

African Westernized universities: Hosts of epistemological exploitation and colonization

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Résumé

Les universités africaines sont des répliques des universités occidentales. Elles constituent des instantiations locales d'un modèle académique dominant fondé sur un canon épistémique eurocentrique, un canon qui n'attribue de vérité qu'aux modes occidentaux de production des savoirs et qui ignore les autres traditions épistémiques. Ce canon s'efforce de présenter le colonialisme comme une forme normale de relations sociales entre les êtres humains plutôt que comme un système d'exploitation et d'oppression. Cette réalité appelle un programme de décolonisation de l'enseignement supérieur. Ainsi, dans cet article, les auteurs entendent s'engager théoriquement dans un processus de déliaison et de désobéissance en mettant en avant d'autres principes de production et de compréhension des savoirs. Le rôle traditionnel des universités occidentalisées en Afrique a été de former et d'entretenir une élite, de faire du prosélytisme et d'occidentaliser les Noirs afin qu'ils participent à la colonisation subtile et continue du continent. Les forces de la mondialisation et du néolibéralisme continuent de dominer les discours éducatifs actuels et n'ont fait que renforcer l'hégémonie épistémologique du Nord. Le défi consiste à délier les traditions épistémiques occidentales de nos programmes d'études, de nos manières d'enseigner et d'évaluer, ainsi que des théories euro-américaines dominantes qui sous-tendent nos recherches et nos travaux savants.

Abstract

African universities are replicas of Western universities. They are local instantiations of a dominant academic model based on a Eurocentric epistemic canon, a canon that attributes truth only to the Western ways of knowledge production; a canon that disregards other epistemic traditions. This canon tries to portray colonialism as a normal form of social relations between human beings rather than a system of exploitation and oppression. This reality begs for a higher education decolonization agenda. Thus, in this article the authors intend to engage theoretically in a processus of de-linking/disobedience by bringing forward other principles of knowledge production and understanding. The traditional role of Westernized universities in Africa has been to train and nurse an elite, to proselytize and westernize Blacks so that they attend to the ongoing subtle colonization of the continent. The forces of globalization and neoliberalism continue to dominate current educational discourses and have only further entrenched Northern epistemological hegemony. The challenge is how to de-link the western epistemic traditions from our curricula, the ways that we teach and assess and the dominant Euro-American theories that underpin our research and scholarship.

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Introduction

Africa inherited Westernized educational institutions given the history of the colonial project. African universities are replicas of Western universities. Mbembe (2016) contests the notion of 'Westernized' succinctly: They are 'Westernized' in the sense that they are local instantiations of a dominant academic model based on a Eurocentric epistemic canon. A Eurocentric canon is a canon that attributes truth only to the Western way of knowledge production. It is a canon that disregards other epistemic traditions. It is a canon that tries to portray colonialism as a normal form of social relations between human beings rather than a system of exploitation and oppression (Mbembe, 2016:32).

To date very little has been done to shift marginalized African writings and theories to the center of the academic program, hence the urgency of the higher education decolonization agenda in Africa. The purpose of this article is to engage theoretically with epistemic delinking/disobedience as a step toward relocating the node of enunciation in the subaltern African spaces, a shifting from Western understandings and bringing forward other principles of knowledge and understandings. Chakrabarty (2007) demonstrates that the forces of globalization and neoliberalism continue to dominate current educational discourses and have only further entrenched Northern epistemological hegemony. We need to explain why we have chosen to rely on quite problematic and binary language like Northern and Western. We seek to explore abstract conceptions of knowledge. Postcolonial theories caution us that identity and culture are hybrid, especially in terms of the multiple migrations and routes that we travel today. However, we have chosen to use these binaries because we are trying to foreground the colonial relations of power that continue to shape the geo-political. We draw upon imagined constructs of categories like 'Northern' and 'Western' in the way that Chakrabarty (2007) draws upon the ways we imagine and position the idea of 'Europe'. We acknowledge that we are displaying a type of essentialism in trying to capture the complexities, blurriness and messiness with these categories.

Universities, Africans are told, are essential to the economic development of the continent (Cloete, Bailey, Pillay, Bunting, & Maassen, 2011; Mosha, 1986). Unfortunately, the traditional role of Westernized universities in Africa has been to train and nurse an elite, to proselytize and westernize Blacks so that they attend to the ongoing subtle colonization of the continent. African scholars who staff these universities and who for the most part have been schooled in the Western tradition, including us, remain oblivious to this dubious role. We provide a brief discussion on our backgrounds in the 'Authors' positionality' section of this chapter to contextualize the catalysts for the change in our thinking around the dominant colonial academic culture and in so doing hope to explicate our own positionalities within the decolonial discourse. Through conversations about our roles in the academe, our teaching styles, what we teach, how we teach, why we teach certain texts and not other writings, both of us concluded that the colonality of power from Western categories of thought are so pervasive that it is difficult to extricate ourselves from it, and hence the difficulty of dismantling the masters house with the masters tools. This led to deeper engagement with the concept of decolonization and the interrogation of the role of the universities in maintaining the capitalist, neo-liberal and neo-colonial agenda. The challenge was how to de-link the western epistemic traditions from our curriculum, the ways that we teach and

assess and the dominant Euro-American theories that underpin our research and scholarship.

De-linking entails epistemic disobedience rather than the constant search for newer concepts to examine power, racism, and the like. In epistemic disobedience, the locus of enunciation is relocated in the subaltern spaces, bringing forward other principles of knowledge and understandings, the marginalized and excluded knowledges that emanate from Africa and what the Western epistemology described as lacking academic value and viewed as deficit. It seeks to move away from strict disciplinarity to transdisciplinarity, and to a disruption of the territorial hold on curriculum, by building theories without or beyond disciplines, a process of knowledge production that is open to epistemic diversity. It embraces, via a horizontal strategy of openness, a dialogue among different epistemic traditions. To decolonize the university is to therefore reform it with the aim of creating a critical cosmopolitan pluriversalism – a task that involves the radical refounding of alternate ways of thinking and a transcendence of disciplinary divisions.

1. Authors' positionality

We feel it is imperative, from a traditional African perspective to outline where we come from, what has shaped our thinking, the contextual spaces that we occupy and how it influenced our ideas and scholarship. Nathalis Wamba was born and grew up in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The Congo was a former colony of Belgium and although he was born two years before the country gained independence, he experienced nevertheless the way the Belgians managed the country and dealt with people. His father who was one of the few intellectuals in the country when it became independent had an uneven relationship with the Belgians. He always struggled whether to hate them or to love them. He also acknowledged the contribution of the Belgians to his education and material well-being. The education he received, however, was predicated on the notion that he will assimilate to the Belgian culture, meaning being like them and be rewarded with adjective 'evolue'. The word evolue literally meant an 'evolved' or 'developed' person, and was used during the colonial era to refer to a native African or Asian who had progressed by becoming Europeanized through education or assimilation and had accepted European values and patterns of behavior (Delancey & Delancey, 2000). Colonial administrators defined evolue as a man/woman having broken social ties with his/her group and having entered another system of motivation, another value system. The term was also used to describe the growing native middle class in Belgian Congo between the end of World War II and the independence of the colony in 1960 (Gillet & Cornet, 2010).

In addition to Nathalis's father's experience, two other critical incidents spurred his reflection on this issue. He studied in a catholic seminary. They were the best schools in his country at that time. All one needed to do was to tell them that one wanted to become a priest and pass their stringent entrance exam. In the seminary Nathalis read Marx, Kant, Hegel Sartre, Simone DeBeauvoir, Camus and more importantly Franz Fanon (*The Wretched of the Earth; Black Skin, White Masks*). In 1982 he came to the United States. Everything seemed to fall into place when he found himself in subtle conditions of oppression including racism and

other types of prejudices. Reading Fanon's works gave him the space to think otherwise and to understand how education for the colony was simply a tool of assimilation with nothing else in it.

Rajendra Chetty is a South African postcolonial scholar, teaches at a university in Cape Town and has engaged extensively with theoretical constructs of power and marginalization within a critical theory paradigm. A critical perspective resonates with the South African context of statutory racism first by the British colonial agenda at the turn of the last century and followed by the Afrikaner apartheid regime till 1994 (the advent of democracy with Mandela as President). The purpose of the critical perspective was to reveal and explain inequalities and hypocrisy in society. Critical educational studies pursued this aim by using two techniques:

- Immanent critique: the researcher questions from a position within a phenomenon in order to expose contradictions between claims and reality; and
- Dialectical thought: a mode of inquiry that seeks the origins of social phenomena in the tensions between opposing social forces and their resolutions (McDaniel, 2006:19).

Growing up in South Africa, Rajendra experienced first-hand the racism and oppression meted out to black people by the white regime's racism against black people which meant exclusive schools, universities, cinemas, amenities, beaches, bathrooms, park benches, etc. for white people. The English white liberal universities like Natal, Witwatersrand and Cape Town, together with the Afrikaner universities like Stellenbosch and Pretoria, adhered to the regime's racist laws and denied access to black students. The universities, which were overwhelmingly white, have been complicit in this oppression of black people through support of the regime's unequal policies and a neo-liberal curriculum that reinforced a capitalist social agenda. South Africa was a world apart characterized by two parallel economies and two education systems. The disadvantaged and under-resourced education system enrolled the vast majority of poor and working-class black children whose health, economic and community difficulties concomitant with deficit schools led to large-scale illiteracy, school drop-outs and unemployment.

In 2015 South Africa experienced a national student revolt and an uprising against lack of access of black students to higher education and financial exclusion of working-class students. More broadly, the student radically questioned the socio-political dispensation resulting from the 1994 social compact between the African National Congress (the liberation movement that replaced the apartheid regime) and big business (controlled by a white monopoly). Decolonization of higher education was central to the student revolt. The revolt strongly foregrounded Frantz Fanon's (1963) thoughts around neo-colonialism and Steven Biko's (2015) black consciousness ideas. Students are clear that aspects of invisibility, representation, marginalization, alienation, voice and integrity must be foregrounded in university spaces. For Fanon,

Decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is, obviously, a program of complete disorder. But it cannot come as a result of magical practices, nor of a natural shock, nor of a friendly understanding. Decolonization, as we know, is a historical process: that is to say it cannot be understood, it cannot become intelligible nor clear to

itself, except in the exact measure that we can discern the movements which give it historical form and content. (Fanon, 1963:36)

Hence, the universities were alerted, unashamedly and ironically, of the need to decolonize both curriculum and society. Rajendra's reflections of the English education curriculum (discussed in the last section of the chapter) revealed the dominance of the western (mainly British, white and male) canon, repressive pedagogy like transmission education and the exclusion of African knowledge and theories in university syllabi.

2. Towards epistemic delinking

When Rajendra visited the City University of New York, Queens College, on a US Fulbright Scholarship in 2015, he had the opportunity to collaborate with Nathalis around the responsibilities of African scholars from the diaspora and those in Africa about their role in the epistemic marginalization of African knowledges and the uncritical adherence to western theories and thoughts. We also realized that, sadly enough, we have become experts at others people knowledge, accustomed to the "repeat after me syndrome" which is symptomatic of the banking concept of education indicated by Freire (1971). We are judged based on our mastery of the Western canon conceived essentially by men in five countries including France, Germany, Italy, England and the United States (the humanities in particular) and our ability to participate in the scholarly dialogue that takes place in our discipline through publications, conferences and other presentations. We have become accomplices in the subtle maintenance of intellectual neo-colonialism so pervasive in most Westernized universities.

Our engagement with epistemological delinking and disobedience (Mignolo, 2009) compels us to interrogate the role of African scholars in particular and their alleged implication in the maintenance of neo-colonialism. This is a prevalent phenomenon with many African scholars trained in Westernized universities. They behave like westerners and seldom question or reflect on their implication in the epistemological exploitation and violence of the colonial project. The Eurocentric epistemic canon attributes truth only to Western ways of knowledge production, disregards other epistemic traditions and justifies the colonial enterprise as a normal form of social relations between people rather than a system of exploitation and oppression. Those of us in academia, the place of authoritative and so-called legitimate knowledge, are implicated in this form of exploitation. We might be implicated unconsciously in this process because of the silent tyranny of these Western institutions that requires faculty members to behave in certain ways including an incontestable deference to the canon. Interestingly, in the South African context with the student revolt in 2015, the academe openly defended the canon of Western knowledge. Seldom are these institutions behavior questioned. Teaching in African universities means being quiet, knowing your place and not rocking the boat. Achieving a higher academic rank, like associate/full professor, or being promoted to university management, means co-option into the institutional bureaucracy and defending the oppressive colonial culture.

It is only recently that African scholars began calling for the decolonization of the Westernized universities in Africa (Mamdani, 2016; Mbembe, 2016). Unfortunately, many

African scholars see no reason for alarm. Academics that were schooled in the Western canon and classics viewed western knowledge as legitimate knowledge and viewed African knowledge as deficit and lacking value, what we label as epistemological marginalization. Spivak refers to it as worlding (1999) - how colonized spaces have normalized western knowledge as sovereign.

The disruptive impulse would intervene on repetitive mainstream narratives and promote critical engagement with marginalized discourses. Disruption does not simply mean changing the positionalities of actors in particular sets of power relations, it means creating the conditions in which agency and voice can emerge. The decolonization narrative is perceived as a temporary disturbance. They hope things to normalize (Pillay, 2009). This is so because they have been educated to be docile minds and docile bodies whose role is to continue to facilitate the exploitation of Africa. In a sense the non-reflective educated African scholar is the foot soldier of the colonizing process and European imperialism and in return for perks: a house in middle class suburbia, a car, a high salary, research funds (oftentimes used for academic tourism). Many African scholars may be very reluctant to repudiate their very-make up. The question then is how do we transcend Western knowledge and ways of learning; how do we move away from strict disciplinarity to transdisciplinarity, and to a disruption of the territorial hold on curriculum, by building theories without or beyond disciplines? For example, African narratives and history transgress the disciplines that the universities have traditionally constituted, which include the divisions of economics, anthropology, history, philosophy, literary criticism and sociology (Chetty, 2010:i). Even with no Marxist leanings, it is not difficult to detect that racial oppression in Africa by the colonial forces was an economic venture for the European masters and that apartheid South Africa was an advanced capitalist society underpinned by statutory exploitation of black people for white benefit. It is highly irresponsible not to locate cultural analyses within the context of colonialism, the organization of production and the appropriation of surplus. Hence, to engage deeply and appropriately with the decolonial curriculum, transdisciplinarity is an imperative.

2.1. Considerations on coloniality

Colonization involved not only physical, military and economic invasion, but was also accompanied and justified by attempts to export Western knowledge. Western universities were heavily implicated in this process. The key features of Western knowledge include a focus on the individual; racial and gender hierarchies; rationality; privileging written over oral texts; linear constructions of time and space and a binary either/or logic. In the process of knowledge production, the North was the location of knowledge and theory, whereas the South functioned as a giant laboratory. An important consequence of this Northern dominance of knowledge production is what Al-e Ahmad (1984) describes as 'Westoxication' and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (1986) calls the 'colonization of the mind'. Essentially each of these terms seeks to capture the self-doubt and dependency on the North. As Al-e Ahmad argues, with the age of Imperialism there was a change from competition to a 'spirit of helplessness', to the point where the westoxicated person regards only Western writings as proper sources.

Western powers have had a long history of aggressive coloniality that is the expropriation of land and resources. Indeed other people and tribes around the world may have been involved one way or the other in this process but not quite to the extent the European colonial powers did. People who are expropriated of their lands and resources lose their capacity for autonomy and self-determination. This expropriation controls their power to think, to create, to imagine and to innovate. As the process persists they develop an inferiority complex and the desire to be Westerners instead of who they are. The continued unfolding of Western modernity is also a reinforcement, through crude and vulgar repetitions as well as more or less creative adjustment of coloniality (Maldonado-Torres, 2008).

We would be remiss if we do not mention African resistance to colonial rule. In fact in 1884-1885 European nations would divide Africa at the Berlin conference and lay claims to various parts of Africa. African peoples were not about to just let them take whatever they wanted (Massig, 1985). In Mali (West Africa) Samory Toure took on the French and fought them through both military and diplomacy means. General Orestede Baratieri's Italian army was simply defeated by the Ethiopian army and its Eritrean allies. In Algeria, Islam became another source of unity as Abd al-Qadir led his resistance against the French (Talton, 2011).

Colonialism was a series of multiple overlapping processes of attempted domination, mis-education, subjugation and epistemicides (knowledge killing) that were simultaneously and mutually reinforcing and disintegrative (Allen, 2016). Grosfoguel (2012) notes the ways in which Western powers have trained themselves prior to engaging in colonial conquest. The prerequisites included the ability to conquer and physically dominate, to subjugate, to expropriate land and resources, to kill knowledge system (epistemicide) and to miseducate. Grosfoguel ponders how is it possible that the canon of thought in all disciplines of the social sciences and humanities in the Westernized university is based on the knowledge produced by a few men from Western Europe (Grosfoguel, 2012:74).

Pursuing this question, Grosfoguel identifies four epistemicides by Western powers in the 16th century. It seems that the story of dispossessing the people from the ownership of their ideas in the medieval universities that brought ecclesiastical power to the new universities was just the start of our knowledge story. These genocides/epistemicides are: 1) against Muslims and Jews in the conquest of Al-Andalus in the name of 'purity of blood'; 2) against indigenous people first in the Americas and then in Asia; 3) against African people with the captive trade and their enslavement in the Americas; and 4) against women who practiced and transmitted Indo-European knowledge in Europe burned alive accused of being witches. This was the genesis of intellectual colonization (Grosfoguel, 2012).

During the conquest of Al-Andalus, Jews and Muslims were expelled from Europe, their libraries burned and those who refused to convert to Christianity were slaughtered. The Spanish started the conquest of indigenous people in America continued by the French and the English. They destroyed most of the codices in the Mayan, Inca and Aztec empires as well. The creation of a slave trade that resulted in millions killed in Africa and at sea and more totally de-humanized by enslavement was the third genocidal knowledge conquest. Enslaved Africans were portrayed as non-humans incapable of Western style thought. Hegel, for example, in commenting on Africans says, "Among negroes it is the case that consciousness has not attained even the intuition of any sort of objectivity...the negro is the

man as beast (cited in Dussell, 1993:70). Last, but not least, the killing of millions of Indo-European women mostly through burning at the stake as witches because of knowledge practices that were not controlled by men. Ironically, Spain and Portugal, the leading military and intellectual powers of the 15th century have been shut out of the post 16th century Northern European knowledge monopoly (Kendi, 2017; Hall, 2016).

This brief section on coloniality summarizes the ways in which colonial powers trained themselves for the colonial enterprise and the current neo-liberal policies seem to follow an almost identical path but in a subtle manner.

2.2. Colonial powers assault on Africa

Colonial powers entered Africa at various times. For example, the first contact between the people in Congo and the Portuguese goes as far back as the seventh century. In South Africa the story of invasion by Europe could be traced back as far as those years. However, it is the Berlin conference that formalized the exploitation of Africa by giving pieces of the continent to various European countries to own, to exploit and to dispossess the indigenous peoples (Theal, 1973; Thornton, 2007; Craven, 2015).

Europeans came to Africa carrying the bible on one hand and a rifle on the other. However, they were fully aware that the bible and the rifle were insufficient to engage in the full process of colonization. They needed formal institutions to discipline the mind and the body so that their exploitation of the continent would go uncontested. Throughout Africa, colonizers who secured, if not expropriated, a piece of land always started by building a church, a school and a hospital. What could possibly be wrong with these institutions?

The school and the church have two things in common. They were disciplinary institutions whose purpose was to control the mind and the body so that the colonizers did not have to use the rifle. Hospitals were created to ensure that the human stock that will be used for the colonial exploitation project remain in good physical health. It is customary for historians to talk about education when schools are mentioned. The schools built by colonizers were designed not to educate people but rather to 'school them' or train them in behavior that colonizers could count on to encourage their economic project. The purpose of schools was to equip people with a modicum of literacy so that they can read the bible and follow Christian principles. Hence, the churches and the schools worked in concert. Most of the schools built were primary schools and the colonizers judged it unnecessary to build high schools or universities. They deemed these institutions not to be necessary (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2003; Brausch, 1966; Reybrouck, 2014). A great deal of schooling took place and very little education if any.

There were few institutions of higher learning. There were generally seminaries where some Africans would be allowed to enter and study to become priests. Few African did take advantage of these institutions pretending that they would become priest. This was the case of the first president of Congo, Joseph Kasa Vubu, Patrice Lumumba and other leaders. Reluctantly, colonizers would later agree to build a few universities where the admission was

very selective. This happened just before the independence movement that swept many African countries in the sixties (Gilis, 1964; Pierre, 1961; Ludo, 2000).

Few men were selected to enter the universities. Women were not allowed because these universities were not created for females. The elite that was 'trained' and not educated had the duty to be the gatekeepers of the colonial project. They were the good blacks (the so-called 'house niggers'), were well compensated, had good jobs and in French colonies and were called the 'evolues' (like Nathalis' father). His mother was illiterate and she was taught her to read and write by her children. When Nathalis enquired why she was illiterate, she replied that she asked the nuns to teach her how to read and write only to be told that she was a woman, she will be married to a man who would take care of her and she did not need to learn how to read and write.

Hall (2005) presents scholarly works by Africans who are challenging the Western grip including scholars who were servants to colonial powers on African universities. Hall acknowledges several African scholars who were able to see through the colonial agenda: Lebakeng, Phalane, Dalindjebo (2006),

Odara-Hoppers (2000), Wangoola (2013) and Ezeyanya (2011) have written/worked extensively on the importance of the recovery of the intellectual traditions of the continent. Institutions of higher education in South Africa were (and still are) copycats whose primary function was (and still is) to serve and promote colonial Western values (Lebakeng, 2006). Similarly Ezeyanya adds, "In Africa, the research agenda, curriculum and 'given' conceptual frameworks should be continuously re-examined ...with the aim of eschewing all manifestations of new-colonial underpinnings and emphasizing indigenous ideas" (Ezeyanya, 2011).

African scholars who feel strongly about this change must come to terms with a epistemic rupture and shift with the North as well as the opening of another path of thinking that prioritizes questions and sources that are often neglected in Western philosophies (Maldonado-Torres, 2008).

Such a questioning should not estrange western scholars because they themselves have revolted against modernity through the postmodernity narrative, which is essentially an interrogation and a questioning of modern standards of rationality, totality, emancipation etc. Postmodernity has seldom travelled beyond Europe to question the rationality imposed by European powers to other countries or seek to understand how problems manifested and are formulated outside Europe.

In our attempt to challenge these views of the world, in particular the canon, we need to respond to Steve Biko's (2015:x) question and challenge that is "Why must it be the case that what whites have achieved constitute the highest standards that humanity can achieve?" It is fifty years after the independence of most countries in Africa and still the continent is struggling to decolonize in so many fashions. There is a divided effort between those who want to seize back their creative initiative in history through a real control of all the means of communal self-definition in time and space (Ngugi wa Thiongo, 1986) on one side and those excoriated by Aimé Césaire in his seminal text "Discourse on Colonialism"

who maintain the system of oppression rooted in colonial capitalism and exploitation. Aimé Césaire writes:

And do not seek to know whether personally these gentlemen are in good or bad faith, whether personally they have good or bad intentions. Whether personally --that is, in the private conscience of Peter and Paul—they are or are not colonialists, because the essential thing is that their highly problematical subjective good faith is entirely irrelevant to the objective social implications of the evil work they perform as watchdogs of colonialism (2004: 54-55).

What is the role of African, diasporic, and Africanist intellectuals to the struggle to decolonize the academy as part of the broader project to constitute and liberate African humanity and subjectivity (Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Zondi, 2016)? The quest for a post neo-colonial phase in academy is essential. De-epistemologizing requires the centering of African discourse first and foremost and seconds the deconstruction of African humanity from this human-inhuman binary which tends to subjugate Africa and its people (ibid, 2016).

2.3. Towards a decolonized curriculum

In this final section we interrogate notions of a decolonized curriculum, by using the example of the tensions between teaching the western canon and African writings in the Departments of English in South African universities. If curriculum is understood as the formal knowledge that make up certain categories and disciplinary divisions set together with particular classroom practices and principles which are underpinned by a set of ideologies and discourses, then intellectualization of the curriculum means interrogating the formulation of what constitutes curriculum - who is influential in curriculum development, what is the influence and what is the outcome of such curricula? Decolonization not only calls for an intellectualization of the curriculum but an alertness to neoliberal influences. Market related governance is visible in terminology of university speak as its intellectual longings have been replaced by performance management, funding and grants, research units, productions units, international rankings and the like.

In what ways can our academic concern with literature in English best support the objective of the cultural liberation of Africa? The University of Cape Town's priorities are less subtly concealed: 'we are interested not only in the canon of great literature'. The words 'not only' betray a sense of 'other' writing included as an afterthought, or an apology. The abiding sentiment is that 'we' are particularly interested in the 'canon' but that 'we' do spend some time looking at 'other' works. Any brief survey of the relative weighting of reading lists reveals how reluctant academics have been to make any substantial change of attitude to being Africans teaching African students.

There is a neglect still of any coherent sense of 'literature in English' as opposed to the dominant 'English literature'. The re-calibrating of a decolonial syllabus has not yet taken place. Periodization of major historical shifts in British literature remains coercive as a mind-set within English curricula. This is particularly troubling because the exclusion of world literatures is more a symptom of intellectual boundaries and limited reading than the refusal to disrupt the curriculum.

The aim is pedagogical significance, not simply the replacement of one set of texts with another. We should equip students to read our practices and be able to identify any authoritarian and exclusionary qualities that we reflect in our reading lists and our teaching strategies. Such a goal encourages students to see connections between the text and the world, and expose them to the excluded images of otherness. The task is not to overthrow the canon, but to subvert and disrupt the relations of power which invest modern education, contesting them by problematizing inequalities, expanding the realm of fiction, experimenting with alternative forms of educational provision and promoting new forms of subjectivity.

The focus on content as curriculum and curriculum transfer of powerful knowledge has an implicit a priori theoretical position in relation to the social context. Its position is to view the social, and bigger questions around politics, power, race and class, as subjective externals to the curriculum. The key shortcoming with this position is that the social context is pushed into the margins. There is a bifurcation of the ontological (being) and the epistemological (knowing). The further danger towards this view of curriculum is that the subjectivity of academics is clouded by the so-called objectivity stance, in other words, the racialized neo-liberal hegemonic discourse dominates under the guise of objectivity. It is simplistic to separate social discourses from knowledge discourses in South Africa, given the context of inequality and a racialized society. The danger of separating the knowledge from the social is that academics offer a functionalist view of the curriculum as a corrective measure to fill in the gaps of powerful knowledge in the student. This view is further reinforced with the academic stance taken against black students as underprepared and low achievers in benchmark tests.

Soudien (2010) rightly argues that social logics of curriculum should be the theoretical fulcrum and emphasizes an openness to the knowledges of subordinate people. Curriculum disruption would benefit from a balanced approach towards the social, i.e. undoing of our racist legacy via the curriculum together with an internally compelling imperative for powerful knowledge.

Conclusion

The critical task of the academe within the decolonial project is to generate alternatives, and alternative thinking. A new post-abyssal thinking (Santos, 2007) is called for. Post-abyssal thinking stems from the idea that the diversity of the world is inexhaustible and that such diversity still lacks an adequate epistemology. In other words, the epistemological diversity of the world does not yet have a form. It confronts the monoculture of modern science with the ecology of knowledges. It is an ecology because it is based on the recognition of the plurality of knowledges and is basically a counter-epistemology. An equitable distribution of scientific knowledge is impossible under conditions of capitalism and colonialism. More importantly, scientific knowledge has intrinsic limits in relation to the types of real-world intervention it makes possible, hence, the need to promote the interaction and interdependence between scientific and non-scientific knowledges.

The myth is produced that modern knowledge is settled knowledge, making attempts at disruption impossible. The dominant view considers knowledge to be predetermined and unquestioned, reinforcing knowledge transmission. As a result of this knowledge/power mobilization, epistemology is perpetually severed from ontology and axiology resulting in curricula with no space for alternate ways of knowing, and pedagogy and learning and teaching that concentrates on simple transfer of what Santos (2007) labels abyssal knowledge.

From an ecology of knowledge perspective, we will be able to value the non-canonic diversity of the world. What do hybrid knowledges, mixing western and non-western components, look like? How do we ensure that in the process of intercultural translations, we do not create new versions of colonialism? How do we distinguish between alternatives to capitalism and alternatives within capitalism? How can we fight against the abyssal lines using conceptual and political instruments that don't reproduce them? What would be the impact of post-abyssal conception of knowledge (as an ecology of knowledges) upon our curricula? None of these questions have definitive answers. It is in the nature of the ecology of knowledges to establish itself through constant questioning and incomplete answers.

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