EDITORIAL

From indoctrination to education: Reflexivity and critique in decolonising knowledge generation and dissemination for Africa's people

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We are in 2022 and uttering this number evokes a surreal feeling, probably caused by the weight of our tasks and responsibilities, which makes writing difficult. As we steer towards new horizons, new borders, new timelines, we feel a heaviness in each moment, and for each crossing the obstacles seem insurmountable. South Africans experienced this feeling when, on 24 November 2021, our scientists announced the presence of the Omicron variant found among travellers who had reportedly arrived from Europe. The result of this 'sharing' was that only southern African countries were placed on a red list and travel from our continent was once again banned. Arguably, this reaction fits the pattern of response and stigma that Africans have become accustomed to and are strangled by, namely the perception that Africa is the continent of death and disease (see, for example, Keim & Somerville 2018; Mengara 2001). The response did not reflect any awareness of an Africa that has outstanding scientists and strong medical ethics. Instead of receiving recognition for their cooperation, the African scientists, and together with them almost the whole of Africa, were punished.

Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic and how Africa has been positioned, especially in the minds of powerful Western countries, has laid bare how our history keeps repeating itself. Instead of building excitement about a better future, we continue to carry dread. So how then do we change this? Peter Beinart's reference to the

year 2021 as 'the year Palestinians entered America's debate over Israel-Palestine' serves as an example for Africans. Palestinian commentators 'shifted the terms of debate about Israel-Palestine in roughly the same way that the increased presence of Black commentators like Nicole Hannah-Jones [and Adam Serwer and Ta-Nehisi Coates] have shifted America's domestic debate about race' (Beinart 2021). Beinart states that this moment was possible because of the rise of movements such as #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo, and the fact that the previously excluded voices now had a platform on social media. In South Africa, the 2015/16 student movements, such as #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustMustFall, have left South Africans and other Africans with a clear imperative for socio-political change (see, for example, Nyamnjoh 2016). These transnational movements have ensured that the voices of the marginalised were amplified, thereby challenging the legacy of media platforms and forcing a shift to questions of representation and bias (Bacchetta, Cupples & Grosfoguel 2019; Maira & Winant 2019; Mignolo 2021). Like the Palestinian and American movements, the COVID-19 pandemic and recent student movements have made it imperative for Africans to enter and lead the global debate about, and interventions for Africa. If they hope to break through the staid responses that have perpetuated for centuries, African scholars and activists will have to work together to challenge the dominant perspectives and to tell African stories from the perspectives of those who live and work on the continent. While we acknowledge the resource constraints that permeate communities and institutions on the continent, including access to technology and access to publishing platforms and other resources, there is also no denying that our collective creativity in our activism and scholarship must propel us to play a key role in shifting and decolonising social, political and intellectual debate about Africa, and developing programming informed by African perspectives (see Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018).

From this perspective, decolonisation must go beyond simply blaming the West and its name- oppression, exploitation and marginalisation of Africa. Rather, our education praxis, scholarship and activism must allow us to broaden our intellectual horizons so that we are more prepared, better skilled, independent and critically reflective. It should prepare us with foresight and fortitude to challenge our own internal inequalities and injustices—while remembering the past and continuing to challenge injustices perpetrated from elsewhere.

This is particularly relevant for South Africa as the country is experiencing a moment of powerful political rupture with the immediate democratic past and the

failure to deliver on promises of equality for all and a real break with the apartheid past. President Ramaphosa highlighted this in his speech at the Dakar International Forum on Peace and Security in Africa 2021, declaring that 'as Africans we would like partnerships to be based on mutual respect.' (https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=266713262103648). He then highlighted the paternalism that underlies the relationship between Africans and their Western counterparts, as well as the questions of the youth regarding their opportunities on the African continent.

These are the imperatives that this general issue of the *Journal of Decolonising Disciplines* takes up. We invited submissions from scholars, both emerging and established, that reflect renewed commitment to comparative and interdisciplinary work that emphasises relationality and rejects coloniality's epistemic investment in totality, universality, linearity and abstraction. For example, Bosco Opi's paper titled 'Borders recolonized - the impacts of the EU externalization policy in Africa' challenges the hypocrisy of Western states in their 'partnerships' with Africa. We are invited to consider, among other things, that the 'EU-Africa relation is often framed in humanitarian language as "development cooperation", which characterises a neo-colonial engagement with Africa'. It is in the continuation of such practices that one finds the echo for the president's frustration and Opi's analysis. This issue needs to be critiqued in terms of our scholarship and public intellectual engagements, and should be politically and ethically addressed. Furthermore, echoing growing alarm across the continent and the views of those in the global community who are interested in justice for all, President Ramaphosa criticised the hoarding of the intellectual property rights over the vaccines by Western pharmaceuticals whilst treating Africans as low-skilled labour. This is reminiscent of the colonial and apartheid past, which was informed by the understanding of Africans as being only good enough 'to fill, finish and package' (https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=266713262103648).

Although Mr Ramaphosa was accurate in his analysis of the attitude of and response by the colonising states/imperial powers, what was glaringly missing from his critique was a recognition and acknowledgement of Africa's own accountability in the downfall of nations due to such factors as corruption, reflected in, for example, patronage and cadre deployment. In this instance, Ndumiso Ncube's paper 'Human rights in the zones of non-being: Lessons on [not] speaking about and on behalf of "others" from JM Coetzee's *Foe*' cuts to the very heart of this internal critique. Ncube considers the voice of the African people, their humanity and dignity, which are still in question despite the notion of a universal declaration of human rights that

articulates the rights of all people. Ncube argues that 'the possession of language in the world where there are two zones, as illustrated in John Maxwell Coetzee's *Foe* (1986), does not guarantee one to be heard or liberated'. While many countries champion the notion of human rights in their constitutions and policy frameworks, in practice, as evidenced by the growing inequalities in some of those countries and across nations, and as the unequal COVID-19 vaccine rollout has aptly illustrated, many humans still remain on the margins of social support and care. It is not only powerful Western nations that need to account for these inequalities. African leaders themselves seem to attach little value to African life. The voices and demands of their citizens are often repressed or drowned in the endless politics of scapegoating, deflection, silencing and political control. This has resulted in the strangling of opportunities for growth and development and has exacerbated impoverishment in communities.

Our critique must also include our higher education systems and their research and development enterprise. Responding to this imperative, in a 2012 *Mail & Guardian* article titled 'Education: Whose knowledge is it anyway?', Leonard Martin wrote:

> *Almost 20 years after the demise of apartheid, South Africa has failed to undertake and complete its own knowledge transition consistent with the constitutional ambition of a democratic, just and peaceful society. The legacy of knowledge that constitutes and shapes our learning institutions is in fundamental need of change* (09 November 2012).

A few years later, the #RhodesMustFall movement reminded us of how our continuing belief that the Western liberal education system is superior and that Western traditions and frameworks must be mimicked for African scholarship to be regarded as credible needs to be challenged and changed. Such change requires a shift from indoctrination to education, a decolonisation of the university space, its curriculum and the knowledge generation and dissemination platforms and the tools that we access and use. The question is whether this achievable. Kasturi Behari-Leak and Rajendra Chetty, in their paper titled 'Drawing a line in the sand: social mapping of responses to calls to "decolonise the university"', address this question and probe 'whether the vision for transforming a largely socially exclusive and unjust academic project into one that is socially just, inclusive and transformed can be actualised in spite of resistance from those who wish to maintain the status quo'. In a

similar vein, M'mboga Akala's paper, 'The effects of implementing neoliberal policies and decoloniality in African *u*niversities' considers the system and institutional policies that limit or hamper change. Together these contributions highlight the mammoth task ahead. Akala argues that 'African universities are still experiencing tenets of colonialism. Freedom to explore, think and educate is greatly hampered by impositions from donor nations'. Akala further emphasises the need for 'greater autonomy regarding decisions that affect … the general public good'. From this vantage point, it is clear that the first step to decolonisation has to be internal or local critique and reflexivity: What has been our role as politicians, academics, public intellectuals and other social players in the marginalisation of the less powerful in our society and the continuing privileging of Western thought and ways of knowing? It is only when we engage in honest critique of our own agency and accountability that an effective examination of the external—the lasting impact of colonialism and apartheid—is possible. As educators, we need to be vigilant about these shortcomings when educating the future generations, and we hope that decolonial scholars will make a lasting impact in developing these skills and critique.

At this time of reflection, doubt and meaning-making, it is necessary to reiterate the *Journal of Decolonising Disciplines*' efforts in this process. In this general issue in particular, while we acknowledge the ever-present issues of access (including language and technological access), we wanted to include contributions that meaningfully contribute to both sides of the critique and include diverse voices, perspectives and identities. For example, Iram Yousuf's article 'Utopias for the impoverished: The Islamicate in the creation of utopias' highlights the Islamicate idea of the *waqf* to address issues of poverty and impoverishment 'and the ability of a history of the Others' utopia … [where the] success of the waqf in poverty alleviation cannot be ignored …'. It is in *allowing* these ideas and historical achievements from different cultures, traditions, religions and societies that we can begin to unearth the wealth of potential in humankind. It is a potential that can build us as a continent and not limit us to being a 'begging bowl'. Aasif Bulbulia's article, 'Now turning to our tomorrows: Decolonial futures in the study of Islam', offers insightful comment on the decolonial turn as anticipatory intervention', incorporating as it does the double lens that decolonial studies amplify. These contributions illustrate what it means to look inwards whilst being cognisant of the influence of external factors. In his article, Bulbulia focuses on re-learning so that there can be greater impact and relevance. Just as Islam and the Islamicate are borderless and denationalised, so too is the reality

of the modern world.Similarly, in his article 'Political modernity and the postcolonial New World Order', Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni asserts that '[m]odern self-contained nation-states are epistemically products of Euro-political modernity', which require a decolonial analysis and imagery so that the crisis of political modernity, the 'limits of both global and national imaginaries, and … the agenda of decolonizing political community' can be critically interrogated and their effect be overcome. Once we begin to appreciate the 'new' lens, it becomes incumbent upon us to imagine alternate systems, or to work towards improving the existing systems so that there can be a shift in the power structures that dominate and oppress. After all, new ideas, new imaginings and creative arguments need to be grounded in purpose and benefit so that what we offer, what we produce and reproduce as academics, contribute to the general well-being of society and the public good.

Ahonaa Roy's article on 'Biopolitics and im/possible citizenship: gender, epidemiology and subversion in India' moves in this direction. In considering the political implications of gender, Roy advances the notion of a 'biopolitics of citizenship with an analytical lens that is viable, de-medicalized [which allows for] the possibility to de-embrace technocratic and depoliticize [a] sense of belonging'. It is in these difficult spaces of modernity and politics, citizenship and belonging that we unpack the realities of a 'created space'—a 'created identity' that often seems so far away from who or what we are or where we need to be. It is here, on these pages of the *JDD*, that we aim to establish the archives and footprints for students, academics and activists to return to and find their authentic selves. Once we have been found, we will be able to focus and build. Thus, whilst Roy considers gender, sexuality and health from an Indian perspective and in relation to biopolitics, Chinwe Obuaku-Igwe and Zethu Matebeni's article, 'The writer's café: Foregrounding ubuntu, decolonisation and deconstruction', draws on ubuntu and African perspectives 'from which to build critical and responsive pedagogies interconnecting [the] sociology of sexuality and gender, and health'. These refer to similar issues addressed by diverse scholars and affirm a known thematic—that people across the world experience similar situations and seek solutions to their difficulties from within their own spaces. The imposition of solutions, approaches and methodologies almost always causes harm as it is foreign and does not have cultural authenticity. It is this imposition that colonised nations have been resisting, and which is now once again being felt in epistemology and identity. Thus, though it may seem that our journal, the *JDD*, is a compilation of thoughts that reside in the ivory towers of learning, we have motivated the

practical reality in which they are grounded. It is our hope that the ideas will become more accessible and framed in simpler terms so that ordinary folk can benefit and contribute to the learning practice. After all, oral histories, story-telling and narration are intrinsically a part of our knowledge archives. This is also a form of resistance to the niches and exclusivity that the neo-liberal westernised university has created around knowledge production that intentionally excludes the majority of the society that it is meant to serve. And yes, knowledge is about service.

As we each reach for our own expressions of resistance, let us remember this: 'What matters is not what any individual thinks, but what is true. A teacher who does not equip his pupils with the rudimentary tools to discover this is substituting indoctrination for teaching.' (As quoted on http://quotes.yourdictionary.com/indoctrination).

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