

An Analysis of the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework: Towards Decoloniality in South African Higher Education

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Abstract

As a national policy imperative, transformation has dominated efforts towards change in higher education in South Africa in the post-1997 period. Twenty years later, students are echoing continuous calls for transformation by the government and scholars, with renewed attention to student fees and decolonisation of the curriculum. Recent violent national protests necessitate interventions at the national higher education policy level as well as at an institutional level. However, the relationship between quality assurance policies and decolonisation priorities has not been considered. The Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) is proposed as a guide to inform curriculum development and programme accreditation. This qualitative study explored how the HEQSF could contribute to calls to decolonise the curriculum. As a national government directive, transformation was interpreted and implemented differently in the various higher education institutions. Due to a lack of adequate debate on how decoloniality should be implemented nationally, transformation and decoloniality will continue to co-exist as discourses in higher education until this is resolved. The analysis of the HEQSF indicates the possibilities and limitations of both the HEQSF and decoloniality to contribute to calls to decolonise the curriculum. The HEQSF was designed in line with a neo-liberal world view which militates against shifts towards embracing different ways of thinking and ‘de-linking’ from traditional perspectives. Re-examining the very notion of a qualifications framework and proposing relevant alternatives to facilitate the decolonisation of the

curriculum, is required. Since no alternative exists to replace the HEQSF, the possibility for change based on prescriptions in a decolonial context are questionable. The article concludes with possibilities and challenges for moving towards decoloniality in the South African higher education system.

Keywords: Decolonisation, decoloniality, Africanisation, curriculum, transformation, Higher Education Qualifications Sub-framework, policy analysis, higher education, South Africa

Introduction

Transformation has been on the higher education (HE) policy agenda since the late 1990s when it was foregrounded in the Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education (DoE 1997). Twenty years later, students are echoing continuous calls for transformation by the government and scholars, with renewed attention to student fees and decolonisation of the curriculum. Recent violent national protests necessitate interventions at a national HE policy level as well as at institutional level. South Africa underwent double colonisation, first under the Dutch until the 1800s and then under the British until 1910. Remnants of coloniality persisted in the apartheid regime from 1948 and into the subsequent democratic society from 1994 onwards. Equity and quality were identified as the guiding principles to transform the country's segregated, fragmented and inequitable HE system (DoE 1997). Public HE institutions are funded by the South African government and as such, it has an interest in ensuring standards and combining policy imperatives such as quality and equity in public policies. According to Cloete *et al.* (2004), the post-1994 period was informed by transformation. However, at policy level, the relationship between quality assurance policies and decolonisation priorities has not been considered. Previous studies on decolonising the curriculum, which are relevant to this study (Leibowitz 2017; Le Grange 2016; Luckett 2016) focused on dehegemonising colonial knowledge which harmed both the colonisers and the colonised (Leibowitz 2017). Studies have also examined what a decolonisation project would entail (Le Grange 2016) and the cultural and structural constraints of knowledge practices in the curriculum (Luckett 2016).

In consultation with the Council on Higher Education, the South African Qualifications Authority, professional bodies and representatives from

industry, the Department of Higher Education promulgated the Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF) in October 2007 (DoE 2007). The purpose was to establish a single qualifications framework for HE and to facilitate the development of a single national co-ordinated HE system, as envisaged in the Education White Paper 3 (DoE 1997). In 2013, three sub-frameworks for qualifications were promulgated, the General and Further Education and Training Sub-framework, the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) and the sub-framework for Trades and Occupations (DHET 2013). The HEQF was revised in 2013 as a sub-framework, in order to address gaps and to include new qualification types.

Recent student protest focused on decolonising curricula in HE, which provides a rationale for analysing the HEQSF as a HE framework, rather than the other two sub-frameworks. This article thus explores how a national quality assurance sub-framework, namely the HEQSF, could assist with calls to decolonise the HE curriculum. It argues that there are possibilities and limitations of both the HEQSF and decoloniality to contribute to calls to decolonise the curriculum. Transformation and curricula are viewed through the lens of equity and quality imperatives in order to problematise the need for decoloniality as a separate process. Decoloniality of power, being and knowledge are then explored. This is followed by an outline of the analytic strategy that guides the analysis of the political, socio-cultural and historical contexts, as well as the orders of discourse in the formulation of the HEQSF. The final section analyses the HEQSF and discusses decoloniality within this context. The article concludes with possibilities for moving towards decoloniality in the South African HE system.

Transformation

Transformation has dominated efforts towards change in HE in South Africa in the post-1997 period. Examples of structural changes in HE include the establishment of a single national system, merging of institutions, the establishment of new universities in the Northern Cape and Mpumalanga, quality assurance processes, enrolment planning and growth in black student enrolment (CHE 2016a). In South Africa, the term transformation has been used to refer to promoting efficiency at the systemic level as well as racial transformation (Francis & Hemson 2010). As such, it is an on-going social

process aimed at reconstructing and developing universities to achieve a democratic society (Universities South Africa (USA) 2015). Transformation thus focuses on social and individual transformation which is informed by quality in HE (CHE 2004a). Transformation policies such as the White Paper 3 (DoE 1997) aimed to achieve equity, focusing on growth and redress. Cloete (2004) argues that the pillars of transformation include democracy, equity, responsiveness and efficiency. However, this is not sufficiently nuanced to cover knowledge and curricula choices. In this article, transformation is regarded as, ‘the active removal of any institutional, social, material and intellectual barriers in the way of creating a more equal, inclusive and socially just higher education system’ (USA 2015: 2). Viewed as such, recent student protests illustrate that HE transformation has not altered students’ lived experiences. Contestations remain with regard to elitism and the ‘whiteness’ of institutions which marginalise black students (Heleta 2016: 1), power relations, inclusion, recognition, identity and a sense of being in HE institutions. This could be attributed to the modernist neo-liberal paradigm which informed transformation. The process of decoloniality needs to inform how we create a socially just, equitable and inclusive HE system (USA 2015). It also needs to directly address what knowledge and what and who are privileged to facilitate change at the institutional and national level. Using decoloniality as a lens to re-assess current calls for change provides a more inclusive means to inform change in HE. Equity, quality and decoloniality are thus regarded as integral policy imperatives to spearhead change in this sector.

Equity and Quality Assurance

Major policy threads in HE include equity and quality assurance (Martin 2010a). Equity has been on the national policy agenda in countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Mexico, Brazil, India and New Zealand (Martin 2010a). South Africa is no exception (DHET 2013; DoE 1997) but it has included access as an aspect of transformation in HE (Machingambi 2011). Equity of access and equity of outcomes are important to address the revolving door syndrome in which almost half the cohort of contact students in HE, does not graduate within five years (CHE 2013). A tension thus exists in achieving equity of access and retention, quality and learning outcomes. While access is important, attention should be devoted to

epistemological access (Morrow 2007), access to knowledge, in order for students to succeed. Epistemological access would enable students to access the kinds of knowledge afforded by HE institutions. However, interrogating whose epistemology informs curricula is integral to achieving equity. To date, admissions policies, assessments and institutional cultures have alienated and excluded the majority of students by not being inclusive and cognisant of students' needs, identity formation, hierarchies and power relations within institutions. Revising the curriculum is an integral part of transformation. However, it has largely been de-contextualised and is socially indifferent to students' experiences; this has contributed to the low levels of student success (Cooper & Subotsky 2001). To date, those responsible for transformation in institutions have not interrogated who defines admission policies and how admission requirements, assessment and progression rules impact on equity. Different modes of assessment in curricula could foster inclusion and success for the majority of students. Who the university and the curriculum are designed for and how equity is incorporated into curricula in terms of whose knowledge is taught, needs to be revisited at national level.

The South African government has an interest in ensuring standards and combining transformation imperatives such as quality and equity in HE policies. As such, it considers equity imperatives parallel to the quality of the educational experience (DoE 1997). Quality is thus envisaged as one of the mechanisms to lead the HE sector to transformation (Moosa & Murray 2016). Ristoff (2010) argues that quality and equity are often viewed as antagonistic concepts since a tension exists between reducing inequality and promoting social inclusion. In contrast, Martin (2010a) asserts that quality and equity could reinforce each other as well as coexist in a HE policy. In order to contribute to real change, equity and quality should be framed at policy level in a manner that builds on past achievements, is inclusive and takes account of national imperatives as well as international trends.

National qualification frameworks have become an international phenomenon (Ferne & Pilcher 2009) and frameworks for quality assurance such as HE frameworks have emerged to assure quality as well as meet transformation imperatives. The assumption is that quality assurance policies imbue international confidence and are mechanisms to address equity imperatives in HE (Martin 2010b). Accreditation is used to ensure quality and meet industry standards set by professional bodies and quality councils as well as to facilitate and increase international student mobility (Haakstad 2001).

Murray (2009) argues that accreditation assures the public of graduates' competence. Martin (2010a) notes that where equity is a national concern, countries have developed quality assurance policies that address this issue as well as quality concerns. Examples of HE qualification frameworks can be found in South Africa, the UK, Belgium (CHE 2004b; QAA 2014; Higher Education Qualifications Framework in Flanders 2008) and more recently on the African continent. Lange and Singh (2010) argue that the relationship between equity and quality is a challenging one that is not understood by all stakeholders. As such, the relationship between transformation policies and national equity, quality and recent decolonial priorities, needs to be considered. The following section discusses decolonisation and decoloniality.

Decolonisation

Inequality in society has been approached from various perspectives. Some studies have focused on the reasons for social segregation as well as the dominance of certain groups (Leibowitz 2017; Martin 2010a). Martin (2010a) argues that inequalities in Brazil, India, South Africa and Australia stem from colonisation. Similar to most societies in which inequality has achieved policy recognition, South Africa's history is an important point of departure (Martin 2010b). The shift from being a colony to apartheid and the subsequent democratisation of South Africa continues to warrant policy attention as we strive for social inclusion in HE. Mbembe contends that we need to decolonise 'to undo the racist legacies of the past' (2016b: 32). This began with the first process of Afrikaner decolonisation through the establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910, which was followed by the second process of undoing the segregated and racist apartheid legacy in the post-1994 period. This provides the context for decolonisation in the South African context.

Decolonisation has its origins in colonisation, since resistance began at the point when colonisation took place. Decolonisation is not a new uncontested call; it has been mooted in former colonies in Africa, Latin America and Australia and America. Decolonisation in America is depicted in the US War of Independence in the 1770s, which ended European control of South and North America (Rickard 2003). It is a complex and multifaceted process and must be approached as such. The literature on decolonisation has presented concepts such as decolonisation, decoloniality and Africanisation within the decolonisation debate. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) regards decoloni-

sation as a historical process, which relates to the withdrawal of colonial powers from the colonies. It could thus be understood as a political process geared towards independence (Maldonado-Torres 2007). However, it does not end once independence is achieved. Colonial structures and cultures persist and the system that perpetuates epistemic, material and aesthetic resources is termed coloniality (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013).

Scholarship from the Latin-American region (Grosfoguel 2011; Maldonado-Torres 2007; Quijano 2000) provides insights into coloniality and decoloniality through concepts such as power, being and knowledge. Dastile and Ndlovu-Gatsheni argue that the ‘decolonial epistemic perspective builds on decolonization discourse but adds the concepts of power, being and knowledge as constitutive of modernity/coloniality’ (2013: 109). Latin American scholars such as Quijano (2000) and African researchers such as Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013), argue that coloniality of power can be understood through binary asymmetrical power structures which are characterised by unequal power relations between developed and developing nations. Coloniality of being relates to integrity of being (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013). Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) views epistemicides of resources during colonialism and the notion of the ‘discovery’ of non-Euro-American countries, as a representation of coloniality of being. Maldonado-Torres (2007) describes coloniality of being as the disintegration and dehumanisation of being and states that coloniality of being is the effect of coloniality on lived experiences that outlive colonialism in socio-historical contexts. Maldonado-Torres (2007) adds that as a practice and a discourse, modernity cannot exist without coloniality and that the outcome of modern discourse is coloniality. It is thus essential for decolonisation to address gender, sexual and racial hierarchies in order to oppose coloniality of knowledge, power and of being (Maldonado-Torres 2007). Coloniality of knowledge privileges and legitimises hegemonic forms of thinking and knowledge and is perpetuated through the modern Westernised university (Grosfoguel 2011). By extension, national policies and frameworks which inform practices in HE institutions perpetuate the status quo which is informed by modernism.

Le Grange (2016) argues that decolonisation is a complex process and that in order to decolonise the curriculum, we need to rethink how we currently understand the term curriculum. The notion of curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived experiences by teachers and students (Lovet & Smith 1995) should be interrogated. While the content must be rethought, Le Grange

(2016) argues that lived experiences should inform the process of decolonising the curriculum. We need to question how knowledge is a carrier of colonialism. Le Grange (2016) and Garuba (2015) thus advocate for current dominant conceptions of curriculum to be rethought. The process of curriculum development is therefore integral to decolonising the curriculum. However, curriculum development is politically laden; for example, Hlebowitsh (2010) argues that through its conception, curriculum development could exclude individuals based on race, class and gender. Hlebowitsh (2010) also notes that curriculum development is an imperialist concept. Sensitivity to the political context in which it takes place is essential. At the Africa Centre for Scholarship and African University Day celebrations on 24 November 2017 at Stellenbosch University, Jonathan Jansen argued that the concern with curriculum in South Africa has been a ‘corrective orientation’ to knowledge which focuses on the past as opposed to a ‘prospective orientation’ that privileges knowledge of the future (Makoni 2017). Jansen stated that the decolonisation movement will not have an effect on curricula because the rules that frame what counts as knowledge remain unchanged and that decolonisation provides the ‘wrong response to a real problem’ (Makoni 2017). Rather than being passive, those committed to transforming the curriculum should continue to propose changes to institutions and curricula within the context of decolonisation.

Calls for decolonising the curriculum thus involve transforming what is taught and how it is taught. This ontological pluralism requires ecologies of knowledge and Mbembe advocates for a ‘new understanding of ontology, epistemology, ethics and politics’ (2016b: 42). Using inclusive approaches and taking the student’s lived experiences as the starting point, the challenges confronting curriculum development are how ecologies of knowledge are incorporated into disciplines and the power relations between them. These require time to implement. During the 2015 and 2016 protests, students demanded the decolonisation of the curriculum. Calls to transform epistemic spaces at universities have thus been mooted. Consequently, curriculum structures need to be cognisant of contextual realities, which serve as barriers to knowledge systems. The process of curriculum development ensures that lecturers design the curricula, and thus select the content, then lecture and ultimately assess courses (Mbembe 2016b). The organisational structure of the university thus needs to be decolonised in as far as it serves as a structure that sets up assessment systems to assess student performance (Mbembe 2016b). Mbembe (2016a) argues that, through ‘epistemic coloniality’, thinking is

subject to the colonial order and colonial perceptions of knowledge are allowed to persist and achieve hegemony over other forms of knowledge production. Ndlovu-Gatsheni describes this as ‘epistemicides’ (2013: 11), which refers to the killing of knowledge practices other than hegemonic epistemologies. Mbembe (2016b) thus advocates that the pursuit of credits needs to be decolonised and that pluriversity of knowledge should replace the current Eurocentric model. This is challenging as there are currently no alternatives to credits as a currency to achieve qualifications.

The pedagogy within the decolonising process needs to be rethought in order to support changes to curricula. There is a need to decolonise both knowledge and systems of knowing (Nakata 2002). Drawing on the Australian experience, Nakata, Nakata, Keech and Bolt (2012) note that decolonising pedagogies have become a means of promoting socially just curricula in that country. Indigenous perspectives, knowledge and content have been inserted in course content at some Australian universities (Nakata *et al.* 2012). Although attempts have been made to decolonise Western pedagogy through indigenous studies, the distinction between what is indigenous and what is colonial and what serves as indigenous knowledge practices is complex and remains unclear (Nakata *et al.* 2012). Pedagogic changes are required to transform the way teaching happens in the classroom. Mbembe (2016a) argues that classrooms in South African HE institutions are characterised by outdated forms of knowledge and pedagogies, which are no longer appropriate, calling for alternative relationships between students and teachers. Odora Hoppers (2001) focuses on the incorporation of indigenous knowledge systems in the curriculum and argues that diverse cosmologies of knowledge should inform policy formulation. In contrast, Horsthemke (2009) asserts that a focus on African indigenous knowledge systems lacks the plausibility to drive the transformation process in South Africa. As such, efforts to including indigenous knowledge in the curriculum remain on the fringes of mainstream curriculum development and pedagogy. The process of decoloniality has thus not been realised.

Decoloniality

Decoloniality has sometimes been used interchangeably with Africanisation to describe the process of transformation that is required in Africa. Africanisation promotes a vision of South African Universities as ‘being in Africa and of

Africa' (Manganyi 1981: 160). Local knowledge should thus be the starting point for knowledge-building in all contexts. According to Manganyi (1981), the global context is an integral component of Africanisation. A transformative process is assumed in both Africanisation and decoloniality since they seek to locate Africa at the centre of its understanding of itself and the curriculum (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 2004). It is also recognised that there is a need to break with the current hegemonic epistemic tradition at our institutions of higher learning. Decoloniality and Africanisation in the African context become the focus of the transformative process to militate against the structures of coloniality such as the university and its processes, traditions and organisational structures. As an exercise in modernism, in the 1960s the South African apartheid government set out to divide universities along racial and language lines in order to distinguish between Afrikaans and English medium universities. Decoloniality could be used to address shifts in epistemology and mindsets. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) argues that it involves moving from the West as the epistemic locale to ex-colonised epistemic sites to describe the world. As such, he defines decoloniality as 'a pluriversal epistemology of the future – a redemptive and liberatory epistemology that seeks to de-link from the tyranny of abstract universals' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013: 13). According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013), decoloniality could allow us to firstly, convey the history of humanity and knowledge using epistemic sites that were previously misrecognised or unrecognised. Secondly, it would highlight the generation of knowledge as 'borrowings, appropriations, epistemicides, and denials of humanity of the other people as part of the story of science' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013: 15). Similarly, Mbembe (2016a) calls for a shift from the current 'epistemic coloniality', which is based on a Eurocentric model, to theorising alternatives. The north-south divide in the production of knowledge highlights the reality which perpetuates the hegemonic Eurocentric Western epistemic model, since no knowledge currently exists to replace Western knowledge. Jansen stated that African and Western knowledge need to co-exist due to the deficit in knowledge production from the South (Makoni 2017). Alternatives will thus take time and need to be crafted in a context which acknowledges this reality.

A shift from the traditional to alternatives can be understood through the concept of 'de-linking' (Mignolo 2000). 'De-linking' (Mignolo 2000) from the past within the context of decoloniality allows contestation to take place and provides a place of 'doing' where traditional content can be contested.

Economic and social disadvantage as well as deficit perspectives which informed policy and curricula can be disrupted in the place of ‘doing’. Unequal power relations within universities and between universities and national policy formulators are possible in such places. The marginalised are able to exercise agency and propose alternatives to their lived experiences. Silences and traditional uncontested ways of viewing the world can thus be exposed and challenged. However, there is lack of understanding of the structures and traditions of the university coupled with government financial models and the categorisation of materials through categorising education subject matter (CESM), which dictate funding. Curricula cannot be changed without addressing the form (university) in which the content (curriculum) resides.

The global internationalisation agenda is set by a Western conception of this phenomenon and has largely focused on programmes involving the movement of staff and students from the South to the North. A new hegemony through Africanisation of the curriculum will not suffice; space is also required for curricula interplay between different and diverse knowledge systems with different cultural viewpoints and international and local case studies (Leask & de Wit 2016). According to Horsthemke (2009), the construct of ‘African knowledge’ is a contradiction that invites more problems than it solves. Nevertheless, institutions have grappled with the complexities of implementing internationalisation of the curriculum in various fields such as the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. Tensions between Africanisation (with its local, regional and African focus) and internationalisation (with its outward, global and Western focus), need to be interrogated in debates on decoloniality, in order to give effect to policy changes. Internationalisation and Africanisation are integral to curriculum reform and create space for epistemic diversity as they become subsumed in the process of curriculum development. Jansen emphasised that during the student protests, a call was made for a focus on African identity and not hierarchies of power, since some students reflected that ‘they studied curricula full of white men while their own scholars were being undermined’ (Makoni 2017). Tensions between Africanisation and internationalisation need to be debated in disciplines. In theory, decoloniality would have us believe that this could be easily achieved. However, there are limitations to how it could be implemented such as resistance to change in institutions and disciplines. Power relations between diverse epistemes are also not easily resolved. Gatekeepers may function to entrench institutional cultures and maintain the status quo and may include ‘those who worked hard to

maintain Apartheid and white domination’ (Heleta 2016: 6). The analytic strategy that informs the analysis of the HEQSF is presented in the following section.

Analytic Strategy

It is prudent to begin with a definition of how policy is viewed in this article. Guba (1984) argues that prior to any analysis, the analyst should explicitly state the definition of policy that is adopted in order to be ethical. He considers various definitions of policy. Those that are relevant to this analysis view policy as policy-in-intentions. These include ‘policy is an assertion of intents or goals’ and ‘policy is a strategy undertaken to solve or ameliorate a problem’ (Guba 1984: 64). Fischer and Miller (2007) argue that policy analysis emerged to elucidate the policy making process and to provide decision makers with knowledge to solve economic and social problems. The legislative process involving the formulation of the HEQSF was undertaken in a similar manner to a policy. As a system of principles and intentions to guide decisions and actions towards achieving accreditation of qualifications, the HEQSF, as a legislative sub-framework, is analysed in a similar manner to a policy.

The policy process has been conceptualised in the form of a policy cycle. Pülzl and Treib (2007) argue that this cycle provides a conceptual framework in policy research. The chronology of the policy process involves agenda setting, formulation and decision-making, implementation and evaluation and finally, termination or reformulation (Jann & Wegrich 2007; Muller, Maasen & Cloete 2004). I have chosen to analyse the design of the HEQSF rather than its implementation and my focus is on the policy formulation and decision-making stage in the policy cycle.

The design of this study is based on a qualitative methodological approach to analyse text. The epistemological view adopted is framed by a social constructivist lens, in which I use an interpretivist approach. This qualitative research design involves a case study of the HEQSF, which is the qualification sub-framework for HE in South Africa. The other two frameworks are devoted to General and Further Education and Training and Trades and Occupations. The central research question explored is: to what extent, if any, could the HEQSF reflect a framework for decolonising the curriculum in the South African HE system?

In order to guide policy analysis, post-structuralist and social-constructionist theories have focused on knowledge production and the nature of knowledge. Bacci (2009) formulated an analytic framework to analyse ‘policy as discourse’ with a focus on understanding a policy by connecting power relations with language where political and social struggles are shaped by the socio-historical context. The What’s the Problem Represented to be? (WPR) framework (Bacci 2009) serves as an approach to analyse the discursive aspects of a policy with a focus on ‘how problems are represented in the policy and how policy subjects are constituted through problem representation’ (Goodwin 2011: 161). This framework offers an alternative way of approaching both policy and practice. The WPR serves as an analytical tool to guide the analysis process and is similar to the discourse analysis frameworks proposed by Fairclough and Parker (Goodwin 2011). Written, nonverbal and verbal text can be interpreted and studied and the timeframe for analysis is both the distant and recent past. Epistemologically, this approach aims to produce representations of the truth to de-familiarise a policy (Goodwin 2011). The WPR framework proposes six questions with associated goals and strategies to analyse how problems are represented in policy discourse (Bacci 2009). The six steps include the following questions:

1. What is the problem represented to be?
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the problem?
3. How has this representation of the problem come about?
4. What is left unproblematic in the problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the ‘problem’ be thought about differently?
5. What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?
6. How/where is this representation of the problem produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disputed and disrupted? (Goodwin 2011: 173; Bacci 2009).

Goodwin’s (2011: 173) summary of the WPR framework is presented in the table below.

Table 1: A summary of the WPR analytic framework

Question	Goal	Strategy
1. What's the problem represented to be?	To identify the implied problem representation.	Identification of the problem as it is expressed in the policy.
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the problem?	To ascertain the conceptual premises or logics that underpin specific problem representations.	Foucauldian archaeology involving discourse analysis techniques such as identifying binaries, key concepts and key categories.
3. How has this representation of the problem come about? Aims	To highlight the conditions that allow a particular problem representation to take shape and assume dominance.	Foucauldian genealogical analysis involving tracing the 'history' of a current problem representation to identify the power relations involved in the prevailing problem representation.
4. What is left unproblematic in the problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be thought about differently?	To raise for reflection and consideration issues and perspectives that are silenced in identified problem representations.	Genealogical analysis and cross-cultural, historical and cross-national comparisons in order to provide examples of alternative representations.

5. What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?	To ascertain discursive effects, subjectification effects, and lived effects.	Discourse analysis techniques including identification of subject positions, dividing practices where subjects are produced in opposition to one another and the production of subjects regarded as 'responsible' for problems. Impact analysis; considerations of the material impact of problem representation on people's lives becomes a strategy to ascertain discursive effects, subjectification effects and lived effects.
6. How/where is this representation of the problem produced, disseminated and defended/ how could it be questioned, disputed and disrupted?	To pay attention to both the means through which some problem representations become dominant, and to the possibility of challenging problem representations that are judged to be harmful.	Identification of institutions, individuals and agencies involved in sustaining the problem representations. Mobilising competing discourses or reframing the 'problem'.

Source: Bacci (2009); Summary depicted in Goodwin (2011: 173).

A limitation of this approach, as with other discourse analysis techniques, relates to partiality in the selection of the text analysed (Goodwin 2011). The WPR is limited in that it focuses on text produced to offer directives to guide implementation (Bacci 2009). However, it is appropriate to analyse text in a document such as the HEQSF, which seeks to prescribe guidelines to achieve accreditation of qualifications and programmes. The WPR forms the basis of an analytic strategy which draws on Foucauldian discourse analysis, archaeological analysis and genealogical analysis as well as interpretive analysis and critical policy analysis (Bacci 2009; Goodwin 2011). A further limitation of my analysis relates to a focus on the formulation and decision-making stage of the HEQSF, rather than a comprehensive analysis or an implementation analysis, which would highlighted implementation challenges. However, this was beyond the scope of this article. I now turn to the design of the HEQSF in order to analyse how the political, historical and socio-cultural contexts, as well as the orders of discourse were formulated.

Design of the HEQSF

A Single Qualifications Framework

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) serves as the umbrella body for the three qualifications sub-frameworks: the General and Further Education and Training Sub-framework, the HEQSF and the sub-framework for Trades and Occupations (DHET 2013). Legislated national frameworks such as the HEQSF, regulate the quality of HE provision and qualifications (Ballim, Scott, Simpson & Webbstock 2016). The HEQSF functions in the interface between quality and equity concerns in HE in order to meet transformation imperatives and could thus be located in the intersection between transformation imperatives such as equity and quality.

The HEQSF, which was gazetted in 2013 was a reformulation of its previous version, the Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF) (DHET 2013). The problem represented in the reformulation is stated in the purpose which is to ‘consider the need for new qualification types to facilitate access, including ensuring the responsiveness of the HEQF to address emerging skills and knowledge needs, and to enhance the coherence of the higher education system’ (DHET 2013: 10). The reformulation was a result of consultation to address ‘inconsistencies and gaps’ (DHET 2013: 10) in the

design of the HEQF. The original formulation placed less emphasis on professional qualifications and also restricted qualification pathways at the postgraduate level (Webbstock & Fisher 2016). The reformulated HEQSF stipulates the rationale for the revised version and the need for a HE sub-framework in the objective to ‘enable the articulation of programmes and the transfer of students between programmes and higher education institutions’ (DHET 2013: 9). The structure of the framework includes qualification standards as well as the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders (the Minister, the South African Qualifications Authority, the Council on Higher Education and professional bodies). The roles of stakeholders beyond legislative bodies such as university staff and students, graduates, employers and employees are not considered.

Language is contested and remains a challenge in HE. The language of academic transcripts and qualification certificates is regulated in the HEQSF (DHET 2013: 22) as well as in the language policy of the issuing institution. While multilingualism is encouraged in the HEQSF, language policies at the institutional level are not as yet fully developed in the entire sector, since some institutions still issue transcripts and certificates only in English or in English and Afrikaans. In addition, the HEQSF is written and published in a monolingual language, English. Whose language is positioned as the hegemonic language, who is subjected to learning in the hegemonic language, how the hegemonic language militates against success in HE and how alternative languages could contribute to minimising ‘epistemicides’ are important considerations highlighted by decoloniality which are required to decolonise the curriculum and institutions.

Qualifications frameworks set out to provide frameworks for comparability, credibility, legitimacy and recognition of national qualifications within a national and international context. At a systemic level, the HEQSF facilitates the ‘comparability of qualifications’ in HE (DHET 2013: 12). It aims to provide a common understanding of qualifications and assure the credibility and legitimacy of the qualifications and programmes offered in HE. Qualification frameworks can thus be used to assess the international comparability of qualifications. International frameworks also serve to instil public confidence in programmes and enable the public to understand the standards set for HE qualifications and their characteristics (QAA 2014). Strengthening regional and international links and ensuring that programmes remain internationally comparable and regionally relevant have been incorporated in the formulation

of the HEQSF. Accreditation of qualifications and recognition in an international context, are goals for incorporating quality standards in the qualification using frameworks. This is problematic within a context which seeks to decolonise since this sub-framework is an integral means of informing curriculum development and national confidence in the first instance but these traditional views militate against ‘de-linking’ from current world views.

Three progression routes, general, professional and vocational, are conceptualised in the HEQSF and these allow for articulation between HE, further education and training and work-based education and training. Integration between levels is achieved through a single system with three progression routes, vertical, horizontal and diagonal. Vertical progression is conceptualised as progression into a qualification at a higher NQF level, horizontal progression occurs with a cognate qualification at the same level and diagonal progression is based on a completed qualification or presenting credits towards a qualification in a cognate field (DHET 2013). While multiple progression routes are proposed, they are regulated by credits, which are defined in traditional ways and influence articulation between qualification types. Articulation between qualification types, sectors and institutions remains a major policy objective (DHET 2013; DoE 1997), to allow students to progress both vertically and horizontally within a coherent NQF. Simkins, Scott, Stumpf and Webbstock argue that, ‘[a]rticulation of this kind is as yet an imperfectly realised objective’ (2016: 328). While articulation is important, the articulation gap between HE qualifications and those offered in the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Colleges have not been sufficiently addressed in the formulation of the HEQSF (DHET 2013). This militates against efforts geared towards inclusion and dispensing with hierarchies of power between different sectors that offer qualifications.

How different knowledge types influence curriculum and the purpose of a qualification has become a recent focus (Webbstock & Fisher 2016). Higher Education comprises three loosely categorised institutions: universities, universities of technology and comprehensive universities (CHE 2016a). The difference relates to ‘the mix of purely academic and vocationally-oriented programmes’ (CHE 2016b: 39) that they offer. Universities generally offer academic qualifications and programmes, universities of technology mainly offer vocationally-oriented qualifications and programmes and comprehensive universities offer a mix of academic and vocationally-oriented qualifications and programmes. Comprehensive universities thus have the

greatest opportunity to achieve integration of education and training, due to the diverse nature of qualifications they offer. The appropriateness of work-based qualifications on the Trades and Occupations Qualifications Sub-Framework, beyond level 6, has not been resolved. This silence is positioned as being subject to consultation and advice. Nevertheless, it prevents an integrated and co-ordinated system and is an issue that needs to be finalised in order to integrate qualifications from Trades and Occupations into higher levels. Historically, professional and vocationally-oriented qualifications such as teaching and engineering were offered at colleges. Engineering and some Health Sciences qualifications which were originally offered at technikons and colleges, were later also offered at universities. More recently, with the mergers of institutions, post-2005, colleges of education were incorporated into HE (CHE 2016c). However, vocationally-oriented qualifications above NQF level 6 have not been incorporated into the HEQSF. This highlights the coloniality of power in the unequal power relations between academic qualifications and those in Trades and Occupations. While diplomas are needed to meet national imperatives related to the development of mid-level skills, Webbstock and Fisher (2016) argue that degrees are now favoured by universities of technology, resulting in the devaluing of industry experience in favour of academic qualifications. Universities of technology have their origin in the former technikons, which were an invention of the apartheid government. As HE institutions, they were subsequently renamed universities of technology and were given a new mission in the post-2005 period. A decolonial lens could assist in determining how vocationally-oriented qualifications could be positioned taking into consideration epistemic coloniality, coloniality of being and coloniality of power. Policy-makers have recognised that the post-schooling sector is dominated by HE, which comprises 990,000 students in the public sector and 120,000 in the private sector (USA 2015). There is thus a need for further integration and systemic changes with improved articulation pathways between HE, Technical and Vocational Education and Training Colleges and the Trades and Occupation sectors, to address a transformed HE sector.

Access and Admissions

The equity imperative in the HEQSF is achieved through two objectives. The first is 'to create a single integrated national framework for learning achieve-

ments’ and the second, to ‘[f]acilitate access to, and mobility and progression within, education and training career paths’ and to, ‘[a]ccelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities’ (DHET 2013: 5). Quality is envisaged through the objective to ‘[e]nhance the quality of education and training’ (DHET 2013: 5). The formulation of the HEQSF focuses on access and admissions with a view to widening access and creating alternative admission pathways. The Higher Education Act allows HE institutions to determine their admission policies and the HEQSF states that admission to HE is governed by institutions’ admissions policies and practice. Widening access has been addressed in the HEQSF in order to, ‘[f]acilitate qualification articulation across the HE system and assist learners to identify potential progression routes, particularly in the context of lifelong learning’ (CHE 2013: 17). Alternative access routes such as life-long learning, recognition of prior learning (RPL) and provision for credit accumulation and transfer (CAT), are envisioned in the HEQSF. Although widening access is central to achieving equity, RPL and CAT are not prominently represented in the HEQSF. Credit accumulation and transfer thus serves as a mechanism to ‘circulate knowledge in an organised framework’ (Ensor 2004: 182). Setting quality standards through the use of credits is integral to the transfer of skills. The notion of credits needs to be reviewed if it is to inform the decolonisation of the curriculum. On the one hand, equity of access is implied through admission requirements and alternative admissions such as RPL and on the other, equity of outcomes is implied by setting quality assurance standards for qualifications, which are internationally comparable. In order to change access and admission policies at institutional level, it is essential to interrogate who gains access to the university, who formulates admissions policies and what and whose purposes admission policies perpetuate.

Standards Setting

Quality is seen as integral to achieving transformation in HE. The HEQSF provides a starting point for standards development and quality assurance of qualifications. Quality assurance of qualifications and programmes is formulated in the HEQF in terms of benchmark standards, which guide the development and accreditation of qualifications. Qualification types are formulated on each level of the HEQSF for academic and professional

qualifications. In seeking a decolonised curriculum, how the design of the HEQSF shifts from this hierarchy is a challenge. Qualification descriptors are specified per qualification and include the NQF exit level, minimum total credits, minimum credits at particular levels, and the designators, qualifiers and abbreviations (DHET 2013). The level descriptors ‘provide generic standards for qualifications on the HEQSF in terms of predictable levels of complexity of knowledge and skills at each NQF level’ (DHET 2013: 15). However, they are not part of this sub-framework, but are contained in a separate document (SAQA 2011). The importance of learning outcomes is signalled in the formulation and design of the HEQSF and assessment is understood as providing an indication of having achieved learning outcomes. However, outcomes per qualification are not included in the qualification descriptors, but merely referred to. While assessment is integral within the curriculum development process, it is not dealt with in the HEQSF. Various assessment strategies should be explored if assessment is to positively influence students’ lived experiences in terms of inclusion and success as a consequence of decolonising the curriculum. Students who enter HE are not a homogenous group. They emanate from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds and disparate school quintiles. These disparities present challenges to HE institutions and call for nuanced approaches to bridge the gap between schooling and HE.

Furthermore, an appropriate funding framework to support the HEQSF is not included. While the HEQSF stipulates the various qualification types, reform that underpins appropriate curricula, which includes decolonising curricula, requires innovative, creative and sustainable solutions. Funding is underplayed in the formulation of the HEQSF. In light of the recent protests, the proportion of national funding allocated to HE as well as the fee amount allocated to qualifications needs to be viewed in the context of decoloniality. A new funding model is required to steer the system since the current funding framework is unsuitable for the HEQSF and undermines it as it cannot support the proposed framework. The funding framework thus remains a policy issue that requires attention.

Decoloniality within the Context of the HEQSF

Modernity brought with it the promise of improvement and removal of obstacles that are part of the modern world (Dastile & Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013).

Dastile and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) argue that a myth of decolonisation exists in Africa where global imperial designs such as neo-liberalism persist. Modernity's ability to address socio-cultural, economic and political issues is no longer tenable. The political, socio-cultural and historical context within which the HEQSF was formulated is essential to understand its potential to contribute to decolonising the curriculum. South Africa is unlike any other African country, in that it experienced double colonisation, firstly under the Dutch until the 1800s and then under the British until 1910. Remnants of coloniality persisted in the apartheid regime and the subsequent democratic society. The HEQSF was proposed in 2013 by the democratic government. However, the NQF upon which it is structured is based on a modernist episteme which advocates for modernist forms of administrative governmentality. Processes such as teaching and learning and the curriculum are viewed as products. These products are then reformulated into abstract objects such as credits that become a form of currency which can be exchanged in a global labour market. This modernist administrative domination of the academy is cited by decolonisation theorists (Mbembe 2016a; Mbembe 2016b) as an impediment to decolonisation of institutions and the curriculum. The HEQSF is thus unable to allow a movement from the Western locale to other epistemic sites, since it was designed for and serves a neo-liberal world view. Its ideology challenges a move towards embracing different ways of thinking and 'de-linking' from traditional perspectives. The socio-political and historical context within which the HEQSF was designed necessitated a sub-framework which would provide South African qualifications with credibility nationally and internationally. More recently, credibility by whom, has been questioned at national level, by staff and students who have called for curricula, as the building blocks of qualifications, to be re-examined for relevance to their lived experiences. The asymmetrical global power relations which necessitate qualification frameworks cannot be easily dispensed of since they have a reach beyond the academy.

Broadening current conceptions of knowledge to incorporate epistemic diversity is essential to support efforts to decolonise the curriculum. Decolonisation allows 'de-linking' beyond current knowledge systems to reconceptualise the purpose of HE through a decolonised curriculum development process. Decolonisation theorists acknowledge that a shift in knowledge production is essential (Le Grange 2016; Luckett 2016; Mbembe 2016b; Maldonado-Torres 2007). The reality is that unequal power relations

between diverse epistemes such as Africanisation, internationalisation and indigenisation, cannot easily be resolved. In addition, the colonialist administrative top-down procedures of control advocated in the HEQSF deviate from more inclusive decolonial efforts. Debates at discipline level are required on how traditional ways of being can be contested to make room for epistemic diversity over a period of time.

Concepts such as vocational and academic as well as knowledge and skills in the HEQSF are placed in opposition to one another. The modern university in Africa and South Africa, is modelled on the German Humboldtian university proposed in the 19th century (Kruse 2006) which later spread to other European countries and America. European countries colonised Africa, and brought this concept with them. It combines research and teaching but distinguishes between academic and vocational education. The binary opposition between academic and vocational training highlights perceptions of a hierarchy in power relations between education provision which previously privileged and positioned academic qualifications, based on whole qualifications, above vocational qualifications, which may be based on unit standards. This brings into question the consideration of coloniality of power and being that plays out in which qualifications institutions are able to offer as well as the currency of qualifications in the market place. Coloniality of knowledge is represented in concepts such as skills and knowledge which are juxtaposed and highlight the asymmetry between what knowledge counts as skills and what counts as knowledge. This has implications for HE curriculum policy due to the emphasis on learning outcomes in the HEQSF, which is based on what knowledge is taught, to whom at various qualification levels as well as the credits accumulated and transferred between qualifications. The binary nature of academic and vocational qualifications in the HEQSF informed by modernism perpetuates the status quo in HE institutions. The assumption is that the HEQSF will provide credibility, legitimacy and recognition as well as assurance of quality nationally and internationally. More recently the curricula informing qualifications have been challenged nationally as non-responsive to the needs of students in HE, without any knock on effect internationally.

The assumptions on which qualification descriptors are based have their origins within the colonial gaze. The inability of the HEQSF to create parity and include the various qualification types above certain levels needs attention. In order to use qualification descriptors to decolonise the curriculum, questions should be raised such as, who determines credits and exit level

outcomes, for what reason and whose purpose do they serve? This could serve as a starting point for developing a decolonised version. Whilst I do not propose an alternative to credits, envisioning a decolonised version will require theorising and national commitment, which is currently not high on the policy agenda. Since no alternative exists to replace the HEQSF, the possibility for change based on these prescriptions in a decolonial context are questionable.

Incorporating decolonisation in university discourses should be a bottom-up process led by staff and students who are committed to positively influencing the lived experiences of students through the curriculum. At national level, policy makers could take advantage of the opportunity to capitalise on and continue to place decoloniality high on the policy agenda. Higgs (2016) argues that we need to develop an awareness of when the status quo needs to be challenged, in order to realise the possibilities inherent in transformation. The time has come to conceptualise how a different paradigm, decoloniality, could inform HE. In order to impact on policies and practices in universities, decoloniality conversations require national commitment and a shift from institutional conversations to those that involve all HE institutions and representation of all levels. Decolonial epistemic perspectives allow discourses to emerge from Africa and the Global South (Dastile & Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013). Opportunities should be created to theorise the university's vision for decolonising the institution and the curriculum as well as influencing national policies. Those who engage in the decolonisation debate should exercise their agency to promote change not only on institutional transformation committees, but also on those that approve curricula and programmes such as curriculum committees, school teaching and learning committees, faculty boards, senate teaching and learning committees, and programme accreditation and review committees as well as senate committees.

A relationship exists between institutional culture and curriculum. Institutional culture has the potential to embrace the process of 'de-linking' from past and present world views, which exclude students, to consider alternative ways of being that are informed by relevance to students. Decolonising the apartheid regime requires a focus on inclusive language policies beyond English and Afrikaans and should thus be a collective effort with a commitment to changing processes and involving university leadership, not just a call from students and a few academics.

Programme accreditation is a mechanism for quality assurance that relates to the entire HE sector. Ryan (2015) argues that a challenge exists for

educational programmes to meet both local and international standards. Programme accreditation is also an integral component of curriculum development and not a substitute for it, if qualifications are to remain internationally comparable. However, the very notion of programme accreditation and international comparability as espoused in the HEQSF, is antagonistic to decolonial theory. Dispensing with the HEQSF will spiral the HE sector into disarray without alternatives to replace it. Those who develop curricula could reflect on what could be done differently through a process of ‘de-linking’ from traditional colonial perceptions, which inform the curriculum before accrediting programmes and qualifications. The intersectionality of programme accreditation, curriculum development, pedagogy and the ecology of knowledge, ‘lecturer’s subjectivity and cultural positioning’ (McLaughlin & Whatman 2008), should triumph over any tick box approaches to decolonising the curriculum. Structural changes to the curriculum need to take place in order to decolonise it. Such a curriculum should focus on efforts towards decoloniality and be embedded in individual courses where they are able to impact on the educational experiences of all students.

While the quality standards stipulated in the HEQSF are designed to inform the curriculum development process, they are diametrically opposed to decolonial theory. How the quality standards articulated in the form of credits, admission requirements and progression inform curriculum development in a decolonised form, is not clear. Curriculum development is viewed as separate from the accreditation process although in reality, it draws on the standards set in the HEQSF in order for a programme or qualification to be accredited. However, programme accreditation is not a substitute for curriculum development. Curriculum development could incorporate the requirements for programme accreditation as stipulated in the HEQSF, but needs to be undertaken as a process, which precedes programme accreditation and becomes the basis upon which any qualification is designed. This allows room to revise the curriculum in a manner that is more relevant to students, although not in a decolonised context.

Decoloniality should also be viewed as a process rather than a project. Mbembe (2016b) suggests that decolonising the university should be an intellectual project. Projects have a start and end date; thus decolonising the curriculum needs to be viewed as a process within HE. A decolonised curriculum should be contextualised within institutions and over a period of time.

Concluding Remarks

Transformation began as a political imperative to address past inequalities in HE and it remains highly relevant to the national policy agenda and policy formulation. The Higher Education Summit acknowledged that, ‘curriculum change is at the core of university transformation initiatives’ (USA 2015: 2). However, based on its modernist neo-liberal paradigm and in its current form embodied in the HEQSF, transformation is unable to facilitate the decolonisation of the curriculum. Without a viable alternative to replace it, transformation in HE will need to co-exist alongside decoloniality efforts.

An ideological critique of the HEQSF indicates that the theory informing it is based on a modernist neo-liberal paradigm. As such, the HEQSF needs to be re-envisioned to support efforts to decolonise the curriculum. The HEQF represents a place of ‘doing’ which currently informs curriculum development but needs to be explored in a manner that highlights how ‘de-linking’ and struggles over meaning take place and contribute to decolonising the curriculum. Re-examining the very notion of a qualifications framework, then designing relevant alternatives to facilitate the decolonisation of the curriculum is required in a context of decoloniality. Both the decolonial theory and the neo-liberal worldview of the HEQSF, have limitations for curriculum development in HE. I have shown that the HEQSF is a product of democracy and is limited in terms of its potential to inform a decolonised curriculum, since its origins lie in a modernist paradigm. I have also shown how decoloniality is limited as a theory to inform curriculum development based on implementation challenges and the need for further debate to give effect to change at discipline level. This analysis of the HEQSF highlighted the ‘orders of discourse’ and the socio-cultural and historical contexts in which it was formulated and thereafter (mis)interpreted and (mis)implemented in the South African context to give effect to international comparability of qualifications. Based on the modernist neo-liberal paradigm that informed the HEQSF, the extent to which it is compatible with a decolonial approach is questionable. Current reality warrants disruption of the system without abruptly dispensing with what has been achieved in HE.

Student success in HE requires new directions with concrete strategies to decolonise the curriculum. The HEQSF provides a framework for minimum standards but does not directly address curriculum issues. These standards, guidelines for admission, qualification levels, articulation pathways, credits and the certification of qualifications could be used in the curriculum develop-

ment process. However, translating different knowledge structures into curricula, creating space for multiple languages and reconceptualising credits is a challenge within a decolonial context. Inequalities and injustice in South Africa from the initial attempt to decolonise after the Dutch and British eras as well as from the apartheid regime have continued into the post-1994 period. Fanon (1963) thus argued that the way in which colonialism persists in structures of injustice and oppression, needs to be questioned. Le Grange (2016) and Garuba (2015) propose a process which reconsiders how the curriculum is constituted. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (2004) argues that the relevance of the curriculum to the African continent could serve as a starting point to guide efforts towards decoloniality. A move away from Western hegemony as the locus of the curriculum and institutions is required in order for decolonisation to take place (Leibowitz 2017; Helata 2016). These are important imperatives but pose challenges to institutions. Dispensing with what Macedo termed 'wilful blindness' (1993: 189), which masks the struggles of marginalised students in South African HE institutions, and recognising and confronting the realities of the majority of students, could be used to decolonise universities. Institutional cultures which are rooted in a decoloniality posture (Maserumule 2015) need to be cultivated. Changing institutional culture could thus foster a culture of decoloniality and kick-start the process of decolonising the curriculum and ultimately lead to a decolonised university. However, theories of decolonisation need to be taken a step further where they are able to influence change processes in a university and lead to appropriate implementation strategies. Implementing language policies was highlighted during student protests, but remains a challenge. The national reality includes insufficient funding and institutional capacity to turn these into transformative practices. At policy level, attention should be given to systemic change that focuses on epistemological access, different modes of assessment and expanded pathways which accord value to academic and vocationally-oriented qualifications. Changes to institutional culture and concrete implementation strategies which focus on change and the relevance of curricula are required. Designing curricula with a focus on skills and knowledge as well as prospective knowledge that will enable South Africa to be at the forefront of knowledge production and development needs to be foregrounded. Universities will also need to create structures that embrace change and diverse worldviews to meet the needs of a generation of students who are demanding decoloniality of our institutions and curricula.

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