

Decolonising Higher Education: The Academic's Turn

Saloshna Vandeyar

*Department of Humanities Education, Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria, Pretoria,
South Africa*

Saloshna.Vandeyar@up.ac.za

Saloshna Vandeyar is a Full Professor and the Director of the Centre for Diversity and Social Cohesion. The focus of her research is on social, cultural and cognitive justice education with a particular focus on race (in)equalities and the ways in which all other kinds of inequalities are produced and reproduced in educational spaces by educational processes, practices and discourses. She is an NRF rated scientist and the recipient of numerous international, national and institutional research awards.

Abstract

This qualitative case study set out to explore how academics respond to the call for decolonisation of education. Social constructivism and the methodology of narrative inquiry was used. Data comprised a mix of an online qualitative survey and semi-structured interviews. Data was analysed using inductive thematic analysis. Findings were threefold; First, academics should ‘turn away’ from the ‘lip service model’ of decolonisation of education and ‘turn towards’ deep and lasting change. Second, academics should ‘turn away’ from challenges and ‘turn towards’ opportunities offered by decolonisation of education. Third, academics should ‘turn towards’ becoming transformative intellectuals and agents of change if they want to ‘turn the tide’. Knowledge in the blood may not be ‘easily changed’, but, the disruption of the authority of received knowledge is possible through the transfusion of new knowledge. This study recommends professional development courses that are focussed on how to effectively decolonise education.

Keywords: academics; agents of change; decolonisation of education; social realism; transformative intellectuals

Introduction and background context

Stuck within coloniality (colonial structures) entrapped in colonial history (ways of doing things) and caught within the tectonic plates of globalisation and social media, South African academics are expected to make the shift towards decolonisation of education. After 350 years of colonialism and apartheid, how do South African academics, make the turn towards decolonisation of education? The call for decolonisation and structural change at South African universities was sparked by the #FeesMustFall protest actions in South Africa. In the wake of these protests, South African universities reacted to this call with a sense of urgency

and immediacy. Numerous discourses were held and processes and practices put in place to abate the impending threat; with a renewed focus and urgent attention on re-curriculating activities. Academics were instructed to re-visit, re-look and revise their study guides and course materials and to indicate their attempts at ‘decolonising the curriculum’. However, in the midst of this urgency, the key agent of curriculum delivery namely, the academic was overlooked. It is now the academic’s ‘turn’. The academic needs to make the ‘turn’ towards decolonising education.

In South Africa, educational advocacy and scholarship easily adopted the decolonizing discourse as evidenced by the increasing number of calls to “decolonize our universities ,” “decolonize methods,” and “decolonize student thinking”. An approach which Tuck and Yang (2021) argue, turns decolonization into a metaphor. Decolonisation of the curriculum requires much more than just changing the curriculum or the choice of materials used (Wa Thiong’o, 1998). It requires a change in academics’ attitudes, perceptions and beliefs. The attitude and disposition of academics to materials used in the curriculum is critical. Western knowledge systems still seem to “constitute the only basis for higher forms of thinking” (DoE, 2008) and is passed on to African students ‘as unquestionable truth and of inscrutable value’ (Jansen, 1998, p.109). Coloniality and Western knowledge systems were exported to the colonies “as the hegemonic criteria to racialize, classify and pathologize the rest of the world’s population in a hierarchy of superior and inferior races” (Grosfuguel, 2007, pp. 217-218). Eurocentric worldviews were promoted and imposed and required a whole new way of thinking, a discourse in which everything that is advanced, good and civilized is defined and measured in European terms” (Kelly, 2000, p. 27), rendering Black bodies as inhuman, disposable, and inherently problematic (Warren & Coles, 2020). Black bodies were “(mis)read under the white/Western gaze as the fetishized, the marginalized or the other than human” (Lyiscott, Green, Ohito & Coles, 2021. p.1). In so doing Indigenous

memories, knowledges, and worldviews are not only subjugated, but erased. It is time for counter narratives.

The pertinent question is whether academics, after more than two decades of democracy in South Africa, are ready to ‘decolonise their minds’ (Wa Thiong'o, 1998) and their ingrained belief and value systems. Accordingly, this study asks, how do academics respond to the call for decolonisation of education at South African universities? What are academics understanding of the term 'decolonisation of education'? What beliefs, perceptions and attitudes do academics hold about decolonisation of education? How do academics understand and implement decolonisation of education in the delivery of the curriculum? How do academics disrupt received knowledge, create pedagogic dissonance and give hope to students?

Exploring the terrain: Understanding decolonisation and decoloniality¹

The concepts of decolonisation and decoloniality, especially in the South African context can only be understood in light of the history of colonisation in South Africa. Colonisation of South Africa unfolded in three categories, namely an 'unofficial colonisation', two 'official colonisations' and an 'internal colonisation' of the country. Processes of colonisation occurred from both the south and the north of South Africa. ‘Unofficial colonisation ‘ occurred with the migration and invasion of people from the north. ‘Official colonisation’ of South Africa occurred in 1652 with the establishment of the Dutch East India Company as a trading post in Cape Town. The two European countries who occupied the land were the Netherlands (1652-1795 and 1803-1806) and Great Britain (1795-1803 and 1806-1961). In 1910, South Africa became a Union with its own white people government. The country however, was

¹ A version of this literature review first appeared in Vandeyar, S. (2020). Why decolonizing the South African university curriculum will fail *Teaching in Higher Education*, 25(7):783-796.

still regarded as a colony of Britain until 1961. ‘Internal colonisation’ of South Africa happened in 1948, with the advent of the National Party coming into power, marking the beginning of white Afrikaner rule in the country under the supervision of Britain. In 1961, South Africa became a republic independent of Britain (Heldring & Robinson, 2012). The advent of democracy in South Africa in 1994, terminated white Afrikaner rule of the country (Oliver & Oliver, 2017).

During the period of colonisation South Africa went through what Odora-hoppers (2001, p.74) equates to ‘symbolic castration’, as everything African and Indigenous was given a negative ontological and cognitive status. A key element of colonialism was the intentional disassociation of the language of conceptualisation, thinking, formal education and mental development, from the language of daily interaction in the home and community (Wa Thiong, 1998, p.103). Le Grange (2016, p.4) argues that colonialism took the form of two generations, - ‘the conquering of the physical spaces and bodies of the colonised, and colonisation of the mind through disciplines such as education, science, economics and law.’ Hence, decolonisation will have to entail a response to both first and second generation colonialism.

The concept of decolonisation is layered, nuanced and complex in nature. The process of decolonisation in South Africa moved from colonialism, to coloniality and then the call for decolonisation. It was thus not simply the removal of a colonial administration and government. It has more to do with what Grosfuguel (2007, p. 219) termed a ‘*colonial power matrix*’. He claims that we have made a paradigm shift from ‘global colonialism’ to one of ‘global coloniality’. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2016, p. 34) claims that ‘coloniality is a global power structure that continues to reproduce Eurocentrism in society and in the academe long after the dismantling of the physical empire’. It is this coloniality that provided the impetus for students’ call for decolonising the university and decolonising the curriculum. Their acts of

defiance were in response to epistemic justice and the violent demand that “Black students and academics assimilate into settler cultures and the old liberal/new neo-liberal values that still define South African universities” (Morreira, et. al. 2020, p. 2). Thus, Lockett (2016) argues for the interrogation of the status quo; an interrogation of the relationship between the *curriculum and power*. According to Pillay (2015) decolonisation of higher education should be ‘about justice that addresses the epistemic violence of colonial knowledge and colonial thought. Questions such as what counts as knowledge and who decides what knowledge is valid, need to be posed, and *Africa-centric epistemology* should be the centre and the heart of decolonising educational reframing (Yosso, 2005; Fataar, 2018). Mbembe (2015) calls for *demythologising* whiteness, decolonising buildings and public spaces, decolonising the curriculum and decolonising systems of management. The decolonisation project must lift out subaltern voices and advocate a logic of *diversality* that states we are equal before we are different (Escobar, 2007). However, despite the plurality of voices advocating for epistemic justice and the need for decolonisation of education, “decolonial politics of knowledge, currently operates at the level of ideas, symbols, and politics” (Fataar, 2018, p.1).

Given that the decolonisation agenda was sparked by the 2016 student protests, there is limited literature on how academics respond to the call for decolonisation of education in South Africa. Much of the literature focuses on decolonisation of the curriculum and on what counts as curriculum knowledge based on decoloniality (Fataar, 2018). Findings of recent studies revealed that academics found it challenging to define the term “decolonisation” and “lacked preparation for critical engagement with the process of curriculum development and design in Higher Education” (Padayachee, et.al., 2018, p. 301). Academics thus resorted to their craft knowledge or common sense understanding in responding to the call for decolonisation of the curriculum.

Conceptual and Theoretical Moorings

The conceptual framework of ‘knowledge in the blood’ and the theoretical framework of social realism was employed in this study. The concept “knowledge in the blood’ illustrates how knowledge about a phenomenon is received, ingrained and learnt from childhood and ‘propels’ people in a particular direction (Jansen, 2009). According to Jansen (2009, p. 117), knowledge is “embedded in the emotional, psychic, spiritual, social, economic, political and psychological lives of a community”. The blood imagery conjures up a sense of just how deeply ingrained and all-pervasive this knowledge is, which is why it cannot “simply dissipate [s] like the morning sun mist under the pressing sunshine of a new regime of truth”. It is ‘knowledge’ that runs through the arteries and veins and constitutes a life giving force. Jansen (2009) argues that such a form of knowledge is ‘emphatic’ as it “does not tolerate ambiguity”, and ‘defensive’ in that it is knowledge “that reacts against and resists rival knowledge”. However, while knowledge in the blood is not ‘easily changed’, it does not mean “through the transfusion of new knowledge the authority of received knowledge cannot be overcome (Jansen, 2009). Agency, is thus central to understanding of the nature of ‘knowledge in the blood’, making the possibility of change inherent to the ‘blood’ – in much the same way as a real blood transfusion is inherently tasked with change (Jansen, 2009). In order for mindsets to change individuals need to be exposed to new knowledge, to experience pedagogic dissonance (Jansen, 2009) and an ethic of discomfort (Zembylas, 2017). This will propel the process of eroding sure knowledge, and in so doing unsettle the foundation of firmly established truths, create ambiguity, and lead to the questioning of ingrained beliefs (Vandeyar & Swart, 2019).

Social realism, is the “acute awareness of the social forces that surround the individual, their power to influence the lives of people and the overall interaction of the individual and the society” (Chandalia, 1996, p. 98). Archer’s Social Realist framework

(1995) provides a useful lens to reveal tensions between an oppressive, hegemonic force, and its victims. The basic tenets of this framework pivots on three concepts namely, 'culture', 'structure', and 'agency'. Culture is constituted of ideas, ideologies, theories, beliefs and values that exist in a cultural system and is manifested through discourses used by particular people at particular times . Structure refers to the material goods as well as "the other demographic markers that condition life chances: the workings of race, class, gender" (Case 2013, p. 31) and falls within the domain of social positions and roles. And, agency rests in the domain of human action and interaction. Human beings possess the power to exercise agency in any social context (Archer, 1995). Although each of these concepts are "analytically separate entities", it is the interplay between agency and culture, and/or agency and structure that provides a meaningful analysis of social patterns within a cultural domain (Archer, 1995, p.15). Structural and cultural conditions of a specific context influence ways in which people can or cannot exercise their agency. How people respond to structural and cultural constraints and enablement, depends on their unique dispositions and power relations. The social realist framework enables us to investigate the structural conditions of agency (for academics) as well as the necessity of agency in the reproduction and transformation of social structures. It is only by looking at the way academics exercise their agency in relation to structural and cultural conditions prevalent in particular contexts that we can begin to understand their response to the call for decolonisation of education.

Research strategy

The meta-theoretical paradigm of this study was social constructivism. Social constructivism regards individuals and the realm of the social as interconnected. Creswell (2014) argues that meaning is essentially created socially by interacting with others. Reality is therefore multiple, because it is socially constructed and a product of the society's language, culture, economic or political divisions and other norms and ideals (Hunkins & Ornstein, 2016). The

methodological paradigm utilised a qualitative case study approach and narrative inquiry. Qualitative researchers believe that there are multiple realities, and therefore, there is no absolute truth (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Creswell (2008, p. 46) defines qualitative research as a “type of educational research in which the researcher relies on the views of the participants; asks broad, general questions; collects data consisting largely of words (or text) from participants; describes and analyses these words for themes; and conducts the inquiry in a subjective and biased manner”. This study followed a qualitative single bounded case study research design, utilizing in-depth data collection methods (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to obtain a holistic understanding of the phenomenon under study (Atkins & Wallace, 2012), which focused on the real-life situation of academics who lecture to students. Creswell (2014) defines a narrative research approach as one that describes the lives of individuals, collects and tells stories about people's lives and writes narratives of individual experiences. The role of a narrative inquirer is “to understand, to systematically inquire into the phenomenon of the storied experiences of people” (Clandinin, Caine, Lessard & Huber, 2016, p. 13). In this study academics' reflections on how they understand and implement decolonisation of education was explored.

The site of this study was a large South African contact-based, research-intensive university undergoing the process of decolonisation of education. Data collection comprised an online survey, and semi-structured interviews. A set of survey questions was sent out to the target sample and this sample then responded to the questions over the world wide web.

Interviewing is an effective tool for capturing participants' lived experience and their interpretation of reality (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018) and is the most important part of the case study evidence because case studies are about what happens in people's lives (Yin, 2011). Semi-structured interviews range from substantially structured, where questions are pre-set, to unstructured where neither the questions nor the order are determined beforehand

(Merriam, 2015). Semi-structured interviews as a data collection technique was selected to gather participants' understanding of and their practice of decolonisation of education.

Seventy-eight academics in one faculty of the university were invited to participate in the online survey of whom thirty-seven responded. Contact details of participants who indicated that they were interested in participating in a follow-up interview were provided on the online response form. Eleven participants subsequently participate in a semi-structured interview. Pseudonyms were given to the research site and to participants to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

Utilising content analysis methods (Mayring, 2000) data was re-coded a priori (Charmaz, 2017) to accommodate 'new insights' (Sandelowski, 2000, p. 338). The data was coded to make sense of emergent categories that expressed the experiential knowledge of the participant, and presented as rich and thick analysis. Research rigour was ensured by means of the following quality criteria: transferability, credibility, dependability, confirmability, and authenticity. Ethics approval to conduct this study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the relevant Faculty.

Findings

Numerous themes emerged from the data of this study, which were clustered into five categories, namely academics understanding of 'decolonisation'. Academics' beliefs, perceptions and attitudes of 'decolonisation of education'. How their beliefs about decolonisation translated into their practice and the challenges and opportunities they experienced in decolonising education.

Academics' understanding of 'decolonisation'

Academics' understanding of the term decolonisation varied. Some placed emphasis on 'democratisation of knowledge production,

I understand the concept of decolonising education to be the process by which we democratise knowledge production in higher education, not only in the country, but more broadly in the globe (Sizwe, African² male, 33 years old).

A few thought it meant the opposite of colonisation

For me the word decolonisation is the opposite of colonisation. So, it means removing all knowledge that came from the colonisers out of the curriculum. How is this going to be possible when we have made such great strides in the sciences? Do we have to return to tribal knowledge? Is this not going backward? (Maretjie, White female, 52 years old).

Others claimed that it meant the reclamation of Indigenous knowledges to replace 'colonised' knowledge systems

Decolonisation means structuring the curriculum to suit Indigenous people. Wanting to claim back, to reclaim Indigenous knowledge (Ketsani). My understanding of decolonisation of education is that it is education that is relevant to Indigenous people. Space should be made for knowledges and values of Indigenous people. The voice of the Indigenous people. We should replace Christian National Education with Indigenous knowledge systems (Andile, African female, 31 years old).

And some, stressed the excavation of marginalised knowledge.

Excavating knowledge that has historically been marginalised from the mainstream in the education sector (John, White male, 34 years old).

² During the apartheid era, the term Blacks referred to Indian, African and Coloured people of South Africa, The terms Coloured, White, Indian and African derive from apartheid racial classifications of the different peoples of South Africa. The use of these terms, although problematic, has continued through the post-apartheid era in the country.

Academics' beliefs, perceptions and attitudes of 'decolonisation of education'

Beliefs, perceptions and attitudes of academics about decolonisation of education also varied. Some academics viewed decolonisation of education as an opportunity for them to create pluriversal spaces and to rethink their teaching. They seemed optimistic about the possibilities that this process may offer.

Decolonising education becomes the project of creating a pluriversal space, knowledge that each knowledge system has something to contribute to the collective project of knowledge generation in its broadest sense (Shavani, Indian female, 30 years old).

I believe the act of decolonising education lies in our capacity to reimagine the possibilities in what we are teaching and how we are teaching this knowledge (Sizwe, African male, 33 years old).

Others remained steadfast in their belief that the process of decolonisation will take education backward and displayed a negative attitude.

I believe decolonisation is going to make South Africa go backward like the rest of the countries on the African continent. Why is South Africa trying to re-invent the wheel when the Western world has already made such great strides in knowledge production? (Annatjie, White female, 41 years old).

Some believed decolonisation served to masquerade as change, where there was in fact little if any change.

Decolonisation of education is just another political ploy to appease the masses. We are basically carrying on with business-as-usual under the guise of decolonisation. It's more of a form of window-dressing....a superficial thing (Nomsa, African female, 46 years old).

Translating beliefs about decolonisation into practice

Academic beliefs translated into suggested practice in different ways. Some viewed it as an opportunity to reimagine our world anew.

Subaltern, Indigenous epistemic frameworks can give us a way of attempting to reimagine the possibilities of our collective futures. To take seriously the epistemic contributions of knowledge that does not come from the centre (Sizwe, African male, 33 years old).

Others believed that it offered a way of bringing back awareness.

Bringing back awareness. These things have always been there. We now need to bring it into the curriculum and teaching and learning space.
(Mpumi, African female, 33 years old).

Most seem to argue that decolonisation went way beyond just changing the methodology of teaching to revising, contesting and critiquing the canons of knowledge that are incorporated into the curriculum.

Decoloniality proper, means that the canons that we look to are constantly being revised, contested and open to critique. Once we establish a methodology to decolonisation we close off this capacity of revisionist approaches to curricula, thinking and modes of curricularisation (Cyril, Coloured male, 53 years old).

We need to refashion how we are thinking about the project of knowledge production. Colonialism has marginalised African knowledge systems. Africanisation should replace Eurocentricism in the curriculum (Karabo, African male, 43 years old).

We need to expose the inequality, the injustice...become more inclusive in our approach. Why is it that only Eurocentric knowledge counts as knowledge? (Norman, Coloured male, 57 years old).

However, a few participants were adamant that decolonisation of education was totally unnecessary as evident from the quotes below,

I don't agree with this process at all! It is unnecessary. Why do we want to become like the rest of Africa when history, time and economics show that the Western world is thriving. Just look at how our economy is spirally downward and we want to talk about decolonisation. It's a whole load of rubbish! (Cherie White female, 28 years old).

How are we expected to decolonise and reach or dare I say surpass the great strides made in advanced sciences – physics, mathematics, aeronautical engineering, nuclear physics to name a few - what has South Africa achieved in this regard? We are way behind the rest of the world already, and now we want to bring in decolonisation. I just don't get it! (Anton, White male, 44 years old).

Challenges experienced in decolonising education

Academics highlighted a number of challenges that they encountered in the decolonisation process. For many academics it seemed that the challenge was not understanding what exactly decolonisation meant and how to go about implementing it.

The major challenge has to be the notion of defining decolonisation. I don't quite understand what is decolonisation of education. What is it that I need to decolonise and how? I need clarity on decolonisation (Piet, White male, 37 years old).

I really don't know where to begin. I want to decolonise education but does this mean I just include sources of other cultural knowledge in my discipline? Do I continue to teach the way I have always done (Connie, White female, 42 years old).

Others claimed that the main challenge was that decolonisation was unfolding in an artificial way with no real change.

A challenge for me it that there is a lot of 'window-dressing' regarding decolonisation, to appease the relevant authorities. No one knows exactly what plays out in the lecture hall context. It is an artificial thing that is happening (Raj, Indian male, 55 years old).

Some raised the issue of personal safety in trying to dismantle polarised thinking,

A major challenge for me the issue of safety – feeling safe in a class of diverse students to bring in decolonial perspectives (Kayla, Coloured female, 35 years old).

One academic mentioned that it was merely a means of advancing one's career trajectory.

A major challenge is that the term decoloniality is becoming much like the term 'Ubuntu'. Those writing about decolonisation and have become its authorities... claim to be speaking on behalf of the progenitor communities without any insight into the languages, the aphorisms or the socio-cultural economy that underpins the philosophy of decoloniality. The concept is becoming an empty signifier and a vacuous concept that holds no meaning as people are merely using it to advance their career trajectories (Lwazi, African female, 27 years old).

Opportunities experienced in decolonising education

A few academics shared opportunities that decolonisation of education offered, such as inspiration to think differently, being open to critique, learning about decolonisation, curriculum transformation and disrupting comfort zones to catalyse change

Decolonisation inspires one to think differently about the context and that you should engage differently and to change your lens (Yusuf, Indian male, 49 years old).

Good teaching is the capacity to be open to critique and having ones' ideas challenged and contested in the university (Sipho, African male 61 years old).

Opportunities to learn more about decolonisation; Read more and understand; to interact (Liesl, white female, 33 years old).

Opportunities for curriculum transformation, for freedom of speech, to create spaces for debate and engagement and to acknowledge that there is diversity and there is more than one way of knowing (Fatima, White female, 36 years old).

It been an eye-opener for me. I was in my comfort zone, now I realise I need to change. This process has spurred me on to bring about change quickly – importance of who we are... to make a change now! (Zama, African female, 53 years old).

The varied responses of academics to the call for decolonisation of education resolutely accentuated the fact that it is not merely a mechanical or clinical process. This process goes

way beyond re-visiting, re-looking and revising study guides and course materials to questioning, engaging and challenging the very core being of a person. It aims to disrupt received knowledge, instil an ethic of discomfort, shatter polite silences and spur action, so that academics can become transformative intellectuals and agents of change.

Discussion

The education triad comprises the academic, the learner and the content (curriculum), which unfolds within historical, political, social and educational contexts. The call for the decolonisation of education was made by students. The institution responded by calling for a change in content. While decolonising the curriculum can mean different things, it includes a “fundamental reconsideration of who is teaching, what the subject matter is and how it’s being taught” (Muldoon, 2019). In the context of this study it is clear that “who is teaching” is extremely significant. Findings seem to suggest that it was mainly Black academics (African, Indian and Coloured) who were in support of decolonisation efforts. It would seem that resistance to decolonisation efforts came from some white academics. Perhaps these academics enjoyed the greatest degree of privilege and thus were most likely to resist decolonization efforts? Now it’s the academic’s ‘turn’. The academic needs to make the ‘turn’ towards decolonising education. What ‘turns’ should academics make?

First, academics should turn away from the ‘lip service model of decolonisation of education towards real, deep and lasting change. Findings revealed that some academics perceived the institution as ‘talking about decolonisation’ rather than effectively decolonising education. This links to Tuck and Wang’s (2021) claim that decolonisation is not a metaphor. They argue that such metaphorization “makes possible a set of evasions, or ‘settler moves to innocence’, that problematically attempt to reconcile settler guilt and complicity, and rescue settler futurity” (Tuck & Wang, 2021, p.1). As Archer (1995) argues, the ideas, beliefs,

theories and values that exist in a cultural system are manifested through the discourses used by particular people at particular times. From a realist perspective, discourses are real and harbour the potential to influence the social context. For the majority of academics it was a ‘business-as-usual’ attitude. Decolonisation was addressed as an additive mode in the form of adding a few references in the reading list, without actually integrating such readings into their teaching. It was more a form of ‘window-dressing’ of the study guide to appease the upper echelons of power. What this points to is the way universities deploy policies and activities in ways that both resist and deflect attention from substantial change. These common sense practices naturalize power imbalances within the university and serve to create a paper ‘trail’ (Ahmed, 2013, p. 97). This results in documents replacing action, where the more a policy circulates, the more it is seen as present, the less it actually does. In this way, the decolonisation of education initiatives becomes just another ‘tick box’ and a means of changing how an organisation is perceived so it can continue, relatively undisturbed, in its existing mode. Ahmed (2013, p. 58) terms such a practice ‘lip service model of diversity’. In similar vein, in terms of the decolonisation initiative at universities, such practices could be seen as a ‘lip service model of decolonisation’. Decolonisation of education seemed to unfold as political symbolism, lacking personal or internal commitment or ownership.

For some academics, colonial knowledge systems were still regarded as the only ‘truth’ and the only basis for higher forms of thinking (Department of Education 2008, p. 91) as evident from the comment “...decolonisation is going to make South Africa go backward”. Eurocentric knowledge remains the “regime of truth,”(Hall, 1992, p. 318) displacing all other knowledges. Macedo (1993) argues that this “omission” is ideological and is aimed at maintenance of structural domination. The use of education for this purpose is what Macedo (1993, p. 186) coins “the pedagogy of big lies.”

Such beliefs could perhaps be attributed to ‘knowledge in the blood’ (Jansen, 2009). According to Indigenous elders, memory resides in the blood and bone. Indigenous stories are passed not just verbally but through a kind of genetic memory, ‘blood memory’ (Bombay, 2015). Allen (1999) claims that ‘blood memory’, is a genetic tie that is carried by one’s blood and is thus immortal. Hogan (2001) prefers the term ‘blood history’, which is inextricably connected with ancestral history, and replicated, like DNA, in contemporary bodies. It is passed on and inherited in the same way genetic material is transmitted from one agent to another. Hence, history, memory and Indigenous bodies become integral and integrated components of identity (Hogan, 2001). Linklater (2013) argues that ‘blood history’, which is traditional knowledge needs to be considered within situations of relationship. He claims “we never lose anything because of our blood history...it is always there. We must use what was given to us and apply it to things that make our lives difficult” (Linklater 2013, p. 6339). Blood memory and history are central to ‘the art of listening and understanding’. “It is important to try and understand Indigenous people and their laws...who they are and where they come from”. (Linklater 2013, p. 6339). Thus, the “iconic placeholder of “the blood” as an organizing principle is “...a productive means of articulating the interior renderings of an Indigenous person and recognizing the essential saliences of communal place-based logics and current political realities” (Mithlo, 2013, p. 104). It is important to point out that understandings of “blood memory” also referred to as “ancestral memory”, which are important components of Indigenous knowledge, is very different from the notion of “knowledge in the blood”(Jansen, 2009), which seems to be more about resisting change to Western Knowledge systems.

Mkhize (2015) claims that such beliefs could also be attributed to disengagement with ‘rigorous African scholarship’. The ‘culture of whiteness’, which was designed to proselytise blacks has left an indelible imprint on the South African higher education

system, where even “African academics may repudiate their very make-up” (Maserumule, 2015, p. 1). Sesanti (2019) argues that European colonialism, continued to be the case beyond “independence” because African males, not only inherited political power, but also oppressive cultural attitudes from their colonial masters.

Real, deep and lasting change requires self-reflexivity (Langdon 2013, p. 385) and a change in beliefs, attitudes and values. Sheehy (1981) claims that the embrace of change only happens with an inner change in people’s beliefs. Change begins with a transformation of people’s perceptions and projects outwards into the social and institutional domain. Personal change - the personal beliefs and missions that individuals bring to the change process - is given importance and thus the lens shifts to focus on how people change internally, which then influences institutional change. Changes in belief and understanding are the foundation of achieving lasting reform because they are based on fundamental changes in conception, which, in turn, relate to skills and materials. The challenge arises in how to negotiate the relationship between change and ‘knowledge in the blood’ - the subjective realities embedded in people’s individual and organisational contexts and their personal histories. How these subjective realities are addressed or ignored is crucial for whether potential changes become meaningful at the level of individual use and effectiveness (Fullan, 2001). The decolonisation of education initiative at universities was externally imposed change. Some academics found it much easier to ignore this call for change than to unlearn the form of knowledge that was designed to subjugate and exploit ‘the other’.

Second, academics should turn away from challenges and turn towards opportunities that decolonisation of education has to offer. Challenges expressed by academics revealed tensions between “people” (agents) and the “parts” (culture and structure). Both the structural and cultural conditions of their specific context influenced the ways in which they could or could not exercise their agency. However, these structural and cultural conditions can be

overcome through agency. Academics need to make the turn towards engaging with opportunities that decolonisation of education has to offer.

Third, academics are key in the decolonisation of education project. They need to turn towards becoming transformative intellectuals (Freire, 1998) rather than be alienated by the current educational dispensation, if they want to cause meaningful educational change. Freire (1970, p. 84) proposes that for academics ‘looking at the past must only be a means of understanding more clearly what and who they are so that they can more wisely build the future’. Maseko (2018) argues that a culture of critical consciousness is central to an emergent transformative praxis and draw attention to a critical decolonial social justice agenda that conceives of the university as a site for the inculcation of multidimensional critical change agency. Academics need to embrace decolonisation of education through the democratisation of knowledge production, which would also entail an excavation and reclaiming of marginalised and Indigenous knowledges. They will need to take seriously the epistemic contributions of knowledge that does not come from the Western world. And, the canons that they look to should be constantly revised, contested and open to critique. What is required is a type of cognitive justice based on an expansion and complete overhaul of the western knowledge canon (Fataar, 2018).

Indigenous knowledge is generally understood as “local knowledge that is unique to a given culture or society” (Warren & Rajasekaran, 1993:8), acquired by local people through the accumulation of experiences, informal experiments, and intimate understanding of the environment in a given culture and “as a network of knowledges, beliefs, and traditions intended to preserve, communicate, and contextualize Indigenous relationships with culture and landscape over time (Bruchac, 2014). Indigenous knowledge is the information base for a society which facilitates communication and informs decision-making about fundamental aspects of day-to-day life and is specifically adapted to the requirements of local people and

conditions. Matowanyika (1994) argues that Indigenous knowledge is also creative and experimental, constantly incorporating outside influences and inside innovations to meet new conditions. “Indigenous knowledges do not ‘sit in pristine fashion’ outside of the effects of other knowledges” (Dei, 2010, p. 111). Different bodies of knowledge are continually influenced by each other to create the dynamism of all knowledge systems. Including, “bringing together decolonial, place attuned, and critical posthumanist orientations” (Murriss, Francis, Babamia, Nxumalo, Bozalek & Giorza, 2020, p. 288). Murriss et.al (2020) add to this debate by attending to the agency of the more-than-human world *and* its entanglement with unequal human geographies of place and land-based education.

Academics would need to create ‘pluriversal’ spaces and become more inclusive in their approach. They would need to advance and celebrate the aspirations of Indigenous people (Camangian, 2021) and re-think their teaching by establishing a methodology to decolonisation that would obstruct revisionist approaches to curricula design and modes of curricularisation. Indigenous knowledges which stem from notions of tradition, authenticity and orality can be fundamentally experientially based, non-universal, holistic and relational knowledges of ‘resistance’ (Dei, 2010). Thus, Indigenous identity and intergenerational memory are crucial to the educational and political project of decolonisation of education. Intergenerational memory refers to how trauma is passed on intergenerationally in subtle ways through stories or silences, through unarticulated fears and the psychological scars that are often left unacknowledged (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2016). According to Prager (2016, p. 18) subsequent generations unwittingly “can inhabit a past that preceded them”. The legacies of historical trauma on individuals and groups that experienced the violence directly, can also impact multiple generations of the descendants of survivors. Intergenerational memory not only highlights the unspoken pain of the past, but is also a response to the crisis of the present, the frustrations, the helplessness, and the disempowerment of people whose lives still

hunger for transformation that has eluded them and their communities (Prager, 2016, p. 418) For Prager (2016), a break with the past means instating “a full-blown humanity for all humans that requires moving beyond memory in order to enable “a hopeful world of possibility for everyone”. What Shults and Sandage (2008, p. 16) call “a broader horizon of humanness”.

One way of achieving this is by identifying strengths in other cultures as a foundation for building positive expectations through what Yosso (2005) terms “community cultural wealth” (CCW). CCW identifies an “array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed by socially marginalized groups that often go unrecognized and unacknowledged” (Yosso, 2005, p. 69). CCW, counters the cultural deficit perspective and serves as a means to challenge the social injustice that is endemic in universities. CCW guides teachers to acknowledge the strength of culturally-related attributes instead of seeing those qualities as barriers to success (Yosso, 2006).

Another way that academics can raise the critical consciousness of students is by adopting an ‘epistemology of compassion’ (Vandeyar, 2017) and implementing a ‘pedagogy of compassion’ (Vandeyar & Swart, 2019). This will enable students to become active critical citizens, imbued with a sense of common humanity and compassion. Taking up the role of transformative intellectuals may challenge the very premise of academics’ identities and practices, but by empowering the student to exert influence on their world the academic in turn also changed and empowered.

Human beings have the powers of critical reflection upon their social context and of creatively redesigning their social environment, its institutional or ideational configurations, or both... it is possible for human beings to become agentially effective...in evaluating their social context,

creatively envisaging alternatives, and collaborating with others in bringing about transformation. (Archer 2000, p. 308).

Conclusion

The South African higher education system is tasked to “develop graduates and intellectuals who can address the epistemic violence of the past and present and who will go on to rewrite the ‘histories and humanity [of both South Africa and Africa] so cruelly seized and denied by Europe” (Zezeza 2009, p. 116). Paradigmatic and epistemic shifts which begin to unearth and then unsettle white supremacy is required, in order to proceed with aims of reconciliation and reclamation (Almeida & Kumalo, 2018). Academics have the power to exercise agency in this regard and to ‘turn the tide’. They stand at the cusp of introducing innovative educational change and ways of knowing; to re-fashion, re-model, and re-imagine knowledges in Higher Education. How they disrupt the authority of received knowledge, create pedagogic dissonance and give hope to students is crucial for attaining decolonisation of education. The key to unlocking the potential of decolonisation of education rests in their hands.

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