which counted no less than 30 credits. Because she registered as a part-time student, she would split the papers into two years where two would be taken in the first year and the other two plus the research paper in the following year, which means in 2015 she registered for two papers.

All honours papers were year modules which meant exams were written either at the end of the year or at the beginning of the following year. However, continuous assessment was used to generate a year mark which counted for 40% of the paper. In September 2015, Gloria was summoned by the Head of Department, where she was registered, to a meeting where the lecturers of one paper had recommended that she deregisters because her performance was poor. These lecturers had not taken into account her performance in the other paper but had gone ahead to recommend that she withdraws from the honours programme. They had concluded wrongly that her poor performance in that paper meant poor performance throughout. Gloria refused to deregister. She went ahead and wrote the exams.

As expected, she failed one paper dismally but passed the other. A meeting was held in the department to discuss her performance as she happened, paradoxically, to be the only student registered for honours in 2015. In the meeting it was questioned how she passed one paper because her level of performance in the other meant that she could not pass any honours paper. The concern was so great that it was resolved that her paper that she had passed had to be brought back to the department to be re-marked (probably for

purposes of failing her). Distressingly, the question paper that she wrote, albeit having gone through internal and external moderation processes, was doubted and deemed to be of low standard. At the time of the meeting the paper in question was already deposited in the institution's examination vault. Attempts to retrieve the paper from the exam section were abandoned as the protocol required the involvement of many higher authorities such as the Dean and Registrar, but the department was not prepared to expose itself to them. This meant that in 2015, Gloria had passed one paper and failed the other.

In 2016 Gloria came back to register for other modules. She made a telephone enquiry to the lecturer whose paper she had passed the previous year about the modules that were on offer in 2016. The lecturer told her what modules other honours students had registered for. She went ahead and registered for those modules. The department was not pleased that she registered herself without her registration form signed either by the Head of Department or the Honours Co-ordinator, , who, particularly, was the most displeased, and argued that her registration was problematic in that she needed to be advised about what specific modules she should register for given her performance the previous year. It was resolved in a departmental meeting that she be advised to take some modules from another department. The Head of Department was requested to liaise with another Head of Department for such an arrangement.

It seems the honours coordinator went ahead and retrieved Gloria's registration form from students' records. Gloria was then called and advised to deregister. When it was discovered that Gloria had been forced to deregister, one concerned member of the department sought an explanation. The honours coordinator explained that Gloria was advised chiefly to deregister because she had registered herself without consulting the Head of Department or the coordinator. The coordinator further maintained that Gloria was given options that would allow her to redeem her registration but she did not take them. Initially it was agreed that the Head of Department would liaise with another Head of Department; however, when this other Head of Department was asked he denied that he had been contacted for such an arrangement although he was ready to accommodate Gloria should the department have approached him. This contradicted the coordinator's claim that the other department did not seem to have any course that Gloria could take in 2016. Gloria was then advised by another lecturer to lodge a complaint with the Dean through the Student Representative Council (SRC) which did not succeed. The department

frowned upon Gloria's decision to involve the SRC arguing that she was trying to force the department to change its mind on the decision it had taken. This meant that Gloria had to remain unregistered throughout 2016.

5 Discussion

Gloria is said to have pursued her tertiary education at an HBU. Whilst the mention of the category of the institution she attended might sound trivial elsewhere in the world, in South Africa it remains the legacy of the infamous apartheid regime. Edwards (2015: 15) reminds us how institutions in the apartheid South Africa came to be categorised into historically white universities (HWUs), which were made of 'the English-language universities of Cape Town, Rhodes, Witwatersrand, and Natal, and the Afrikaans-language universities of Stellenbosch, Pretoria, Free State, and Potchefstroom', and the historically black universities (HBUs) that were particularly rural and disadvantaged for many reasons. The rural universities were therefore steeped into a continuous struggle for freedom from apartheid and its legacies (Edwards 2015). Furthermore, Edwards (2015: 54) reports that:

> In a post-apartheid study on state-tertiary education relationships conducted with Zululand University staff, whose demographics generally represented the country as a whole, more positive opinions on state involvement in higher education were held by younger females, previously disadvantaged, and lower educated staff in administrative positions, and more negative opinions were held by older males, previously advantaged, and higher educated staff in academic positions.

In a nutshell, highly qualified academics that most probably hold higher positions in their disciplines are likely to be resistant to change. Academic resistance to change is usually presented as a protection of academic freedom. This academic freedom in some cases means stringent bureaucratic procedures that only serve to authenticate the hierarchical position of the academics. This is the kind of environment that Gloria encountered when she registered for her Honours degree.

Whilst in a colonial setup, race would be the determining factor of prejudice, in Gloria's case it does not seem her experiences could be linked to

racial prejudice. The department where she was registered was multiracial and multinational. Student protests and uprisings as noted earlier could be easily linked to racial tensions. In the Soweto uprisings of 1976, it was tension between Black students and the apartheid government led by the white minority. Even in recent protests of #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall, there are traces of racial undertones in the fact that the statue of Cecil John Rhodes represented the imperial British system that was oppressive of the black populace. The exorbitant fees as well affected to a large extent the black populace. Nonetheless, these tendencies have a way of resurfacing through the new masters who need not wear a different racial hat in a neo-colonial system (Prah 2018). Gloria's experiences therefore could be explained in the light of neo-colonialism where as a student, she is subjected to arbitrary bureaucracies that are not helpful to her. Whilst in the colonial arrangement she could have been mistreated on account of being black (and perhaps female as well), in a neo-colonial system, she suffers only because she is a student whose voice does not carry any weight against her lecturers.

The question is whether Gloria had any options available to her that she could use to alleviate her plight. She was advised to escalate her matter to the Dean through the SRC. Although this might present itself as a viable option, the question of power relations was skewed in favour of the academics. In fact, the SRC does not seem to fare well on issues of the hidden curriculum. The department as the custodian of the programme that Gloria had registered for remained the ultimate authority. This is one of the reasons it did not go down well with the department that Gloria had sought to involve the SRC. In the view of the department, such matters do not belong to the mandate of the SRC. Similarly, academics and intellectuals who have responded to calls for decolonisation of the curriculum are noted to be concerned 'with empowering students to engage knowledge by asking critical questions such as: Where did this knowledge come from? In whose interests does this knowledge persist? What does it include and leave out? What are its authoritative claims? What are the underlying assumptions and silences that govern such knowledge?' Jansen (2017: 161). Although it is imperative for students to be trained as critical agents, there could be an imposed demarcation of what issues students could deal with and how. In the case of Gloria, the SRC might have been deemed to have overstepped.

Notwithstanding what seems to be a failure in keeping Gloria registered, she did not seem to accept her fate outright without resistance. In

the initial meeting where she was advised to deregister, she exercised her right to remain in the programme. This resistance must have been interpreted as insolence, which could be why her registration was reversed unilaterally the following year. Within a colonial and neo-colonial arrangement, resistance is not tolerated and is usually met with punishment as a warning to others – the Soweto uprising of 1976 is a case in point. Admittedly, the resistance that Gloria mounted had all the stakes against her. She was a solo student resisting the injunction of the department with very limited backup if at all any. The impact of the recent student protests and even the 1976 Soweto uprising could be ascribed to a relatively large number of students who participated. Gloria all by herself could not do much. But the experiences that Gloria had could be widespread. The fact that Gloria was the only student registered for an Honours programme might mean that other potential students were either barred or simply did not wish to be associated with the department that treat students the way Gloria was treated.

The experiences that Gloria went through regarding her performance and registration indicate how students are treated and labelled. Ntombela (2018) has argued that the elitist bureaucratic position of a lecturer is promoted by mainstream pedagogy, which, according to Canagarajah (1999), regards learning as a detached cognitive activity, transcendental, employing universal learning processes, and where knowledge is value-free and pre-constructed. In this arrangement, the student is reduced into a universal being who must engage with decontextualised learning objectively. The cultural, local, and politically subjective nuances of learning are brushed aside to such an extent that a student is expected to fit the universal academic worldview with all its bureaucracies. This usually plays itself out in assessment. For instance, Ntombela (2018) asserts that lecturers do fall into a trap of attaching judgment to a person than to the work that is being assessed. Clearly, the lecturers who handled Gloria's work had fallen into that trap. That is, Gloria's challenge with one module is immediately used to label her as a failure that she is incapable of handling any other academic work. In fact, such failure seems so repulsive that she must be punished for it.

The punishment that Gloria suffers is two-fold: she is first disallowed to continue with any academic work by being asked to deregister, but when she persists and eventually passes the other module, she is punished for coming back to the programme and is made to spend the whole year at home. In the university system, she does not seem to stand any chance, as the scales are

tilted in favour of her lecturers. There is no way that she could be an isolated case. The system is made to function such that academics retain their place of authority. This is similar to the situation in the United States of America where Hooper (2015) argues convincingly that the shooting and killing of many unarmed black people demonstrate the workings of the American system meant to work that way. In other words, the university system was made to function in such a way that even if Gloria were registered legitimately, she would not be able to win her case against those who did not want her registered. The SRC could not assist even though it is believed to represent the best interests of the students.

In addition, the lecturers, who wanted Gloria to deregister because she was not doing well in one module and eventually succeeded in having her deregistered the following year, show their preoccupation with their own interests than with Gloria's. Seemingly they were concerned about their reputation than about Gloria's. The fact that Gloria was the only student registered for the Honours programme that year meant that if she failed, the department would have registered a hundred per cent failure rate. If there were any concerns for Gloria to pass, then all efforts could have been made given that she was the only honours student that year. It is also concerning that, as stated before, her better performance in another paper is treated with suspicion. It gives the implication that it is no longer about how she performs than about her as a person. This is confirmed by the fact that she is deregistered against her will the following year on very trivial accounts – the system was being used to fight her and hurt her as a person. In other words, she was being reduced into a non-intellectual who must not independently make routine decisions such as getting herself registered. This kind of treatment is not very different from the imposition of Afrikaans language as the sole medium of instruction in black schools back in 1976, which terminated in the Soweto uprisings. Those in authority did not expect that students would have the intellectual capacity to read the implications of that edict and to resist it. Similarly, it might have come as a surprise that students read the statue of Cecil Rhodes for what it stood for even though such a message seemed to have fallen onto deaf ears among the academics and intellectuals.

From how things turned out for Gloria, it seems appropriate to deduce that the academics on whose hands her academic journey depended would not be the right people to free, rather to oppress her. Gloria would then be left with no option but to take the matter of her freedom into her own hands. This seems

to have been the modus operandi employed by students in the Soweto uprisings and the recent #Rhodes Must Fall and #FeesMustFall campaigns. Notably, the academics were never in the forefront, which implies that issues of decolonisation in the Higher Education sector would only succeed when handled by those who are directly affected. Although there is progress in the debates around epistemological decolonisation from various academics and intellectuals as noted in the literature review section, there is a notable lack of militancy and urgency that generally characterise student response. Decolonisation responses from intellectuals and academics are weighed, balance, and reduced largely into a metaphor and therefore lack urgency. This is not likely to emancipate students who continue to be burdened by colonial legacies of education. The problem, however, is that when the colonised subject unleashes the militant response, the coloniser is often caught off guard, which sometimes leaves unintended casualties. There must be, nonetheless, a way in which both get to work together for common good.

6 Conclusion

This paper has interrogated what decolonisation has come to mean in the higher education sector. This has been done by highlighting how students paved the way forward in responding to colonial legacies in education. Most importantly, the paper sought to underscore how academics and intellectuals stole the project of decolonisation as exemplified through successful students' protests and campaigns. For example, the 1976 Soweto uprising where Afrikaans was resisted and the recent 2015 Rhodes Must Fall campaign that resulted in the removal of Cecil Rhodes statue, and #FeesMustFall protests where fees were eventually slashed for deserving students. Decolonisation was usurped into academic debates that ended up metaphorising the project of decolonisation. Metaphorisation occurred in the continued academic debates that mostly result in agreements to disagree. This should be expected in the context where the beneficiaries of the implicated system are also players. In other words, giving up on the benefits of colonisation would not be that easy. That is, academics have benefited from the long-established traditions of academia founded on colonial legacies that it is almost impossible to see anything wrong with the system.

Gloria's experiences are used to demonstrate why calls for decolonisation would have to be urgent. Her experiences indicate why students

come to 'enough is enough'. Tellingly, her experiences show that whilst academics and intellectuals get fixated on epistemic issues, simple human interactions and treatment of students are more likely to indicate the depth of colonial tendencies. Objectifying students who must only 'tow the line' and not use their thinking capacity is reminiscent of a colonial mindset where subjects are regarded as unintelligent and therefore incapable of responding to the master. It is that sort of mindset that decolonisation must exorcise.

This paper has taken the African student context in order to frame the urgency of decolonisation. The reality is that African students tend to be the most muted in issues of decolonisation. Their protests are usually brushed aside and their experiences are trivialised. Those who are gatekeepers in higher education would find it convenient to remind African students constantly how fortunate they are to be enrolled in a university and therefore should not behave like ungrateful brats. This is the same rhetoric used by former colonisers who found it convenient to remind their former slaves how they brought them civilisation and therefore should be grateful for the progress they have come to share. This is the same narrative that beneficiaries of the Cecil Rhodes escapades must have used in silencing student voices that they must be grateful for the university Cecil built them. Verily, the call for decolonisation could never be this urgent.

There is surely a need to revisit how students are treated. This is more urgent in historically black universities where student dropout and delayed completion rates remain high. Even though the rhetoric of treating students as customers is not very popular among academics, there is a growing need to recognise them as equal partners in knowledge construction. This means they also deserve humane and equal treatment given to academics. If this is not addressed, those students who get produced under such a system would perpetuate the same behaviour and reproduce repression. On the other hand, this might reach a tipping point and initiate another student resistance in very unpredictable ways with unpredictable consequences. Institutions should therefore open up opportunities for students to interrogate the hidden curriculum behind such treatment that Gloria received. By so doing, there could be a way of reversing colonial and neo-colonial tendencies that continue to plaque institutions of higher learning. Most importantly, this would contribute to the project of decolonising education in higher institutions of learning.

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Berrington Ntombela
Senior Lecturer and Head of Department
Department of English
University of Zululand
KwaDlangezwa
ntombelab@unizulu.ac.za