The Lingering Coloniality of Knowledge: Challenges to Decolonising South African Universities

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Abstract

Despite South Africa's democratic transformation, colonial epistemic frameworks continue to dominate university curricula, impeding decolonisation and Africanisation efforts. This paper examines the persistence of these colonial knowledge systems within higher education, drawing on the #FeesMustFall movement as a critical juncture that exposed fundamental inequities in knowledge production. Situated within the history of education, this work interrogates the historical, sociological, and philosophical dimensions of teaching

and learning through a decolonial theoretical lens. Using qualitative methodology, the research investigates institutional cultures and pedagogical practices across South African universities. The cases of Lwazi Lushaba and Pedro Mzileni contextualise the movement's origins and significance for international audiences. Findings reveal enduring colonial legacies manifested through Western ideological dominance across disciplines, including history, sociology, development, and literature, perpetuating systemic and epistemic injustices. The research identifies specific forms of institutional resistance to decolonisation: the maintenance of Eurocentric curricula, pedagogical approaches disconnected from Indigenous Knowledge Systems, and historical disparities in educational access. The study demonstrates that Africanisation can foster intellectual sovereignty, cultural pride, critical consciousness, and ontological density among academics and students. However, entrenched institutional practices and Western epistemologies continue to hinder meaningful curricular reform. This work underscores the need for a (re)evaluation of higher education curricula to achieve epistemic justice and authentic decolonisation. The findings contribute to broader discussions on post-colonial education reform and knowledge production in the Global South.

Keywords: Decolonisation; Africanisation; #FeesMustFall; Curriculum Reform; Lwazi Lushaba; Pedro Mzileni; Epistemic Justice

Introduction

The colonial, apartheid past and the slow pace of transformation necessitated movements such as #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall, which inspired a commitment to improve re-engagement efforts to decolonise and Africanise South Africa's educational systems. As we reflect on three decades of democracy, the call to decolonise knowledge systems and prioritise African epistemologies has become increasingly urgent (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). This work explores the interplay between decolonisation and Africanisation in South Africa's higher education, with a particular emphasis on curricular transformation and knowledge production paradigms that continue to prioritise Western perspectives over Indigenous Knowledge Systems. Ramoupi's (2014) conclusion on 20 years of lost scholarship supports this claim, emphasising that despite three decades of struggle, there is still lingering coloniality in the higher education system.

The conceptual framework of decolonisation, as articulated by Heleta (2016), encompasses more than simple curricular reform; it involves a fundamental restructuring of knowledge hierarchies and the dismantling of the epistemic violence entrenched within educational institutions. This process is intertwined with Africanisation, which

Letsekha (2013) defines as the intentional integration of African philosophical traditions, historical narratives and cultural paradigms into educational practice. Collectively, these movements pose a significant challenge to the hegemonic Western knowledge systems that have historically dominated South African education and still do. The need for this transformation has been illustrated by recent social movements, particularly the #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall movements, which brought to light not only the financial barriers to education, but also the deeper structural inequities inherited from the colonial and apartheid eras. These student-led protests underscored how the legacy of colonialism continues to echo in both the material conditions surrounding education and the epistemic frameworks that influence curriculum content and delivery.

This work contributes to decolonial scholarship by analysing why coloniality continues to linger in higher education. Drawing on critical pedagogy and African philosophy, the study explores how curricular transformation can serve as a vehicle for epistemic justice and social change. The analysis goes beyond theoretical frameworks to consider the practical implications of decolonisation and Africanisation for pedagogy, knowledge production, and identity formation within educational spaces. By situating this discussion within the broader historical context of South African education reform, the aim of this study is to highlight the interplay between colonial legacies, contemporary struggles for educational justice and the vision of an education system that authentically reflects and serves the diverse communities of South Africa (Mbembe, 2016). This investigation is appropriate, as South Africa continues to confront pressing questions of educational equity, cultural representation, epistemic justice and the role of education in fostering social cohesion in a post-apartheid context; this is witnessed through ongoing parliamentary debates, ministerial works, committees, curriculum review boards and court verdicts.

Background: Cases of Lwazi Lushaba and Pedro Mzileni

This work centres on the cases of Lwazi Lushaba and Pedro Mzileni as its focal point. It analyses the earlier (2016) matter with Lwazi Lushaba and the University of Cape Town (UCT) on 'class disruption' and the recent (2023) matter with Pedro Mzileni at the University of the Free State (UFS) on 'hate speech' (Lushaba, 2016; Mzileni, 2023). These two matters are employed to explore the tensions between Western-centred knowledge systems and decolonial pedagogical approaches in South African higher education. By interrogating institutional responses to critical scholarship that challenges colonial epistemologies, this discussion contributes to broader debates concerning academic

freedom, epistemic justice, and the simultaneous processes of decolonisation and Africanisation in post-apartheid academic spaces.

The enduring dominance of Western epistemologies in African higher education institutions poses a significant obstacle to the transformation of knowledge systems in post-colonial contexts. This work contends that the matters of two exceptional academics in the political and social sciences, Lushaba, who was threatened behind closed doors and warned for aiding class disruptions of political mobilisations and Mzileni, who faced institutional disciplinary actions and accusations of hate speech for teaching from decolonial and Pan-African perspectives, illustrates the structural resistance to epistemic diversification within former white universities in South Africa. By analysing these cases, the discussion explores the interplay between academic freedom, entrenched colonial knowledge systems, and the need to decolonise and Africanise curricula.

Mzileni faced disciplinary charges after questioning the university's vision and participating in public debates, ultimately resulting in his suspension and subsequent hearings (Mzileni, 2023). Both Lushaba and Mzileni have since shared their experiences through mainstream media outlets such as SAfm, various newspapers, YouTube and other social media platforms. They have discussed the challenges they encountered, including false accusations from right-wing organisations such as AfriForum targeting Mzileni, as well as the lack of institutional support from the university administration (Mzileni, 2023). By analysing these cases, the discussion highlights the relationship between academic freedom, entrenched colonial knowledge systems, and the imperative to decolonise and Africanise curricula.

Institutional resistance to decolonial knowledge production

Whilst these two cases have gone public in South Africa, they sit as empirical evidence that demonstrates how historically white institutions may operationalise administrative and disciplinary mechanisms to constrain decolonial scholarship. Many other cases are unknown, yet they exist, which is attested by the book titled *Black Academic Voices: The South African Experience* by Khunou et al. (2019). Lushaba and Mzileni's assertion that South African higher education places a very high premium on academic discourse that does not disrupt coloniality, whiteness, white supremacy, racism and the legacy of land dispossession and Eurocentric epistemic hegemony is evidenced by UCT and UFS's response to their teachings. This pattern of institutional response suggests not only disagreement with particular academic positions, but a structural resistance to epistemological approaches that

fundamentally challenge the colonial foundations of knowledge production. It exemplifies what Mamdani (2016) identifies as the epistemological containment of African scholarship, wherein critique is tolerated only insofar as it does not threaten established power relations in knowledge production. The Higher Education Act of 1997 states 'transformation' at least 50 times, which emphasises the cruciality of the reformation of higher educational systems to portray historical inequalities and foster inclusivity and an equal system. Transformation is characterised by the Act as the restructuring of institutional traditions, governance as well as curriculum to reflect the diversified needs and desires of South Africa's people (South Africa, 1997).

The South African Human Rights Commission's dismissal of hate speech (SAHRC) allegations against Mzileni affirmed that his teaching "constituted robust, constructive scholarly engagements backed by credible academic sources that enjoy special protection as an expression that lies at the heart of the right to freedom of expression and academic freedom" (Mzileni, 2024: 1). Academic freedom and university autonomy refer to the ability of a university and scholars to be independent, enabling them to pursue knowledge, be able to teach and conduct valuable research without any external assistance, enabling an inclusive and diverse academic environment for all (Ramoupi, 2014). This ruling highlights the essential tension between narrow conceptions of academic freedom that privilege Western epistemologies and broader understandings that encompass the freedom to challenge those very epistemologies.

By analysing the cases of Lushaba and Mzileni, this work contends that genuine academic freedom in post-colonial contexts must include the right to interrogate and dismantle colonial knowledge structures. Duncan (2018) argues that academic freedom in South Africa has historically been conceptualised in liberal terms, namely abstract knowledge production from its socio-political context. These cases demonstrate how this abstraction serves to protect established epistemological hierarchies, while delegitimising scholarship that explicitly addresses colonial power relations.

The institutional response to Lushaba and Mzileni's teaching demonstrates the necessity of conceptualising decolonisation and Africanisation as simultaneous, dialectically related processes. Decolonisation, understood as the dismantling of colonial knowledge frameworks and power relations, is insufficient without the concurrent Africanisation of curricula, which is the centre of African experiences, histories and knowledge systems (Swart et al., 2020). Decolonisation without Africanisation risks removing colonial elements without replacing them with Indigenous perspectives, while Africanisation

without decolonisation may add African content without challenging the underlying colonial structures. Lushaba and Mzileni's pedagogical approach engaged in both processes simultaneously by critiquing colonial narratives while teaching from Pan-African and decolonial perspectives. They commented on colonial narratives and included Pan-African narratives, which resulted in institutional resistance. The aggressive institutional responses suggest that this simultaneity is particularly threatening to established epistemic orders, because it not only critiques Western frameworks, it actively constructs alternatives.

This dialectical conceptualisation challenges approaches to curriculum transformation that emphasise either a critique of Western epistemologies or the inclusion of African content without fundamentally altering epistemological foundations. As Nyamnjoh (2012) argues, genuine transformation requires more than simply adding African content to Western frameworks, but reconstituting the fundamental epistemological assumptions of academic disciplines. Lushaba and Mzileni's involvement with Africanisation and decolonisation represents this dialectical approach, emphasising the need for both procedures to take place together for effective curricular change.

The analysis of this case yields several implications for the transformation of South African higher education. First, it makes one think, how many other cases are similar, but unreported and unpublicised in the universities in South Africa? Secondly, it demonstrates that formal decolonisation has not yielded substantive epistemic decolonisation in historically white universities. Institutional cultures continue to privilege Western knowledge systems while marginalising or actively suppressing African-centred approaches. While these cases provide a specific example, further research into the curricula of history, sociology, literature and the representation of Black professors is necessary to understand the extent of this issue. Thirdly, the two cases highlight the vulnerability of scholars, especially Black South African scholars, engaged in decolonial work to institutional backlash, suggesting the need for stronger structural protections for academic freedom that explicitly acknowledge the legitimacy of challenging dominant epistemologies. The asymmetry in institutional responses against Lushaba and Mzileni without equivalent investigation, reveals the operation of power in determining which voices are protected in academic spaces. Fourthly, the media's amplification of allegations demonstrates how public discourse reinforces colonial knowledge hierarchies. This suggests that decolonisation must extend beyond academic institutions to encompass broader societal narratives about knowledge production (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018).

The matters concerning Lushaba and Mzileni exemplify the complexities of decolonising and Africanising curricula in post-apartheid South Africa. In Chapter 5 of *Paradise Lost: Race and Racism in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, Langa Ramoupi examines racial exclusion from academic positions at universities, attributing it to both the historical governance of the apartheid system and the ongoing racism in the democratic era (Ramoupi, 2022). The analysis reveals that Western knowledge systems remain entrenched in predominantly white institutions, and attempts to prioritise African perspectives, face considerable resistance. The situations involving Lushaba and Mzileni highlight that decolonisation encompasses more than merely diversifying content; it fundamentally challenges the power dynamics that determine whose knowledge is regarded as valuable and whose voices are amplified within academic contexts. Therefore, it is crucial to see decolonisation and Africanisation as interconnected processes that collectively represent a quest for epistemic justice in South African higher education.

Methodology

This work employed a qualitative research design to explore the persistent colonial legacies and contemporary challenges embedded within South African higher education, particularly as they relate to curriculum reform and the dynamics of decolonisation and Africanisation. The qualitative approach was selected for its capacity to unpack the complexities of institutional cultures, power relations, and epistemic hierarchies, while providing deeper insights into the lived experiences, perceptions and struggles of academics and students navigating these contested spaces. This methodological choice enabled the identification of subtle forms of resistance, the interplay between academic freedom and institutional authority, and the intricate processes through which Western epistemologies continue to shape curricula and knowledge production in South African universities. The research methodology was grounded in critical theory and post-colonial studies, providing a theoretical framework that facilitated an examination of how dominant knowledge systems maintain their hegemonic position within higher education institutions. This framework allowed for a nuanced understanding of the dialectical relationship between structural constraints and individual agency, revealing both the barriers to epistemic transformation and the possibilities for contesting established knowledge hierarchies.

The investigation employed three complementary data collection methods. Firstly, case study analysis focusing on two purposively selected cases, formed the core of this investigation: the experiences of Lushaba at the UCT and Mzileni at the UFS. These

cases were chosen for their exemplification of the colonial epistemological and power structures that persist in higher education, as well as their representation of individual agency within broader decolonisation and Africanisation movements. The case study approach enabled a detailed, situated analysis that revealed ongoing tensions, institutional resistance and complexities involved in transforming curricula and fostering epistemic justice within specific institutional contexts. Secondly, media analysis and interview data were sourced from publicly available content, including a SAfm interview with Sakina Kamwendo on AMLive concerning Lwazi Lushaba's matter and a YouTube interview with Sizwe Mpofu-Walsh on SMWX concerning Mzileni's case. These media sources provided rich, contextualised data about the participants lived experiences, institutional challenges and perspectives on decolonisation efforts within their respective universities, offering insights into the personal dimensions of broader structural transformations. Thirdly, a scholarly literature review was conducted, focusing on decolonial theory and practice in higher education, Africanisation of curricula and knowledge systems, the #FeesMustFall movement and its impact on institutional transformation, South Africa's colonial and apartheid educational legacies and epistemic justice and knowledge production in post-colonial contexts. The literature review provided theoretical grounding and contextualised the case studies within the broader academic discourse on transformation in South African higher education, establishing the intellectual foundations for understanding contemporary challenges and possibilities.

Assessing the necessity to simultaneously decolonise and Africanise Western-centred curricula

The intricate relationship between decolonisation and Africanisation within South Africa's educational framework reveals several significant tensions and opportunities that merit thorough exploration. This work assesses the multifaceted dimensions of curriculum transformation, contextualising these processes within broader socio-historical frameworks to understand why coloniality still prevails despite efforts to decolonise and Africanise. It is essential to recognise that the endeavour to decolonise education transcends curricular changes. As Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) contends, it necessitates a fundamental epistemic rupture, a radical reimagining of knowledge production, validation and dissemination. Despite post-apartheid reforms, the current educational structure continues to favour Western epistemologies, leaving African knowledge systems on the margins. This epistemic violence, as Maldonado-Torres (2016) terms it, perpetuates cognitive injustice and cultural alienation among learners. The integration of Africanisation into educational practice

presents both opportunities and hurdles. Letsekha (2013) advocates for the prioritisation of African philosophical traditions and cultural paradigms, yet the implementation of such approaches often encounters institutional resistance. This resistance frequently manifests itself in what Mbembe (2016) describes as cognitive imperialism, the enduring belief in the superiority of Western knowledge systems. Therefore, the challenge lies not only in embedding African perspectives, but also in fundamentally transforming the epistemological underpinnings of education.

A critical analysis of existing curriculum structures exposes what Heleta (2016) identifies as epistemic racism, the systematic exclusion or marginalisation of non-Western knowledge systems. This marginalisation occurs at various levels: in the selection of content; pedagogical methods and assessment techniques. The imperative for curriculum transformation must be understood within the framework of what De Sousa Santos (2014) refers to as cognitive justice. This concept underscores the importance of recognising the plurality of knowledge systems and diverse ways of knowing. Ramoupi (2014) points out that the existing educational system often reduces Africanisation to a superficial inclusion of culture, while perpetuating Western epistemological dominance. Steve Biko's decolonial and African-rooted scholarship and activism with a Pan-Africanist perspective attests to this. Likewise, Robert Sobukwe placed emphasis on Africanisation and decolonisation during the Student Representative Council President's Address in 1949. The relationship between decolonisation and Africanisation necessitates careful examination. While these processes are complementary, they are not synonymous. Decolonisation, as articulated by Fanon (1963), requires a fundamental dismantling of colonial power structures. In contrast, Africanisation emphasises the positive assertion of African epistemologies and cultural paradigms. The integration of these approaches foster what Grosfoguel (2011) and De Sousa Santos (2014) describe as pluriversality, a space where various knowledge systems coexist without hierarchical ranking.

However, the practical implementation of these theoretical frameworks presents considerable challenges. Msila (2017) notes that there is a need to interrogate educators; some educators lack theoretical knowledge, but, most particularly in higher education, lack the interest to incorporate African knowledge systems into their teaching practices effectively.

Perpetuation of Western-centred curricula

Western education has globally influenced educational standards. The educational paradigm is characterised by the promotion of science and liberal arts, which has structured lifetime learning and adaptation in modern society (Benavot et al, 2022). Critics such as Crossley and Watson (2003) contend that the dominance of Western educational paradigms is not only a reflection of a colonial legacy but also a practical necessity in an interconnected world. From this viewpoint, the revolutionary shift for decolonisation may unintentionally put South African students in a very tricky position where they are perceived as being disadvantaged in global contexts. King and McGrath (2004) noted that international employers and institutions often prefer Western educational credentials and knowledge systems.

Nevertheless, the argument for maintaining Western-centred curricula deserves careful consideration within the context of global economic and academic systems. Genuine educational transformation should embrace what Young (2008) refers to as powerful knowledge from all traditions, rather than favouring any single epistemological framework. Furthermore, in an increasingly globalised world, the argument for maintaining diverse epistemological perspectives becomes even more compelling. Contemporary knowledge production occurs through global networks that transcend traditional cultural boundaries.

Resistance to curriculum transformation often arises from empirical observations regarding the effectiveness of existing systems. Jansen (2017) highlights that many educators point to successful outcomes within current frameworks, particularly for students who excel in Western academic conventions. This pragmatic defence of the status quo implies that a wholesale transformation could disrupt functional aspects of education without ensuring improved results. Moreover, such critics assert that institutional resistance is rooted not only in a colonial mentality but also in genuine concerns regarding educational quality and consistency. As Biesta (2015) observes, educational systems require stable frameworks for assessment and progression. Therefore, radical transformation risks undermining these essential structural elements.

Critics contend that instead of continuing with decolonisation and Africanisation in their current forms, South African education might benefit from a more effective alternative framework. This new approach would (i) acknowledge the practical utility of Western knowledge systems while critically evaluating their limitations; (ii) integrate African epistemologies, recognising the valuable aspects of existing frameworks and (iii)

develop hybrid pedagogical strategies that adequately prepare students for both local and global contexts. This suggests that an exclusive emphasis on Africanisation could potentially restrict, rather than expand, educational horizons (Edoho, 2011). While linguistic imperialism deserves critique, critics argue that the pragmatic advantages of English proficiency cannot be overlooked. As noted by Crystal (2003), English functions as a global lingua franca in academic and professional environments. Therefore, prioritising Indigenous languages, although culturally significant, may limit access to international opportunities for both students and academics.

Additionally, critics raise concerns regarding the institutional capacity for transformation. Cloete et al. (2015) emphasise that many South African educational institutions are struggling with fundamental resource constraints. This suggests that radical transformation could overextend already limited resources without guaranteeing improved outcomes.

Historical educational structures in South Africa

The historical trajectory of South African education under colonialism and apartheid reveals deeply entrenched systems of epistemic violence that continue to impact contemporary educational frameworks. This discussion critically examines how colonial education functioned as an instrument of cultural domination and explores its lasting implications for current decolonial initiatives. The colonial education system functioned as a deliberate strategy aimed at fostering psychological dependence on Western epistemologies, while systematically undermining Indigenous Knowledge Systems. This process, as demonstrated by the educational policies of the colonial administration, went beyond academic instruction to become what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021) refers to as epistemicide, the systematic eradication of Indigenous ways of knowing and existing. The strategic implementation of Western education in colonial Sub-Saharan Africa exemplifies what Abrokwaa (2017) identifies as a three-pronged approach: administrative control, economic exploitation, and missionary influence. This tripartite system produced colonial subjects, individuals alienated from their cultural roots and simultaneously excluded from full participation in the colonial power structure. The consequences of this system extend far beyond the colonial era, yielding what Wa Thiong'o (1986) describes as a cultural bomb that continues to disrupt the psychological landscape of African learners.

A critical analysis indicates that colonial education served various functions in maintaining hegemonic control. As Shizha and Kariwo (2012) observe, the emphasis on

Western academic literacy skills over Indigenous Knowledge Systems resulted in a form of cognitive imperialism that continues to shape educational policies and practices today. This systematic devaluation of African epistemologies has led to what De Sousa Santos (2014) describes as an abyssal line, creating a pronounced division between Western and Indigenous Knowledge Systems that renders the latter invisible or inconsequential.

For instance, in History at various South African universities, the core undergraduate modules predominantly emphasise European history, such as the French Revolution, British imperialism and the World Wars. In contrast, African precolonial and Indigenous histories are often relegated to electives or receive minimal attention. Similarly, in Sociology, foundational texts and theories by Western scholars such as Durkheim, Marx and Weber are standard requirements, while African sociological perspectives are seldom prioritised in the curriculum (Lushaba, 2016). In the field of literature, syllabi frequently favour works by British and American authors, with African literature either confined to a single module or examined through a Western analytical lens. This preference for Western content is also reflected in prescribed reading lists, which are primarily dominated by Western theorists and frameworks, as well as in assessment criteria that favour familiarity with Western academic conventions over Indigenous knowledge production methods. Consequently, students are often compelled to engage with and master Western paradigms to achieve academic success, while African epistemologies remain marginalised or treated as supplementary.

Equally important are the economic dimensions of colonial education. Rodney (2018) illustrates how education was a crucial instrument in establishing and perpetuating economic dependencies. The curriculum was deliberately designed to produce individuals trained to serve colonial interests, rather than contribute to Indigenous development and the production of knowledge. This is clearly illustrated in the Bantu Education Act of 1953, which mandated that Black South African learners receive an education focused on basic literacy, religious instruction and vocational training, while systematically excluding African history, indigenous languages, and critical thinking skills. School syllabi were tailored to prepare Black students for menial jobs in the service of the colonial economy.

University curricula similarly prioritised European thinkers and frameworks, with African intellectual traditions either omitted or treated as peripheral. These curricular choices ensured that Black learners were socialised to admire and emulate Western norms and values, while being denied the tools and knowledge necessary to advance their communities. The contemporary implications of this historical legacy are profound. As

Heleta (2016) argues, current initiatives in decolonial education must confront not only institutional structures, but also deeply entrenched psychological and epistemological challenges.

Bantu Education

The implementation of Bantu Education represents one of the most insidious forms of systemic oppression under apartheid, with effects that continue to resonate across South Africa's educational landscape. This segment examines how Bantu Education served as a foundational element of racial capitalism and explores its enduring impact on contemporary efforts aimed at educational transformation.

The framework of Bantu Education exemplifies what Wolpe (2023) termed education for domestication, a deliberate strategy designed to sustain racial capitalism through educational means. The Eiselen Commission's Report of 1951 claims that regarding the perceived inability of Black Africans to develop their curricula, underscores the fundamental justification of the colonial state: the notion of racial difference as both natural and immutable. This justification for educational apartheid illustrates the boomerang effect of colonialism, as described by Césaire (2000), wherein the dehumanisation of the colonised ultimately undermines the ethical foundations of the colonisers themselves. The strategic implementation of differentiated education systems, as Thobejane (2013) documents, operated through what Foucault would term capillary power, penetrating every aspect of educational experience to produce subjects suited to apartheid's racial hierarchy. This system, as Alexander (2003) argues, was not about limiting access to knowledge, but about producing specific forms of consciousness that would maintain white supremacy.

The contemporary implications of Bantu Education's legacy are profound. As Soudien (2012) argues, post-apartheid educational reforms must contend not only with material inequalities, but institutional habitus and deeply embedded patterns of thinking and practice that reproduce inequality, even in formally democratic structures.

Post-apartheid curriculum reforms

The trajectory of post-apartheid curriculum reforms in South Africa illuminates both the aspirations and limitations of educational transformation within a society grappling with entrenched colonial legacies. Since 1994, there have been significant efforts to transform higher education curricula, including the adoption of new policies, the establishment of

curriculum review committees, and the explicit commitment by universities to Africanise and decolonise their syllabi. Institutions have repeatedly articulated their intention to move beyond Eurocentric frameworks and to include African perspectives in teaching and research. However, as the history of the Mamdani Affair at UCT demonstrates, these efforts have often encountered substantial resistance at the level of implementation. In 1996, Mamdani's proposal to introduce a foundational course, Problematising Africa, which would have foregrounded African thoughts and experiences, was met with institutional pushback and ultimately sidelined by university authorities. As Smit (2018) reports, the controversy revealed a deep-seated reluctance within the institution to fundamentally challenge Western epistemological dominance despite official rhetoric supporting transformation. Even decades later, Mamdani's return to UCT was marked by reflection on how little had changed in terms of actual curricular content and the persistence of what he called an intellectual apartheid.

This gap between policy rhetoric and the realities of implementation exemplifies the abyssal line in knowledge production described by De Sousa Santos (2007), where Western epistemological frameworks continue to dominate despite professed commitments to transformation. The Mamdani case, and others such as it, as well as that of Lushaba and Mzileni, show that while transformation is frequently discussed at the policy level, entrenched institutional cultures and practices often prevent meaningful curricular change. The inability of higher education to truly emancipate students must be understood in the context of what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) terms the coloniality of knowledge and the ongoing prevalence of colonial epistemological hierarchies even after formal decolonisation. As Gumede and Biyase (2016) illustrate, the complexities of Western educational frameworks have inadvertently reinforced what Bourdieu (1990) describes as cultural capital, thereby privileging educators and learners who are already familiar with Western pedagogical approaches.

This brings to light what Mbembe (2016) understands as the phenomenon where attempts at transformation inadvertently reinforce existing power structures. The ongoing marginalisation of indigenous knowledge systems calls for a fundamental challenge to Western epistemological dominance. This challenge is particularly pressing in what Fataar (2018) identifies as the lived curriculum, the intersection of educational policies with the realities of daily classroom experiences.

#FeesMustFall movement: Beyond the colonial-decolonial binary

A critical counterargument to the dominant decolonial critique of South African curriculum reforms reveals a more nuanced reality than is typically represented in the literature. While scholars such as Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) and Mbembe (2016) frame these reforms within a colonial-decolonial binary, this perspective may oversimplify the intricate dynamics of educational transformation in post-apartheid South Africa. As demonstrated from the foregoing discussions, the trajectory of curriculum transformation in South Africa reveals deep-seated contradictions and persistent challenges that illuminate the interplay between colonial legacies and post-apartheid reforms. The historical analysis reveals what Jansen (1990) refers to as curriculum convergence, a trend in which superficial alignment between Black and white education conceals more profound structural inequalities. This phenomenon exemplifies what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2022) identifies as the coloniality of power, the persistence of colonial power dynamics even in the aftermath of formal decolonisation.

This segment examines how curriculum transformation and student activism, particularly through the lens of the #FeesMustFall movement, intersect with identity formation in contemporary South Africa. By situating these developments within the broader context of knowledge production and societal change, the analysis highlights both the progress made and the persistent challenges in achieving genuine educational equity and epistemic justice. As Ocheni and Nwankwo (2012) contend, these systematic barriers have fostered a cycle of voicelessness that extends beyond educational achievement to influence broader societal participation. The dominance of Western educational paradigms has led to what can be characterised as an epistemicide of local knowledge systems, effectively alienating learners from their cultural heritage and contemporary realities.

The advocacy for the Africanisation of the curriculum transcends the superficial inclusion of African content; it represents a profound shift in the conceptualisation and transmission of knowledge. Hungwe and Mkhize (2022) illustrate how this transformation process reconnects learners with their cultural identities, while challenging the hegemony of Eurocentric epistemologies. Furthermore, the integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems, as noted by Saurombe (2018), serves a dual purpose: it validates local ways of knowing and enhances cognitive development through multilingual engagement. The #FeesMustFall movement represents a pivotal moment in South African higher education,

serving as more than just a protest against rising fees. As Langa et al. (2017) note, the movement articulated a thorough critique of the neoliberal university model, while emphasising the intersectionality of economic exclusion and cognitive justice. Its demands for decolonisation and Africanisation reflect a profound awareness of how financial exclusion intertwines with epistemological violence, perpetuating systemic inequalities.

The influence of decolonial practices on identity formation highlights the intricate relationship between individual and collective consciousness. The psychological remnants of colonialism, as discussed in Steve Biko's writings, continue to evoke what can be termed a colonial wound that impacts both personal and collective identity development (Biko, 1981). Engaging with Africanised perspectives in the context of contemporary global realities, creates what Fomunyam and Khoza (2020) describe as a third space where new forms of knowledge and identity can take shape. The transformation of the curriculum holds significant implications for livelihood dynamics and social justice outcomes. As argued by Ogude et al. (2005), an Africanised curriculum cultivates critical consciousness, empowering learners to confront systemic inequalities, while acquiring practical skills relevant to their communities. This approach aligns with what can be characterised as decolonial praxis, wherein theoretical understanding translates into tangible action for social transformation.

The ongoing process of decolonising higher education in South Africa reveals the intricate relationships between knowledge systems, identity formation and social justice. The #FeesMustFall movement has highlighted how financial exclusion operates in tandem with epistemological violence to maintain systemic inequalities. The push for Africanisation represents not just a curricular change, but a fundamental transformation in how knowledge is conceived, produced and transmitted in the South African context.

Conclusion

The trajectory of educational transformation in post-apartheid South Africa highlights both the enduring challenges and emerging opportunities in the pursuit of decolonial education. This analysis illustrates that the intertwined processes of decolonisation and Africanisation extend beyond curricular reforms; they pose fundamental challenges to the epistemic violence inherent in South African educational institutions. The historical legacy of colonial and apartheid-era education continues to profoundly influence contemporary educational frameworks. The systematic dismantling of indigenous knowledge systems, combined with coloniality, has created entrenched psychological and institutional obstacles to genuine

transformation. These barriers are evident not only in the content of the curriculum, but also in the very foundations of knowledge production and validation.

The #FeesMustFall movement serves as a powerful illustration of how financial exclusion intersects with epistemic violence in the perpetuation of systemic inequalities. Student activism has highlighted the shortcomings of post-apartheid reforms that address only superficial changes while allowing colonial knowledge hierarchies to persist. The push for decolonisation and Africanisation presents potential pathways for progress. However, this process must extend beyond content inclusion to the coloniality of knowledge and the underlying power relations that dictate what constitutes valid knowledge. Integrating Indigenous knowledge systems can both validate local epistemologies and enhance cognitive development through multilingual engagement.

Looking ahead, transforming South African education requires the creation of educational spaces that genuinely embrace multiple knowledge systems without imposing a hierarchical structure. This transformation necessitates attention to the intersection of educational policies with everyday classroom realities. It also involves addressing epistemic racism, which refers to the systematic exclusion or marginalisation of non-Western knowledge systems. The path forward must acknowledge that psychological liberation is inextricably linked to structural transformation. This entails confronting colonial education while fostering spaces where new forms of knowledge and identity can flourish. Therefore, the task of decolonising South Africa's education remains urgent. It requires not only policy reform, but also a fundamental shift in how knowledge is conceived, produced and transmitted.

In conclusion, the project of decolonising and Africanising South African education represents a fundamental challenge to centuries of epistemic violence. Its success requires sustained engagement with both theoretical frameworks and practical implementation strategies, always mindful of the coloniality of knowledge. Through such transformation, South Africa's education may truly serve its diverse communities, whose majority population is African and Black, while contributing to broader social justice and epistemic freedom.

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