

Rethinking the Complexities of Decolonising Curricula and Humanising Pedagogy in South Africa's Higher Education

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Abstract

The article discusses the complexities of decolonising curricula and humanising pedagogy in South Africa's Higher education. It is based on the secondary data source and empirical evidence of existing researches that have focused on the decolonisation of higher education. Since knowledge is produced in higher education where teachers are trained to develop the curriculum for the whole education system, decolonisation of the curriculum requires the system to consider the important role played by the teacher. The article examines decolonisation as a theory, concept, and pedagogical practices. The main argument herein is that since decolonisation has proliferated at a theoretical level, its operationalisation at higher education is just beginning. There is no theorist best known to the writers who have adequately provided the theoretical meaning of decolonisation for South Africa's higher education pedagogy and praxis. As such, the article lays the theoretical groundwork that brings decolonial theory into concrete engagement with pedagogic practice. The Freirean humanising pedagogy was used in an attempt to explore the relationship between humanisation and decolonisation of higher education in South Africa. To this effect, the main argument advanced in this section is that decolonial thinking of higher education in South Africa requires the development of pedagogical and intellectual spaces that respect Freirean problem-posing philosophy. The initial part of the article discusses the historical view of decolonial thinking and the theoretical gist of

the article. The penultimate part of the article discusses the impact of COVID-19 on the decolonisation project. It unpacks the complexities of decolonising curricula and pedagogy in South Africa's Higher education as set against the background of COVID-19.

Keywords: COVID-19, Decolonisation, Freirean pedagogy, Higher education, Humanising pedagogy.

1 Introduction

The article examines decolonisation as a theory, concept, and pedagogical practices. The main argument herein is that since decolonisation has proliferated at a theoretical level that is why debates on decoloniality and decolonisation have proliferated at a theoretical level, and its operationalisation at higher education is just beginning. As such, the article argues that there is a gap between operationalisation (the practice of implementation) and the decolonial theory. Literature provided in this article shows that there is no one way of instigating decolonial thought and practice at higher education in South Africa. This allows for curricula and pedagogy in South African universities to become contextually situated irrespective of different forms of knowledge. The article conceptualises decoloniality as a pedagogy and curricula that are inherently a set of practices that challenge and disregard the dominant hegemonic discourse and knowledge matrix in higher education practices. The education practices often affect knowledge production, curriculum, as well as teaching and assessment methods. The article argues that the decolonial process should start by colonising the teacher. Teachers understand the complexities and contradictions in the work of decolonising higher education. This provides intellectual thought which lays the theoretical groundwork that brings decolonial theory into concrete engagement with pedagogic practice. Decolonisation of the curriculum is not a new phenomenon. Understanding of decolonisation as applied to the context of this study is informed by Stein and Andreotti (2017). The authors conceptualise decolonisation as,

an umbrella term for diverse efforts to resist the distinct but intertwined processes of colonisation and racialisation, to enact transformation and redress in reference to the historical and ongoing

effects of these processes, and to create and keep alive modes of knowing, being, and relating that these processes seek to eradicate (Stein & Andreotti 2017: 370).

Taking a cue from the above definition, some complexities exist under the umbrella of decolonisation. Also, tensions and paradoxes emerge in the efforts to decolonise higher education. As an illustration, there exists a plethora of complications, complexities, and paradoxes that disturbs the efforts to decolonise higher education institutions in South Africa, where Eurocentric knowledge is privileged over non-Eurocentric intellectual thought and knowledge production (Higgs 2016; Mamdani 2016; Mbembe 2016). One of the complexities is whether decolonial thinking is compatible with existing social justice and transformation projects at regional and international levels (Mamdani 2016). Irrespective of the abovementioned tensions and paradoxes that emerge in the efforts to decolonise higher education, decolonisation and the discourse of transformation has remained at the centre of South African universities.

Since scholars have discussed decolonisation efforts at higher education (see Higgs 2016; Mamdani 2016; Stein & Andreotti; Mbembe 2016), none best known to the writers has provided theoretically the meaning of decolonisation for higher education pedagogy and praxis. As such, this article reflects on the theoretical meaning of decolonising higher education pedagogies with specific reference to South African universities. The main argument herein is that decolonisation of higher education pedagogies requires the generation of novel pedagogical thought, language, and praxis that disregard normalised Eurocentric discourse and structures of South African universities. The position taken by the ongoing article is backed up by Keet (2014) who unpacks the complexities of university discourse in epistemic othering. Epistemic othering constitutes injustice in the knowledge production process. This article brings the theoretical gist of Paulo Freire into conversation with his notion of humanising pedagogy. Humanising pedagogy is in Freire's notion of humanisation and it is centred on the hunt for people's full humanity.

2 Historical View of Decolonial Thinking

Calls for decolonisation are not a recent phenomenon. In Africa, decolonial writings were initially associated with political ideologies and anti-colonial

struggles (see Du Bois & Edwards 2008; Nkrumah 1970; Nyere 1968; Fanon [1961] 2001; Biko [1978] 2010). During the colonial era, the decolonisation concept was prominently used by Fanon on the Algerian anti-colonial war and Biko on the South African Apartheid struggle. In their political theorisation, Fanon (2001: 27) views decolonisation as a violent process which ‘sets out to change the order of the world’. As such the process involves the confrontation between two conflicting forces, namely, the coloniser and colonised. For Fanon (2001:28), decolonisation requires ‘complete calling into question of the colonial situation and the proof of success lies in a whole social structure being changed from the bottom up’. From a political perspective, the above statement shows that decolonisation is a process of anticolonial revolution and a counter-hegemonic force which questions, challenges, and overthrows the colonial systems of power and knowledge production. It is important to note that education is an ideological weapon used by the imperialists to maintain their status quo. As such decolonising the curriculum as argued throughout this article is central in emancipating the oppressed from the hands of their oppressor.

Decolonial thinking was expressed through a plethora of methods that include music, art, political writing, manifestos, political activism, *inter alia*. Although decolonisation was originally associated with a political revolution against the oppressor, the concept gained broader meaning that suggests the rejection of any form of imperialist domination. As an illustration, scholars such as Bell Hooks (2012) provided new ways of thinking in her emphasis on the intersectionality of the whole system which reproduces inequality. In her understanding of decolonial thinking, Hooks (2012:4) notes that the ‘imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy’ creates a system that shapes the marginalised view of the world. In the neo-colonial project, the imperialists use the education system to maintain their status quo and domination. According to Mignolo (2011), the realisation of this new political thought brought a new wave of decolonisation scholarship which comprises interconnected structures of control such as knowledge, economy, racism, and authority. It is against this backdrop that the 21st-century decolonial thinking led to students’ protests demanding emancipatory curricula. In South Africa, this is in response to the absence of local context, identities, and thought, in the curriculum of higher education. To this end, the 2015 South African student protest which the current article views as an example of the discourse of #Falloism, restated the mandate for the decolonisation of higher education. The

point established here is that student protest is linked to a decolonial thinking that emerged in the 20th century. Since 2015, calls for decolonisation has gained power across South African universities, leading to a resurgence of protest movements across the globe. Universities and students across the globe and racial divide support the decolonial project. As such, they support learning curricula designed in line with the Freirean problem-posing education as discussed in this article. Calls for decolonisation in South African universities offer new ways of thinking about pedagogy. Thus, the main argument presented in this section is that decolonial thinking in higher education systems is associated with systems of power and political rule.

Borrowing from Randall's (1988) study of the history of South African education, there has been little attention to teacher training education. The current discourse of South African education appears to follow the Western approach. The post-apartheid South Africa adopted the Western approach used during the colonial era. Commenting on colonial education Randall (1988:15) states that:

the orthodoxy that ruled in the English language South African universities in South Africa was modelled closely on the one in Britain; it too followed a heavily factual linear and chronological approach and it too concentrated on Western schooling. Where it considered schooling in South Africa at all, it dealt almost exclusively with the development of a public-school system for whites.

According to Chisholm, Friedman, and Sindoh (2018), the abovementioned approach is demonstrated in the case study of the University of Cape Town (UCT) where they are following the same in the Afrikaans system established in 1959. This system isolated the Eurocentric knowledge system from the Afrocentric discourse (Randall 1990). McCulloch (2017:4) notes that 'a succession of challenges arose against once-dominant orthodoxies in history that amounted to an all-encompassing wave of historical revisionism'. The Western education system attributes truth only to the Eurocentric knowledge production, at the same time disregarding other epistemic traditions. As such, Mbembe (nd:19) calls for the Africanisation approach which does not abandon the idea of collective and universal knowledge for humanity, 'but which embraces it via a horizontal strategy of openness to dialogue among different epistemic traditions ... a less provincial and more open critical cosmopolitan

pluriversalism'. Mbembe's (2008:np) expression of the post-colonial education system reveals the 'symbolic workings' of representations forcing 'the subjugated into silence and inaction'. A decolonial approach to education does not view the colonised individual as a passive being but as an active and conscious being capable of rewriting history.

3 Methodology

This article contributes to the scholarship of decolonisation of higher education. It used secondary data sources and existing literature. The article also draws on empirical evidence of existing researches that focus on the decolonisation of higher education. The methodological process started with what the authors knew about the decolonisation of higher education. A theoretical knowledge gap was identified thereafter. The authors established that there is a theoretical knowledge gap regarding decolonising of Curriculum, including the impacts of COVID-19 in decolonial thinking. As such, the authors began to search literature on the phenomenon, as well as that of the Freirean humanising pedagogy. Online material was searched for by use of key search terms like decolonisation, higher education curriculum transformation, South Africa, and Freirean pedagogy. There was limited literature on the impact of COVID-19 on the decolonisation of higher education and context-specific theoretical approach to this phenomenon. Key literature such as Mbembe (2016), Freire (2003), Mamdani (1998), Higgs (2012), and Biko (2010) were found helpful. Other useful literature was also found from the University of KwaZulu-Natal library database. The article uses exploratory design. Bryman (2012) argues that exploratory design uncovers hidden ideas and provides new insights into problems that are not understood clearly.

- Discourse analysis was used in this article. Hodges, Kuper, and Reeves (2008) conceptualise discourse analysis as a process that brings the text into being through consumption, dissemination, and production. More accurately, this article used discourse analysis of Michel Foucault which is grounded in constructivism. Foucault (1972) used the term 'discourse' to signify a social system that produces and reproduces knowledge and meaning. He maintains that discourse analysis is a way in which knowledge is organised and developed through a mutual understanding of the discursive logic and new meaning is established. This type of discourse

analysis, as used in this article, shows how systematically constructed versions available from the literature provide an articulate method of understanding multifaceted issues at the meta-level. A critical standpoint was taken from textual analysis and it provided an insightful interpretation of data gathered. In so doing, hidden meanings of text were examined and interpreted through the process of social thinking. This data analysis tool enabled the researchers to understand and attach meanings to what is communicated in the literature. In this respect, the ideologies were reshaped and already constructed knowledge was used to establish new facts.

Also, the article utilise a scoping review. According to Daudt, van Mossel, and Scott (2013), this is a way of reviewing the existing literature about a particular topic. The main aim is to indicate the nature of existing literature and identifying knowledge gaps more comprehensively. It is mainly skewed towards a qualitative explanation of existing knowledge. The researchers utilise this technique to examine the complexities of decolonising curricula and pedagogy in South Africa's Higher education. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to deliberately eliminate studies that did not add value to the key objectives of the article. A non-probability snowball and purposive method were used to search literature. The authors selected text purposively that is aligned to decolonial thinking and humanising pedagogies of higher education in South Africa. The first text that was identified was used to locate other text using both intext and the list of references.

4 Theoretical Framework

As outlined above, this article is grounded on a Freirean humanising pedagogy. The humanising theory addresses the struggle for change and explains how people needed to fight against the dominant education system which appears to be oppressive. The article used the humanising pedagogy to explore the relationship between humanisation and decolonisation of higher education in South Africa. Freire (2003) opines that humanising pedagogy is a form of critical pedagogy. His idea of humanisation is grounded in Marxist humanisation which disregards any system responsible for (re)reproducing social inequalities. Thus, the central Freirean idea of humanisation is the theoretical gist of pedagogy. Freire (2003) highlights pedagogy is the

entanglement of philosophy and practice which requires teachers to engage students in transforming and decolonising oppressive social conditions. His notion of pedagogy offers opportunities for researchers and activists to organise counterhegemonic learning suitable to challenge the dominant hegemonic discourse. Humanising pedagogy in this regard is a revolutionary method that involves teachers and students through dialogue, and problem-posing processes are aimed at critical consciousness.

Salazar (2013) confirms that humanising pedagogies are teaching practices that use the realities, knowledge, and histories of learners as an essential part of educational practice. The pedagogy makes learners active participants and they are critically engaged in the construction of knowledge. Humanising pedagogy is central to Freire's philosophy. The pedagogy argues that students are active beings who can reason. Their lived experiences are shaped by their reasoning capacity as they move towards achieving self-actualisation, thus developing their full humanity. Such lines of thought find complementarity in Salazar (2013:126) who proclaims that humanisation 'is the process of becoming more fully human as social, historical, thinking, communicative, transformative, creative persons, who participate in and with the world'. Central to Salazar's precept is the idea that humanisation liberates students from colonial oppression.

This typifies Freire's (2003) suggestion that problem-posing dialogue can transform oppressive structures and facilitate liberation for all. Employing these theoretical gists into the context of this article, it can be argued that effective decolonisation requires teachers and higher education institutions to create enabling conditions that can promote equal pedagogical practices. However, despite the potentials of humanising pedagogy, the article acknowledges some critiques of Freirean pedagogies. Some have argued that revolutionary critical pedagogy remains entrenched in the Eurocentric mode; hence it defeats the real intention of the agenda. This critique is anchored on Grande (2008:238) who posits that,

Revolutionary critical pedagogy remains rooted in the Western paradigm and therefore in tension with indigenous knowledge and praxis. In particular, the root constructs of democratization [sic], subjectivity, and property are all defined through Western frames of reference that presume the individual as the primary subject of 'rights' and social status.

The critiques of Freirean humanising pedagogy, emphasise that pertinent features of the pedagogy should not be overlooked, but rather they need to be revisited taking into consideration the context of decolonisation projects in countries such as South Africa. Also, the current article argues that a closer introspection of Freire's limitation is important and productive for supporting the decolonial thinking. As such, the article argues that the limitations of the humanising pedagogy are not sufficient enough to disregard the discourse. Instead, rethinking Freirean humanising pedagogy provides deep insights into the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed and the complexity of the environment of oppression. These philosophical thoughts provide complementary understanding to the decolonial project, making the humanising pedagogy relevant in providing new theoretical insights to the decolonisation of South African Higher education.

5 Understanding Humanising and Decolonising Pedagogies

In the previous sections, the article suggested the identification of epistemic injustice, such as the inclusion of pedagogical practices, which are central in the decolonisation of higher education in South Africa. This section discusses humanising and decolonising pedagogies and how these practices can be reconfigured in higher education. The section augments humanising pedagogies and decolonising pedagogies is in an attempt to provide theoretical explanations to the decolonisation debate in South Africa. There is no theorist best known to the writers who have provided theoretical the meaning of decolonisation for higher education pedagogy and praxis. As such, the current article draws on the Freirean humanising approach to understand the phenomenon. The main argument advanced in this section is that decolonial thinking of higher education in South Africa requires the development of pedagogical and intellectual spaces that respect Freirean problem-posing philosophy. As informed by Andreotti *et al.* (2015), the said spaces should be accompanied by a strategic form of system hacking. System hacking involves the creation of intellectual spaces within the higher education system, 'using its resources, where people can be educated about the violence of the system and have their desires re-oriented away from it. This requires 'playing the game' of institutions at the same time that rules are bent to generate alternative outcomes' (Andreotti *et al.* 2015:27). This implies that the higher education system and teachers have a responsibility to challenge the banking concept

pedagogical thought that is grounded in Eurocentric knowledge practices. These efforts will assist higher education to reclaim its identity.

The South African higher education decoloniality and humanising pedagogies create spaces for the contextualisation of knowledge. Taking a cue from the Freirean humanising pedagogies, the process of decolonising knowledge must be informed by a set of values that disregard the effects of colonial domination, oppression, and exploitation (Mbembe 2016). Instead, there should be a recognition of problem-posing education in the reframing of pedagogical practices. The main argument herein is that knowledge production should emerge from counter-narratives on the Eurocentric thought. Going beyond the Freirean-based approaches, this section also argues that decolonial thinking and praxis should focus on the geopolitics of knowledge production. In the context of South African higher education, this would suggest pedagogies that follow the development of human relations that counterattack coloniality in its entirety. This argument is supported by Gaztambide-Fernandez (2012) who opines that the said pedagogical practices require a reflective commitment to the strategy of solidarity which in this context is central in the decolonisation project. The narrative provided here shows that humanising pedagogies and decolonising practices in higher education requires solidarity that unifies indigenous knowledge system, sexualised, and people of all classes, irrespective of their race and colonial struggle. As an illustration, radical decolonising the South African university curriculum would require the inclusion of the experiences, memories, and histories of colonised people. Also, to avoid dehumanisation, the previously colonised people should be engaged in knowledge production and be treated as rational beings rather than passive recipients of knowledge. Thus, Freirean pedagogy offers a unique theoretical understanding of the decolonisation of higher education in South Africa. His salient theoretical gist unearths the importance of various institutions and actors who act and respond to decolonisation calls.

5.1 The Emergence of Decolonial Thinking in Higher Education

Although South African Universities enjoy academic freedom, there is no doubt that existing curricula continue to promote Eurocentric thought and hegemonic ideology that maintain the Western status quo in learning, teaching, and research. As such the decolonial thinking should address the injustice of colonial knowledge. According to Pillay (2015), decolonisation of higher

education focuses on the justice that addresses the injustices of colonial knowledge and colonial thought and it is an act of nonconformity to Eurocentrism. Derrida (1982) confirms that decolonial thinking is an act of disobedience and deviance and there is nothing bad if Africa claims its indigenous knowledge production. It shifts the focus from Western thought hence the decolonisation discourse imagines accepting Africa as a centre of epistemology generation. To put it in plain words, decolonial thinking requires the dismantling of the colonial education system in its entirety. The process aims to emancipate the 'black' African from the bondage of Eurocentric thought. This argument is informed by Fanon (2008:14) who argues that 'the juxtaposition of the black and white races has resulted in a massive psycho-existential complex'. Fanon (2008) meant that to liberate a black man, they should be emancipated from the psychological effects of colonialism and education should play a central role in the process. The ongoing article augments the ideas of Pillay (2015) and Derrida (1982), and the victorious views of Fanon (2008), and argues that an urgent need to decolonise curriculum in South Africa is needed. The adopted approach should manage racial undertones, promote gender equality, and Africanise the curriculum and other ideological forms that breed discrimination at African universities. Knowledge production is central in the decolonisation process; hence the process should be peaceful and serve as an indicator of the emergence of a decolonised world.

5.2 Decolonisation of Higher Education

This section discusses higher education during and after the apartheid era as well as the importance of the decolonisation project. It draws on key decolonisation scholarship in the 20th century. According to Kelley (2000:27), 'colonial domination required a whole way of thinking, a discourse in which everything advanced, good and civilised is defined and measured in European terms'. The colonial thought and educational system played a role in promoting the Eurocentric ideology and the oppression of the black majority. The understanding of 'blackness' as articulated in this article is informed by Steve Biko's notion of black consciousness. Biko conceptualises 'black' not in terms of skin color but as synonymous with all those previously oppressed by the apartheid regime. This includes Coloured, Indian, and the Black majority. The most disparaging effects of the colonial project were the suppression of the local knowledge system and the promotion of Eurocentric thought which was

the view as universal knowledge. Kelly (2000) is of the view that the Eurocentric literature portrayed the non-Western ideology as inferior and backward and this was used to justify racism. As such, the role of universities was to promote the expansion of imperialism and white supremacy, and to expand the colonial project (Pietsch [2013](#); Ramoupi [2011](#)). As Zeleza (2009: 114) puts it, colonial universities ‘were unapologetically Eurocentric, patterned on the metropolitan universities from which they drew much of their faculty and curricula’. During the apartheid era, higher education and universities in particular were intended to imbue the power of the ruling white elites (Bunting 2004:52). The author adds that the universities gave full support to the white apartheid project.

The majority of universities in Africa, including South Africa, are controlled by the colonial legacy of the education system. According to Heleta (2016), many universities adopted the colonial curricula and educational system. In the context of South Africa, Universities were established in 1948 to promote the apartheid ideology and white supremacy (Lavery 2007). Literature provided by Badat (2008) and Heleta (2016) reiterates that the apartheid system was coupled with educational inequality because of racial segregation and marginalisation of women. During the Apartheid regime, universities were established as agents of colonial suppression, as evidenced by the establishment of English schools deemed to be the only sources of high-quality knowledge production. White schools and universities attracted more funding from the west and black institutions did not enjoy the same benefits (Heleta 2016). As such Mbembe (2016) opines that the apartheid educational system was not conducive for post-apartheid teaching and learning, although the system did not change even after independence. The system of teaching and learning in South African universities continues to be dominated by Western thought (Heleta 2016; Mbembe 2016). As such transformation and decolonisation are essential and they should address the needs of the previously disadvantaged groups. The decolonial thinking started in 2015 during the #FeesMustFall when students fought to be liberated from Eurocentric hegemonic discourse (Heleta 2016; Nwadeyi 2016). Students around the country fought for social, economic, and political injustices historically created by the apartheid regime.

Although efforts have been made to formulate policies that address racial inequalities and discrimination, Mbembe (2016) argues that such efforts have failed to bring transformation needed by the black majority. Nwadeyi

(2016) concurs with the thoughtful ideas of Mbembe (2016) and adds that higher education institutions in South Africa have done little to address the imbalances of higher learning due to lack of governmental support and willingness from other actors. As outlined above, the post-apartheid education system is still characterised by colonial thought and this makes decolonisation inevitable in the country. Taking a cue from Mbembe (2016), decolonisation requires a complete change of the whole system including ways of thinking and Africanisation. The apartheid educational system was established as a way of enforcing Eurocentric culture treating local cultures, and thought of as retrogressive, pagan, and backward. To this effect, decolonisation is central as it disregards such misconstrued thoughts set by the imperialists.

Failure to decolonise the curriculum leaves Eurocentric knowledge unchallenged. It will reflect a failure to challenge the curriculum and knowledge system that reinforce prejudice and bias towards the white minority. As such decolonisation advocates for knowledge produced by native Africans which has been largely ignored in the mainstream discourse. Natives should be viewed as intellectuals and sources of knowledge. On this note, Mamdani (1998:71) posits that:

the idea that natives can only be informants, and not intellectuals, is part of an old imperial tradition. It is part of the imperial conviction that natives cannot think for themselves; they need tutelage.

Mbembe (2001:8f) shares the same sentiments and provides an additional account that reflects on Eurocentric knowledge systems. He recounts that:

Reduced to impatience and ignorance, carried away by verbal delirium, slogans, and linguistic inadequacy – with some analysts, reading French only, others English only, and few speaking local languages – the literature lapses into repetition and plagiarism; dogmatic assertions, cavalier interpretations, and shallow rehashes become the order of the day.

The above extract shows how Eurocentric knowledge promotes white supremacy and stereotyping of Africa. It is a type of knowledge that alienates native Africans. The lesson that this article draws on the above extract is on the approaches to be taken in decolonial thinking. Two approaches should be considered in the decolonial project. First, there is a need to consider adding

new ideas and items to the current curriculum. This approach is often promoted by intellectuals who seek to maintain the status quo of the existing discourse. The result of this approach would be the continual domination of Western ideologies and worldviews. Secondly, there is a need to reconstruct the current project and provide possible changes. The second approach provides fundamental changes. It rejects imperialist values and seeks to replace them with a new knowledge system. This approach is supported by Césaire (2000: 89) who maintains that ‘decolonisation is about the consciousness and rejection of values, norms, customs, and worldviews imposed by the [former] colonisers’. Kaya and Seleti (2013:33) concur with Césaire (2000) that decolonisation has to do with the rejection of the ‘utilisation of dominant Western worldview of knowing and knowledge production *as* the only way of knowing’. Decolonisation in this regard is about defining what is at the centre of South African universities.

5.3 Decolonising the Teacher

This article provides new ways of thinking about education and decolonisation of the curriculum. It views education as a unified system where the teacher plays a central role in the decolonisation process. As such, the article argues that decolonisation of the curriculum requires us to consider the role played by the university teachers in the current hegemonic discourse. Teachers play a significant role in the decolonisation process. Such lines of thought find complementarity in Mamdani (2007:13) who argues that:

Higher education is where teachers are trained and curricula developed. Without research in higher education to develop curricula for the entire system of education, all curricula will be as an off-the-shelf imported facility, with little relevance to the lived circumstances of both students and society. If our object is to transform general education, we need to begin with higher education. Higher education is the strategic heart – indeed head – of education.

The above extract indicates that knowledge is produced at higher education. It is where teachers are trained to develop the curriculum for the whole education system. As such, Mamdani (2007) reiterates that decolonisation of the curriculum at higher education requires the system to consider the important

role played by the teacher. To this effect, decolonisation requires one to consider teacher education and all provision designed to equip the teacher with pertinent skills, knowledge, and behaviours, and skills required to accomplish given tasks effectively.

A quantitative study conducted by Sayed, Motala and Hoffman (2017) concludes that decolonisation of the curriculum in South African universities is lagged by limited exposure of understanding of African history and its complexities. Teachers are not equipped with complex African education histories hence the curricula are moving slowly towards a more spacious imagination of what counts as intellectual decolonised work and who is deemed to be intellectual. Also, a theme evolving from Sayed *et al.* (2017) is the challenges that come in the efforts to decolonize the teacher. Decolonisation goes beyond including African writers in the curriculum and modules that are taught at universities. It is a continuous process of negotiating the struggle with institutions, students, and other stakeholders. This means that decolonisation of the curriculum is a multi-layered process that starts with the initial teacher, their institutions, relationship with students, and, most importantly, understanding of intellectual biographies. Decolonisation is not a single event but a collective process that provides intellectual opportunities for different actors to come together and discuss the meaning and processes of intellectual thought.

6 Impact of COVID-19 on the Decolonisation Project

This section discusses the impact of COVID-19 on the decolonisation project. The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has impacted higher education in South Africa in multifarious ways. Many students have responded differently to eLearning and online study material. Many have concentrated on moving to online teaching and learning while neglecting the broader transformation of decolonisation of higher education in South Africa. The article argues that COVID-19 has re-configured the already deep-seated neo-colonial knowledge production in South Africa. The main argument herein is that due to the pandemic, the South African educational system at higher educational institutions has experienced an epic shift by changing contact teaching into an online one. To put it in plain words, COVID-19 has revolutionized teaching and learning systems in South Africa digitally. Universities have recommended eLearning strongly as a permanent solution to academic challenges posed by

the unexpected crisis. The digitisation of teaching and learning appears to be a threat to the decolonial project that has over years been advanced by the South African Higher education. Against this backdrop, this article argues that the celebrated online teaching-learning disadvantaged the already struggling black majority especially those staying in remote areas. The COVID-19 has affected higher education significantly and slowed down the decolonisation project as universities closed their premises in response to lockdown measures. Since higher education institutions moved to online learning, the closure of premises affected students and the decolonisation project in multifarious ways.

The Covid-19 pandemic, lockdown regulations, as well as social and physical distancing that followed, have affected education and the decolonisation project. It bought new ways of teaching that are contrary to the democratic education system. Freire (2003) argues that a democratic education system allows learners to work collectively despite their different backgrounds. Collective effort is possible in contact teaching and online teaching is a threat to this educational model. The majority of South Africa rural-based university students face unprecedented challenges in coping with a new model of online teaching and learning due to various conditions such as lack of internet connectivity, electricity shortages, unconducive learning environment, *inter alia*. In such circumstances, online teaching and learning can be blamed for dehumanising rural-based universities facing the abovementioned problems. This makes decolonisation of higher education a very important conversation in the light of the challenges posed by the pandemic.

Also, the COVID-19 pandemic brought the physical separation of schooling where students and lecturers in all South African universities are expected to work from home. Borrowing from Freire (2003), this article argues that physical and social distancing, as well as closure of university campuses, conditioned students away from the ethics of empathy, social interaction, and human contact important to a democratic life. In other words, spaces for the re-contextualisation of knowledge that is central to decolonial thinking were heavily affected. Instead, the online teaching and learning model makes teachers function as technological mediators rather than critical mentors. Against this backdrop, the current article argues that the online standardised curriculum brought about by COVID-19 is an undemocratic practice to the humanising pedagogy. Online teaching and learning transform students into objects as it reduces opportunities for dialogue. Also, online teaching and learning created by COVID-19 produced an educational culture that makes is

possible for both learners and teachers to accept technological surveillance. As such, there is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic will shape the way South African Higher education institutions rethink their decolonial thinking especially focusing much on how to support participatory democracy. Another alternative to the new normal would be to advocate for the Freirean critical instructional approach which is centred on students' experiences as the starting point decolonisation of the Higher education curriculum.

7 Conclusion

The article has discussed the complexities of decolonising curricula and humanising pedagogy in South Africa's Higher education. It conceptualises both decolonisation as a theory, concept, and pedagogical practices. The main argument discussed in the article is that the operationalisation of decolonial thought at higher education is just beginning. The article used the Freirean humanising pedagogy. The humanising theory addresses the struggle for change and explains how people needed to fight against the dominant education system which appears to be oppressive. This form of critical pedagogy was used to explore the relationship between humanisation and decolonisation of higher education in South African. The South African Higher Education decoloniality and humanising pedagogies create spaces for the re-contextualisation of knowledge. Taking a cue from the Freirean humanising pedagogies, the process of decolonising knowledge must be informed by a set of values that disregard the effects of colonial domination, oppression, and exploitation. Instead, there should be a recognition of problem-posing education in the reframing of pedagogical practices. Knowledge production should emerge from counter-narratives on the Eurocentric thought. Going beyond the Freirean-based approaches, decolonial thinking and praxis should focus on the geopolitics of knowledge production. In the context of the South African higher education, this would suggest pedagogies that follow the development of human relations that counterattack coloniality in its entirety. Most universities in Africa, including South Africa, are controlled by the colonial legacy of the education system. Many universities adopted the colonial curricula and educational system. Thus, failure to decolonise the curriculum leaves Eurocentric knowledge unchallenged. It will reflect a failure to challenge the curriculum and knowledge system that reinforce prejudice and bias towards the white minority. The last part of the article has discussed the

impact of COVID-19 on the decolonisation process. The Covid-19 pandemic, lockdown regulations, as well as social and physical distancing that followed, have affected education and the decolonisation project. It brought new ways of teaching that are contrary to the democratic educational system.

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