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Curbing Inequality Through Decolonising Knowledge Production in Higher Education in South Africa

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Abstract

In South Africa, the question of whether a Western education system can lead to the achievement of equality among citizens is quite a problematic one. Thus, the question that has since the advent of the post-apartheid South Africa been a subject of contestation among scholars, is that of, how can the higher education system that was founded on colonial and apartheid white supremacy and hegemony be transformed into a transformative tool that addresses inequalities characterising South African society in the democratic era? This article seeks to provide a de-colonial perspective of how the higher education system of the post-apartheid South Africa can be transformed to address different developmental needs of a heterogeneous population. The purpose is not to dictate answers, but to create avenues of (re)thinking the knowledge production in the South African higher education sector in the quest for an equal and inclusive society. The article's key argument is that a higher education system such as that in South Africa which was founded on colonial and apartheid ideologies, interests and agendas needs a de-colonial transformation in order to respond to the developmental needs, challenges and aspirations of its heterogeneous population. After an engagement with the myths and assumptions of a decolonised world that conceals coloniality of knowledge, this article, delves into the South African higher education system and the quest for equality that confronts the country. The need to 'unthink' and 'unlearn' present forms of imagining higher education in South Africa is emphasised.

Introduction

There is an inextricable correlation between knowledge, education and society. This is because the nature of knowledge shapes the quality of education, which inevitably determines the type of people or society. Philosopher Socrates accentuates that the only useful knowledge is that which makes society or people better (*see* Chotikapanich, 2008). By and large, the question of decolonizing knowledge and the education systems that underpin its production in many of the countries of the non-Western world in general, and particularly in South Africa, is quite significant. This is mainly because the manner in which knowledge production currently takes place among many of the countries of the global South, including South Africa, does not address many of the developmental aspirations, challenges and needs of their indigenous populations, but continues to sustain the very colonial power structures that were put in place during the imposition of direct and indirect forms of colonial domination. Thus, the formal higher education system which became the key instrument in the production of knowledge among the majority of countries of the South, since the imposition of colonial domination, has remained unchanged even after the demise of juridical administrative colonialism. The question that, therefore needs urgent attention is that of, whether it is possible for a higher education system that was once used for colonial domination and exploitation in the not-so-distant past, to address the developmental needs, aspirations and challenges of both the former colonizer and the formerly colonized subject in the postcolonial and post-apartheid era without being subjected to a transformation process? This question is quite important with specific reference to countries such as South Africa where, after the demise of juridical administrative colonial and apartheid systems, both the former colonizers and the formerly colonized remained together within the same cartographic and spatio-temporality known as South Africa, in search of a new inclusive national identity. At the same time, this is also quite problematic with specific reference to institutions of higher learning such as universities, because universities as academic institutions serve as places where future decision-makers, knowledge producers and leaders in all spheres of life are produced.

This article, which methodologically relies on literature study and therefore is conceptual, is a de-colonial critique on the South African higher education system. It argues that the current higher education system in South Africa can only respond to various developmental needs, challenges and aspirations of all its population when its knowledge production is

decolonized and pluriversalized rather than having only one western universal epistemic centre model (Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Zondi, 2016). However, the question of decolonizing the higher education system cannot be understood without articulating the myth and/or incompleteness of the decolonization process itself as well as the presence of coloniality in knowledge production. After exploring the myth of decolonisation, this article delves into the challenge of inequality that confronts South African society at large and the higher education system. The article concludes by suggesting the need to ‘unthink’ and ‘unlearn’ the present ways of imagining a decolonial education system in South Africa.

The myth of a decolonized world and the idea of coloniality in knowledge production

The case for decolonizing the knowledge production in Southern African higher education, like in other non-western countries in general, cannot be sustained without an understanding that the decolonization process that took place in the juridical administrative aspect of colonial domination, did not lead to the full demolition of all colonial tendencies and practices in every aspect of life, such as knowledge production, identity construction and imaginations of development, among others (Grosfoguel, 2007; Mignolo, 2011). Thus, the continuing colonial manifestations in several spheres of life other than the juridical administrative sphere among most of the countries of the South have led scholars such as Grosfoguel (2007) to decry the idea of a ‘postcolonial’ world as myth. According to Grosfoguel:

One of the most powerful myths of the twentieth century was the notion that the elimination of colonial administrations amounted to the decolonization of the world. This led to the myth of a ‘postcolonial’ world. The heterogeneous and multiple global structures put in place over a period of 450 years did not evaporate with the juridical-political decolonization of the periphery over the past 50 years. We continue to live under the same ‘colonial power matrix’. With juridical administrative decolonization we moved from a period of ‘global colonialism’ to the current period of ‘global coloniality’. Although ‘colonial administrations’ have been entirely eradicated, and the majority of the periphery is politically organised into independent states, non-European people are still living under crude European exploitation and

domination. The old colonial hierarchies of European versus non-Europeans remain in place and are entangled with the ‘international division of labour’ and accumulation of capital at a world-scale (2007, 219).

It is from such observations by scholars such as Grosfoguel among others, that the idea of ‘coloniality’ instead of classical juridical administrative colonialism has been developed to capture all the colonial matrices of power that underpin the construction of the present modern world. By the present ‘modern world’ I mean the world system that came into being since the ‘voyages of discovery’ by figures such as Christopher Columbus in 1492 (see Hicken, 2013). According to scholars such as Grosfoguel (2007) and Mignolo (2011) among others, the year 1492 is quite foundational to our understanding of the modern world system and the advent of Western-centred modernity because it is the year when Christopher Columbus under the auspices of the voyages of discovery reached the Americas leading to the development of the idea of the non-Western ‘Other’ (Hicken, 2013). This discovery of the non-Western ‘Other’ paved way for negative developments such as racism, imperialism, colonialism, apartheid, neo-colonialism and coloniality at large because it is the period when Europeans began to question whether a people that are different from them are also human beings (Schumpeter, 1951; Stuchtey, 2011). It was, therefore, the denial of humanity of the non-Western ‘Other’ that justified activities such as oppression, domination, conversion, exploitation, slavery, racism, genocide, neo-colonialism, coloniality and apartheid, among others because the non-Western subject was and/or is viewed not as human enough to be on par with Westerners (Koebner & Schmidt, 1965; Kiernan, 1995; Stuchtey, 2011). Thus, for instance, at the theological level, questions were and/or are still raised, on whether the non-Western subjects have souls or religion while at the secular sphere questions were and/or are still being raised whether the non-Western ‘Other’ has development or human rights (Amin, 2009).

In the context of re-thinking Western models of education in the non-Western world, it is important to question whether the higher education system as a mode of knowledge of production does not propagate the colonial tendency of domination and exploitation. This is important because a decolonized higher education system must be free from the idea that education can be something that some human beings located in a different socio-historical experience can do for and to other human beings located in a different socio-historical experience. In other words, a decolonized higher education system must be able to dismiss the idea of ‘thinking for them’ with

the contempt it deserves because a de-colonized education model must be predicated on the notion that all human beings have monopoly over their thinking, knowledge production and what constitutes progress to them (Fanon, 1968).

The idea of ‘coloniality’ instead of a singular form of colonialism can be a very useful method in questioning the appropriateness of a Western education system in the non-Western world because it enables us to evaluate whether the education models that we adopted after the demise of juridical administration is not just another form of colonialism. This is mainly because the idea of coloniality visualizes other dynamics of the colonial process which includes among them the ‘colonization of imagination’ (Quijano, 2007), the ‘colonization of the mind’ (Dascal, 2009) and the colonization of knowledge and power. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism.

It needs to be emphasized that coloniality is different from classical colonialism because in the absence of juridical administrative colonialism, other forms of colonialism survive by being invisible to the colonized subject. This means the idea of coloniality reveals those colonialisms that are hidden but continue to subjugate, exploit and dominate the non-Western subject hence coloniality needs to be explained at length. According to scholars such as Maldonado-Torres:

Coloniality is different from colonialism. Colonialism denotes a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on the power of another nation, which makes such a nation an empire. Coloniality, instead, refers to a long-standing pattern of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labour, intersubjectivity relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and every day (2007, 243).

In other words, what we can understand from the above articulation by Maldonado-Torres is that the idea of coloniality can help to debunk the problem of colonial domination from a vantage point of a variety of ‘colonial situations’ that include cultural, political, sexual, spiritual, epistemic and

economic oppression of subordinate racialized/ethnic groups by dominant racialized/ethnic groups with or without the existence of colonial administrations (Grosfoguel, 2007, 220).

The idea of coloniality cannot be fully understood outside the history of the emergence of Western modernity and the division of the world into two: The West and the non-West. Thus, the advent of Western-centred modernity is central to understanding the idea coloniality because coloniality is the darker side of Western modernity. What this means is that since the birth of Euro-American centred modernity after the year 1492, the peoples of the non-Western world have come to endure and live under what scholars such as Mignolo (2011) have described as the 'darker side of Western modernity' in opposition to its brighter side in the West. The darker side of Western modernity has been characterised by scholars such as Fanon (1961) and Santos (2007) among others, as the 'Zone of Non-Being' which is 'hellish', non-human and a product of a Western form of abyssal thinking which divides the world into zones of being and non-being or human and non-human. What needs to be understood in this formulation of the division of the world is that the indigenous peoples of the non-Western world live in the Zone of Non-Being, not out of their will, but through conquest, while the conquerors in the name of Westerners in Europe and North America live in the Zone of Being—the brighter side of Western-centred modernity. The question that emerges from the above understanding of how the world system is divided, therefore, is that of whether it is possible for a singular homogenous model of education to address the developmental needs, aspirations and challenges of both the subject that is found in the Zone of Being and that which is found in the Zone of Non-Being. This question is even more important because the manner in which the world system is divided is mirrored in the internal affairs of many of the countries of the non-Western world such as South Africa.

In post-apartheid South Africa, it can be noted that the former colonizers are still reaping the fruits of being on a different side of colonial difference—the dominant side, and the formerly colonized are also still bearing the pains of being on the other side of colonial difference—the dominated side. The urgent question that needs our attention when re-thinking the higher education system in South Africa, therefore, is that of whether it is possible for people who were located and/or are still located on different sides of colonial difference to tell a similar tale about their socio-historical experiences and imaginations of the future. This question is important because the moment people from different sides of colonial difference begin to tell a homogenous tale about their experiences and/or imagination of the

future, there is a possibility that one side of the different socio-historical experiences is silenced. It is from such a premise that the need to decolonize the higher education system as the instrument of re-imagining the past and imagining the future is pluriversalized in such way that it articulates the aspirations, challenges and needs of diverse people from different indigenous epistemologies and practices.

In order to understand how the world is divided into two zones, it is important to briefly get an insight into what particularly distinguishes the Zone of Non-Being from the Zone of Being in descriptive terms. According to scholars such as Grosfoguel (2007) the people located in the Zone of Non-Being are characterized by a catalogue of deficits and a series of lacks, but those located in the Zone of Being systematically reap all the fruits of Western-centred modernity, from the sixteenth century 'rights of people' to the eighteenth century 'rights of man [sic]' and the late twentieth century 'human rights'. Thus, in his description of how those in the Zone of Non-Being are treated by those in the Zone of Being, Grosfoguel argued that,

We went from the sixteenth century characterization of 'people without writing' to the eighteenth and nineteenth century characterization of 'people without history', to the twentieth century characterization of 'people without development' and more recently, to the early twenty first century of 'people without democracy' (2007, 214).

In contrast to the characterization of people in the Zone of Non-Being who are governed through 'appropriation/violence', those in the Zone of Being are represented as progressive and are governed through "social regulation and social emancipation" (Santos, 2007, 46). What all the above means in the sphere of education and/knowledge production is that the developmental needs, challenges and aspirations of people living in these two zones of the modern world system: The Zone of Being and the Zone of Non-Being cannot be addressed by a single model of education since the two spaces of colonial difference are informed by different socio-historical experiences such as indigenous or colonial offspring. Thus, a decolonized higher education model must not entertain the notion that there are people without education and/or without knowledge but must seek to accommodate, nurture and cultivate a variety of experience to pluriversalize the centre of knowledge production (Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Zondi, 2016).

Indeed, it needs to be noted that what typically defines the relationship between the Zone of Being and the Zone Non-Being is not only the vertical

social hierarchization of identities informed by race (i.e. that the lighter ones skin is, the more they have the ability to think) but also that the Zone of Non-Being perpetually produces subjects who are deceived and crushed by the power of the Zone of Being in the academic realm, for example. Thus, according to Fanon:

The colonial world is a world cut into two. The dividing line, the frontiers are shown by barracks and police stations. In the colonies it is the policemen and the soldiers who are the official, instituted go-betweens, the spokesmen of the settler and his rule of oppression...the policemen and the soldier, by their immediate presence and their direct action maintain contact with the native and advise him by means of rifle-butts and napalm not to budge. It is obvious here that the agents of government speak the language of pure force. The intermediary does not lighten the oppression, nor seek to hide domination; he shows them up and puts them into practice with the clear conscience of an upholder of the peace; yet he is the bringer of violence into the home and into the mind of the native (1961, 29).

The above reflection by Fanon clearly reveals that the life-world to which the death project has condemned the damned of the earth, remains generally hellish, but what is even more problematic is the desire of those in the Zone of Being to always dominate and colonize those in the Zone of Non-Being by any means including through the education system. It can also be noted that the relationship between the Zone of Being and Zone of Non-Being resembles what Fanon (1961) described as a Manichean structure. According to Fanon:

The zone where the natives live is not complementary to the zone inhabited by the settlers. The two zones are opposed, but not in the service of a higher unity. ... they both follow the principle of reciprocal exclusivity. ... The settlers' town is a strongly-built town, all made of stone and steel. It is a brightly-lit town, with the streets are covered with asphalt ... The town belonging to the colonized people, or at least the native town ... the reservation, is a place of ill-fame... It is a world without spaciousness; men live there on top of each other, and their huts are built one on top of the other. The native town is a hungry

town, starved of bread, of meat, of shoes, of coal, of light (Fanon, 1961, 38-39).

In the context of education, we can articulate through Fanon (1961) that there is no way in which those who are bent on colonizing others can be expected to come up with an education system that will genuinely promote the developmental aspirations and agendas of the colonised. For instance, colonized peoples are denied the opportunity to know themselves. Instead, the colonizer claims to 'know' the colonized, but this knowledge "betrays a determination to objectify, to confine, to imprison, to harden" (Fanon, 1968, 34). In Fanon's reading, the rich history and institutions of the indigenous population are physically and symbolically destroyed, and in their place the colonizer produces a people who deserve only to be ruled. The colonizer constructs colonized peoples as 'lazy' and 'unproductive,' thereby justifying low wages or coercive systems of labour. The Colonizer also constructs them as 'stupid,' thereby justifying the imposition of the colonial power's institutions and practices. Finally, the colonizer constructs them as 'savage' and 'dangerous,' thereby justifying military conquest and coercive forms of social control. The result is a people "in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality" (Fanon, 1967, 18). More than that, there is an issue of Eurocentrism and scientism at the centre of knowledge production deemed by Wallerstein as the only legitimate mode of knowledge (see Grosfoguel, 2007). For Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Zondi this implies that scientism was coined to be the preserve of modern subjects claimed by Europe and later North America as producers of progressive scientific ideas (2016, 7). These ideas were portrayed to be disembodied, un-situated, objective, truthful and universal (Grosfoguel, 2012). Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Zondi (2016) contend that the Euro-North America conceit, which gave birth to Eurocentrism (Amin, 2009), had far reaching consequences for the non-Western world in general and Africa in particular. Eurocentrism assumed the form of a theory of world history underpinned by a bundle of prejudices, Euro-North American-ethnocentrism, ignorance and mistrust of non-Western people, chauvism and xenophobia (Amin, 2009). To substantiate the above statement, Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Zondi illustrate that:

Despite the existence of strong archaeological evidence that indicated to Africa as a cradle of mankind [sic], Eurocentrism a discourse continued to articulate a Western-centric idea of human history and progress from Greek-Roman classical world

to Christian feudalism, to current European-centric global capitalism (2016, 7).

Since the idea of coloniality reminds us that there are many other colonialisms that survive juridical colonial administration, the question that needs to be answered in the postcolonial era among the countries of the non-Western world is how far we can trust the education models that we inherited from our colonizers without transforming them. In the context of coloniality, can we assume that there is an education system that is free of ideologies of those that once dominated and/or continue to dominate others at international and national levels? In South Africa, the problem of coloniality is exemplified by the current racial inequality in the socio-economic sphere. This even led the former South African President Thabo Mbeki to describe South Africa as ‘two worlds in one country’:

... South Africa is a country of two nations. One of these nations is white, relatively prosperous, regardless of gender or geographic dispersal. It has ready access to a developed economic, physical, educational, communication and other infrastructure ... The second and larger nation of South Africa is black and poor ... This nation lives under conditions of a grossly underdeveloped economic, physical, educational, communication and other infrastructure (Mbeki, 1998, 68).

Indeed, Thabo Mbeki’s observation of South African inequalities cannot be divorced from the manner in which the modern world is generally structured today, but the most compelling question is that of, whether those who live in either the Zone of Being or the Zone of Non-Being within South Africa, need a similar form of education in order to achieve their development needs and aspirations? Thus, put differently, can the people who are economically at the apex of an unequal power structure approve of an education system that equips the less powerful to take power from them? This question is critical in a country such as South Africa where the question of equality in the socio-economic sphere is central to development (Mbeki, 2009).

Indeed, the urgent question is that in light of coloniality in the education system of many of the non-Western world, what can be done in-order to undo the power structure of domination in the sphere of education? This article motivates for a de-colonial approach to the idea of education among the countries of the non-Western world with specific reference to South Africa.

Decoloniality can reveal coloniality and possibly dismantle it in the sphere of education and/or knowledge production at large, because it is a cocktail of liberatory projects of critical thought from the former colonised sites of knowledge production, that seek to make sense of the position of former colonized/or still colonized people since the fifteen century modern world, described by Mignolo (2000) for example, to be Euro-America-centric, Christian-centric, patriarchal, capitalist, hetero-normative, racially-hierarchized (also see Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2014, 91). To substantiate the above, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2014) borrows from Maldonado-Torres' comments that:

By decoloniality it is meant here the dismantling of relations of power and conceptions of knowledge that foment the reproduction of racial, gender, and geo-political hierarchies that came into being or found new and more powerful forms of expression in the modern/colonial world (cited in Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2014, 91).

In the case of South Africa, de-coloniality means that we must conceive and imagine the idea of education beyond the current rhetoric of the skills development discourse that seeks to construct other citizens as workers while others remain as natural owners of the means of production. Thus, the fact that the white population own the means of production as a result of colonialism and apartheid, and also that the black population historically constituted cheap labour, means that an education system that primarily seeks to prepare the previously disadvantaged communities for employment reinforces coloniality, rather than dismantles it, since the worker cannot be equal to an employer -the one who own the means of production. In terms of racial profiling such an education system re-constructs black identity as constituted by being a worker and/or being poor and whiteness as constituted by being rich, powerful and entitled to own resources.

Westernised higher education in the tides of equality in South Africa

Without delving too much into debates surrounding conceptualisation of inequality that opposes different schools of thoughts, the concept is simply viewed as the state of not being equal, especially in status, rights, and opportunities (Kuznets, 1955), depending on contingent circumstances, both personal and social (Sen, 1999, 70) that include education systems. Therefore, this article describes briefly Western Higher Education in South Africa and

the ways in which it produces inequality among citizens. The thrust for decolonizing higher education in South Africa must be seen in the context of the enormous social and economic inequalities that this country is experiencing and from the point of view that change in the conditions that control human existence is imperative to the social transformation of South African society itself (Keeton, 2014). Education thus should enact social change in an improving manner (see Mungazi & Walker, 1997). On the contrary, from British colonial education to Afrikaner education, South African higher education was designed to prolong racism, segregation and the disempowerment of the indigenous people (Kallaway, 2004). Christie (in Msila, 2007, 148) laments that British Mission education was introduced to spread the Western way of life among the 'backward' South Africans and to teach certain colonial work values.

Despite this, there is time to correct the historical record by presenting the African and particularly South African roots of scientific knowledge production through scientific debates. The Colonial government in South Africa, like the rest of colonised African countries, used education to attain their political goals, to make South Africans docile, tame and alienate them from their cultural practices (Msila, 2007). Politicisation of education and abuse of religious principles have been at the centre of knowledge production in South African higher education with the ultimate goal to indoctrinate and domesticate the people (Kallaway, 2004). During the apartheid era, as Gibbon and Kabaki (2004, 123) have emphasised, the entire South African higher education system served to construct and maintain the social, political and economic features of the apartheid order. One of the ways it did this was by contributing to the systematic under-qualification of the majority black population. While the Afrikaans-medium universities worked closely with the government on this, the English-medium universities at the same time played a role in maintaining segregation and oppression (Heleta, 2016). Flabbergasted by the style of colonial education in South Africa, in his speech of 13 February 1990, Nelson Mandela confirmed that:

The crisis in education that exists in South Africa demands special attention. The education crisis in black schools is a political crisis. It arises out of the fact that our people have no vote and therefore cannot make the government of the day responsive to their needs. Apartheid education is inferior and a crime against humanity. Education is an area that needs the attention of all our people, students, parents, teachers, workers and all other organised sectors of our community.

Let us build disciplined structures, Student Representative Councils, a united national teachers organisation, parent structures and parent teacher-student associations and the National Education Crisis Committee (Mandela, 1990).

The reason was, in the past, South African education reflected the fragmented society in which it was based, and it hardly created conscientious, critical citizens. Education as a means of under-democratic social control created individuals who were not only short changed but were also compartmentalised along racial and cultural lines. The education system also failed to address the truly democratic principles based on access, full participation and equity (Mungazi & Walter, 1997; Msila, 2007).

Despite being in a democratic era, tertiary students in South Africa are still being indoctrinated by a Westernised knowledge production system that inhibits most marginalised black students from fully reaping the benefits of a transformative educational system (Msila, 2007). The 2015 student uprising in South African universities has been a striking example of student activism aimed at disrupting whiteness at universities, imposed since colonial times as a symbol of purity, at the same time defined by what it means to be civilised, modern and human (Sardar cited in Heleta, 2016). This Westernised higher education in South Africa is deemed by many decolonial scholars, such as Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013; 2016), Siphamandla Zondi (2016), Teboho Lebakeng (2016), and Savo Heleta (2016) to name a few, to be universalised and contaminated with one racial supremacy, segregated language in education and oppressed ideologies that in all reproduce inequalities among scholars and citizens at large (Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Zondi, 2016). This race supremacy is still engaged in daily open, and/or subtle racism, and the marginalisation of black people. More than that, Westernised higher education in South Africa has fashioned western supremacy, in the form of Euro-American-centric modernity, and hegemony embedded into the knowledge production and higher education philosophies of South African universities (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2016; Lebakeng, 2016). This white supremacy and segregation of black students continues today to fuel inequality among black and white students subjected to westernised models of knowledge production systems which undermine indigenous knowledges within westernised learning institutions.

In the case of South Africa, this Western supremacy has, on its turn, engendered two clustered higher education systems of which one is predominantly white while the rest are black dominated institutions. Consequently, young black graduates lose confidence in their qualifications,

are mostly challenged in the job market compared to their white counterparts from the westernised ranked institutions and knowledge production systems, which subsequently contributes to social and economic inequalities. Western higher education has indoctrinated students instead of liberating them (Gutek, 1974). This higher education system of post-apartheid South Africa was declared a way of maintaining the black South Africans in a permanent state of political and economic subordination fuelled by racial inequalities of apartheid and wealth disparities, largely which remain intact and benefits whites (Msila, 2007; Jacobs, 2016). It has been a means of restricting the development of the learner by distorting epistemology to ensure control over the intellect of the learners and teachers, and propagating state propaganda, especially at the higher education level (Kallaway, 2004). Heleta (2016) argues that institutional cultures and epistemological traditions have not yet changed considerably, despite a myriad of new policies and frameworks that speak about equality, equity, transformation and change in South African universities. Mbembe (2016, 32) exclaims that it was wrong to keep, in the liberation era, the same syllabus which was designed to meet the needs of colonialism and apartheid. Apart from being an exclusive and hegemonic system, Westernised higher education in South Africa is an obvious instrument of control to protect power and privilege (Hartshorne, 1988). In summary, Westernised higher education reproduces an elite instead of creating a democratic education system that promotes equal access for all races and social classes in South African society. It does not produce or inculcate indigenous and endogenous knowledge, instead it is deeply imbricated in the reproduction of epistemic apartheid and imperialism of knowledge that is compounded by 'disciplinary decadence and intellectual historical amnesia' (Rabaka cited in Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2016). Thus, decolonizing knowledge production in higher education in South Africa becomes of paramount importance to the quest for equality among its divided citizens, divided from epistemicides.

The South African higher education system and the quest for equality

The South African higher education system, like that of the countries of the non-Western world in general, is a product of colonial expansion. This context needs to be unpacked because the South African higher education system like that of the rest of the global South is confronted by the question of whether it can adequately address the needs, challenges and aspirations of all those who constitute its demographic composition in the present without being subjected to a process of social transformation. This question is quite

important in a country such as South Africa after 1994. Epistemological transformation was supposed to entail a “reorientation away from the apartheid knowledge system, in which curriculum was used as a tool of exclusion, to a democratic curriculum that is inclusive of all human thought” (Department of Education, 2008, 89; Heleta, 2016, 3). A transformed knowledge production was needed to articulate the developmental priorities, agendas, challenges and aspirations of all the citizens who constitute the demographic base of the new nation. Thus, in other words, the question that remains a bone of contention among the people of South Africa is, whether the current education system prioritizes the aspirations of both the members of previously disadvantaged communities and those that colonized them prior to the advent of the so-called post-apartheid dispensation? However, the transformation efforts have not “translated into any significant shifts in the structure and content of the curriculum” (Department of Education, 2008, 89; Heleta 2016, 3).

In order to question whether the South African education system in the post-apartheid period can address the developmental imperatives, which are likely to be different from those of the colonial and apartheid period, one must be able to map out the role that colonial education played in sustaining colonial perpetrated discrimination and marginalisation, including dislocation of the centre of indigenous knowledge production. However, to adequately map-out the role that the formal education system (as an instrument of knowledge production at large) played during the colonial and apartheid systems in South Africa, it can be helpful to begin by articulating how and why education became a key instrument of colonial administration and governance in the global South in general. This is important to understand because education became an instrument of colonial governance and administration when, in the West, people began to raise questions about whether it is profitable to keep colonies without making their indigenous peoples as anything, but the pure objects of colonial state will as “nobody’s people,” coined for example by the Bismarkian state in colonial Germany (von Joeden-Forgey, 2004). Thus, the question of how to rule the colonized territories became central because, in the process, the indigenous peoples of the colonized world had to be turned into subjects that are disciplined to be subject to others - colonial subjects who would consent to be subject of the colonizers (Hall, 2008). It was, therefore, through such intentions of disciplining the people in the colonies into colonial subjects that the formal process of education was identified as one of the instruments that was to be used to turn the indigenous peoples in the colonies into new subjects that will consent to colonial domination (Fanon, 1968). As Said pointed out:

The Western European literature has for centuries portrayed the non-Western world and peoples as ‘inferior’ and ‘subordinate’; this helped ‘normalise’ racism among the colonialists and developed a notion that ‘Europe should rule, non-Europeans ruled’ (1994, 120).

Indeed, a number of formal education institutions and facilities were constructed in many parts of the non-Western world with the majority of them being established by the Christian missionaries, but this initiative backfired since it was the indigenous Christian educated elite who began to question the legitimacy of the colonial system that produced them. Illustrating from the Algerian Christianity case, Fontaine (2016) laments the dramatic transformation of Christianity from its position as the moral foundation of European imperialism to its role as a radical voice of political and social change in the era of decolonization. More than that, indigenous Christians began to confront the consequences of racism and violence that Christianity had reinforced in European colonies. Brett (2008) contends that the Bible was deemed to be misinterpreted by colonial powers to undergird their imperial designs, which washed away indigenous rights. Across the African continent for example, the first formal attempts at European schooling were made by the Portuguese missionaries around the middle of the sixteenth century, while the more solid foundations for European education were laid in the nineteenth century by missionaries from Great Britain, France and America (White, 2010).

In South Africa, the unintended consequence of the colonial education system driven, by the Christian missionaries, was that it ended up producing some of the most ardent and fiercest anti-colonial figures. However, the attempt to produce a docile and consenting colonial subject was never abandoned leading to the promulgation of the Bantu Education Act of 1953 by the apartheid regime (Kallaway, 2004; Moore, 2015). Pietsch (2013) comments that, the colonial universities in South Africa were set up by settler elites who saw them as both symbols and disseminators of European civilisation in the colonies.

Despite different forms of transformation that South African higher education experienced in the post-apartheid era, the question of western supremacy and western hegemony in knowledge production in higher learning institutions, especially in universities, remains problematic, with specific reference to institutions of higher learning such as universities, because universities as academic institutions, serve as places where future

decision-makers, knowledge producers and leaders in all spheres of life are produced. According to Odora-Hoppers and Richards,

... a university is a place where people think. Researchers produce knowledge. Teachers communicate knowledge. Students acquire knowledge, skills, values, and professional qualifications. If all goes well everyone in the university community serves humanity. None of this could happen without thinking (2011, 1).

The question that emerges out of the above analysis of what universities are, is that of what kinds of 'thinking' should underpin the university in the non-Western part of the world. South African higher education, similar to others in Africa, is not a sole learning institution that exhibits epistemic colonial thinking (Lebakeng, 2016). Thus, in South Africa, the major question that faces its universities as institutions of higher learning, is whether they are 'African' universities, or 'Western' universities. This question is quite significant because the issue of the identity of the university in a space such as South Africa, has a bearing on the nature of graduates that the universities produce and therefore, on the direction that development is heading towards.

However, before we even discuss the question of identity in relation to universities as institutions of higher learning in South Africa, it is imperative to tackle first the question of why a different system of education would be needed. While it is true that, apart from the violence of Euro-American centred political and economic oppression and domination, the indigenous peoples of Africa suffered epistemological violence and colonial domination in knowledge production that left them with almost no original thinking tradition to which they can go back to, the possibility for kinds of thinking that reflect the pluriversity of historical processes outside the purviews of Western epistemology remains real (Ndlovu, 2008, 31-2). Thus, apart from domination, postcolonial theorists such as Bhabha (1994) have reminded us that the colonial encounter was characterized also by other processes that included resistance, negotiation, mimicry, hybridity and alienation. These complex and dynamic processes that characterized the colonial encounter beyond domination and hegemony categories, point to the fact that rather than overwhelmingly altering African ways of living and thinking, colonial domination left behind a patchwork of 'geo-political', 'ego-political', 'theo-political' and 'body-political' forms of knowledge(s) that may not necessarily fall within Western philosophy of what constitutes knowledge.

Thus, even though scholars such as Spivak (1994) have questioned whether the subaltern can speak, and Hobsbawn and Ranger (1983) have stressed the ‘invention of traditions’, it is too simplistic to view the impact of the colonial encounter as though it was homogenous, and as if it left no stone untouched in committing ‘epistemicides’ on the part of the colonized peoples of the global South.

By and large, the impact of direct colonial domination on epistemologies of the colonised varied from place to place and time to time. Thus, according to Quijano,

The forms and the effects of that cultural coloniality have been different as regards to times and cases. In Latin America, the cultural repression and the colonization of the imaginary were accompanied by a massive and gigantic extermination of the natives, mainly by their use as expendable labor force, in addition to the violence of the conquest and the diseases brought by Europeans ... The cultural repression and the massive genocide together turned the previous high cultures of America into illiterate, peasant subcultures condemned to orality; that is, deprived of their own pattern of formalised, objectivised, intellectual, and plastic or visual expression (2007, 169-70).

Quijano’s position is that Latin America became the most extreme case of cultural colonization by Europe, and thus cannot be compared with Asia, the Middle East and Africa, because:

In Asia and in the Middle East, the high cultures could never be destroyed with such intensity and profundity. But they were nevertheless placed in a subordinate relation not only in the European view but also in the eyes of their own bearers. In Africa, cultural destruction was certainly much more intense than in Asia, but less than in America. Nor did the Europeans there succeed in complete destruction of the patterns of expression, in particular of objectification and of visual formalization. What the Europeans did was to deprive Africans of legitimacy and recognition in the global cultural order dominated by European patterns (2007, 170).

What emerges from Quijano's analysis of the impact of colonialism across the regions of the Third World is that in Africa, the process of colonial domination did not totally annihilate and exterminate indigenous African ways of thinking, knowing and patterns of expression, but merely subalternized and inferiorized them in the global cultural order. What then needs to be done to reverse the status quo is to deliberately exalt those subaltern knowledge(s) through formal education, especially in institutions of higher learning such as universities. Thus, Quijano's analysis of the effects colonial domination on African culture(s) and knowledge systems resonates with Odora-Hoppers and Richards when they argue that:

Two centuries of politicised and scienticized denial of the existence of the metaphysics of indigenous people has not eradicated their knowledge systems, their rituals, and their practices ... at least not completely. Whenever we look deeply at African society, or indeed most indigenous societies, the empirical fact that stares back at us is a reality of life lived differently, lives constituted around very different metaphysics of economics, of law, of science, of healing, of marriage, of joy, of dying, and of co-existence. The problem before us is therefore that the academy has not adapted to its natural context, or has resisted adaptation epistemologically, cosmologically and culturally—with immense ensuing cognitive injustice to boot! (2011, 10).

Odora-Hoppers and Richards clearly indicate here that the colonial encounter did not alter everything and everybody in Africa, as scholars such as Comaroff and Comaroff (1991) would have us believe. With reference to the above scholars such as Quijano (2007), Odora-Hoppers and Richards (2011), Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2014, 2016), Zondi (2016), Lebakeng (2016), Heleta (2016), Mbembe (2016), to name a few on decolonising knowledge production in the global south, South Africa needs an education system that fits its context in line with African values, norms and existing indigenous systems of knowledge production, rather than that which was imposed by the colonizers. Thus, according to scholars like Gutto:

Education in Africa needs a fundamental paradigm change which entails, among other things, focusing on confronting, with a view of correcting and departing from, hegemonic knowledge and knowledge systems that are predicated on racist

paradigms that have deliberately and otherwise distorted, and continue to distort, the reality of who Africans really are (2006, 306).

In spite of the significance of the many calls from Fanon (1967, 1968), Quijano (2007), Odora-Hoppers and Richards (2011), Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013; 2016), Zondi (2016), Lebakeng (2016), Heleta (2016), and Mbembe (2016) to name a few, for epistemological paradigm shifts needed to rehabilitate African education so that it serves the developmental aspirations of indigenous African communities, the biggest challenge remains the question of, whether it is possible for the colonized, Westernised educated African elite to unlearn and un-think the education system that produced them even within the African continent itself? It is possible for all African scholars including the emerging generation in the entire global South to challenge western knowledge production systems including the westernised academic traditions to present indigenous knowledge and think out of the westernised box of knowledge production that welcomes them into westernised academic debates. It is time to think how Southern knowledge should be equally presented at the same level as other northern knowledge. Scholars from the global South need to think about which dissemination tools need to be used in order to present their knowledge to the world without falling into the trap of ‘coconut scholars’ (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013) who are western-thinking on the inside, and with an African accent on the outside. In line with this article, transforming higher education in South Africa, in order to suit the contextual needs of the African people is paramount, important and possible.

In South Africa, a number of initiatives have been trialled to transform the education system in general and more specifically within the context of higher learning, but without success (Kallaway, 2004; Moore, 2015). Generally speaking, South African education trajectory reform, including in its higher sector, is respectively constituted of British Education; the Bantu Education Act of 1953; Christian National Education (CNE); Outcomes Based Education (OBE); National Qualification Framework (NQF); National Curriculum Statement (NCS); Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) followed by the South African School Acts (SASA), General Education and Training (GET); Further Education and Training (FET); and the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), to perpetuate awareness between social justice, human rights and inclusivity (Kallaway, 2004; Msila, 2007; Black, 2014). More than that, another important tool of transformation was the Report Commissioned by the Minister of Higher

Education and Training for the *Charter for Humanities and Social Sciences: Final Report of 30 June 2011*, that pushed for the establishment of five Virtual Schools spread across Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Western Cape, and Eastern Cape, with the mandate of dealing with issues of economy, race, culture, identity, literature, performance, creative arts, local languages and rural transformation (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013).

Other education reform initiatives involved only cosmetic changes; the training of Black, Indian and Coloured people as teachers in higher education; the opening of universities to previously disadvantaged communities; and the revision of the curricula with the intention to diversify knowledge production (Kallaway, 2004; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2016). While the initiatives to transform the higher education landscape in South Africa need to be applauded, there is a need to highlight that many of these efforts are caught-up within the spider web of coloniality, because they largely seek to transform the higher education system within its own epistemic terms that do not compromise colonial thinking (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2016).

In 2015, for example, this failure to truly decolonise the knowledge production systems as delivered at the higher education level, triggered a myriad of student protest movements across South Africa. They argued for structural changes including: curriculum change; an epistemological paradigm shift from Euro-centric knowledge to Afro-centred knowledge; a change of university cultures and systems that alienate many; and also to increase access and affordability to education in general (Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Zondi, 2016, 4; Heleta, 2016).

The decolonization part of the transformation process is when the Western-centric epistemic foundations on what constitutes and does not constitute knowledge, skill and education, is not taken for granted. Thus, the lack of questioning of the Western canon, which scholars such as Maldonado-Torres (2004) argues, largely informed by some form of 'epistemic racism' and the 'forgetfulness of coloniality,' means that the very 'black faces' that have replaced the 'white faces' at the South African institutions of higher learning can also practice epistemic racism or epistemic Afro-phobia against themselves - a situation of which Balibar termed 'racism without race' (cited in Rossiter, 2010). At the same time, the increase of 'black faces' in university teaching, management, administration and students, constitutes the process of de-racialisation of the academy, and not decolonization per se that requires a deep epistemological and disciplinary transformations that reflects African identities and other imperatives (Lebakeng, 2016; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2016).

Thus, without questioning the very foundations of what constitutes and does not constitute education and/or knowledge means that the discourse and practice of transformation in South African education in general is conservative, and indeed, not revolutionary enough in that it is a transformation framed within a flawed enterprise which confirms Europe is the only ‘root of authentic thinking’ (Maldonado-Torres, 2004).

Transformation in the South African higher education system, especially in universities, should not remain loyal to the Western premise of what constitutes knowledge, skill and education because the Western worldview is universalist and as such, commits epistemicides on other legitimate views. Similar to other universities in Africa, South African universities need a radical transformation through a decolonisation process that must include, according to Ndlovu-Gatsheni:

... careful and deep thinking on what values should distinguish and underpin an African university; what competencies and crucial skills must distinguish its products; what psychologies, ideologies, visions, and worldviews an African university should nurture and inculcate on its students; and what teaching methodologies should an African university develop in its endeavour to produce pan- African students able to creatively, innovatively and originally respond to African development challenges (2016, 39).

Indeed, efforts such as promoting the ideas of ‘multi, inter and trans-disciplinarity’ at universities whereby disciplines and research methods are free from coloniality, should not be a solution in decolonial thinking, but ecologies of knowledge instead. Whereby knowledges from all continents worldwide should be given equal space in the academy (Santos, 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2016). Thus, in other words, the ideas of inter, multi and trans-disciplinarity do not question the epistemic foundations on which all the disciplines are predicated but merely seeks to move beyond academic tribes in the practice of research and teaching in universities. This does not entail some form of post-disciplinarity that can take us beyond the idea of disciplines in the first place, but allows those indigenous knowledges that were denied voice and entry into the academy to penetrate and pluriversalize our understanding of the world.

In order to achieve a truly post-disciplinary transformation predicated on de-colonial aspirations in the South African higher education system, it will be important to begin by embracing the idea of ‘epistemic disobedience’

(Mignolo, 2009), which will lead the younger generation to question domination in the field of knowledge production. Thus, epistemic disobedience will lead us to reject the idea that all the technologies of subjectivation in knowledge production, are pre-conceived and ‘sewn up’ methodologies in research, which serve as technologies of knowing and seeing that re-inscribe the very epistemicidal Eurocentric worldview. Additionally, there is a need for Africanisation or indigenisation of knowledge production systems in the South African context by putting more emphasis on South African and African scholarship to assume a respectable and remarkable role in the knowledge production which is grounded in South African experiences, sensibilities, aspirations and reflect/articulate South African hope, wishes, experiences, dilemmas and predicaments (Lebakeng, 2016). More importantly, what needs to be rejected in crafting a truly transformed South African higher education system, is the fundamentalism of Western epistemic perspectives that refuse the possibility of ecologies of knowledges (Santos, 2007).

Conclusion

To conclude, it needs to be emphasized that to achieve a revolutionary and/or subversive transformation of the higher education in South Africa or in the non-Western world in general, there is a need to synchronize the social location of the people who are the intended beneficiaries of the education system and their epistemic location. What this means is that the intended beneficiaries of the education system must re-think and or ‘un-think’ what constitutes education from their own ‘locus of enunciation’ (Grosfoguel, 2007). This is important because the impact of the hegemonic Euro-centric worldview on what constitutes higher education and knowledge production on the part of the non-Western subject is that it decouples the epistemic location of the subject that speaks from their social location. Thus, Western education through its false ideal of ‘objectivity’ led to a situation whereby the people who are located on the oppressed side of colonial difference think as though they are on the dominant side of colonial difference. This is possible because the idea of an ‘objective truth’ rather than a ‘regime of truth’ is nothing but a point of view that pretends to be without a point of view. In order to achieve a revolutionary transformation of the higher education system in a country such as South Africa, it is important to reject the notion of a neutral, ‘point-zero’, ‘god-eye view’ (Castro-Gomez, 2003) knowledge, because every knowledge is situated somewhere in terms of ‘geo-politics’, ‘ego-politics’, ‘theo-politics’ and ‘body-politics’ of knowledge production.

What this means is that we cannot continue to conceive of the idea of education from a Western epistemic location which corresponds to our social location, and as such, there is a need to shift from what Mignolo (2009) referred to as ‘the geography of reason’ - that is, reason education from where we are socially located, which is the position of being oppressed, subalternized and dominated. In order to achieve social transformation through decolonising knowledge production, curriculum, language in educations and contents in South African higher education, we need to approach higher education from an antiracist and anticolonial perspective, because, colonial and racial perspectives on South Africa, and Africa in general, have misconstrued South Africa as a country without a centre of knowledge production. Therefore, there is a need for an epistemological paradigm shift in order to perpetuate the importance of indigenous knowledge production and its implications for current and future generations hoping for an inclusive and equal South Africa.

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