

The Rise of the Neoliberal University in South Africa: Some Implications for Curriculum Imagination(s)

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Abstract

The public university in the global South continues to be trapped in an existential slumber, struggling to self-define/self-diagnose its purposes, rationales, goals and agenda(s). Despite the emergence of the #FeesMustfall, #RhodesMustFall, and more recently the #Asinamali student protests, South African higher education continues to adopt neoliberal and colonial conceptions of institutional reforms, seen through the emergence and enactment of performance management instruments, demographic understandings of transformation, incoherent/illogical policy prescriptions, and the use of technology as pedagogic replacement. In this article, I attempt to do two things. Firstly, I critique the South African higher education policy and legislative framework as largely inadequate and neoliberal in nature and designed to reinforce market-orientated logics and discourses. Secondly, and in thinking beyond the neoliberal university, I propose what an inclusive curriculum could look like through a decolonial lens. I end the article with some parting thoughts on the future of the neoliberal university in South Africa, and the potential implications for what I see as the emergence of decolonial and transformative curricula.

Keywords: neoliberal university; ubuntu currere; curricula; decolonialisation; higher education

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Introduction

Since the early 1990s, there has been widespread consensus that the South African higher education system is structurally and existentially trapped in a crisis (Heleta 2016; Kumalo 2020; Madlingozi 2018). This crisis is largely based on the inability to seriously confront the history of imperialism, colonialism, apartheid, and more recently, the neoliberal logic that continues to shape and affect the very ontology and epistemic orientations of higher education in the country. The emergence of the #FeesMustFall, #RhodesMustFall, Black Student Movement, #OpenStellenboschCollective, and more recently the #Asinamali protests proved a painful reminder that nearly 30 years after the end of institutionalised apartheid, neoliberal forms of coloniality still persist and appear deeply entrenched in the higher education system (Hlatshwayo 2021; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013, 2018). One of the most striking placards that was held by a student during the #RhodesMustFall protests in Cape Town during 2015–2016 was a message that read, “Our parents were sold dreams in 1994—we want a refund”, condemning the then Mandelanian and Tutu fallacy of South Africa as the “rainbow people of God” (Baines 1998), and showing the country as a failed political experiment that has not lived up to the hopes of millions of black people who are still trapped in structural and intergenerational poverty (Booyesen 2016; Chikane 2018a, 2018b).

In this article, I attempt to do two things. Firstly, I offer a critique of what I see as the neoliberal logic and its (shifting) discourses, both in the global North as well as in South Africa. I see and read this discourse as colonial, oppressive, alienating, and unsustainable for scholars in the university. This emergent neoliberal discourse presents itself through various national policy and legislative frameworks and institutional practices. Neoliberalism as a mode of being in the world often sees students as fee-paying “clients” and academics as “knowledge producers” who are all engaged in the marketplace of ideas, selling these educational “products” to enable these clients to obtain employment and contribute to the economic needs of the market. Secondly, and thinking beyond the neoliberal university, I attempt to provide an alternative and inclusive conception of curricula, one that is rooted in decolonial thought. In this article, I hope to contribute to thinking beyond the neoliberal university through higher education curricula, and to what the empirical decolonial possibilities could be for teachers and lecturers in the classroom. I now turn to outlining the philosophical orientations of the article.

The Philosophical Orientations

There is an existing relationship between neoliberalism, market fundamentalism and coloniality. Mignolo’s (2007) colonial matrix of power attempts to capture, diagnose and explain the institutionalised and deeply entrenched coloniality in power, knowledge(s), ontological bodies and legalised authority that continues to persist long after formalised colonisation has ceased. The colonial matrix of power is largely influenced by the works of Anzaldúa (1987), whose conceptual idea of the “borderlands” continues to shape the way we think about our “schizophrenic” and

unstable nature of engaging with Western epistemic traditions and Euro-American modernity, “race” and racism, and imposed binaries such as black/white, academics/students, men/women (Valenzuela 2019). Put differently, the idea of the borderlands attempts to clearly capture the instability/limbo-ness/two-ness that comes with black people living in spaces that are full of contradictions and discomfort (Acosta 2018). The marginalised subalterns who live, breathe and think in such spaces use these contradictions and resort to what Anzaldúa (1987) refers to as the *la facultad*, which reflects the ability to look beyond the surface and to seek deeper meaning in our complex lifeworlds (Acosta 2018). The conceptual notion of the borderlands is similar to Du Bois’s (2008) double consciousness and the struggles of black Americans in being *both* Negroes and Americans, showing the complicated and contradictory existential tensions of living/thinking/breathing as a Negro (being African, immigrant, coloured, non-black, and distrusted) and being American (being black but identifying with the neoliberal and democratic ideals of America, culture, heritage, corporate identity, and trusted) (Moore 2005).

Returning to Mignolo’s colonial matrix of power, the framework has three sets of dimensions, that is, the coloniality of power, the coloniality of being, and finally, and perhaps most relevant to this article, the coloniality of knowledge (Maldonado-Torres 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013; Quijano 2000). The coloniality of power refers to the unequal power relations and the institutionalised political/geopolitical/economic stranglehold that the global North continues to have on the global South. For Nkrumah (1966), it is “neo-colonialism” that reflects the ever-present economic colonisation and structural dependency that the formerly colonised still have on their colonial masters. Walter Rodney (1972) has furthermore incisively mapped the architectural relations between the economic growth and industrialisation of the global North at the expense of the enslavement, looting and degradation of Africa. The coloniality of power is at the heart of the emergence of Euro-American modernity and its neoliberal/market-based logics.

The second dimension, the coloniality of being, is best captured in the French philosopher René Descartes’s onto-epistemic argument that *cogito ergo sum*, “I think therefore I am”, premised on the understanding that because “I am” (that is, ontology), what I then think is valid, legitimate and constitutes universal knowledge (that is, epistemology) (see Okello 2020). This shows the extent of the dominance/colonisation/ownership of global South epistemic traditions, and the dispossession of black/indigenous/marginalised groups from access to *recognised* and *valued* forms of thinking, being, existing, and theorising. The apparent, deliberate and racialised collapsing of being/living with thinking/theorising is meant to suggest that only those who occupy particular kinds of bodies can have access to reason, are human beings and can be recognised. And finally, the coloniality of knowledge refers to the intellectual/epistemological colonisation that the global South continues to experience and rife against—Euro-American modernity and its imperial/military/corporate empire. This refers to what Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) calls the “cognitive empire”, the

unequal knowledge production and epistemological colonisation that we continue to experience, feel and negotiate. Scholars such as Kumalo (2020), Madlingozi (2018) and Nyoka (2020), in an attempt at navigating and negotiating the coloniality of knowledge, have “resurrected” the Black Archives with an eye to recentring and re-placing African marginalised knowledges in curricula.

I now turn to exploring more closely the emergence of neoliberal logics in higher education.

Higher Education in Context: Global and Local Perspectives

We cannot write, think, or theorise about the effects of neoliberal capitalism and its market-orientated fundamentalism on the curricula without first discussing the emergence of neoliberalism in higher education.

Since at least the 1970s and the 1980s, the higher education system in the global North has been subjected to what could be seen as systemic processes and policies of reform in an attempt at curbing government spending and capitalising on the new commercial opportunities resulting from the “globalised knowledge economy” (Shore 2010, 15). In a chapter titled “Beyond the Multiversity: Neoliberalism and the Rise of the Schizophrenic University”, Shore (2010) argues that these reform processes in the global North could be characterised by mainly two important trends. First is the massification of the higher education sector combined with the decline of government funding per student. For Shore (2010), this indicates a fundamental shift in the global North in that university education ceases to be seen as a “public good” beneficial to the broader collective in society and is rather seen as an individual economic investment in one’s future. Second, and far more troubling for us, this shift in the 1970s/1980s produced a corresponding change in public discourse concerning universities, which are no longer seen as places producing critical citizenship, intellectual thought and crucial debates; instead, these ideas have morphed into a new vision of the university, one that firmly believes that universities are there primarily to help transnational businesses and corporations to operate and succeed in the increasingly competitive and cut-throat global economy (see Fitzsimons 2004; Kelsey 1998; Readings 1996, 13; Shore 2010; Strathern 2000). This corporate colonisation recalibrates the purposes of a university towards the needs of the industrialised state and its neoliberal benefactors. Thus, rather than imagining and enacting an inclusive and transformative curricula and pedagogy, the focus in the global North was on what the market needs and how universities could best support them. It is in this early moment that we begin to see the coloniality of power and the coloniality of being aligning in the academy to produce new forms of marginality for the university, academics and students.

It should be noted that these neoliberal changes have been accompanied by various quality assurance and funding mechanisms as well as regulatory measures underpinned by the discourses of “performance management”, “benchmarking” and “standardisation” (see Shore 2010). These were not only unprecedented, but have also

shaped the sector in radical and transformative ways (see Crook, Gross, and Dymott 2006; French 2001; Robertson and Dale 2002; Shore and Wright 1999, 2000). This resulted in Olssen and Peters (2005) arguing that universities' "traditional professional culture of open intellectual enquiry and debate has been replaced with an institutional stress on performativity ... strategic planning, performance indicators, quality assurance measures and academic audits" (Olssen and Peters 2005, 313–14). For Slaughter and Rhoades (2000), the adoption and institutionalisation of neoliberal regimes in higher education could be classified and categorised in two ways. Firstly, they coin the term "academic capitalism" to refer to the expansion in corporate welfare, where universities increasingly see themselves as private companies that need to achieve financial "solvency" and "viability" through efficiency, productivity and performance management instruments. This includes investing in companies, start-ups, shares, revenues, grants and other profit-generating measures that make the university less financially reliant on government support (Slaughter and Rhoades 2000). In South Africa, we especially see both historically white universities and research-intensive universities tapping into their expansive and lucrative donor communities and possessing large assets of reserves that enable them to attract the best students and academics to their institutions. This logic is also seen in the growing obsession with grant applications and raising what is often called "third-stream income" in the academy, where universities are encouraging academics/researchers to raise their own research grants to support the profile of the university in the global rankings.

Secondly, Slaughter and Rhoades (2000) suggest that neoliberalism in the global North, and to some extent everywhere, is also seen through "managed professionalisation", where the university adopts cost-cutting measures, outsources its employees, and introduces precarity and employment insecurity as a financial and performance management instrument that is meant to enable and facilitate commitment, productivity and "good performance". In the South African context, this is where we see the introduction of "contract lecturers", private cleaning companies, private security companies, performance management and key indicators that are meant to reflect corporate performance targets, using the pressures of performance as an incentive to keep one's job and get promoted. Building on the work of Slaughter and Rhoades (2000), I wish to add another dimension to the neoliberalisation of the academy: the phasing out or loss of funding of humanities and social sciences modules and programmes to benefit STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) research, because the former are seen as economically useless and not offering any employment/corporate/economic/capitalist benefit to the market compared to the highly sought-after needs of the latter programmes and qualifications (Bawa 2019; Goodley and Runswick-Cole 2022; Greenspan 2019). Various funding mechanisms, scholarships and grants are geared towards providing support to programmes that are perceived as valuable and essential to economic growth and corporate economic interests. This "epistemic inequality" belies the fact that the humanities and social sciences have actually been "quiet contributors" to innovation in the past (Linton 2018).

American political scientist Francis Fukuyama perhaps best lays out the philosophical and pragmatic orientations of neoliberalism in the social world in his book, *Liberalism and Its Discontents* (2022). He argues that what sets neoliberalism apart from classical liberalism is its hostility towards and rejection of the role of the state in the economy. For Fukuyama, economists such as Milton Friedman, Gary Becker, George Stigler, Ludwig von Mises, and Friedrich Hayek are influential in neoliberal thought because of their sharp critique of the state's involvement in the marketplace and their argument that the market itself is more than capable and efficient in allocating the "scarce" resources (Fukuyama 2022, 19–20). In the American context, neoliberalism tended to align with libertarianism and has tended to promote the sanctity of individual freedom from the ever-encroaching powers of the all-powerful state (Fukuyama 2022), resulting in Robert Putnam lamenting in the early 2000s that Americans are now "bowling alone", separated and disengaged from their community (Putnam 1995). It should be highlighted that ever-present in the neoliberal economic thinking is the fear of Thomas Hobbes's Leviathan, that is, the conception of an all-powerful/all-knowing/all-seeing state that is susceptible to abuse and undermines individual freedoms in society.

Since at least the 1990s, the neoliberal concern with market-orientated vision, goals and solutions in the South African higher education context has found expression in the policy documents, legislations and vision of the democratic government. *Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education* (hereafter White Paper 3) articulates this tension in how the government sought to balance the need for sector-wide reforms or reconfiguration as well as ensuring that the skills and qualifications that are being produced help benefit the then depressed economy. The higher education reform articulated by White Paper 3 suggests that there was a mismatch between "the output of higher education and the needs of a modernising economy. ... In particular, there is a shortage of highly trained graduates in fields such as science, engineering, technology and commerce" (Department of Education [DoE] 1997, 3–4). Although White Paper 3 does claim to attempt to lay the foundations for the "critical civil society" needed in South Africa, the emphasis appears to be on responding to the stunted economic growth and the needs of the labour market by building high level "competencies" and "expertise" that are necessary for the development of an envisioned "modern economy" (DoE 1997). This neoliberal logic and its discourses are also articulated in the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997, in which the legislative framework attempts to "restructure and transform programmes and institutions to respond better to the human resource, economic and development needs of the Republic" (RSA 1997, 2).

The introduction of the South African National Qualifications Act of 1995 (SAQA), which established the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and its structures, was meant to steer South Africa along the path of high skills, high growth as well as strong economic development, which would be central in laying the foundations for a new democratic society (Ensor 2004). The NQF was meant to produce a curriculum for both the school and higher education that would be "relevant" to the world of work and its

demands for scarce skills. For Boughey and McKenna (2021, 41–42), and I agree with them, this “relevance” meant that the establishment of the NQF was a broader reflection of the “commodification of knowledge” in global higher education, and its attempt at socially constructing the “knowledge workers” who are needed for the neoliberal context. These knowledge workers are required especially considering a growing discourse around the “Fourth Industrial Revolution” and the rise of the techno-rational being who can be/think/live in this neoliberal reality. The construction of the NQF was meant to facilitate transnational learning beyond the borders of nation-states, with students being able to study without being worried about recognition and acknowledgment of their prior modules/courses. Thus, the NQF introduced “learning outcomes” or “learning competencies” to describe what learners would have to do in order to obtain a qualification (Boughey and McKenna 2021, 42). It was based on these competencies and learning outcomes that some curriculum scholars felt knowledge in general and disciplinary knowledge in particular was being “sold out” and sacrificed in favour of smaller “chunks” of learning outcomes, which were at times segmented and differentiated, and thus deprived students of access to powerful/theoretical knowledge (see Allais 2014; Ensor 2014; Muller 2009).

In “Thinking Outside the Ivory Tower: Towards a Radical Humanities in South Africa”, Gibson (2015) offers a critique of the ways in which higher education institutions in South Africa, and historically white universities in particular, have appropriated and adopted neoliberal discourses, giving up on the radical and grand ideas of social change, and instead thinking/working/believing in pragmatic ideas of “civic engagement”, “ethical capitalism”, “entrepreneurial good” and “corporate social responsibility”. For Gibson, this echoes former UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’s arrogant comment that “there is no alternative” to neoliberalism (see Berlinski 2011), and the attendant argument that what is needed to address social justice, urgent structural reforms and decolonial aims is “self-commodification” (Gibson 2015, 184). This self-commodification indicates the extent to which individuals within the neoliberal academy are meant to think differently. It frustrates and denies the possibilities of achieving what Said called “critical humanism”, which continues to be sacrificed on the altar of what the current Ramaphosa administration in South Africa sees as the usefulness of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and its “corporate goods”, that is, those scientific/technological/innovative/commercial skills, attributes, and expertise that are needed for economic and industrial growth (Radakrishnan 2007).

One of the most insightful and incisive perspectives on academics navigating and negotiating the neoliberal university in South Africa can be found in Khunou et al.’s (2019) book, *Black Academic Voices: The South African Experience*. In the book and throughout the different painful and haunting chapters, the authors reflect on the intersectional challenges of racism, gender discrimination, classicism, obsolete forms of performance management, and the existential crisis that black women academics continue to experience in South African higher education. Evoking what the decolonial scholar Anzaldúa (1987) terms thinking from the “borderlands”, these black academics

reflect on the traumata, anguish and suffering of navigating the colonality of power/being/knowledge and the existential crisis it brings them, their mental health and their standing in the field. In a chapter titled “Thinking While Black”, Grace Musila (2019) writes about the difficulties of being, existing, thinking and acting black in the academy, trying to prove oneself as valid, legitimate, and belonging, while at the same time confronting the sustained assault and critique of black epistemic traditions. For Musila, the epistemic struggles and ontological erasure that confront black and African intellectual traditions reflect the very same patterns of existential crisis where Eurocentric discourses regard black persons and Blackness as non-being, as objects and entities that could be owned, controlled, subjected, undermined and dominated. In another book chapter, Khoza-Shangase (2019) navigates what she calls “intellectual and emotional toxicity” because of her struggles with institutional racism, sexism, harassment and the misrecognition that comes with being black, female and an academic in a white, colonising space.

It should be noted and appreciated that the role, history and functions of a university remain deeply contested to this day. Simply put, questions concerning what universities are for and what role they should play in society are not easy questions, and they cannot demand easy answers. The early medieval university in Europe was largely dominated by theological orientations, where art was studied and understood in largely theological and Christian terms.¹ It was John Henry Newman (1852) who argued, in *The Idea of a University*, that:

A University is a place ... whither students come from every quarter for every kind of knowledge; ... a place for the communication and circulation of thought, by means of personal intercourse. ... It is the place to which a thousand schools make contributions; in which the intellect may safely range and speculate. It is a place where inquiry is pushed forward, ... discoveries verified and perfected, and ... error exposed, by the collision of mind with mind, and knowledge with knowledge. ... Mutual education, in a large sense of the word, is one of the great and incessant occupations of human society. ... One generation forms another. ... We must consult the living man and listen to his living voice, ... by familiar intercourse to adjust together the claims and relations of their respective subjects of investigation. Thus is created a pure and clear atmosphere of thought, which the student also breathes. (Newman 1852, 1)

For Newman, the purposes of a university are built on critical reflections, deep engagements, scientific explorations and the testing of ideas shared between both the teachers and students in mutual knowledge production. For Wilhelm Von Humboldt (1903), the purpose of the Western university should respond to three primary functions and principles—that is, unity of research and teaching, freedom of teaching, and finally self-governance (Boulton and Lucas 2011). Both Newman’s and Von Homboldt’s ideas have largely shaped the contemporary university, with variations of teaching and

¹ Cleaveland suggests that the University of Bologna, which was founded in 1088, was an exception as it was largely secular in its ideology and operations (Cleaveland 2008, 78).

learning, research, and community engagement, all constituting central institutional functions and operations. For the African higher education system, both the University of Al-Karaouine or Al-Qarawiyyin and the Al-Azhar University are often considered the very first institutions of higher learning on the continent, dedicated to the theorising and scholarly pursuit of Islamic theological education in the region. In “Beyond Afropessimism: Historical Accounting of African Universities”, Paul Zeleza (2006) maps the different types of universities that have emerged in Africa as a result of first, the Alexandria Museum and Library, second, the early Christian monasteries, and third, the Islamic mosque universities. In the southern African region, missionaries set up higher education institutions in 1828, with the South African College in Cape Town (later the University of Cape Town) largely dedicated to catering for the interests of white, colonial settlers in the colony. In 1866, a college for what were then Afrikaner settlers was established called the Stellenbosch Gymnasium, which would later become Stellenbosch University in 1918. A relatively small college dedicated to the educational pursuits of Africans, called Lovedale Institution, was created in 1841, modelled around the American industrial and vocational colleges. In 1873 the University of the Cape of Good Hope (later the University of South Africa in 1916) was established, initially with the function of examining the body. On the emergence of the colonial universities, Zeleza writes:

The first colonial university college in Northern Africa was the Gordon Memorial College founded in the Sudan in 1902, renamed Khartoum University College in 1951 and Khartoum University at independence in 1956. A decade later, in 1912, the Islamic Institute was founded; it became a college in 1924 and was renamed the Omdurman Islamic University in 1965. In Egypt, Cairo University was founded in 1908 despite the vehement opposition of the colonial governor. It grew to become one of the largest universities in Africa, with a student population presently of 155,000 students and more than 5,500 faculty members and instructors. In 1938 the university formed a branch in Alexandria, which later became Alexandria University in 1942. In South Africa, a new era in higher education began with the establishment of the Inter-State Native College in 1916, later renamed the University College of Fort Hare in 1951. Fort Hare became a magnet for not only black South African students but also for African students from across Southern Africa as attested by its list of alumni who include such nationalist leaders as Nelson Mandela, Seretse Khama, and Robert Mugabe. (Zeleza 2006)

So far, I have outlined the philosophical and decolonial orientations of this article. I have also discussed, in some detail, the emergence of the neoliberal logics/thinking in the higher education sector. Now, I turn to providing what I see as the solutions in higher education curricula.

Rethinking Curricula: On Curriculum Design, Pedagogy, and a *New Student*

The need to rethink/reconsider/reimagine what an inclusive and decolonial curricula might comprise is at the very heart of the fight for a decolonial university. Real and

material transformation and decolonisation of the higher education system cannot occur without the urgent task of tackling curriculum reforms and the need to dismember coloniality. Thus, my discussion in this section will focus on the need to rethink curriculum design, teaching and learning, and the need to reconsider students beyond commodification.

In “Currere’s Active Force and the Concept of Ubuntu”, Le Grange (2019) introduces the onto-epistemic notion of “ubuntu currere” to argue and call for a radical reimagination of the curriculum and curricula thinking in the academy. In this framework, Le Grange draws on Pinar (1994) and Wallin (2011) to suggest that we need to return to the classical conception of *currere*, that is, “to run”, to be active, to bring about this dialectical and radical concept of ubuntu currere. Le Grange argues that this currere will bring about “newness, the creation of things unforeseen, experimentation, and the expansion of difference and movement” (Le Grange 2014, 1288). The challenge, at least according to Le Grange, is that curriculum conceptions and their design/construction have often been vertical, unequal, hierarchical, top-down and imposed on students. I agree with Le Grange’s assertion that traditional forms of curricula and curriculum design/construction/imagination(s) in South African higher education have often occurred through various methods of academic freedom and individual autonomy, with academics sitting alone in their offices, departments or universities and exercising their own discretion and designing their own desired curriculum products. The site of curriculum design or what Bernstein (2000) calls the field of recontextualising is often hidden from students (and at times, colleagues); it is deeply political, unequal and often reveals the role that ideology plays in designing a course, module or programme, with lecturers often imposing their vision, goals or agenda on what they want to teach, why and how. This process often begins to position students as passive consumers of curriculum knowledge who are meant to play no role in its design, implementation or experience (Freire 2018). Furthermore, the current top-down conceptions of curriculum design reinforce the unequal power relations in the classroom in terms of how the academic or teacher becomes the neoliberal, managerial leader who possesses “expertise” knowledge and cannot be questioned or critiqued, and who is there to transmit the curriculum goods to the “clients” who paid for them. Part of a commitment to rethinking curriculum design demands progressively and decolonially repoliticising the space of academic freedom to be a site of critical, epistemic and productive conversations and dialogues between the academics and students in thinking in dialectical terms on the kind of curricula that is required outside and beyond the needs of the neoliberal university. Ubuntu currere proposes a more horizontal curriculum in the academy, one that gives insight into our students’ lived experiences, tapping into them and drawing from them in our curricula. This will ensure that the curriculum is meaningful, democratic,² and accessible to students, instead of

² In this article, democracy is conceptualised as and thought of beyond Samuel Huntington’s (1991) electoral participation/voting and Rieta Abrahamsen’s (2000) social goods in society. Democracy in this context, and in higher education, demands inclusive, socially just and ethical ways of

imposing our ideology and vision on them. A democratic curriculum, one that takes into account students' lived experiences, voices, input and critical lifeworld(s), was a central organisation motif of the #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall protests in 2015–2016. Academics adopting a more horizontal, democratic and inclusive approach to curriculum design is part of the decolonial agenda.

Curriculum design and its imaginations also offer an opportunity to achieve what Kumalo (2020) calls “epistemic restitution” by recentring, re-placing and reprioritising Othered and marginalised African and global South epistemic traditions that continue to be silenced and pushed to the margins of higher education curricula. This means that we need to take seriously the critical questions: Whose knowledge is valued, recognised, and legitimated in our curricula? Where are they located geopolitically? And whose knowledge(s) continues to be epistemically erased, devalued and disregarded? These questions, although seemingly simple and straightforward, offer a path forward to thinking through and being reflective and reflexive about the kind of curricula and scholars we draw from and what they represent. This task reflects the ethical calls on thinking from the “borderlands” in adopting what could be called an excavationist task of resurrecting/resuscitating our knowledge(s) and bringing them to the fore. This is seen in the important work of Thulani Mkhize, who revisits the works of S.E.K. Mqhayi, Nontsizi Mqgqwetho and the Reverent Tiya Soga (Mkhize 2018; Nxasana 2011, 2016) as decolonial devices to re-read the contributions of these texts in the current context; it is also seen in Siphokazi Magadla’s work in shining a spotlight on women combatants and the liberation movements in South Africa, focusing on the role played by guerrilla girls, combative mothers and what she calls the “in-betweeners” in liberating South Africa (Magadla 2015, 2017, 2021a, 2021b), and Tshepo Madlingozi’s work in providing a critique of the neoliberal and colonising nature of the South African Constitution, and the need to fashion a post-conquest Constitution that recognises the humanity and epistemic integrity of the historically conquered in South Africa (Madlingozi 2016). These works and others offer insights into the rich intellectual/decolonial traditions that the Black Archive holds, and the possibilities for enactment in concrete terms what an inclusive and decolonial higher education curricula could look like.

I agree with Kumalo’s (2018) rejection of the term epistemicide in relation to African and global South epistemic traditions, as our knowledges were (and to some extent still are) largely hidden/silenced/marginalised/oppressed/Othered, *but* they are still there—they exist; we know them, and we need to recentre them and reprioritise them in our curriculum design/imaginings. This, for me, achieves a number of decolonial objectives. Firstly, it responds to the Cartesian duality and its colonising mission in situating white forms of humanity and their intellectual contributions as the “only game in town”, where white heteronormative males were seen as the only ones who have

being/seeing/doing that enable and facilitate mutual respect and collaboration between academics and students.

access to humanity, dignity, rationality, respect, and epistemic recognition. The presence and recognition of African and global South epistemic traditions ensure that black people and other marginalised groups are also seen as human beings who are rational and have access to reason, spirituality, and culture. Secondly, representing marginalised/Othered knowledges in higher education curricula as compulsory decolonial texts forces students to critically engage with the marginalised works, how they are read and perceived as well as reflecting on the growing epistemic inequality between the dominance of the global North and the subjugation of the global South. In particular, it could help highlight to students what role they can play in achieving what De Sousa Santos (2007) calls the “ecologies of knowledge”, or in Mbembe’s (2016) and Ramose’s (2016) terms, the need for a “pluriversity”, that is, an institution that looks beyond the monolithic epistemologies as prescribed by a *university*, and one that will bring about an ecosystem of knowledge(s) that enable and promote cumulative knowledge-building that can co-exist without collapsing or colonising one another.

In “Teacher and Student with a Critical Pan-Epistemic Orientation: An Ethical Necessity for Africanising the Educational Curriculum in Africa”, Ramose (2016) argues that the aims of education should talk to what he calls the “critical pan-epistemic education”, that is, love, courage, respect, sensitivity, good health and epistemic love for the teacher and the student. Adopting the Freirean task of reimagining the teacher/student relationship beyond Hegel’s master/slave dialectic (see Cole 2004), Ramose proposes five ways that this critical pan-epistemic education could be enacted both in curriculum design and in the teacher’s and student’s lives. Firstly, he proposes the need to actively discourage lies in private and also in educational life; secondly, he proposes holistic education/learning; third, he emphasises the need to understand that dogmatism is what he calls the “deadly enemy of science”, and that the truth is always relative, contextual, and provisional. And finally, Ramose suggests that the fruits of education should be used to contribute towards the concrete achievement of justice and peace (Ramose 2016, 554). For Ramose, any meaningful educational dialogue and conversation between the teacher/student in seeking to be/breathe/think/live outside the shackles of the “neoliberal university” requires a critical pan-epistemic education as the foundation so that we can finally reach the pluriversity. Ramose writes:

[It is a] challenge to talk about the “university” because *unius* (one) is not *plurius* (many). On this basis pluriversity must replace university. Without this replacement the “university’s” claim that it is the site of a pluriverse of epistemological paradigms is conceptually flawed even if it may empirically reflect the opposite. Here it is instructive to consider the translation of “university” into some African languages. In South Africa there is seriously no translation except the imitation of the sound university echoed in what purports to be a translation, for example, *unibesithi*. I suggest instead, *sedibeng sa dithuto tse phagameng*. By contrast, the Igbo translation of this concept is *mahadum* meaning “know all of them” (Ugwuanyi 2007, 100). The “all” in the Igbo vernacular stands in sharp contrast to the *unius* singular, meaning one, and the *versus*, meaning side or version in Latin. ... Thus the pluriversity and not the university is an educational institution open to acquire knowledge of all that may be known. It is a pan-epistemic

institution. The continued use of the word “university” speaks against the pan-epistemic openness of the pluriversity. It is sufficient to recall the problem of “the one and the many” in Ancient Greek and early Medieval philosophy in the West in order to show that ontologically, being manifests itself as pluriversality. (Ramosé 2016, 551)

Although Ramosé does not provide in concrete terms what critical pan-epistemic curricula could look like, and how they could practically benefit students, it is nonetheless a useful framework in thinking about the kind of roles, functions, and purposes of education outside the needs of the neoliberal university. Ramosé’s challenge to us, in thinking through what inclusive, democratic and decolonial curricula could look like, demands that we also take into consideration the kind of student that is in front of us, their backgrounds, where they come from, and how the curricula and academy continue to treat and position them in relation to knowledge. The literature’s neoliberal, market-orientated logic of looking at students as fee-paying “clients” who bought and should be sold education is problematic, and potentially anti-education (see Cini 2019; Ngcamu 2019; Sonn and Vermeulen 2018). It tends to create a number of challenges and tensions. Firstly, the “student as a client” discourse reinforces the neoliberal, colonial commodification of the university, curriculum and knowledge. Secondly, it reduces the academic and intellectual project as only meant to serve the needs of the marketplace. According to this logic, we teach only that which is required and considered a “scarce skill” in the economy, what is needed to help spark and stimulate job opportunities and encourage industrial development. Simply put, all forms of teaching and learning (including curricula) need to serve the knowledge economy and its knowledge workers. Thirdly, it reinforces Bourdieu’s (1984) and more recently Biesta’s (2009) suggestion on the cultural production/reproductive value of education, in how the elites use the different forms of capital (social/economic/cultural) and their habitus through education to reinforce and institutionalise their privilege and structural advantages in society. Thus, the emergence of the #RhodesMustFall, #OpenStelleborschCollective, Black Student Movement and other student formations in 2015–2016 was indicative of the crisis of the neoliberal university and its inability to deliver on the promised “democratic dividends” of post-apartheid South Africa.

Overall, a democratic and inclusive curriculum in the university demands that we firstly rethink and reimagine the student/academic relationship so as to ensure that both student and academic have a voice in the curriculum design and knowledge selection space. Secondly, Ramosé’s critical pan-epistemic curricula are inherently democratic and decolonial in that they demand that we recognise the kind of student in front of us and that we tap into their complex lifeworlds in our teaching and learning practices.

Some Parting Thoughts

The rise of the neoliberal university in South Africa reveals a global trend across the international higher education system in which the corporate marketplace is gradually being seen as useful for achieving economic growth, industrial development and upward social mobility in society (Brown 2019; Darder 2012; Whyte 2019). The public

university in South Africa has similarly adopted and co-opted this corporate logic, with the wide-ranging introductions of performance management instruments, efficiency, quality assurance and employment insecurity (including outsourcing) in an attempt at mimicking the corporate community. In this article I have attempted to do two things. Firstly, I outlined my critique of the emergent neoliberal university in South Africa as a colonial, alienating and marginalising ontological and epistemic entity. Secondly, I have attempted to propose, through decolonial tools, my thoughts on what an inclusive, transformative curricula could include in our work. Furthermore, I called for the decommodification of higher education curricula, knowledge, and students, and the need to rethink/reimagine/reconsider how progressive relation(s) between the teacher and student could be emancipatory for both parties, as well as for the future of the academy itself.

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