

Dynamics of Decoloniality in South Africa: A Critique of the History of Swiss Mission Education for Indigenous People

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Abstract

This paper presents a new framework to analyse missionary education in South Africa, using Grosfoguel's conceptual and methodological lens of coloniality of power, coloniality of knowledge, and coloniality of being. Firstly, the paper introduces the theoretical lens that undergirds this study and describes the three above-mentioned dimensions. Rather than seek generalisations concerning missionary education in the historical record, the paper presents an analysis of the endeavours of the Swiss Mission Society as an example of Protestant evangelism in South Africa. I indicate how the Swiss Mission used education to racialise and hierarchise the indigenous people and how, in this process, knowledge and indigenous people were dehumanised. The argument is based on examples drawn from the Swiss Mission's teacher training institution, namely the Lemana Teachers' Training College, near Elim. Based on the paper's critical analysis, I propose how power structures, colonised knowledge systems and beings could be decolonised.

Keywords: Swiss Mission; Lemana; coloniality; decoloniality; mission education; power; knowledge; being

Introduction

The consequence of colonialism and coloniality on indigenous social, political and economic organisation is currently a serious concern. The call to decolonise university programmes, intellectual landscapes and infrastructures has become the norm. Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986, 16) argues that the most important area of domination regarding colonialism was the domination of the mind and imagination. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013, 177–195) posits that schools, colleges, universities and churches in Africa are sites for the reproduction of every kind of coloniality. Comaroff (1989, 661) explains that “the image of colonialism as a coherent, monolithic process can no longer be sustained.” Decolonial theorists (Maldonado-



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Torres 2007; Ngugi wa Thiong'o 1986; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013) have been most concerned with the consequences of conquest for the colonised and its impact on indigenous social, political and economic organisation. The economic, political or social control of indigenous people could not have been complete or effective without mental control. Ritskes (2012) maintains that the decolonisation project should push back the ongoing colonialism and colonial mentalities that permeate education, the media, government policies and "common sense." Oelofsen (2015, 130) concurs:

To claim that the colonial project stops having an impact on the newly decolonised country and its citizens, is to misunderstand how deeply the colonial project affected these countries and their citizens. In order to overcome the legacy of colonialism, it is necessary to also decolonise the intellectual landscape of the country in question, and ultimately, decolonise the mind of the formerly colonised.

The aim of this paper is to examine the historiography of the education provided for indigenous and non-European peoples during the 19th century in South Africa and to point out how the mission project used colonialism to undervalue indigenous people's culture, mind and imagination. Comaroff and Comaroff (1991; 1997) argue that the roots of colonisation during the missionary period were in the form of knowledge claims, power relations and in a set of hegemonic cultural discourses. To explore how the decolonisation project in post-democratic South Africa may be realised, it is necessary to examine the impact of colonialism on indigenous people. This paper begins by back-grounding and contextualising the concepts of colonialism and decoloniality. Thereafter, the Lemana Teachers' Training College, which provided education to indigenous people during the British colonial period in South Africa, is examined to indicate how coloniality colonised indigenous people's culture, imagination and mind.

In this paper, I seek not only to examine the colonial implications of missionary endeavour on the intellectual landscape of indigenous people, but also to inquire how this endeavour is related to: 1) the coloniality of power; 2) the coloniality of knowledge; and 3) the coloniality of being. Rather than seek generalisations in the historical record, I have chosen to analyse an instance of Protestant evangelism in South Africa; that of the Swiss Mission Society. Examples have been drawn from the Swiss Mission's teacher training institution, namely Lemana Training College, located near Elim in the former Transvaal or the *Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek* (ZAR), a region settled by Voortrekkers who left the Cape Colony during the Great Trek, which commenced in 1836.

Theoretical Framework

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013, 63) argues that "the worst form of colonisation ... on the continent is the epistemological one [colonisation of imagination and the mind] that is hidden in institutions and discourses that govern the modern globe." To Cesaire (2000, 32), a leading decolonial theorist, colonialism is "a disruptive, 'decivilizing,' dehumanizing, exploitative, racist, violent, brutal, covetous, and 'thingfying' system." Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986, 16) emphasises:

Colonialism imposed its control of the social production of wealth through military conquest and subsequent political dictatorship. But its most important area of domination was the *mental* universe of the colonised, the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world. Economic and political control can never be complete or effective without *mental* control [italics author].

The colonisation of the mind aimed at destructing and undervaluing indigenous people's social practices as related to literature, religion, education and history (Ngugi wa Thiong'o 1986, 16). In most instances, the colonisation of the mind, which was more destructive than the colonisation of material resources, took place through the inculcation of Western epistemologies. However, there is a need to transcend beyond colonialism to understand what its effects were during various historical epochs (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 243). Maldonado-Torres (2007) opines that colonialism focused on the economic and political power a particular sovereign nation wielded over another nation. Further, Maldonado-Torres argues that the long-standing patterns beyond colonial administration that emerged as a result of colonialism are often not investigated.

In this paper, I prefer the term “coloniality” to understand how the colonisers undervalued and dehumanised the imagination and the mind of indigenous people. The concept of coloniality was first introduced around 2000 by Anibal Quijano (2000a; 2000b) and Walter D. Mignolo (2000). Mignolo (2005, 6) explains that coloniality is the “darker side” of modernity and it should be unveiled. This darker side, which exists as “an embedded logic” continues to enforce domination, exploitation and is always portrayed as being good for everyone. Maldonado-Torres (2007, 243) emphasises that 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.

Institutions such as schools, colleges, universities and churches are continually reproducing coloniality (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013, 177–195). The call to decolonise the minds and the mental universe (university programmes, infrastructures and sites of knowledge production) is incessant.

Undoubtedly, undoing colonialism is fundamental to the decolonisation project. There is a need to revisit, reimagine and redefine spaces where indigenous and non-indigenous people experienced colonialism, neo-colonialism, imperialism and underdevelopment (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013). The reason to visit these spaces is that the domains of culture (the intellect, language, aesthetics, religion of indigenous people) still remain colonised. In this paper, I use Grosfoguel's analysis of coloniality: coloniality of power; coloniality of knowledge; and coloniality of being (see Figure 1) to unpack coloniality of the mind of indigenous people during the period of Swiss Mission activity in the Lemana Training College.

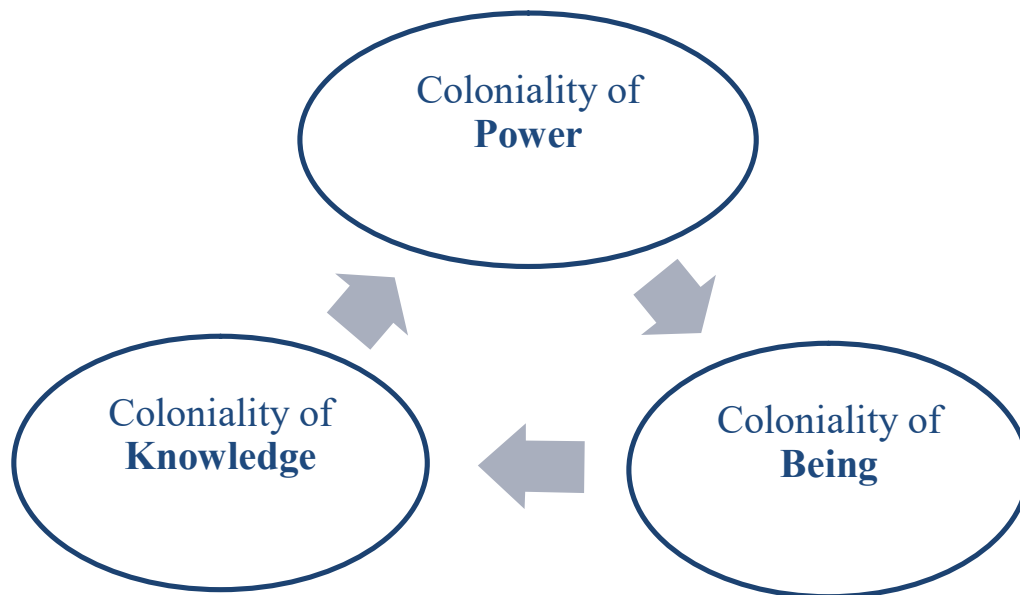


Figure 1: Grosfoguel’s model of coloniality (Grosfoguel 2007, 203–246)

Coloniality of Power

Quijano (2000a) defines the term “coloniality of power” as racial and epistemological hierarchies that are entangled within structural hierarchies such as global capitalism, which continues to be a factor after the period of colonisation. Coloniality of power assists in investigating how the current “global-political” order has been constructed, constituted and configured into a racially hierarchised, Euro-American-centric, Christian-centric, patriarchal, capitalist, hetero-normative, hegemonic, asymmetrical, and modern power structure. In this paper, I use the concept of the “coloniality of power” to understand how the West has used conversion to Christianity to colonise the consciousness and the minds of Africans to accept Eurocentric hierarchisation of power. In her book, titled *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, Miranda Fricker (2007) posits that the notion of (social) “power”—which she defines as “a socially situated capacity to control others’ actions” (2007, 13)—can be used “to create or preserve a given social order.” This social power is displayed in various forms of enablement. In most cases it manifests itself in disbelief, misinterpretation and silencing on the “other.” Fricker (2007) argues that this power’s main interest is in what she refers to as “identity power.” The latter is manifested through “identity prejudices”—prejudices we hold about our own and the other’s identity.

Coloniality of Knowledge

The coloniality of knowledge has something to do with impact of colonisation on the different areas of knowledge production. Mbembe (2015) cautions that institutions of learning cannot continue providing a “Westernised” kind of knowledge. The purpose of promoting Western and Eurocentric thought, imagination and “knowledge” in Africa was to erase the colonised from mainstream existence and place them as “things” in the realm of otherness. Coloniality of knowledge compels colonial scholars to understand how and why

other knowledge systems, such as indigenous knowledges, have been pushed to the territorial side of society (Grosfoguel 2013). Mpofu (2013, 109–110) enriches our debate in this article by saying:

The coloniser does not only distort the history of the colonised, slaughter their knowledge systems and empty their heads of self-confidence and their hearts of the emotional stamina to live without colonial domination. But he goes ahead to manufacture accusations and labels against the colonised, among many of the accusations are—laziness, drunkenness, backwardness, propensity to violence, dirtiness, stupidity, ignorance, bad luck and spiritual damnation—all of which require the coloniser to intervene and save the colonised from the abyss of many “lacks” and “deficits” that bedevil him and his lot.

When missionaries came to Africa, they consciously or unconsciously levelled damning accusations at indigenous people who were perceived as inadequate beings who deserved to be developed and civilised by inculcating Western knowledges in them. Different institutions of learning were used to promote Eurocentric knowledges. Foucault (2013) distinguishes between two kinds of knowledge which dominated these institutions: knowledge as organised in disciplines, scientific fields or areas (*connaissance*) and general knowledge, which creates conditions for an object of knowledge to be taken up by a discipline (*savoir*). In his book, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon (2008, 14) explains that it is imperative “to liberate the black man from the arsenal of complexes that germinated in the colonial situation.” In other words, Fanon believes that it is necessary for indigenous people to overcome inferiority and superiority complexes that are hidden in Western knowledge systems. Steve Biko (2004), the founder of the Black Consciousness movement in South Africa, contends that colonialism left indigenous people with an inferiority complex, which in some ways crippled them psychologically.

Further, the coloniality of knowledge poses epistemological questions that are linked to: 1) the politics of knowledge generation; 2) questions of who generates which knowledge and for what purpose; 3) the question of relevance and irrelevance of knowledge; and 4) how some knowledges disempowered/empowered communities and peoples (Ake 1979; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013). Coloniality of knowledge contributes to an understanding and exposure of epistemic silences, conspiracies, and epistemic violence that are hidden within Eurocentric epistemologies.

Coloniality of Being

The concept “coloniality of being” was first reflected in Walter D. Mignolo’s writings as early as 1995. The concept “coloniality of being” came into existence after scholars of colonialism/decolonialism concluded that colonial relations of power did not only leave indelible marks in the areas of authority, sexuality, knowledge and the economy, but also on the general understanding of being. Mignolo (2007, 242) asserts that the concept “coloniality of being” responded to the “need to thematise the question of the effects of coloniality in lived experience and not only in the mind.” The concept penetrates issues of human ontology (Wynter 2003, 257–337), restoration of denied self-pride and sovereign subjectivity (Blyden 1967). Mignolo (2007, 256) summarises the coloniality of being as follows:

The coloniality of Being appears in historical projects and ideas of civilization which advance colonial projects of various kinds inspired or legitimized by the idea of race. The coloniality of Being is therefore coextensive with the production of the color-line in its different expressions and dimensions. It becomes concrete in the appearance of liminal subjects, which mark, as it were, the limit of Being, that is, the point at which Being distorts meaning and evidence to the point of dehumanization. The coloniality of Being produces the ontological colonial difference, deploying a series of fundamental existential characteristics and symbolic realities.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) argues that coloniality of being is important because it helps us to investigate how humanity for indigenous people was portrayed, which subsequently led to the “objectification”/“thingification”/“commodification” of these people.

A Brief Overview of Colonisation in South Africa

The period of colonisation in South Africa, which stretched from 1652–1910, can be broadly be divided as follows: the Dutch East India Company (DEIC) Rule (1652–1795); the British occupation of the Cape Colony (1795–1803); the Dutch occupation under the rule of the Batavian Republic (1803–1806); and British rule (1807–1910) (Le Roux 1998). My focus will be on the period between 1807 and 1910 because during this period missionaries introduced formal education for indigenous people (Horrel 1963; Shepherd 1941; Tabata 1959).

In the following section, I critique education that was provided to indigenous people by the Swiss Mission in the former Transvaal. To do this, I use the decolonial theoretical lens I have alluded to above.

Missionary Education at Lemana and the Coloniality of Power

The missionaries used conversion to Christianity to colonise the consciousness and the mind of the indigenous people to accept Eurocentric hierarchisation of power. Missionary advocates propagated and promoted the notion of racial hierarchy. In 1902, Rev H. A. Junod, an eminent missionary-anthropologist of the Swiss Mission, wrote that although indigenous people and colonists were both human, they were different in terms of character, heredity and mental health (Junod 1902, 2). Religion was used as a marker of social hierarchies.

In 1903, when a system of grant-in-aid (through the *Education Ordinance of 1903*¹) was introduced in the Transvaal (Transvaal Education Department 1904), a requirement for the grant was:

Each black mission school had to be under the superintendency of a white missionary or any other person recognised by the government as being competent and efficient to exercise control and act as an intermediary with the government in all matters relating to the school.

1 The Education Ordinance of 1903 was premised on the principle that there should be separate schools for white people and black people (Union of South Africa, 1936, par 95). The funding model was to be differentiated according to race groups.

Between 1906 and 1952, only white superintendents were appointed at Lemana Training College (Seroto 1999). By appointing white superintendents at the helm of their institutions, the Swiss Mission created a racial and political order that was Euro-centric and Christian-centric. Veronelli (2015, 113) explains:

... race is a classification that dictates “this being is not human” or “is less than human”; racialization is the process that dehumanizes, the processes of dehumanization that reduce people by putting them in situations and relations that strip them of their humanity.

This hierarchical order was aimed at prejudicing indigenous people about their identity.

Missionaries tended to create a space for the state to inculcate its colonial policies and to undermine indigenous chieftainship. The relationship between missionary institutions and the state was of dramatic contestation. This relationship was not necessarily based on religious differences, but also racial differences. The Swiss Mission Society missionaries, in their teaching at Lemana Training College, emphasised the notion that white people are superior to indigenous people. This is evident in the perception that students at Lemana had about their chiefs. These students reiterated in the *Lemana Training College Magazine* (n.d.) that they would prefer a white man to represent them in parliament because he/she would be able to look after their interests. The social and political power, which Fricker (2007, 13) explains as “a situated capacity to control others’ actions” and which was a practice at Lemana, had a negative psychological impact on indigenous people (Pyke 2010, 551).

The Swiss Mission Society also had a tendency to undermine indigenous people’s royal sovereignty and chieftainship, by opposing their communal rites. One of the rituals they opposed was traditional circumcision. Missionaries uncompromisingly denounced traditional circumcision since they believed that it contradicted precepts of Christianity. One of the reasons why the Swiss Mission undermined traditional rites and practices of indigenous people was that the missionaries saw a direct link between the traditional practices of indigenous people and witchcraft. Kaplan (1986, 166) commented that in most cases missionaries were unable to separate the Christian faith from such European trappings as Western dress, norms, mores and etiquette.

Missionary Education at Lemana and the Coloniality of Knowledge

The institutionalisation of missionary education took various forms: from infant care and day schools to secondary schools and colleges to universities and seminars (Jensz 2012, 295). The curriculum offered by these institutions were designed in such a way that indigenous learners would be obliged to meet the economic, political and cultural demands of their mission societies as well as the government of the day. The year, 1854, “marked an important era in the development of state interest” (Kallaway 1984, 50) in the schooling of indigenous people. During this year Sir George Grey took over from Lord Charles Somerset as governor of the Cape Colony and tried to use native education to subjugate indigenous people (Christie 1991, 36). In 1855, Sir George Grey (in Rose and Turner 1975, 275) outlined why it was regarded as important to allow mission schools to operate in South Africa, stating:

If we leave the natives beyond our border ignorant barbarians, they will remain a race of troublesome marauders. We should try to make them a part of ourselves, with a common faith and common interests, useful servants, consumers of our goods, contributors to our revenue.

The statement above explains the aim of education for indigenous people hidden within Eurocentric epistemologies and curriculum. The education of indigenous people was introduced to enhance the security and social progress of the colonists. To accelerate the call made by Grey when he took office in 1955, Thomas Muir, governor of the Cape in 1892, introduced practical subjects in the curriculum such as singing, needlework, woodwork and cookery (Behr and MacMillan 1971, 379–380). Grey's intentions were removed from what education actually aims at.

In their response to the call made by the British colonial government, under various superintendents general, the Swiss Mission (Christian Express 1878, 1–2) reiterated:

...we want to see natives become workers and we believe that Christianity will be a chief cause of their becoming a working class.

In 1906, the Principal of Lemana Training College, Rev D.P. Lenoir (1906), advocated:

Our mission is in sympathy with the efforts made by the government to impress upon the native mind the importance and the moral value of manual labour, and to offer to pupils in training institutions an opportunity to be developed in some form of industrial knowledge.

Both the missionaries and the then British government converged on the point of dictating what was relevant and suitable for indigenous people. This convergence disadvantaged indigenous people in many ways. White missionaries under the British government enjoyed epistemic privileges while indigenous people were subjected to knowledge which was inferior.

The question of relevance and irrelevance of the knowledge system as contained in the curriculum and the question of who decided on which knowledge to be consumed, was problematic. Manual labour, for example, was thought to be relevant for indigenous people whereas mental activities were thought to be relevant for white people. This is evident in the declaration made by Rev Henri Junod (1902, 5), during his superintendence of the Lemana Training College, when he outrageously stated:

...the head of the native is not able to sustain the strain of mental study so well as the heads of the whites. He has not been accustomed for generations to school attendance and to mental work, and would apt very quickly to get headaches, nervous exhaustion arising from overstudy if he has not as a diversion the bodily exercise of outdoor work.

The Swiss Missionaries at Lemana College were trapped in what Carl Vogt (a German/Swiss scientist and politician) referred to as a belief that indigenous people were intellectually inferior because they were physically primitive and that their brains were undeveloped (Baker 1974, 129–132). The objective of training student teachers in manual and handcraft work was to supply cheap labour to the colonists.

The re-ordering of the indigenous people's way of life through mission education also extended to the notion of gender. Training in manual labour had a gender differentiation motive. The Swiss Mission stressed the "gospel of work" as a means of remedying a so-called wayward kind of existence and transforming it into a more organised way of life (Harries 2007, 82). Boys and girls received different training: boys did carpentry; girls did needlework (Lemana Training Institution 1918, 1). This gender role differentiation had a more deep-seated origin. Through the establishment of domesticated training (such as sewing and needlework), the missionaries wanted to extend their belief that women do not belong in the public sphere but in the home. Dressmaking and domestic arts enabled women to provide clothing for mission residents and earn extra income through selling their products (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997). Although the gender role differentiation was in keeping with the spirit of the times, the rationale behind the differentiation was to subjugate indigenous people to menial tasks; to keep them from aspiring to more affluent careers; and at the same time, make them useful to the colonists and not only to the missionaries. Missionaries also believed that appropriate gender-specific clothing was a sign of Christian respectability and consequently converts were required to adopt Western dress and customs, thereby further alienating them from their traditional roots and conventions.

The other challenge that faced mission institutions was the notion of "spiritualicide" and "epistemicide"—the destruction of spirituality and knowledge. This refers to the "slaughter" of indigenous people's knowledge systems, thereby destroying their self-confidence. Two months after his arrival at Rikatla (one of the mission stations in the former Transvaal) in 1889, Henri Junod (cited by Harries 1997, 171) described the noise made in the village adjoining the mission station:

These are outbursts of strident, savage, breath-taking laughter, sometimes dominated by a strange cry, like the wailing of a child. Then the whooping, howling, all the most hideous noises of which the human throat is capable. When the shouting calms a little, the voices of young boys or women intone a sort of song without melody in which violent inhalations and guttural sounds abound. What a concert! I think of the descriptions of Goethe and others of witches of Sabbaths.

The statement above promotes hierarchisation of knowledge and epistemological practices such as spirituality. The notion that the "spiritual activities" of the indigenous people were backward, uncivilised and stupid, is questionable. The subtext of this statement was that Eurocentric knowledge was superior to indigenous knowledge.

Missionary Education at Lemana and the Coloniality of Being

In this section, my focus is on how history, as an academic subject, portrayed indigenous people as taught at Lemana Training College. The history syllabus at Lemana was divided into three periods: at first year level 1652–1828; second year level 1829–1918; and at third year level the whole South African history and history of the British Empire (Transvaal Education Department 1918).

In the syllabus, the history of South Africa was seen to begin with the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck at the Cape in 1652. However, archaeological evidence illustrates that prior to the arrival of the European settlers at the Cape in 1652, indigenous peoples resided in and lived a nomadic life at the Cape of Good Hope. The Khoi, who originated from the north and eastern regions of what is now Botswana, were the first people to settle in South Africa and were already resident in the area when Van Riebeeck arrived. The San were the oldest indigenous people to settle at the Cape of Good Hope; the Bantu-speaking people also referred to as black people or Africans established themselves more in the southern part of South Africa (Booyse, Le Roux, Seroto and Wolhuter 2014) in time, and especially during the British expansion to the south-eastern frontiers.

Reference was made in the syllabus and history content taught at Lemana to indigenous people as “blood-thirsty savages” (Maree 1984, 151). Indigenous people were dehumanised because the colonial powers regarded them as uncivilised. The history taught at Lemana drilled into the mind of the black child the idea that in all conflicts white soldiers emerged as victors, whereas the black people were the villains (Molteno 1984, 66). Fraser (1925, 516) argues that the teaching of history was a learning of names and dates and it depicted the life of a tribe in what was a distant epoch. The study of indigenous people’s customs and culture, showing how society as a whole was preserved, was not reflected in the subject history as taught at Lemana.

Thus, the teaching of history during the missionary period did not assist indigenous people in accessing the truth about whom they really were and where they came from. The ideological underpinning of colonial powers, which suggested that indigenous people were inferior beings, contaminated the education which was provided at Lemana.

Conclusion

In this article, I have given a historical perspective of how the Swiss Mission used hierarchical power, knowledge and the understanding of being to colonise the consciousness of indigenous people. This paper addresses how racial hierarchy was implemented at Lemana and was reinforced by the knowledge provided to student teachers and how student teachers were to perceive themselves. Three dimensions of decoloniality (decoloniality of power; decoloniality of knowledge; and decoloniality of being) are crucial in this analysis of the provision of education by the Swiss Mission during the British colonial period.

Firstly, race was a defining factor when superintendents of the Lemana Training College were appointed. The portrayal and emphasis of “race” at the Lemana Training College dictated relations of superiority and inferiority that are the product of domination and power and turned them into a natural and acceptable phenomenon (Quijano 2000a).

Further, knowledge production at Lemana Training College was Euro-centrally imbued and hegemonically installed within the structure and consciousness of the curriculum offered by the Swiss Mission to the indigenous people. Swiss missionaries used race attributes to codify

intellectual differences between white people and indigenous people. The fact that students at Lemana were encouraged to focus on manual work illustrated the clear and exclusive claim that they were not “wired” to do subjects that were associated with rational thinking. Missionary education at Lemana was designed in such a way that indigenous people were denied the space to develop mentally; and this denial, which was race based, was internalised by some students.

Finally, how the humanity—their being—of indigenous people was portrayed in the history syllabus offered at Lemana Training College, was problematic. The history of South Africa excluded indigenous people, attributed achievements during this period to Europeans and presented them at the centre of history. The glorification of the European history alienated indigenous people and made them feel irrational and primitive. Kedebe (2004, 99) argues that if indigenous people “have a low opinion about themselves, they will be less ambitious and less inclined to think that they have the calibre to achieve great goals.”

In conclusion, missionaries were unique in the role they played in influencing and shaping the minds of the indigenous people. Missionary education operated within the colonial discourse, which corroborated the notion that indigenous people were undeveloped and of low intellectual standing. The education provided by the Swiss Mission at Lemana Training College provides a premise and a means to evaluate intellectual paradigms that also existed elsewhere during the missionary period. Scholars of anti-colonialism and decolonisation are not only faced with confronting racialism, sexism and related hierarchies, but are also faced with the challenge of confronting coloniality of power, coloniality of knowledge and coloniality of being.

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