Decolonising the Social Sciences Curriculum in the University Classroom: A Pragmatic-realism Approach

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Abstract

Debates about decolonisation in general and decolonising the curriculum in higher education are often focused on theoretical critiques including epistemicide, linguicide, historicide, alienation, and dismemberment. As important as these contributions are, they seldom offer integrated strategies for those who are tasked with decolonising the curriculum in the university context or those who must teach individual courses, and who would like to do so from a Southern, decolonised perspective. In this paper we adopt a pragmatic, critical, and realist approach and hover above many of these constituent debates to offer a consolidated approach to how the (social science) curriculum in higher education might be decolonised practically and pragmatically. Drawing on ideas from Freire, Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Mbembe, and Bhambra, we ask: 1) what are the stakes of the struggle towards decolonising the curriculum 2) what are the blind spots needed to be overcome in the journey and 3) what practicaland incremental steps can be taken, regardless of your own positionality, to achieve a decolonised curriculum. Practically, we outline a number of theses that we have adopted in our own teaching. These centre around *input and expertise* (who should be decolonising the curriculum, who

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should be teaching?); *content and canon* (what should be taught, what excluded, and whether material from the centre should be taught at all, and if so, when?); *institutions and pedagogies* of decolonised education (how should material be taught, how might the hidden curriculum of the institution in which it is taught be made explicit), and *the role of theory* in decolonised education (what is the aim of decolonised education?). It is envisioned that packaged together, these theses offer key considerations for those tasked with thinking about and teaching a decolonised curriculum.

Keywords: Decolonisation, curriculum, university, social sciences, pragmatic realism.

1 Introduction

Following the 2015/2016 student movements in South African higher education institutions, the term decolonisation gained heightened visibility in higher education and public discourse as an emancipatory framework, coalescing under the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall banners. Observing the protest repertoires used by university students who deployed the term, decolonisation enveloped a wide range of calls, such as the deracialisation, decorporatisation and depatriarchalisation of the university (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2017). These calls also had an epistemic thrust, evident in calls to decolonise the curriculum and university more generally. Recognising the curriculum as a site where authoritative knowledge is produced, these calls urged a re-examination of the biography and geography of authoritative knowledge. However, despite the persuasiveness of such calls, the importance of cultivating a praxis of decolonisation cannot be under-emphasized.

2 What are the Stakes of the Struggle towards Decolonising the Curriculum?

Decolonisation is the historical and on-going project through which formerly colonised societies think through the legacies of colonial domination and work to extricate themselves from it. The idea that we bear colonial legacies in knowledge production is not new as Africans have historically struggled for political, economic *and* epistemic decolonisation (Mamdani 2016). Noting the

current preoccupation with intellectual autonomy in South African higher education, calls for epistemic decolonisation are animated by the recognition that colonialism impinged on processes of knowledge production, circulation, and validation. Furthermore, it also distorted the subjectivity of Africans as knowledge producers. Thus, intellectual decolonisation is built on the idea emphasised within postcolonialism, that knowledge is not simply a means to power, but constitutes a mode of power in itself (Said 1979). Taking this into consideration, the 'construction of knowledge about Africa forms part of the colonial subjugation of Africa' (Matthews 2018: 49).

In the post #RhodesMustFall academic landscape in South Africa, most people sympathetic to the project of epistemic decolonisation have a basic understanding of the problem. Whether it is framed in terms of marginality, alienation, epistemic injustice or violence, the basic template of the problem appears unchanging. Africans were told they had no history, no historical achievement, and no reason. Evidence of history or reason was often externalised, appropriated without recognition or misrecognised (Coquery-Vidrovitch 2013). Knowledge about these societies (such as their polities and economies) were, and continue to be, laden with discourses of pathologisation, often through ahistorical ethnocentric scholarship (Zeleza 1997; 2006). In a nutshell, the perception is that African discursive formations continue to be overdetermined by colonial and colonising epistemologies (F. Nyamnjoh 2012; Diawara 1990; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018). As much as scholars eschew crude binaries when mapping the problem of decolonisation, they invariably utilise these binaries, at least as a basic point of departure. So, whether it is dichotomies like North/South, West/Non-west; Euro-American/Africa, the latter is marginal, the former dominant (Heleta 2016). This asymmetrical relation has been variously described as 'eurocentrism' (Amin 2011), 'cultural imperialism' (Ake 1979), 'scientific dependency', and 'extraversion' (Hountondji 1990; 2007). All help explain historical and contemporary calls for decolonisation.

Noting this, scholars bear a responsibility to cultivate a critical gaze towards the concepts, methods, categories, and assumptions that inform knowledge production, circulation, and validation. We need to interrogate the historically produced assumptions that undergird social relations of knowledge production. These include questions pertaining to *who* can produce authoritative knowledge; *which languages* are vehicles of intellectual and scientific activity; *where* authoritative knowledge comes from (evident in

discourses such as Southern theory that look to privilege the Global South as a locus of enunciation). These questions expose histories of exclusion, erasure, and marginalisation in the interwoven processes of disciplinary formation and empire. And because these exclusions shape the very objects of study that differentiate disciplines, Garuba (2015) asks that we also consider how contemporary attempts at inclusion fundamentally reconstitute the objects of study that have given disciplines their identity.

Critical realism (CR) can be helpful in articulating the problem of intellectual decolonisation as well as the possibility for emancipatory change. As a philosophy of social science, it notably postulates a depth ontology (comprising the empirical, the actual, and the structural, which stands in a causal relationship to the former two). Firstly, this layered ontology is helpful in articulating the possibility of social change, because it maps out varying levels at which emancipatory change is possible. As such, our intervention subsequently describes some of the practical changes in our engagement with the social change necessary to further emancipatory decolonial praxis.

Furthermore, in positing a realist ontology and a subjective epistemology, CR allows us to adduce the existence and nature of discursive mechanisms (like coloniality) that underpin epistemological phenomena like curricula and the experiences of this, like alienation and epistemic injustice, which necessitate a decolonial intervention (Priestley 2011). In fact, such an emphasis on subjective experience in critical realism dovetails with accounts of the curriculum as autobiographical. By way of definition, curriculum can refer not just to a set course to be run by students, for it also captures how that course is taken on board by the individual (subjective experience). Therefore, epistemic decolonisation, curriculum-as-autobiographical, and CR share a fundamental preoccupation with the reconstruction of the subject and subjectivity (Le Grange 2019: 38f).

3 What are the Blind Spots Needed to be Overcome in Journey?

The problem we face now is one of transcendence. How do we move beyond a rhetoric that articulates the problem to developing a pragmatic approach to decolonisation? While this is an understandably difficult task, this paper offers a number of considerations that will be pivotal to any emergent praxis of decolonisation.

This objective of transcendence proves difficult for a number of reasons. Among them, it is often the case that calls for decolonising the curriculum are seldom expressed in the idiom of curriculum theory, resulting in a gulf between concrete curriculum change and high-level epistemic debates (Hoadley & Galant 2019). Furthermore, Matthews (2018) employs Congolese philosopher V.Y. Mudimbe's notion of the 'colonial library' to underscore the difficulty of breaking completely with the system of representations that structure knowledge about and from Africa. In a nutshell, in looking to break from the colonial library, we find to our dismay, that our claims are often circumscribed by it. In the worst cases, we may reproduce the very thing we seek to dismantle.

This difficulty notwithstanding, one can still observe many valiant attempts to develop a praxis of decolonisation. This praxis invariably depends on what one sets one's sights on. Some make a case for decolonising institutional culture by deracialising university senates (Mangcu 2017; Chikane 2018). Similarly, we have also seen calls for Africanising the University institutional culture (Metz 2017). Another approach affirms the belief that a distinct kind of scholarly disposition and subjectivity is necessary for the decolonising enterprise. Francis Nyamnjoh (2017; 2019) has made a case for the nimble-footed 'frontier scholar' committed to an ethic of conviviality. This view is anchored in an understanding of personhood that jettisons ideas of absolute autonomy as an ontological condition of agency and has been endorsed in Anugwom's (2019) call for the 'frontier sociologist'. Mamdani (2016) has urged a balancing act between two types of identities - the 'scholar' and 'public intellectual'. In so doing, he encourages an orientation where one's *local* context acts as a springboard to participate in a *global* discourse of humanity. At the level of pedagogy, there are ongoing experiments with 'multi-languaging' as decolonial pedagogy (Antia & Dyers 2019).

Disciplines (their objects of study, methods, and associated concepts and categories), and disciplinary curricula (as a field of production where authoritative knowledge is validated) tend to get the most attention. Take political science for example … Zondi (2018) considers enlarging the disciplinary canon, as well as expanding the spaces where one can interrogate problems of knowledge and power. This latter argument resonates with Naidoo's (2015) insightful description of the South African student movements as a pedagogical process that extended the conventional

boundaries of the classroom. Sally Matthews' (2018) account of the problem of decolonisation yields two imperatives for teachers of political science — vigilance to ethnocentrism, and 'the possibility of the emancipatory reappropriation of aspects of the colonial library' (Matthews 2018: 57). This latter point resonates with Allais' (2016) take on Africanising philosophy which calls for appropriating western philosophy by troubling the implicit notion of ownership evident in our use of labels like 'western' and 'African' when mapping the problem of decolonisation (Nyamnjoh 2020). For Matthews, these imperatives can be practised by ensuring diversity in curriculum design*;* emphasising histories of disciplinary contestation through 'contrapuntal reading'; and considering a biographical element when discussing ideas in order to recognise the impact on knowledge that identity and context have without necessarily fixing knowledge as an expression of identity.

Illustrating this disciplinary contestation, other approaches looking to avoid eurocentrism emphasise rethinking (from an African centre) key concepts, categories, and dominant narratives, which rely on Euro-American contexts and histories for their normative framing. Take for example notions like democracy and clientelism as part of the study of state-society relations in Africa. Noting the tendency to pathologise African societies against a western ideal, Anciano (2018) makes a case for the compatibility of democracy and clientelism anchored in everyday realities at the interface of local governance in South Africa. Clientelism does not necessarily erode democratic norms and may even enhance participation and accountability. Another example is Pillay's (2018) endorsement of a genealogical approach to key objects in one's field of inquiry, illustrated with an account of the modern state from an African centred perspective. The critical question here is to unpack *where* and *how* the things we study become constituted as objects of study.

Other discipline-oriented approach examples include Night (2017), Kathard *et al.* (2015), Fomunyam (2017), Pillay (2017) and Mangcu (2017) who focus on Geography, Health Science, Engineering, Psychology, and Sociology respectively. Furthermore, there are other approaches not mentioned, such as those on the integration of indigenous knowledge systems in the curriculum. That notwithstanding, the point of this brief overview is to underscore the importance of translating decolonisation into practice. In so doing, we note expressly that this is where this paper intervenes by offering some important considerations towards developing a praxis of decolonisation.

We do so in the tradition of wa Thiong'o (1987), hooks (1994), Tuhiwai-Smith (2012) and Chilisa (2012) who all view education as the intentional act of empowering while offering strategies and methods on what decolonising the classroom could look like. We thus adopt a pragmatic realist approach intentionally.

4 What Practical and Incremental Steps can be Taken?

What practical and incremental steps can be taken, regardless of one's positionality, to promote decolonisation in the various fields where knowledge is produced, such as the curriculum or pedagogic encounter? We outline several theses which are the outcome of a reflexive approach to our own teaching. They centre around input and expertise (who should be decolonising the curriculum, who should be teaching?), content and canon (what should be taught, what excluded?), pedagogies of decolonised education (how should material be taught and how might the hidden curriculum of the institution in which it is taught be made explicit?), and the role of theory in decolonised education (what is the aim of decolonised education?). Taken separately these ideas are hardly novel. However, they are intended to operate concurrently and serve as a reflexive guide for educators and other higher education stakeholders who wish to embrace a decolonial ethos. In the sections that follow, each thesis is discussed.

5 Input and Expertise: Who should be Decolonising the Curriculum, Who should be Teaching?

While curriculum studies is an area of expert inquiry, the issue of its decolonisation needs the input and expertise of those who are skilful in understanding exclusion, oppression, marginality and history. 'Who is at the centre' and 'who is at the margins' constitutes an important background consideration. This follows Ngugi wa Thiong'o, who engages with decolonisation, not as a finite place or goal but, as a continuous process of 'seeing ourselves clearly' (1987: 87). In Ngugi wa Thiong'o's terms, 'decolonisation' is a project of 're-centering' (1987: 90). It is about dismissing the idea that Africa is just an extension of the West and about defining explicitly who is at the centre (Mbembe 2015). For Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Africa

(and therefore Africans) is always at the centre. This is an ethic that is cultivated over time -- a virtue that asks for constant reflexivity on our positions and relationships. As such, echoing other voices in this epistemic project (e.g. F. Nyamnjoh 2017), decolonisation requires a particular kind of scholarly subjectivity. That is, if decolonisation raises questions about 'who teaches', we contend that it takes a particular kind of scholar who can advance the project. Moreover, the biographical and geographical situatedness of teachers are considerations in this matter.

At the most intuitive level, we can appeal to the values of diversity and multivocality to underscore the significance of 'who teaches'. Students should be exposed to a multiplicity of views from different kinds of people, and also be able to identify with people like them, since so much is 'caught rather than taught'. Given the justice claims that often constitute calls for decolonisation, this has often translated into demands for Africanisation in staffing. This dimension is not without critique, for the idea of Africanisation glosses over the heterogeneity and inequities (class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, etc.) within African identity. As such, more critical voices tend to be sceptical about the inclusivity of the African for whom representation is sought.

Another critical perspective notes that when it comes to 'who teaches', it is not enough to 'just add black people' as though one were slightly adjusting an already tried and tested recipe. In other words, adding black people to distinctly western systems does very little to alter the fundamental culture of those systems. Their inclusion must attend precisely to the effects of their prior exclusion.

However, if the discussion ended here, it might imply that only Africans can teach a decolonised curriculum. To the contrary, identity does not disqualify one from teaching a decolonised curriculum or from using decolonising pedagogies. The key is to cultivate a distinct scholarly disposition, one that recognises and reflects on how one's identity is shaped by the historical and contemporary asymmetries that legitimate …. talk of decolonisation. After all, bodies both shape and are inscribed with social processes and meanings. This means that an educator is more than just a body standing in front of a class. These inscriptions on the body can thus influence the pedagogical encounter, possibly undermining the possibilities for decolonisation.

The geographical location from where you teach/learn is also critical and central. As with almost everywhere on the globe, the production of

knowledge in Africa has long been subject to colonial and imperial thinking, to 'a geopolitics that universalize European thought as scientific truths, while subalternising and invisibilising other epistemes' (Walsh 2007: 224). This trend is empirically noticeable; it is called 'extraversion' by Hountondji (1990; 2004), 'academic dependency' by Alatas (2006) and 'quasi-globalization' by Connell (2007; 2014). *All* educators, regardless of identity and positionality, have work to do in this regard because our education has been influenced largely by Global North scholarship. We are not merely part of a globalised world on an equal footing but in different power relations to each other. Northern education in South African bodies present different views and locations. For that reason, attending to the geopolitics of knowledge is critical. The geopolitics of knowledge has to do with the theoretical and ideological structures that position those who are recognised (by the academy) as producers and champions of critical thought and theory (Global North) and those who consume and preserve that knowledge (Global South). As Walsh (2007) points out, the problem is not with the existence of these structures but with the ways in which information flows from one point to another; it is one-directional and rarely symbiotic. Walsh offers a provocation:

> What might it mean to think critical theory from other places - not simply from the West and from modernity, but from what has occurred in its margins or borders, and with a need to shed light on its underside, that is on coloniality? To recognise and take seriously the critical intellectual production of those historically denied the category of 'thinkers' - that is, of indigenous and blacks - including the knowledge produced collectively in the context and struggles of social movements? (2007: 225)

To speak of the geopolitics of knowledge is to acknowledge the persistence of a Western hegemony that orients Eurocentric thought as ubiquitous 'while localizing other forms of thought as at best folkloric' (Walsh 2007: 225). That is not to say that global north scholarship has no place in Africa. Rather, 'decolonizing the African university requires a geographical imagination that extends well beyond the confines of the nation-state' Mbembe 2015).

In a nutshell, going beyond discourses that address 'who teaches' as a matter of Africanisation, we suggest a particular kind of scholarly ethic anchored in recognition and reflexivity, identity, and place. Our biographies

and geographies as teachers should be the object of recognition and reflection because they are often shaped by the very structures of coloniality we seek to dislodge. We say this without necessarily ascribing over-determinate power to one's social position.

In addition, the issue of 'who teaches' is taken to be a shared responsibility, evident in a willingness to engage students in the decolonising enterprise. Progressive academics have an opportunity to decolonise with the help of students; 'They can do this through a creation of an educational space where academics and students jointly work on critical understanding of the past and present and in the process create relevant knowledge for the future' (Heleta 2018: 60).

6 Content and Canon: What should be Taught, What Excluded, in What Sequence?

It is helpful to think of the university classroom as a site of decolonisation (Mbembe 2015). Consequently, what is taught in the classroom needs to be thought of over a continuum – beginning with what needs to be untaught from schooling, through to undergraduate basics, and on to graduate education. A key question to ask is what is the role of the 'canon' in our disciplines, and in fact what needs to change about disciplinary study? Mbembe draws on wa Thiong'o in addressing the struggle over what is to be taught. The educator should have in mind, not a generic idea of a student, but rather a specific image and understanding of 'the African child' so that what is taught contributes to how 'New Africans… view themselves and their universe' (Mbembe 2015, unnumbered). In this section, 'what is taught' is discussed in terms of: 1) relevance 2) the notion of the 'canon' and 3) what is explicit, hidden or null in the curriculum.

6.1 Relevance

Mbembe (2015), Shay (2016), Fomunyam (2017) and Prah (2017) all question the relevance of the university curriculum in Africa.

> A number of our institutions are teaching obsolete forms of knowledge with obsolete pedagogies (Mbembe 2015, unnumbered).

> Professional areas of study like health sciences, engineering and law have grappled with their relevance to the 'real world. For example, in an African medical curriculum, should universities prepare students for the problems of first world specialists or those of doctors working in poor, rural areas? Or both?' (Shay 2016).
>
> The undergraduate curriculum beginning from the hard sciences and engineering to the social sciences is no longer fit for its purpose (Fomunyam 2017: 6798).
>
> The decolonisation of knowledge and education does not and should not mean the facile rejection of Western-derived epistemologies and their modes of construction. It means stripping Western specificities from our modes of knowledge construction and the production of knowledge to suit and speak to our cultural/linguistic particularities. It means in short societal relevance (Prah 2017: 17)

In order to maintain relevance in a decolonised curriculum, our institutions must unearth future knowledges, promote co-learning, and create spaces and resources for dialogue among all stakeholders of the university on how to envisage all cultures and knowledge systems in the curriculum, with respect to what is being taught and how it frames the world (Charles 2019).

6.2 The Canon

What does it mean to be confined by the persistence of a Western hegemony? In other words, what is a Eurocentric canon? Mbembe (2015, unnumbered) describes a Eurocentric canon as one 'that attributes truth only to the Western way of knowledge production'. In this manner ignoring other epistemic traditions in favour of depicting colonialism as a way of life rather than what it was: 'a system of exploitation and oppression' (Mbembe 2015, unnumbered). Decolonising the canon therefore reminds us to consider everything we study from new perspectives. It draws attention to how often the only worldview made accessible to students is male, white, and European. This is not as simple as removing some content from the curriculum and replacing it with new content – it is about considering multiple perspectives and making space to think carefully about what we value (Charles 2019).

6.3 What is Explicit, Hidden, or Null?

What is excluded and eluded from and silenced in the curriculum is as important as what it contains. The 'hidden curriculum' must be made explicit in decolonised education – from the values of the institution, to its explicit and tacit practices, and ultimately its vision and mission. This offers an opportunity for reflexivity on the part of those who teach and increases scope for critical thinking from students.

Aoki (2012) asserts that in as much as the curriculum should be planned and taught, it should also be taught as lived - 'curriculum-as-lived' to empower educators and students to critique and decolonise it. The university curriculum can take various forms, namely, explicit, hidden, or null. Lebeloane succinctly describes the differences between these so that educators can ask the relevant questions of 'what, when, who, how, and why 'as they make efforts to decolonise the curriculum:

> The *explicit curriculum* refers to… *planned and packaged* explicit learning content. It exposes learners to past, present, and possible future situations… promotes critical thinking by providing learners with the tools to critique learning content … Some of the sources which are used in the explicit curriculum include assessments guidelines, presentations by experts, prescribed textbooks and readers, etc. *Hidden curriculum* refers to the one in which students are taught and at the same time *indoctrinated about the dominant culture* and values of, for example, the coloniser. The *null curriculum* refers to whatever content knowledge is *excluded* in a curriculum [such as African indigenous knowledge systems] (Lebeloane 2017: 3f emphasis added.)

Finally, in considering 'what is taught', the 'when' question is probably the least relevant. Whether we teach local/indigenous/Southern knowledge first, second, or last does not really matter. What matters is that all knowledges are treated with the same rigour, detail, and reverence. While adding local, indigenous, and global South literature is crucial in the decolonisation project, it is not enough; 'the attitude to the materials used in the curriculum is as important' (Heleta 2018: 58). This is why *how* the curriculum is taught is critical.

7 Pedagogies of Decolonised Education: How should the Curriculum be Taught?

Pedagogy is the term used to describe the method and practice of teaching; it is how a curriculum is taught. However, even before we think through how our teaching might reflect a decolonising approach, teachers have frequently asked, what do people know when they enter a learning space, and thus what must be unlearned before new material can be engaged. Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire (1972), in his landmark book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* describes helpfully and succinctly the primary decision in pedagogy as being between 'bank deposit education' and 'problem posing education'.

Bank deposit education is 'education to avoid the threat of student *conscientizaqiio* [conscientisation]' and the oppressed are 'treated as individual cases, as marginal persons … as the pathology of the healthy society' (Freire 1972: 74).

Furthermore,

> The banking concept of education regards [wo/]men as adaptable, manageable beings. The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world. The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them. The capability of banking education to minimise or annul the students' creative power and to stimulate their credulity serves the interests of the oppressors, who care neither to have the world revealed nor to see it transformed (Freire 1972: 73).

Rather Freire advocated that the poor and oppressed, through 'conscientisation' and dialogue about their lives and the conditions of their oppression, be helped to 'name their world' (Freire 1972: 61). In so doing Freire postulated that they would be able to 'perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform' (Freire 1972: 25f). The pedagogy most suited to such an agenda would be 'problem-posing' education in which 'men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world' (Richard Shaull, Foreword to Freire 1972: 13f).

> For Freire, in problem posing education,
>
> people develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves… Hence, the teachers-students and the students-teachers reflect simultaneously on themselves and the world without dichotomising this reflection from action, and thus establish an authentic form of thought and action (Freire 1972: 83).

These differences can be summarised in relation to opposing views concerning understandings of education, the world, students, teachers, knowledge, content, praxis, teaching, dialogue, as well as how we think of our current state and reality in which we find ourselves. Freire's articulation of these two opposing models of education furthermore articulates the antagonisms they reveal around reality, respect, difference, humanity, engagement, history, attitudes, and power. Also to be expected is that his view of problem-solving education results in differences in curricula, learning, measures, results, and outcomes for education. Table 1 summarises these antagonisms.

	Banking education	**Problem posing education**
Education	The practice of domination	The practice of freedom
World	As an abstraction	As relationships
Students	Empty container to be filled, a gift for the ignorant, spectator, receiving objects.	Being with experiences, inquiring hopeful people, re-creator, creative subjects.
Teacher	Narrating, owner, prescriber, domesticator.	Dialoguing, partner, suggested, exploration leader.
Knowledge	As received and transmitted, controlled.	As co-created, nothing out of bounds, invention and re-invention.
Content	End point, text.	Starting point, text, world, lived experience.
Praxis	Indifferent	As the outcome of knowledge, as a goal.

Teaching	A one-directional deposit, teacher and student, receiving, filing, storing, memorises, repeating, cataloguing.	As a cycle between teacher and student. There are both teacher-student and students-teachers.
Dialogue	Avoided, absent.	Indispensable, Energetic discourse – respectful, loving, humble.
Current state	Permanence, reactionary.	Dynamic present, not unalterable, merely limiting.
Reality	Conceals, motionless, static.	Demythologises, shifting.
Respect	Teacher - student	Both ways, challenge leads to new understandings.
Difference	To be treated with disdain.	To be treated with humility.
Humanity	Complete, static.	Becoming – unfinished, incomplete.
Engagement	Optional	Mandatory
History	Ignores	Contextualises
Curriculum	Chosen, given.	Proposed, decided on together.
Result	Immobilises, fixates, alienating.	Frees, allows imaginative possibilities, humanises.
Measures	Ignorance	Consciousness
Outcome	To advance materially; enslavement, rigidity; adapt them to the world; information.	To become more fully human, emancipatory, liberatory, adapt the world, cognition.
Attitudes	Pessimistic, fatalistic, resigned.	Open, critical, transformative.
Learning	Isolated, individual.	Fellowship and solidarity.
Power	Located in teacher, system	Shared, questioned

Table 1 Contrasting Freire's understanding of problem-solving versus bank deposit education - Authors' summary of Freire (1972: Chapter 2)

Problem posing education makes 'oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed', in the belief that, 'from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation' (Freire 1972: 48). This is at the heart of a decolonising pedagogy.

While others have argued that the sustained use of colonial languages is the key to decolonising education, and while we agree that monolingualism remains a major stumbling block to the decolonisation project, we do not agree that language 'is precisely where the decolonisation of education must start' (Prah 2010: 5). So, while teaching of and in African languages these languages need to be included in the decolonising project; it will not be facilitated, if, for example, Eurocentric content is taught in a mother-tongue language. Nor can we claim decolonial pedagogy on the basis of employing translanguaging in the classroom yet maintaining the use of bank deposit pedagogy that quashes open, critical, transformative, and humanising learning.

8 The Aim of Decolonised Education and the Role of Theory

The current state of global knowledge production favours the Global North. Just over ten percent of the world's population lives in Africa, and more than seventy-five percent live in the Global South. Despite this, academic knowledge is produced and dominated primarily by the knowledge economy of the global North - especially Western Europe, North America, and Australia (Cote 2014). Southern knowledge, when it is produced, is limited frequently to describing empirical realities. This self-silencing regarding writing and producing theory from the South is a further impediment to the decolonising project.

The hegemony of Northern knowledge and theory is far from benign. Northern scholars, through,

> Western enlightenment thought has, from the first, posited itself as the wellspring of universal learning … it has regarded the non-West … the global South – primarily as a place of parochial wisdom, of antiquarian traditions, of exotic ways and means. Above all, of unprocessed data... reservoirs of raw fact: of the historical, natural, and ethnographic minutiae from which Euromodernity might fashion its testable theories and transcendent truths, its axioms and certitudes, its premises, postulates, and principles (Comaroff & Comaroff 2012: 1).

Not only is this so-called universal Northern knowledge contextually incongruent with Southern experiences, but these claims to universality exerts 'material power in the world' (Bhambra 2014: 120) as Northern scholars are then read more, made more visible to a global audience and thus are better placed economically to reproduce their view of their world. Theoretical knowledge especially – concepts and constructs – has a power of its own. It allows for the reproduction of representations that travel across borders and settle through skin. So when students in Southern universities themselves 'blame the victim', reinforce cultural stereotypes, or support popular discourses around 'the worthy poor' or 'colour-blindness' with regards to race, it is because they have seen the problem of their world through a Western or Northern gaze.

In contrast, a decolonising curriculum that centres theory – both reading theory and constructing theory from empirical realities – will result in tales told from the perspectives of the subaltern. Such a curriculum built on contextually produced theory will respond to empirical problems of population density, income poverty, unemployment, underemployment, precarious employment, forms of violence, and inequality from the perspective of theories of empire, practices of erasure, histories of dispossession, colonialism, enslavement, and appropriation (Bhambra 2014). In this way 'the colonial matrix of power' with its rhetoric of Northern 'modernity (progress, development, growth)' and Southern litany of 'poverty, misery, inequality… [and] contemporary global inequalities' can now be understood through 'the historical basis of their emergence' (Bhambra 2014: 119).

Re-orienting our attention to historical legacies of dispossession and appropriation will serve also to elevate Southern accounts of inclusion and visibility (Connell 2007) and legitimate Southern solutions to these problems, drawing on overlooked, frequently, less-valued forms of resources, such as collectivity, solidarity, personhood, intersectionality, consciousness, navigational capacities, collective agency, and emancipation to do so. A curriculum focused on African and Southern knowledge, that includes generating theory, will substantially advance the decolonising project. Students will be equipped to take over the means of (knowledge) production rather than merely be its users.

As a consequence, Southern knowledge, and with it, Southern theory, would be seen as having relevance for the global context rather than only for the South. Theory from the South is for the South and for the world. Building theory is of critical importance so that decolonised education can endure and

take its place in shaping new practices and realities. This is something we have to teach students intentionally to accomplish.

9 Conclusion

These considerations are intended to aid in the process of decolonial thinking for all university stakeholders. While this may seem burdensome and expensive, Walter Mignolo maintains that decolonial thinking 'can be done however within academia through courses, seminars, workshops, mentoring students and working with colleagues who have the same conviction' (2013: 137). In Africa the stakes are high, but this is a fecund moment of opportunity. As the Global North experiences increasing economic and political instability (conditions that have long defined life in the Global South), the formerly colonised have the potential to rise to prominence as decolonising locus of enunciation - one informed by its own concepts, methods, categories, assumptions, and theories.

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