Reflections on Prospects, Practice and Interventions of the Decolonial Turn

Edited by

Mellissa Simbisai Mlambo

and

Dominique Wnuczek-Lobaczewski



ESI

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Introduction

Mellissa Simbisai Mlambo and Dominique Wnuczek-Lobaczewski

This book emerges from a sustained intellectual project, the conviction that the project of decolonisation cannot be confined into a single discipline but an ongoing venture which reaches into all fields of knowledge. This conviction was found in the first preface of the Journal of Decolonising Disciplines (JDD), published in 2019, where Professor Vasu Reddy outlines the intention of the journal—to collectively look outside of the academic disciplinary boxes within which intellectuals often place themselves (Reddy 2019: v). This call welcomed disciplinarians (knowledge producers) outside of the humanities, arts and social sciences to submit their contributions toward the project of decolonisation. This invitation befitted the decolonial tradition, calling for a declaration from where these 'knowledge producers' speak[1] (Reddy 2019: vi). The contributors to this book responded to this call, producing a wide range of inputs from various disciplines that find themselves within, but not limited to philosophy, the arts, history, economics, information and data sciences as well as the health sciences (OpenAI ChatGPT 2025).[2] The chapters within this book serve not only as a reminder of the work done, but also as a reminder of work yet to be accomplished in the ongoing shifts towards decolonisation. The chapters within this collection, while varied in theme and scope, converge around a shared commitment to the ongoing project of decolonisation—challenging dominant paradigms, reclaiming marginalised knowledge systems and reimagining disciplines in ways that are inclusive, just and transformative.

The first chapter in this volume titled, *Mobile App and Data Specifications for Afro-Colombian Ancestral Medicine Units in Bogota: Technology Affordance and Data Sovereignty Limitations* by Laura Niño Cáceres, Camila Nino Fernandez, Daisy Yoo and Caroline Hummels, critically addresses a space

1 Ramón Grosfoguel defines the locus of enunciation better as the "the geo-political and body-political location of the subject that speaks" (Grosfoguel 2011; 5)

2 This list only name a few of the many disciplines from which the chapters in this book draw and is thus, not an exhaustive list.

which is often overlooked in conversations around decoloniality. While we look towards knowledge generation in most approaches to decolonial practices, the authors bring to our attention the question: Whose data is it anyway and who gets to benefit from it? As Sooliman *et al*. (2021), highlight:, the question of knowledge generation and how it has shaped learning institutions still benefits from 'the continuing belief that the Western liberal education system is superior' (Sooliman *et al*. 2021: 4). In a similar fashion, this chapter investigates how Western data practices within healthcare have largely shaped not only medical practices, but also influenced the decisions on who benefits from these practices. This unique international case study highlights the need for interdisciplinary approaches to the practicalities of decolonisation. Using a mobile app, the authors explore the practical application of the decolonisation of Digital Health and Data Sovereignty by providing a digital space for ancestral medicine practitioners. This chapter looks beyond data as a way of including the human within the digital.

Similarly, the chapter, *Decolonial African Posthumanism: Beyond the Eurocentric Human* by Mourad El Fahli, seeks alternative ways through which one can look for the human outside of the confines of Western humanism where 'Man [is] the measure of all things'. Bringing the human central to the discussion of decolonial practice within philosophy, the author poignantly offers African humanism and African metaphysics as the alternative. The author problematised the Eurocentricity of definitions on what it means to be human and more importantly, who gets to be categorised as "man". Decolonial posthumanism in this sense offers a call to challenge practices of "othering". To challenge this practice, therefore, means to look toward "the human" and what it means to be "human". Brown scholar, Anthony Bogues, argues that 'to be human is to have the capacity to be creative, to be able to recreate oneself, and to do that with a certain amount of freedom, not a freedom that is fixed and frozen but one that constantly emerges from the horizons of those who are unfree' (2020: 76). The author calls for this emergence by looking toward more inclusive understandings of the human condition.

States of being and doing emerged as central conversations within the varied inputs of this volume. The chapter, *Listening Affects: Evocations on Sound/Silence as a Mode of Decolonial Thinking/Being/Doing/Theorizing* by

Girinandini Singh, emphasises the need for action where silence, specifically within the colonial, becomes empirical for the decolonial. Silence, in this instance, not only 'speaks', but echoes a restriction and constriction that colonial institutions (like those of higher education) impose on those that have historically been excluded. This chapter speaks to Sooliman's statement: 'It is time to write out of a world of silence' (Sooliman 2020: 1). Looking again toward the role of the self within these silences, the author offers a reflection on how these silences are experienced and activated by the reader through their inclusion of 'Conversations in the Margins'. More importantly, this chapter also speaks to Bogues' (2020) notion that being human requires the need to be creative. Through the inclusion of creative practices, the author challenges the confines of writing and creatively incorporated sound to combat the silences.

Silence, as a form of restriction, hinders the unfree. In the chapter *Historical Justice: An Interplay between Colonialism and Capitalism*, Ibraheem Rasras addresses the connection between freedom and justice by investigating the dynamics of 'historical injustice'. Through an investigation into the lives of the oppressed after oppression, the author explores varied states of historical justice and the interplay between capitalism and colonialism (ICC). By focusing on the past and future of Mali, as a site of conflict, the author investigates the cyclical implications of colonisation. The argument, therefore, reminds us that colonialism does not halt at the point of emancipation, but rather continues and seeps into the futures of the oppressed through a coloniser's projections against the past. Rasras further referred to the need for self-building, thus, a return to the reconstruction of narratives of the self and calls for alternative ways of looking toward the past.

The chapter, *Mohlomi's Indigenous Knowledge System as a Tool to Decolonise the Basotho: The Botho Perspective* by Johannes Seema, contributes to the discussion on the building of the self by turning toward the use of indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) as a tool for decolonisation. This chapter also critically addresses the Western sentiment of knowledge generation through written literature by implementing the alternative of an African philosophy of *Botho* (Chief Mohlomi's philosophy) as an oral philosophy, which is the basis for the chapter, rather than written literature.

It is evident in this chapter that Chief Mohlomi's philosophy incorporated IKS and can be used as an example of how we look to the alternative past. Furthermore, this chapter can be read in conjunction with the final chapter of this book, *Decoloniality and Decolonisation Leadership Inclusion: Insights from Higher Education Experiences*, as it speaks to traditional leadership paradigms. Seema furthers the argument that Chief Mohlomi should be viewed as an Africanist for the advancement of Africanism.

In this chapter by Susan Haskins, titled, *Classics and Decolonising the Curriculum: A Case Study Using the Teaching of Sexuality*, Haskins turns to Greek and Roman literature which is often considered as a discipline which is irredeemably entangled with empire. Haskins considers the value that classics offer in the process of decolonisation. Classics offer the opportunity to engage critically with narratives of the West and ultimately to challenge them. In particular, Haskin's focus on the teaching of sexuality in ancient Greece and Rome in relation to Africa, demonstrates the opportunities that re-engaging with the classical world holds to support decolonisation. This is done not by reinforcing hierarchies but to promote assessment with informed agency.

Further highlighting the gaps that are yet to be addressed within the project of decoloniality, the chapter, *Decoloniality and Decolonisation Leadership Inclusion: Insights from Higher Education Experiences* by Jabulani Nyoni and Lineo Toolo, specifies the need to address the gaps that exist within scholarship on leadership models. Echoing Rasras' chapter on *Historical Justice: An Interplay between Colonialism and Capitalism*, Nyoni and Toolo further observe deep-rooted animosity and mistrust, more specifically among university academics. The authors' critical review of literature constitutes the need for decolonial leadership within higher education in South Africa. It is evident through the chapter of Nyoni and Toolo that there is an urgency for an honest dialogue on power dynamics that still plague leadership models within universities. The authors pose whiteness as one of the urgent dynamics which require redress. This chapter contributes largely to the discourse on leadership inclusivity in colonial afterlives.

The chapters included in this book address the multifaceted points at issue. These contributions call for reflection on the pragmatic and

conscientious directives of decolonising disciplines. They go beyond the need of ranged voices and the multidisciplinary, by rethinking ways of being, ways of knowing, and ways of thinking. On the outset, the JDD, as a journal, aimed to provide 'an intellectually unique space for considering responsive and cutting-edge research across all disciplines' (Journal of Decolonising Disciplines: 2019). This volume is a culmination of the achievement of this aim. To paraphrase Sooliman *et al*. (2021: 6): 'while the project of decolonisation might read to some as conversations limited to the halls of academia, these contributions have motivated the practical realities in which they are grounded'.

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Chapter 1: Mobile App and Data Specifications for Afro-Colombian Ancestral Medicine Units in Bogota: Technology Affordance and Data Sovereignty Limitations

Laura Niño Cáceres, Camila Nino Fernandez, Daisy Yoo, Caroline Hummels

Introduction

In the heart of Bogota, Colombia, a unique healthcare initiative has been unfolding since 2014. Kilombos, ethnomedical units providing healthcare services to displaced Afro-Colombian populations, have been operating with municipal funding. These units, led by Afro-Colombian traditional healers, midwives and nurses, practice ancestral medicine that has been historically marginalised. The partnership with the municipality, however, came at a cost: extensive bureaucratic data collection through paper forms, which limited the agency of Kilombos' practitioners and their ability to prioritise their traditional healing methods.

In 2023, one of these units, Kilombo Yumma, hereafter referred to as Yumma, took a significant step toward digital transformation by developing a mobile app to streamline data collection and achieve representation of Afro-Colombian ancestral medicine practices in digital spaces. This chapter explores the journey of Yumma's digital transition, examining the application of human-computer interaction (HCI) principles rooted in decolonial computing and the limitations of achieving data sovereignty for marginalised communities within Western-dominated technological and healthcare systems.

Context: Kilombo Yumma and its digital transition

Kilombos emerged as a response to the displacement of Afro-Colombians due to the Colombian civil war in the 1990s. Despite receiving municipal funding since 2014, the bureaucratic processes imposed on Kilombos through paper-based data collection created friction between their traditional practices and the expectations of modern healthcare audits.

To address these challenges, Yumma, supported by a grant from Share-Net International, sought to transition from paper forms to a mobile app. This move toward digitisation has been part of a broader phenomenon since the 1960s, when digital technologies replaced traditional processes to increase efficiency. However, this shift often comes with challenges, particularly for communities like Yumma, whose practices are deeply rooted in cultural and spiritual traditions that are not easily captured in digital formats.

Theoretical framework

Technology affordance in HCI

The technology affordance theory, as developed by Gibson (1979), refers to the possibilities the environment offers for interaction. In HCI, affordances refer to how the interface enables or constrains the user's interactions with technology. This concept is especially relevant when designing technology for marginalised communities, where cultural and social contexts influence how users perceive and interact with digital tools.

For Yumma, the mobile app's affordances were designed to reflect the cultural realities of Afro-Colombian healers, balancing ancestral and Western medical practices within a single interface. The app's design aimed to provide intuitive interactions aligned with the practitioners' existing workflows while introducing new data management and analysis capabilities.

Data ontology and sovereignty

Data ontology explores the meaning of data in different contexts, recognising that data is not a neutral entity, but one that reflects the values and priorities of the system that collects and uses it. In mainstream healthcare systems, data is often framed from a Western medical perspective, leaving little room for alternative forms of health knowledge, such as Afro-Colombian ancestral medicine.

Data sovereignty refers to the right of marginalised communities to control how their data is collected, used and shared, challenging the dominance of Western data practices and promoting self-determination over their digital information. For Yumma, achieving data sovereignty means having control over their data and ensuring that the data collected reflects the nuances and complexities of their ancestral medical practices.

Methodology: Participatory design and iterative development

To ensure that the mobile app met the needs of Yumma's personnel, we employed participatory design methods involving the healers, midwives and community health workers in the design and development process. This approach aligns with the Scandinavian participatory design model, which emphasises social justice and inclusion by involving users in co-designing the systems that affect them.

The development process included several iterations, with the final iteration session being crucial for validating the HCI affordances and data field specifications (Image 1.1). This session involved:

1. Demonstrating the app's interface to Yumma's personnel.
2. Gathering feedback on stress load, cultural representation and data functionality.
3. Assessing the app's alignment with the day-to-day realities of Yumma's work.
4. Ensuring an intuitive and culturally resonant user experience.



Image 1.1: Demonstration of Yumma's app flows selected

Findings: HCI affordances and data sovereignty in practice

The final iteration session revealed several key insights into how Yumma's personnel interacted with the mobile app:

1. Stress Load: The app's flows significantly reduced the time required for data collection compared to paper forms, alleviating stress on Yumma's personnel. This improvement is critical for ensuring consistent adoption and use of the app. As the nurse reflected:

   'Using the app can focus more on the person and less on the lengthy and cumbersome paper forms.' This shift lightens the workload and re-centre's care on the individual, supporting a more personalised approach foundational in ancestral medicine.

2. Cultural Representation: Yumma's personnel appreciated the visual and linguistic elements that reflected their cultural identity. This included icons representing Afro-Colombian figures and terminology distinguishing between ancestral and Western medicine practices.

There needs to be more than one icon of a woman to reflect the diversity among Afro-Colombians across the country', the healer emphasised during the discussion on cultural representation. 'Our features, our noses, our lips, vary greatly from region to region, and that diversity should be visible in the app. We want icons with braided hair, big earrings, and colours and accessories that reflect who we are.'

Yumma's personnel expressed a strong desire to see their identities fully represented in both visual and linguistic elements, advocating for icons that honour Afro-Colombian aesthetics and for the app to highlight the role of women, in recognition of Kilombos as a female-led initiative.

3. Data Field Specifications: The data fields were designed to capture ancestral and Western medical practices, ensuring that Yumma's unique approach to healthcare was represented. Additionally, the app provided dashboards that allowed Yumma to track the impact of their work, such as the number of checkups, risk evaluations and referrals to the healthcare system. Image 1.2 provides a selection of the screens of the mobile app.



Image 1.2: A general impression of the flows and screen of Yumma's app

Challenges and Limitations: Data Sovereignty and Systemic Barriers

While the mobile app presents significant opportunities for Yumma, it also highlights the limitations of achieving data sovereignty within systemic constraints. Although Yumma now has greater control over data collection and management, leveraging this data remains challenging due to a lack of resources and infrastructure.

Moreover, Yumma's data still needs to be recognised by the broader healthcare system, limiting its impact on public health outcomes. For data sovereignty to be meaningful, Yumma must establish partnerships with larger organisations to help manage their data and advocate for including Afro-Colombian ancestral medicine in national healthcare policies.

Discussion: A path toward decolonising digital health and data sovereignty

The development of the Yumma mobile app serves as a case study of how digital health solutions can support marginalised communities. However, it also underscores the need for systemic change to ensure these communities can fully benefit from technological advancements. Data sovereignty offers a framework for resisting data colonialism, however, it requires a commitment to building the necessary infrastructures and capabilities within the communities.

As Yumma continues navigating the complexities of digitising their practices, their journey highlights the importance of designing digital tools that reflect non-Western communities' cultural and spiritual realities. This pluriversal approach to HCI and data challenges the dominant narratives in digital health and offers a more inclusive vision for the future of healthcare.

Conclusion

The Yumma mobile app addresses Afro-Colombian ancestral medicine practitioners' systemic challenges. By integrating ancestral and Western medical practices into a single digital platform, the app provides Yumma

with a tool to collect, manage and interpret their data in ways that align with their cultural values.

Achieving true data sovereignty will, however, require continued efforts to:

1. Build capacity within the community;
2. Establish partnerships with supportive organisations; and
3. Challenge structural inequalities within the healthcare system.

Future research should explore how data sovereignty can be operationalised for marginalised communities in other contexts and how digital health solutions can be designed to support more inclusive and pluriversal approaches to healthcare. The Yumma case study offers valuable insights into the potential as well as the challenges of using technology to empower marginalised communities in healthcare settings, paving the way for more equitable and culturally sensitive digital health solutions.

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Chapter 2: Decolonial African Posthumanism: Beyond the Eurocentric Human

Mourad El Fahli

Beyond Western humanism

The trajectory of Western humanism, tracing its lineage back to the philosophical foundations laid by Aristotle, who posited Man as a rational animal (Kiel and Kreft 2019), and subsequently enriched by the Renaissance concept of 'Man as the measure of all things' (Braidotti 2023: 34), is one that has undeniably shaped the intellectual landscape of the West. However, beneath this overarching narrative, there lies a critical dimension characterised by a series of exclusions. These exclusions are multi-faceted, encompassing the marginalisation of women, minorities and those who did not fit within the Greek mould during the Aristotelian epoch, as well as the exclusion of non-Western voices during the zenith of Renaissance humanism. In essence, the very humanism that purports to celebrate the human condition has historically been guilty of drawing arbitrary boundaries around who qualifies as fully human. This unsettling paradox has been a focal point for posthumanist critique, which has diligently sought to unearth the ideological processes of exclusion woven into the fabric of humanism. Posthumanism, with its democratic and humanitarian aspirations, has ardently endeavoured to illuminate these exclusions and in doing so, has embarked on a quest to reimagine a more comprehensive and inclusive planetary perspective. In her book, *The Posthuman*, Rosi Braidotti (2013: 1) makes it clear that:

> Not all of us can say, with any degree of certainty, that we have always been human, or that we are only that. Some of us are not even considered fully human now, let alone at previous moments of Western social, political and scientific history. Not if by "human" we mean that creature

familiar to us from the Enlightenment and its legacy.

Despite its noble intentions, it is essential to underscore a conspicuous blind spot within the current discourse of posthumanism. While it vigorously interrogates the Eurocentric biases ingrained within humanism, it regrettably overlooks the existence of alternative forms of humanism that emanate from Indigenous cultures and repositories of knowledge, notably within the rich African thought. These Indigenous humanisms, borne out of distinct worldviews and experiences, stand as testament to the profound diversity of human experience and the multiplicity of ways in which humanity conceives of itself. Conversely, critical posthumanism,[1] instead of merely critiquing the Eurocentric order of knowledge from the periphery, should expand the scope of posthuman perspectives to encompass the valuable insights and alternative narratives that emerge from non-European contexts. This transformative agenda holds the promise of transcending the limitations of traditional Eurocentric posthumanism, thereby facilitating a more inclusive dialogue that acknowledges and engages with the myriad expressions of humanism across the globe. Because of these considerations, the purpose of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, it aims to shed light on the historical exclusions within Western humanism, elucidating how these exclusions have shaped the intellectual traditions of the West. Secondly, it seeks to advocate for a broader, more inclusive posthumanism that actively incorporates non-European alternatives, notably those rooted in native and Indigenous cultures such as African humanism. By embracing this more expansive vision of posthumanism, we endeavour to foster a global, planetary discourse that reflects the true diversity of human experiences and aspirations, transcending the boundaries that have historically confined our understanding of the human condition.

Decolonial posthumanism

Decolonial (Mignolo and Walsh 2018) posthumanism serves as a critical and transformative framework, challenging established concepts of cultural monopoly and othering. Rooted in a commitment to acknowledging

1 Posthuman knowledge and the critical posthumanities.

and celebrating cultural complexity, this emerging paradigm seeks to deconstruct Eurocentric worldviews and colonial legacies, thereby facilitating a more comprehensive, equitable and pluralistic comprehension of human experiences. In essence, decolonial posthumanism stands as a multidisciplinary approach, transcending conventional boundaries within fields like anthropology, philosophy, cultural studies and critical theory. At its core, this approach challenges the hegemony of Western epistemologies, while forging novel pathways for knowledge production that respect and incorporate diverse cultural perspectives. Hence, decolonial thinking refers to 'the need to free people from the colonial matrix of power that holds on the three layers of coloniality: power, knowledge, and being' (Mignolo and Walsh 2018: 254). Historically, Western cultures have often asserted their universal superiority, resulting in the marginalisation and homogenisation of other cultures, labelling them as "primitive", "savage" and "other". Decolonial posthumanism vehemently rejects this hegemonic stance, recognising that no single culture possesses a monopoly on knowledge, wisdom or truth. Instead, it advocates for a more inclusive worldview that honours diverse ways of knowing and being.

Within the colonial context, non-Western cultures were frequently depicted as the different other, reinforcing a divisive binary between the West and the rest of the world. Decolonial posthumanism endeavours to dismantle this binary by embracing a multitude of cultural perspectives, thereby dismantling hierarchical notions of self and other. A central tenet of decolonial posthumanism emphasises the significance of cultural complexity and heterogeneity. This principle asserts that human experiences and worldviews are multifaceted and cannot be reduced to simplistic narratives and 'single stories' (Adichie 2009). Cultural complexity, thus, recognises the richness of human diversity and the depth of cultural knowledge systems. Decolonial posthumanism fosters a pluralistic worldview that appreciates diverse ways of knowing and being, challenging the Eurocentric inclination to impose a singular, universal narrative. It celebrates the coexistence of multiple narratives and epistemologies, leading to a more profound understanding of the intricate configurations of human existence. This paradigm acknowledges the interconnectedness and interdependence of all life forms, whether human or non-human, advocating

for an ecological consciousness that transcends anthropocentrism. This perspective underscores the importance of considering the well-being of the entire ecosystem, particularly in addressing pressing global challenges such as climate change and biodiversity loss.

Decolonial posthumanism, as defined throughout this chapter, aims to reconfigure the epistemological order, promoting a more inclusive and dialogical approach to knowledge creation that encourages active collaboration and mutual learning. Within this paradigmatic dialogism diverse voices and perspectives are not only heard, but also respected. It calls for the inclusion of indigenous knowledge systems, oral traditions, and non-Western epistemologies in the global discourse. By engaging in this meaningful trans-dialogue, individuals from different cultural backgrounds can co-create knowledge that is not only more comprehensive but also enriched. To implement decolonial posthumanism effectively, it becomes imperative to revise educational curricula, ensuring they reflect a more inclusive and culturally diverse worldview. This revision includes the integration of non-Western philosophies, histories and perspectives into mainstream education, exposing future generations to a broader spectrum of human experiences and perspectives. This approach ultimately fosters a more empathetic and globally conscious society. Hence, decolonial posthumanism provides a robust framework for transcending the confines of cultural monopoly and absolutism through the embrace of cultural complexity and the appreciation of the richness of human diversity as well as the interconnectedness of all life forms, advocating for a more inclusive epistemological order. The omission of African ethics and philosophical perspectives from discourses within both humanist and posthumanist frameworks is noteworthy. The ensuing section undertakes an examination of avenues through which African ontological systems of thought can contribute to and enhance the ongoing dialogues within posthumanist discourse.

African metaphysics

In essence, the path towards a critical posthumanism (Callus and Herbrechter 2023) underscores the imperative of moving beyond

the dominant Western paradigm of humanism. This paradigm, while historically influential, is critiqued in this chapter for its ethnocentrism and its proclivity to universalise particular cultural and philosophical values. Consequently, the quest for a more inclusive and diversified posthumanist framework beckons scholars and thinkers to broaden their intellectual horizons and scope. A salient exemplar of such intellectual broadening is the exploration of African philosophies. These philosophical traditions, rooted in Africa's diverse cultures and histories, offer alternative perspectives on humanism that significantly deviate from Western normalcy. African philosophies encompass a plethora of epistemological and ontological viewpoints that challenge conventional Eurocentric conceptions of the human experience, conceptualising the human and human-nature relationships through the lens of African metaphysics, which may be defined as the African manner of perceiving, interpreting, and deriving significance from interactions among beings and the broader fabric of reality. This metaphysical perspective diverges from the Western metaphysical tradition (Lajul 2013),[2] which dictates that truth is attainable exclusively through criticality and rationality, relegating anything beyond the scope of human reason to a position of deficiency. This dichotomy is further explicated through the humanist axiom that asserts a humanistic idea of Man as the universal measure of all things (Braidotti 2023: 5), thus, dislodging and diminishing the influence of other entities, such as women, gods or nature. In contrast to this absolute, rationalistic worldview, African metaphysics acknowledges both the existence of realities that are empirically verifiable and those that transcend empirical validation. Consequently, a pivotal attribute of African metaphysics is the recognition of the inherent limitations of humanity and the intricate interconnections between human beings and other forces, encompassing the spiritual, the imperceptible and the natural realms.

A second notable characteristic of African metaphysics is its teleological nature, which entails understanding reality as a construct

2 Following Lajul (2013: 23), 'Western metaphysics considers only those realities that are logical, reasonable and comprehensible by our rational minds to fall under the scope of metaphysics, yet the scope of African metaphysics goes beyond that which is provable by our rational minds.'

that 'hangs together because of aims' (Teffo and Roux 2003: 192), with the metaphysical framework itself being propelled by intrinsic purpose. As posited by Lajul (2014: 21-23), a 'teleological metaphysics' implies the capacity to perceive meaning in the existence of reality, discern purpose in the world's existence and identify underlying consistent principles that maintain coherence between being and existence. In essence, all actions and phenomena within the African metaphysical framework are perceived as purpose-driven. Besides, African metaphysics embodies a holistic perspective, where reality is comprehended as a "closed system" in which every component is interconnected and influenced by any alteration within the system. This holistic approach extends to the principles governing the interaction of forces, which encompass the relationships between God and humankind, diverse human interactions, the interactions between humanity and animals and the interactions between humanity and material entities. In this comprehensive and interconnected view, African metaphysics emerges as a distinct and profound framework for understanding the fundamental aspects of human existence and its relationship with the broader tapestry of reality. Hence, as argued by Pancras Kaboha (1992), as cited in Lajul (2013: 22), Western metaphysics 'narrows the scope of metaphysics, while African philosophy has the potential to open the eyes of Western thinkers to the wider scope of metaphysics'[3]. Indeed, the primary objective of this chapter is to assert that any critical discourse on the posthuman condition ought to transcend the confines of exclusively Western conceptions concerning the human, identity and nature, thereby, embarking upon an exploration of alternative paradigms that have persistently proffered distinct avenues of humanistic inquiry. Kaboha further posits that knowledge acquisition encompasses not only the faculties of reason, but also extends to the corporeal and spiritual dimensions. The author notes, as cited in Lajul (2013: 26), that 'communicating with nature at times gives us knowledge that defies easy rational analysis'. Hence, the apprehension of reality is conceived as a holistic construct, irrespective of whether this reality pertains to the

3 Kaboha maintains that since the industrial revolution western philosophers from Hume to Wittegenstein started to exclude metaphysics and ethics from the domain of philosophy, leading to dialectical materialism and the denial of the soul in man (Cited in Lajul 2013).

material or immaterial realm, the visible or the invisible, the mundane or the celestial, the human or the non-human, the animate or the inanimate.

Indeed, African metaphysics does not preclude the acknowledgment of human agency; rather, it conceives the human as a pivotal constituent within a cohesive system that encompasses spiritual entities, ancestral influences, and the natural environment. Consequently, African anthropocentrism diverges from its Western humanist counterpart by virtue of its distinct emphasis on the interrelated triad of human-spirit-nature complementarity and interdependence. This unique perspective finds manifestation in various facets of African metaphysical thought, including conceptions of being, personhood, cosmology and ontology, as explicated in the subsequent section.

Being and personhood in African metaphysics

In the African ontological paradigm, it is a fundamental tenet that all entities and objects within the cosmological framework are construed as corporeal representations of distinct and dynamic forces. Within this worldview, there is a pronounced emphasis on the conceptual framework wherein the entirety of existence, spanning from natural phenomena to sentient beings, is comprehended and delineated through the prism of the vitalising forces that engender and propel them. The concept of being as force was initially expounded upon by Tempels, whose scholarship steadfastly asserts that which Western intellectuals identify as "being" is, in the African context, denoted as "force" by the Bantu people. Tempels (1998: 431) contends that:

> Where we see concrete beings, they see concrete forces. When we say that "beings" are differentiated by their essence or nature, Bantu say that "forces" differ in their essence or nature. They hold that there is the divine force, celestial or terrestrial forces, human forces, animal forces, vegetable and even material or mineral forces.

This comprehension of the essence of being is more aptly exemplified through the African conceptualisation of non-human entities, particularly

the natural world. In this framework, nature is not merely personified through metaphorical interpretation, it is rather imbued with an intrinsic sentience, housing various potent forces. Therefore, European materialism, deeply rooted in the enlightenment era and modern scientific paradigms, is notably inclined toward an emphasis on a materialistic ontology. It frequently asserts that the fundamental nature of existence is firmly anchored in physical matter and the mechanistic principles that regulate it. In stark contrast, the African worldview, as exemplified by the Bantu ontology, is characterised by a more nuanced perspective that conceptualises reality as an amalgamation of both material and spiritual dimensions.

The African conceptualisation of being is rendered with greater precision when one scrutinises the intricate interplay between the human and non-human domains, in conjunction with the fusion of the physical and metaphysical aspects inherent to African ontological frameworks. This perspective notably diverges from the Western anthropocentric standpoint, which asserts the primacy of humanity as the ultimate yardstick for all phenomena. Nevertheless, it is crucial to underscore that this holistic perspective does not advocate for a post-anthropocentric perspective that marginalises the human subject. Instead, it underscores the interconnectedness of these forces with the human experience. In the words of Anyanwu (1983: 90), 'From the beginning of the world, it is assumed, there has existed a life force, created by one God which is always active, spread throughout the universe, dispensed to all animate-life forces, man, animals and the plants, sometimes communicated to things which we consider inanimate'. African ontology promotes the notion that entities exist in a state of harmonious and complementary interrelation, with the human being 'as a central agent in that harmony' (Lajul 2013: 27). In accordance with this line of reasoning, African thought places a pronounced emphasis on the interdependence and interconnectedness of individuals within their communal and societal contexts. It regards the individual not in isolation, rather as an integral constituent of a broader social tapestry, as eloquently encapsulated by the renowned dictum of Mbiti (1990: 102), "I am because we are."

While Western humanism is predicated upon a dualistic perception of

the human-nature relationship, one characterised not by complementarity, but by separability, the African comprehension of personal identity introduces an alternative framework for apprehending dualism as an essential constituent of identity. In this regard, an individual is fundamentally composed of both a "material" component and one or more "spiritual" aspects. In the broader context, there is a consensus that an individual transcends mere corporeality; there exists an immaterial dimension intrinsic to the human persona. In addition to the conventional body-soul dualism, certain African perspectives delineate the human entity within a three-dimensional (triadic) framework, comprising the corporeal, the spiritual soul and the heart as constituent elements.

Conclusion

African philosophy and metaphysics offer rich and profound insights that challenge the dominant Western paradigms of humanism and posthumanism. By integrating these perspectives, posthumanist discourse can transcend its Eurocentric confines, fostering a more inclusive and globally relevant understanding of the human condition. The holistic and interconnected worldview of African metaphysics, with its emphasis on the interplay between the human, the spiritual, and the natural realms, provides a valuable framework for addressing the complex and multifaceted challenges of the posthuman era.

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Chapter 3: Listening to Affects: Working with affective evocations of sound/silence as a mode of doing decoloniality

Girinandini Singh

Introduction: Listening for the murmurs of resistance

It is the first discussion group session with my PhD colleagues in the Faculty of Education at the University of Cambridge. I sit across from them, taking up a small corner just around the edges of the rectangular table. New faces and old faces turn towards each other smiling and exchanging pleasantries. Many of us have played in this field before, having completed our master's degree from this very institution, knowing already of the unspoken rules one needs to be conversant in to navigate through its ranks. We begin introducing ourselves first and foremost by way of our research—countries, colleges, experiences, and other such identifiers come after ***(refer to i – Conversations in the Margins)****; we lead with research—which is of the utmost importance. Each project sounds exciting, engaging and with immense potential for outcomes—a living breathing organism of promise. Slowly, as we reach my corner of the table, I take a breath steadying myself, I do not have a fully-formed research question, I have an open-ended inquiry—an exploration—I*

Conversations in the Margins

(i) Dear Reader, I want to begin by introducing our conversations in the margins, as we move through this text, I will keep calling your attention to the margins and the footnotes where we will find reveries, segue ways, provocations and more which I present as building blocks of research often ignored. The Margins is where I present my provocations, and the footnotes is where I do my critical thinking – rough notes – or where the process is depicted. The centre of the writing is where you will find the stories, the argument, but it is in the excess you will see the detours, the winding road I took to arrive here. Let us talk about the attempt to bring neutrality in research, in arts and humanities and social sciences, where there has been much debate on the possibility of neutrality. Neutral, impartial or non-involved observer position has been a standard shared by several qualitative traditions (Skovulund *et.al.* 2023). The authors write, 'Can and should research be based on ideals of neutrality and impartiality or should researchers instead embrace the personal interests and subjective reasons that drive them to study a specific field?' (Skovulund et.al. 2023: 363). In our introductory seminar, we introduce ourselves with our research first rather than our 'selves'. The questions we are seeking to unravel, our hypothesis, all come before our experiences, our colleges, our countries, our beings, etcetera. Glimpses of our lived experiences cast aside—the

positions we take, the lived entry points into our research enquiry—the great big belly of where our research stems from is shelved for the time-being. In academia and our academic lives, it seems almost as though our research positions our lived experience within the environment, rather than our ***living*** that positions how we will lead the next four years of academia and academic life, even when the experience tells us otherwise. As a decolonial scholar, I know that research is never neutral—historically it has been used to oppress and manage narratives of indigenous and marginalised communities, even the word holds a dirty connotation associating with exploitative behaviours (Thambinathan and Kinsella 2021).

In acknowledging the layered power-structures—systemic, individual and community-based—it is essential to build a true-sense of ethics of care.

like to call it, its post-humanist research I think, or is it more so post-qualitative? It is definitely decolonial and perhaps I will use some critical feminist theoretical frameworks. I feel better acknowledging the boxes within which this "open enquiry" fits in (ironic, I know) precisely so in academic terms, yet it feels insufficient if not restrictive as though I am placing bindings upon myself (refer to ***ii – Conversations in the Margins on next page****). There is no hypothesis, and my methodology is through the act of creating, living, building, observing, engaging, rather than analysing, I embed myself in the lived embodied experience of the research. Examining the effect of sound, silence, and stillness within learning spaces—how do we listen? The project itself is on the act/action*[1] *of decolonisation, but I am practice first, art first. This introduction is met with intimidating silence, I could have spoken in an alien language, incoherent, but nonetheless, I am surrounded by a supportive group of peers who rally together as they nod their approval not quite understanding what I have said. Someone says, 'I have been fascinated by the introduction that was given to us at the induction about the Arts Creativity Research Group, you all do some really cool stuff, I imagine it's like playing all the time.' I smile and agree. Most of the time the work does feel like play. Nevertheless, I can't shake the feeling that this well-*

1 The meaning of act/action is based on the definition of decoloniality as given by Catherine E. Walsh that is a way of thinking/doing/knowing/being; an ongoing process of reconfiguring the practice of decoloniality, that attempts to breakthrough the hierarchical structures of race, gender, class and heteropatriarchy; the way this impacts life, knowledge, spirituality, and thought processes (2018: 17). The act/ion, thus, in this context is both the process by which one approaches/thinks about knowledge and learning—what that means individually, communally and as a society? What does the actual act of producing said "knowledge" look like?

meaning remark somehow undermines the importance of the research[2] *and its critical heft, raising questions about the work that is being done, that should be considered as "work" despite its inherent "playfulness".*

Conversations in the Margins

(ii) Thinking about the restraint of a call for open enquiry reminds me of an experience of conducting a creative writing workshop with primary school students in Nepal. When given a free lease to be as creative in their storytelling and writing—when I had told them to not worry about whether their story began at the beginning, middle or end, they were frozen in writer paralysis—unable to think outside the box now that the parameters of control often found in academic writing were removed. Many students instead chose to re-write familiar stories and follow known structures for the safety of results and feedback.

In this chapter I explore the practice of decoloniality as a process of questioning and exploring what thinking/being/doing/theorising through the decolonial lens can look like? I do this as I move through the Institution[3] as an academic, researcher, and teacher. I use a new-materialist lens that is founded on Barad's (2007) idea that everything is matter, which by extension, allows us to think of knowledge and meaning-making as also matter, matter that is malleable, giving birth to new and always emerging materialities of the world and in the world. This is the entry-point, from which I engage with the sounds of white patriarchy and colonial rhetoric stemming out of the Institution and knowledge making spaces, the instances of silence and stillness that spill out like fleshy sonic vibrations shaping academia and our learning spaces, what are the readings of systemic power inequities that we can listen for in our attempt to reimagine just education futures. What resistances can emerge working with these points of sonic tension to build

2 A problem with arts-based research is that it is interdisciplinary in nature, and while in academia we go hoarse shouting for more interdisciplinary work as Hull (1999) puts it the interdisciplinarian is the first to be hired and fired. He writes about the extreme standards across disciplines that we hold the interdisciplinarian to – the highest form of assessment across all disciplines that find their way into his work, and all the while addressing the different interests and values of scholars in these disciplines – it's a labour that is often ten-times harder than that of a single disciplinarian – almost as though we are making a case for inter-disciplines to fail. Alternatively, research in siloes is what has kept academic output in its ivory tower – perhaps adopting a diffractive model i.e. reading one discipline through the lens or praxis of another in a truly enmeshed and entangled nature is worth the labour to see what new materialities emerge – whether they meet the highest standards yet or not.

3 The Institution is representative of academia and the bodies of knowledge making.

new meanings and new materialities that practice decoloniality and move us towards doing pluralistic knowledge? What arises in the slippages and fissures (Dernikos *et al*. 2020) of an unequal knowledge-building terrain, showing up as sonic points of tension on the body[4], dear reader, I listen through the filter of affective theory – wherein sound leaves marks on the bodies. Think about the shushing of excitement at the start of a new class, the quiet thumbs up during reading hour, the Pavlovian clap that teachers use to quieten a room of Key satge-2 students in the UK. I am calling us to pay attention to the movement of sound and silence impinging on fleshy bodies, held in the space of a racially, socio-politically, and intellectually diverse environment of the academy. What gets revealed to us when we make an attempt towards holding space for plural forms to exist - of knowing, learning, relating, and entangling with one another and with many worlds (refer to **iii – Conversations in the Margins**).

Conversations in the Margins

(iii) The idea of many worlds and the pluriverse was introduced by decolonial scholars such as Mignolo (2007) and Dussel (2012), giving the impression that many worlds exist simultaneously. Thinking along these lines, I cannot help but visualise it as layers of knots placed upon each other as knotted overlays, richer, nuanced and taut. Perhaps, if we allow ourselves to engage with this tension as teachers, researcher and students, the living bodies that take up space in the Institution, it will give us a glimpse into what makes true plurality possible—not to resolve difference, but to witness and hold space for it.

Problematising academic living and the Institution:

The academy is often primed to speak in restrictive formats, reaching for an arbitrary check-box set-up of diversity, inclusiveness and equity, rather than the multi-layered, nuanced alternative of plurality that becomes part of the systemic framework of an institution, building certain inherent issues in academia and the production of research (Biasco *et al*. 2001). This has perhaps been most starkly evident with the recent rolling back of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives and measures in the academic institutions of the United States of America which found themselves without funding and resources to continue significant research. If DEI measures are truly nuanced, part of the working process of our systems of knowledge, a

4 The body of learners, researchers, knowledge-makers, institution heads, etc.

working practice framework within the institution rather than a framing worn on top as adornment, it would not be as easy to dismantle them. We are left considering who gets to choose who comes in or is left out. Who decides and how, who are these stakeholders?

One of the aims of this piece of writing is to interject and impinge upon the idea of the "academic" in writing and research, and the building of "formal knowledge", to once again centre the lives and the processes of living within education systems and knowledge-building. Thus, to make a case for the fleshy bodies that take up space, and for the nuances of the lived experiences that are the building blocks of "significant research".[5] For someone reading this chapter, you would have seen there are boxes referred to as Conversations within the Margins. These "Conversations" already explained as spaces where I speak about the ideas, reveries, half-formed thoughts and provocations that have arisen as I was writing this piece. These are not complete or polished or peer-reviewed writings, they are glimpses of lived experiences, of conversations with peers, friends and mentors, conversations between you the reader (or my imagination of you) and myself the writer, yet I argue that they hold the same significance as the scholarly works cited, because they lead the direction of this inquiry. The "Conversations" guide this exploration, and in doing so, hold academic weight despite their half-formed, informal nature. This is what shows up as the belly of my research—as my supervisor is fond of saying—meaning that this is where the soft flesh as well as the vulnerability of what drives this research project lies,[6] it frames my positionality, it guides my enquiry and while it is often discarded because it does not fit the extractive norms

5 Reader, I am thinking of DEI in a widened context, we must also consider the processes within other knowledge forms that help build meanings and readings of the world, their ability to exist and take as much space as the Eurocentric knowledge tradition has, not as alternatives, but rather as co-existing in their own right. This allows one to think of the praxis format by which DEI measures can and should be reimagined, as permeating all aspects of research, teaching, learning and knowledge-building, rather than acting as an odd-and ill-fitted skeletal structure placed upon an academic institution.

6 I continually speak of research inquiry as an exploration or a journey and in the tradition of post-qualitative research it is so, not to prove or disprove a hypothesis but rather to inquire after research questions (St. Pierre 2019). In the decolonial tradition this resists the neoliberal need for research to produce a finished product or result (Thambinathan and Kinsella 2021) and instead foreground a process or a way of knowing and then paying attention to the emergences that come up along the way.

of Western academic citation practices (Calderón 2022), I ask here—is it any less important? Is our disregard of these stories and anecdotes and unpolished ideations as "fluff" or the stuff for the notebooks and margins, not simply another form of silencing? The impulse to clean up the "fluff", the very *process* of germination,[7] by its nature interjects the depiction of a valuable process; the process of "showing the work" as we were often told to do in our math classes. Even detours and ideas that have been discarded before completion leave their imprint behind, building a weblike network of impressions and paths marking our journey on the way to building knowledge? Each of these Conversations in the Margins are those tracings that have built the "meat" of this text, even if they are not themselves fully-formed or tidied appetisingly, and I find it counter-intuitive to discard them as insignificant.

In an earlier conversation with my PhD advisor, I expressed my anxiety around fitting in within the ivory tower of the Institution, I was starting out as a researcher and worrying about the part of myself I would have to discard to fit within the norms and values of the Institution. Would I have to violently cut off parts of myself and leave them at the door and plead my allegiance to the Cartesian logic of binaries and absolutes applauded within the Institution? Would I need to separate my many selves and many worlds when out in the field, or when writing papers, adopt a make-believe neutrality as I indulge in a split between the mind, the body, the social, the intellectual, the many worlds I inhabit? I said to her—

> I am practice first, I am poetry first, I am lived experiences first, art is my research, building from life and thinking through life and living is what I centre in my research. This is the critical lens through which I view and understand the world, and I feel as though this is not understood much less accepted as of value in academia. I don't ever seem to have enough words to explain how rich and important art, poetry, the everyday, the mundane, and the trivial can be as data in research enquiry, more so human enquiry, I feel silenced. Feel the silence on my body – diminished by it. Marking it as other. I am always left feeling that I need to choose one over the other.

7 Of an idea.

I was attempting to describe to her, the possibility and the existence of a creative practice that held a critical lens within it in academia and research. The creation of a by-product that was art, but it held within a process by which it came to knowledge-building, what I liked to think of as research in motion. The "artwork" itself is fraught with nodes of tension, interrogation, theory and epistemics, which perhaps are done differently to *traditional* qualitative or quantitative research, but are no less intensive for the critical rigour that they bring to my enquiry. While, as my peers sounded the Eurocentric rhetoric, declaring that my research processes feel like play (after all building poems from responses gathered in a sound-walk or a trip through a museum display as a form of engendering deeper engagement via deep listening) does feel like fun, the critical intensity within that process and method was examining and building new onto-epistemological configurations of knowing which allow us to examine the politico-ethical cuts we make to our ways of meaning-making in the world.

Simon O'Sullivan calls this the 'ethico-aesthetics' which is best understood as a kind of paradigm that moves beyond the scientific parameters and is related to a practice of 'self-creation' (2017: 210), speaking to the ways in which we can produce ourselves differently onto-epistemologically. The spaces and pockets where this process occurs is what Finley (2014: 531) refers to as the liminal space[8] of the arts, which is primed 'for the discovery of "what is not yet" in an improved world'. I do not know if I would be as optimistic to claim an improved world as Finley does, as it runs the risk of looking for a certain wholeness or a universalism that turns away from the simple fact that differences always exist and there is not one "improved world", but multiple that leads us to acknowledging that birth and destruction always exist side-by-side (refer to **iv – Conversations in the Margins**). I would, however, agree that the liminal space here holds room for the pluralities of the world/reality to show up authentically, as a

8 Many academics, scholars, artists and creative practitioners have grown weary of the "liminal space" of becoming, as post-humanists would say, since it implies an ongoing state of limbo where we are always becoming, about to take form, but not yet formed. I think the liminal space here layered atop the tension nodes where neocolonialist and neoliberal rhetoric permeates through the academy, creating an affective tension in the fleshy bodies of students, teachers, researchers, etcetera. The liminal space is where change can happen through tension and engaging with this tension.

necessary reflection of how knowledge occurs, exists, is born and reformed in an infinite recursive process of assembling and re-assembling. It is in reflecting this in our Institution and academic living that we honour a polyphony of life and nature making our knowledge environments agile and resilient to the complex and nuanced changes of an ever-evolving world.

Conversations in the Margins

(iv) Reader, I invite you think of the plurality of lived experience as a layered universe made up of multiple universes of varying sizes existing atop one another, and through one another. In what is almost a prismatic reality, wherein perceptions and entry points diffract into new ways of being/knowing/thinking/learning. There is no *one* improved world as it begs the question improved according to whom? Rather a world that is not yet, is a world rife with potential and possibilities, wherein process itself is product—it makes room for theory to exist in motion.

Affects potential to build new materialities:

It would help to bring attention to the language I have been using to describe the tension emerging within and outside the Institution as the entanglement of neoliberal, white patriarchal, and colonial forces tighten and evolve their restrain. When I explained that 'art is my research', I used words such as 'silenced', 'choose (between)' and 'feelings', the tautness of this tension emerges as an affective and visceral response in my body and I wonder reader, does it show up in yours too? When you think back to moments in your academic life where your lived experiences and the day-to-day had to be left at the door, examined with an objective lens of scrutiny, for fear of the bias that stems from the nuance of human experience slipping into the research field. We are so intent on keeping bias, nuances, and the personal away from our positionality, yet it is impossible to do so since research is never neutral (Thambhinathan and Kinsella 2021). I say this as I read affective lived experience as a social force, that holds in it the potential for doing decoloniality. The affective is often described as "'charges' (Stewart 2007), 'flows' (Manning 2016), 'forces' (Coleman and Ringrose 2013; Seigworth and Gregg 2010), 'intensities' (Deleuze 1994; Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Massumi 1987), and 'vibrations' (Henriques 2010)'" (Dernikos, *et.al.* 2020: 8). These words imply a sense of movement, resisting and disrupting the status quo leading to our different ways of knowing and understanding. The affective is no longer limited to a narrow emotion-based definition,

rather it is treated as a process that as understood here, highlights spaces of tension and difference. In these spaces new materialities are born, out of the tension that arises within and engages with what is outside of us; thus, I treat tension here as the difference and differencing of lived experiences (Clandinnin and Connelly 2000) clashing together.

Engaging with these clashes can take us beyond the norm of a Eurocentric 'universality' (Akena 2012: 600). These nodes of tension that we bump into in deeply diverse academic spaces, need not be silenced, nor should they be solved and unknotted to reach a form universalism, held in a space of stillness it helps to notice what is emerging from these discomforting spaces.

Barad (2010) gives us the concept of new materialism which as briefly mentioned before, accepts matter as everything, the building blocks of our ways of meaning-making that can be assembled and re-assembled differently. When we look at the idea of plural knowledge systems, and plural ways of knowing it is with the acknowledgement that many worlds exist (Gatt 2023; Terry 2024) and this layered existence continues in simultaneous cycles of birth-death-rebirth. The points of tension become spaces of opportunities for building these different formats of knowing and knowledge, creating new materialities. With that in mind, I move to discuss the entanglement of the affective in education, playing with this lens through the modes of sound, silence and stillness in learning spaces and the potential for presencing multiple worlds, cultures and knowledge systems. In my research, I do this specifically through workshops with researchers and practitioners working in higher education. The workshops focus on our listening processes and practices to understand our agentic roles in what stories we allow in, those we disallow and why—what forms of worlding have led to these agentic choices. What is heard and what remains unheard—how do we, and why do we make those agentic cuts and decisions? Examining the underlying structures of coloniality, neo-liberalism and white patriarchy that are inherent in our academic spaces—and exploring ways in which we can engage with their tension to move towards a pluralised 'hopeful futurity' (Demos 2020: 2).

Rattling Affects: Examining affects potential through sound/ silence:

[Dear Reader, I ask you to read this section out loud, revelling in the sound of these words and the keen intimacy of another's memory]

> *I remember the rat-ta-tat-rat-ta-tat clinking of cans that trailed the cart of the kabbadi-wallah (recycling man) as he wheeled his gems / shiny curiosities in his mobile treasury / we hear him a block away as he makes his rounds, marking his steps closer and closer to us, around the blocks of flats that make our suburbia – A, B, C, D – hear the clinking of cans a mile away inching closer / impatient we run towards him, a hoard of children our shoes hitting the pavement pitter-patter, pitter-patter / pulled to the music of the cart / he lets us examine one by one the discarded pieces of lives – historied trinkets / rat-ta-tat-rat-ta-tat I hear in the recesses of my mind each time I sit down to write, unpacking my own assimilation myth, searching deep within for the long discarded historied trinkets of my life / knowingly-unknowingly buying into the dream 'only to realize that assimilation just can't happen' (Villanueva 2001: 267).*

I am concerned with contextualising my own positionality before moving forward, since it heavily influences my entry-point into this piece of writing. I am a researcher of colour from the Global South, my education has been culturally diverse in that I went to a British boarding school in India and completed my higher education in India, Italy and the United Kingdom. This education varied across socio-cultural class systems too—from private boarding schools to government universities and eventually, *the* academic institution of the University of Cambridge **(refer to v Conversations in the Margins)**. As a researcher, I began from practice as an artist, writer and spoken word poet, moving into academia, with the arts always being the critical methodology and lens with which I enter the space of academic research.

Conversations in the Margins

(v) Reader, I am describing the University of Cambridge as ***the*** academic institution because of the inherent coloniality and its reverberating impact on knowledge—what is considered as such and what is not and the power dynamics that such contextualisation lends to "knowledge"—which is at the heart of the institution. One example of this is the power structures within the IELTS examination (Part of University of Cambridge Press and Assessment) that most international students from South Asia and South-East Asia must undertake to move on to higher education in universities outside their home countries; this exam is mandatory and expires every two years, and irrespective of their fluency in the language, the student must undertake the exam to prove their ability. Due to the expiring nature of these results, I have taken this exam three times, despite English being the primary language of instruction for the entirety of my educational career. To undertake a project of decoloniality within this institution, given the contextualisation of my position as stated above, creates its own circles of tension allowing for varying degrees of agency. Each of these tension knots and my engagement with them through time (at different times, with different levels of experience, and reputation), have resulted in different new materialities. The university, thus, itself becomes a diffractive apparatus which in turn, leads to multiple ways of thinking/being/doing/theorising knowledge and ways of knowing.

Allowing myself to embed my lived experience within my research, rather than maintain any form of separateness starts to feel novel and yet, it is not new. Linda Tuhiwai Smith talked about how Imperialism continues to have its lasting impact on people who have experienced its violence, writing that it, 'still destroys and is reforming itself constantly' and going on to explain that 'Indigenous peoples as an international group have had to challenge, understand, and have a shared language to talk about it [the experience]' (2012: 19). It begins with allowing ourselves to be able to talk about what was lost and perhaps is continually lost, to be able to choose our own language in doing so and not having it delegitimised.

In a recent reading group meeting, I asked my fellow colleagues and my PhD advisor as we closely read the book *Life, Re-Scaled: The Biological Imagination in Twenty-First Century Literature and Performance*. There was much discussion around this excerpt,

> "[this book]by investigating engagement with life sciences and biopolitical questions in recent European and North American fiction, poetry, graphic novels, and performances…They ask how artistic work integrates new knowledge about neurons, microbes or fungi, how it echoes new perspectives brought by epidemiology, ecosystem

> modelling, or Earth System science, and how it contributes to critical thought concerned with those fields" (Campos and Patoine 2022: 3).

One of my colleagues voiced the freedom they felt in reading that art itself is a form of critical inquiry, that it was a process of research, doing research. Another spoke of the necessity to understand art as a mode of questioning and as a form of knowing and knowledge-building. How revolutionary it was to hear this for the first time, to be given permission for the first time. Yet another spoke on how encouraging it was to have art engage with scientific narrative, not simply to explain it, but to diffract through it. Hearing these remarks, I question whether we feel this sense of permissiveness or validation because of the language that is being used to make this statement, since the statement itself is not new and certainly not revolutionary. This language is codified. It is in the guise of "scientific" language and hence, perhaps holds a perceived veracity. Indigenous scholars, scholars of colour, artists, poets and others have expressed similar sentiments time and again and yet these narratives do not stick, nor do they hold the same sense of veracity to them—they are forgotten in the collective archive of the memory, disregarded, or silenced. Calling out this hypocrisy, Barbara Christian, an African-American literary scholar who in the late 1980s wrote about the potentially, yet unrecognised varied nature of "theory" as done by people of colour (which I reminded the group),

> For people of colour have always theorized – but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic. And I am inclined to say that our theorizing (and I intentionally use the verb rather than the noun) is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking. How else have we managed to survive with such spiritedness the assault on our bodies, social institutions, countries, and our very humanity (1987: 52)?

The sense of validity and to what extent it is felt from one excerpt to the other was distinctly different, the first excerpt codified in the language of the academic institution, in the language of "science", in the "official" tone,

held an inherent perceived assuredness and veracity when compared to the other. It made me consider the ways in which silences emerge in academic spaces and ways in which the processes of silencing are reiterated and stabilised—where/how do plural cultures emerge in these spaces that are rife with inherent and unspoken rules of coloniality and neo-liberalism? Going back to the anecdote of the *kabbadiwallah*—having given up the historied trinkets that make up our uniquely diverse lived experiences in the false hope of an assimilation myth (Villanueva 2001: 267), how do we begin to listen for these silences? How do we begin to sound our multiple selves and our many worlds into being, to do the work of decoloniality in practice?

Deep listening methodology as a process of presencing

[Dear Reader, this section is to be read aloud]

When I begin to perform a poem standing in front of the classroom/I picture my body spreading itself outward / like wings drawn out / bringing you – the 'other, – the 'audience'—the 'separate' into the fold of an internal world / an invitation, perhaps, or an act of vulnerability, or is it rather the experiencing of a collectivity – co-theorising, collaborating, co-storytelling? (Niccolini et al. 2018: 337)/ I call them research poems, and through/with/in them, I question myself, often wondering, how internal is this world I built/build/will build? Marked up by externalities, it opens out its circles of influence, impact and impingement/ we are changed in and of ourselves by others and other selves. As I stand in front of the room, poised to let my sound carry, my voice, my words, my poems, then again in an instant I am the face on your screen, a series of ones and zeroes, come together as a moving picture, delivering – raw insides turned out – I am simply a voice, travelling through wireless headphones, a story – punctuated by pauses and inflections, a moving cadence, silence, short breaths, your breaths, my poem, our poem. Our bodies moved.

The movement of sound in the act of listening and the affective impingements that we experience as we listen to the sounds around us and the listening field provide interesting layers that, when engaged with, mark the spaces where decoloniality can be practised as more than theory. Affective encounters with sound make space for thinking in assemblages, building layers in motion, where some affect theorists include "'feelings'

(Cvetkovich 2012; Ngai 2005), 'emotions' (Ahmed 2010; Cvetkovich 2012; Zembylas 2014) when defining what affect is, many characterise affect more as 'an immanent social force' (Massumi 1987; Stewart, Zembylas 2014)" (Dernikos *et al.* 2020: 5) that is always in motion leaving a changed state behind. The body then becomes an interactive and intra-active dynamic field (Barad 2007). It is constantly being affected or re-modelled by events, ideas, experiences, etcetera, occurring outside and inside, in a state of continual configuration and re-configuration by human and more-than-human elements. Sound, by its nature, is ephemeral, and where it collides with the body, sometimes it simply passes through and other times it leaves its mark, as McLuhan puts it, we have no earlids, sound always surrounds us even in our times of rest (Carlyle and Lane 2013). It can be felt, and yet it remains obscure (Crawley 2016), and it is because of this that it opens itself to the possibilities of new ways of knowing/being in the world, new materialities within our onto-epistemology.

To do this, I turned to a methodology of Deep Listening to imagine a pedagogy of deep affective listening founded on the work of Pauline Oliveros (2022), wherein we listen in layers, and as we listen, we move along the length and breadth of these layers of sound/soundlessness moving in space. These movements are prismatic, bouncing between layers in our process of meaning-making and making-meaning. All the while I, as the researcher, am observing where we collectively[9] make our cuts of agency in shutting out certain sounds, certain meanings pertaining to these sounds, certain politics around these sounds and how they are encountered and how these might trap us, if at all, into systems of coloniality and neoliberalism preventing experiences of plurality and variedness that surround us. I also turn to the work of Salome Voegelin, who places the body as an enmeshed frame of research, wherein the body thinking, doing, performing "words as a muscular engagement with the world whose actuality in turn is felt on the body, as fleshly and material form: as human and more-than-human matter that comes to matter from their in-between and in conversations" (2023: xi). The points where the body is impinged upon, particularly by sound, are where the gaps and spaces for making a difference and engaging with the world in different ways can be practiced. Deep Listening brings

9 Participants in the group workshops.

attention to the consciousness of this act of listening, the space within which we notice, as Oliveros writes, "Listening affects what is sounding" (2022: 9); this immediately places us as part of the listening field and an important element within it. The body acts as an apparatus of listening and simultaneously silencing, in this process of sifting we reimagine our engagement with soundlessness and silencing and question what is being silenced, with the inherent politics of what is heard and unheard.

The act/process of Deep Listening during the research workshops is a collaborative one, a collective listening that leads to embodied and emergent affective responses, paying attention to these sounds as we (participants) listen to the listening field with a deeper receptiveness that is tied to fleshy body—we start to dismantle why certain sounds and stories are accepted and why other are rejected or considered disruptive. At the end of the session, participants build on their responses and the collective responses about the process of listening from site—the physical body and the listening field—to the experience of depth and the width of listening. What emerged, and what was the experience of navigating such a collective and layered listening field when contextualised as an emergent site of knowledge? This allows plurality to emerge, interlacing with what is already known. Oliveros writes about the process of deep listening as one where experience comes first, before everything else; in doing so, we emphasise both the details and scope of sound (2022), and I extend this to think also about the scope of the act of listening. The listening act with which a workshop session begins focuses on multiple layers of listening (as shown in the audio example below), and then it is through the performance of a research poem that I, as the researcher guiding the workshop, encourage participants to explore their process of listening and the social-political agentic soundings we place upon this process. Here I take the example of a workshop conducted at the NYC Face-To-Face Arts Roundtable Conference in April, 2023. The questions or prompts that I provided explore the nature of sound tracks/flows, their pulls and our focus on certain sounds as meaningful, meaningless and noise. The poem performed had music and a beat to it, at times the listener felt a pull to the music, which took them away from the words, and then we questioned—what affects emerged when this happens? Anxiety, ease, restlessness, alarm? And if so, where do they come from, why

and what do they mean? Can they open us up to new ways of knowing and engaging with difference?

Instructions to guide the performance:
https://soundcloud.com/user-13841562/instructions-for-collaborative-listening-exercise?si=51fc1d0a860d4247b98df159cbc81f6f&utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing

Transcript:
I will begin by performing a poem I wrote called *The Wild Girl*; before we begin, there are certain things that I invite you to pay attention to, if I may, in fact, call you into a collaborative exercise in listening. Today we will try to listen differently, going deeper, or we will listen in layers. As much as I want you to listen to my reading, focus on the words, the music, the beat, etcetera. I want you to also listen to yourselves, to the spaces within that may or may not directly connect/link with what I am saying. Let me clarify myself; we will be focusing on three layers of listening, to begin with, that go beyond listening to the words of the poem; the first is the physical—any sensation that arises in the body, tension during the performance, for instance, pay close attention to how the beat of your heart changes. Pay attention to your breathing as it rises and falls with the words and the song of the poem. Maybe you start to tap your fingers or your foot, or maybe you begin to sway a little; you could get restless fidgety, and we must pay attention to each of these impulses. The second layer we will focus on is the mental field, that is, the thoughts that emerge as you listen. Maybe there's a word, a phrase, a section that sticks to the body (**refer to vi – Conversations in the Margins**), maybe it's the sound in this room or outside or in the recesses of the memory hold onto that. Lastly, pay close attention to your personal, if there is something in the listening process and in this exchange that unearths the epiphanies and half-formed thoughts from your own lived experiences, what you bring to the listening process, memories from the collective, which might not be universal but where called out and upon today, here, within **this** listening field—we will think about why and what called upon them?

Conversations in the Margins
(vi) Affect has the ability to perpetuate and hold in place systems and parameters, specifically hold in place particular 'racialized bodies' within systems of oppression (Ahmed 2010). It is only by paying attention to the listening process, to what/how/why is emerging within us that we can move to pluralised ways of knowing/being/doing difference and its impact on our onto-epistemological self-creation, our theory-building in motion.

At the NYC Face-to-Face roundtable conference, I followed these instructions with the poem *Wild Girl*. This poem speaks to the urge to engage with our unlearned forms of knowing/thinking/being/doing—where do they take us? In listening to this poem **(refer to vii – Conversations in the Margins)**, which acts as a prompt, participants are encouraged to question the listening process, thinking about the idea of learning/un-learning meaning-making processes through sound and silence—that is, what sounds we filter out or push down.

Conversations in the Margins
(vii) Dear Reader, the turn to poetry for making seen the unseen arises from the impulse that has been written about by Neilsen – 'lyric enquiry' (2008): inquiry that both recognizes and welcomes the lyric impulse, the singing of the self' that Lorde has also spoken about at length in her essay *Poetry is not a Luxury*, 'such inquiry honours expressive and aesthetic writing and processes which are, at once, creatively and wholly themselves and sufficient, free from the conventional demands of having to make a case or prove a point' (2017: 18). It is a form of inquiry that is process-driven in doing the work of a revelation or unearthing. It makes it no less significant in resonance that it comes from the realm of the storied imagination.

Link to the poem here:
https://soundcloud.com/user-13841562/wild-girl-wild-girl-a-call-to-listen?si=9bb8b3ff3d34423381b6fb7c36509f69&utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing

Some of the questions which came up in the session after participants had listened to the poem were—what does listening mean to you? What are your earliest memories of listening? What does silence sound like to you? How do you listen to the space within which you are situated? Where is the cut that allows you the listener and the teacher/researcher to tune into certain sounds, soundings, storying and subsequently out of these sounds/soundings? To add to these, I borrowed provocations from Oliveros' *Quantum Listener* (2022: 3): "When do you stop hearing the sound? When

does sound simply exist?". These echoes reverberate through the layers of the listening field—sound, silence, stillness, the affective and its moving force that leads to new materialities—new ways of knowing, new ways of being, new ways of theorising.

Listening for meaning and power

In the collaborative act of deep listening, this collective listening, led to shared responses around the process of listening. One of the participants of the workshop spoke on how she was pulled in different points in the performance by the beat of the drum (the musical track within which the poem was nestled) steadying the rhythm of her body, it pulled her away from the words till she realised that she was missing out on what was being said—it felt like a distraction to her from capturing/understanding the meaning behind the poem. The affective resonance to this distraction caused a sense of panic in this participant, as though she would not be able to perform or engage in the session if she missed even a small portion of the content or of the product being shared. The focus was on the content, not the process, what it was doing, or how it allowed her to show up in the session. The fact that we are pulled by the beat of the drum, rather than the words of the poem is doing something, and this was missed because of the sheer panic it off-set in participants. She said, '*I felt that I was getting distracted from listening to the poem, following the words, and the meaning, because of the beat of the music. I felt an urgency to keep up with everyone.*'

As a researcher, I thought her response was particularly interesting, specifically when considering the behavioural process of listening, its performance, and how that makes us feel secure within an academic space. The urgency to keep up, the urgency to follow the meaning behind the words of the poem, which can be argued is one part of the poem, but not the only part; the music, the rise and the fall and the way the words are overlaid upon it, have been done so with intention and yet in our listening process we are trying our best to silence the music and its ontology. We are trying to tune it all out.

The provocation I presented to all listeners was around when, where and why is it that we condition ourselves into believing that we missed out on the

meaning-making act by allowing the song of the poem to take centre stage in this case, which ignores the other aspects of the listening field which can also bring us emergent knowings. Perhaps in the stillness[10]—what can emerge is a flow towards a different/differenced/alternative meaning. The participant eventually admitted '*I stopped forcing myself to draw my attention back to the words and let it flow with the poem and the song, and when I was pulled back to the words it was by something that struck a chord deeply within me*.' These words evoke a sense of uncovering/unearthing/revealing—a resonance-building capacity that is inherent in poetic enquiry—an undoing of how 'matter emerges in the invisible in-between, which as a sphere of sound, even if inaudible or unheard, confirms how matter mattering is indivisible, in that it is connecting rather than a theoretical apart' (Voegelin 2023: 44). I would briefly like to come to the idea of hauntologies in education grounded in a "spectral event":

> The event is not what we desire but what is being desired in what we desire, some deeper disturbance of our desire. When we desire this or that, we have the uneasy feeling that something else is getting itself desired in that desire, like a *desire beyond desire*. In this sense, we can never say what we desire. We do not know what we desire. Still, this is not some fault or limitation … It is the very structure of the event, of temporality, of the openness of the future, of the ghost of the future (Caputo 2016: 116).

The spectral event in this workshop tapped into ghosts of the past and future, from the experiences of past meaning-making/behaving as were developed whilst our young years spent in school/the Institution/the academy to the present when how, what, when, where and why we listen and allow certain stories, words, sounds into our periphery more actively over others is simply a regurgitation of past inclinations—done unconsciously.

Dernikos provides an example of this from a primary school classroom in New York City, where she observed: '[the] slippages among sound, silence, noise, voice, and ir/rationality [that allowed her] to map out the ways white

10 Where words slip through the consciousness of attention, that is attention placed and misplaced.

supremacist forces subtly moved with/in' (2020: 134). In these spaces of silence, students were encouraged to approach a text in codified formats, wherein the text is holding space for a very concrete form of materialities/knowing the text that does not change, nor engages with change and with the potentialities and possibilities of what could be. Excited exclamations of young readers as they engaged with stories were shushed and dampened, they were encouraged instead to put their quiet thumbs up in appreciation. While peers (having learnt the behaviours of the institution) would readily shush an excited child engaging exuberantly with a reading text, they would ignore the blaring sounds of car horns outside of a New York classroom. Something similar occurred in the workshop, where participants struggled with the layers of listening processes and understanding why certain layers were so easily and naturally tuned out. It is significant for these questions to be asked for this work to be done with researchers, especially since it allows us to acknowledge and engage with the 'relational becoming' inherent in research,

> 'knowledge does not determine what is shown or what is seen, "this" or "that" and it is not about human agency and ability to show or to see. Instead, it is how we emerge with each other, between what is shown and what is seen. How we become visible. And it entails a responsibility to this process' (Voegelin 2023: 44).

Listening to not only the poem, but also what it enlivened within and without the listener was an act of activating varied environments, the awareness of noises and voices that are sounded through our socio-cultural lenses, both innate and learned, that allow us to make the cuts of what is relevant and what is not. As much as listening can act as an agent of silencing, it can also do the contrary—hold a space that presences alternative narratives, stories, sounds and experiences.

Conclusion: Listening deeply

Engaging with the act of listening by engaging with sounds, silence and stillness as a multi-tentacled force (Haraway 2007), highlight points of

tension moving through learning spaces and in academia. For researchers/knowledge-makers, it is important to pay attention to these pulsating points as it allows them to access what 'was once lost' due to the assimilation myth (Villanueva 2001: 268). To build plurality that takes away from binaries towards a multiple, polyphonous world as Law suggests, 'if much of reality is ephemeral and elusive, then we cannot expect single answers. If the world is complex and messy, then at least some of the time we are going to have to give up simplicities' (2004: 2). Giving up these simplicities in research and when we attempt thinking/being/doing/theorising as decoloniality, we must centre what emerges when paying attention to the affect. To the tension nodes where we make the agential cuts of our attention addressing the politics of such attention—the scope and politics of sound/listening, the entanglements of these cuts within the larger power relational structures of education and how plural/multi- worlds can be presenced. This is a 'claiming' wherein 'the voice of a "witness" is accorded space and protection, the sound/listening space, the listening field herein acts as that sacred protective space (Smith 2012: 144). The act of 'claiming' embraces the 'tension' and enlivens it as a way of seeing/being/knowing/doing ourselves differently and opening a space for possibilities 'to perform a communal dialogic function' (Finley 2014: 531).

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Chapter 4: Historical Justice: An Interplay Between Colonialism and Capitalism

Ibraheem Rasras

Introduction

This chapter aims to dig into the interplay between capitalism and colonialism (ICC), exposing the historical injustice imposed on the colonised peoples. The exploration involves the combination of Walter Benjamin's "angel of history" with Rosa Luxemburg's concepts of "accumulation of capital" and "accumulation of power". By examining empirical examples from Africa and the Arab world, the aim is to examine how the coloniser could accumulate power and capital, and how this accumulation left the colonised in a state of struggle even in the aftermath of colonisation.

This chapter argues that historical injustice can be observed through the accumulation of power and capital by the coloniser. Moreover, there are limitations on the subjectification capacities of the colonised people, as they develop a reactionary consciousness in reaction to the image of the colonised portrayed by the colonisers. Therefore, research in this field should investigate how colonialism not only diminishes the consciousness of the colonised, but also shapes a mode of consciousness that persists in the post-colonial era. Thus, the research should uncover the problematic aspects of this consciousness within the framework of ICC.

The main goal of this chapter is to reveal how the ICC contributes to historical injustice. To do this, it is required to examine the obstructive forces that structure historical injustice, such as dependency and wealth extraction from the colonised lands. Thus, the central question in this chapter is: How do these obstructive forces hinder the colonised people from eliminating the continuous impact of colonisation?

The formation of the incidental and substantial consciousnesses

The concept of the angel of history refers to the 'prefere[nce] to free men by taking from them, rather than make them happy by giving to them' (Handelman 1991: 345). Benjamin explores that historical advancement does not provide people with happiness or fulfilment by providing them with something constructive. This is implied by the previous statement. Freeing men can be made by removing things, usually through pain, loss or devastation. This sheds light on the price of advancement, which is frequently harsh and agonising, rather than uplifting. Moreover, the first insight emerging from this perspective is the supposition that men in history, reading from the angel of history's eye, find no fulfilment in taking from others, but rather in challenging their circumstances and understanding their pains that shape their awareness of their freedom and the end of subordination.

The achievement of those men's happiness is obstructed, and their happiness continually searches for a place to embody itself, where it can become more realistic and they are finally happy. That angel of history seeks to be happy, however, that happiness carries within its essence an obstruction that prevents this angel from being content. Additionally, the angel, caught between the past and the future, suffers from a sense of loss and remains trapped between the past's 'empty repetitive unfulfilled moments and the future's utopianism' (Handelman 1991: 347). In other words, the angel of history, that attempts to be happy, remains obscured by uncertainties illustrated in the future, and remains burdened by the pains of the past. This obstruction indicates an error in consciousness, especially when shaped by past incidents, which serve as the lens through which the future is prescribed, with all its pains, deficiencies, alienation, and exploitation.

Accumulation of capital is the result of accumulating the surplus profits. Specifically, accumulation occurs as the bourgeois class sells their products, enabling them to achieve their surplus wealth in the form of "money". That accumulation is generated by 'additional labour power and constant capital' (Sweezy 1967: 476), which was referred to as the surplus. The surplus arises

from growing capital, especially among its private owners, who emerged without any prior plan for that development (Luxemburg 2003). One might conclude from this that emerging capitalists pursue their self-interest individually, however, the general rule is that there must be capitalists with more capital than others. In other words, there must be disparity to allow competition, and this requires a perpetual state of conflict: a war of all against all (Arendt 1958). Moreover, and most importantly, one must not overlook the existence of non-capitalists. Luxemburg (2003) classifies the world into capitalist countries alongside non-capitalists (Sweezy 1967), which helps one understand how they coexist, despite their contradictory positions (that is, capitalist versus non-capitalist), enabling the survival of the global capitalist system. The former exploits the latter, who also serve as a useful market for the capitalists. The non-capitalist, in this context, reflects the angel of history, specifically in how their position is revealed within the process of accumulation. If accumulation occurs on the side of the capitalist, then deprivation is the result for the non-capitalist.

The concern within this theoretical framework centres on the implications of deprivation for the non-capitalist, especially in comprehending how colonialism, as a historically bounded process experienced by the colonised, has shaped the colonised consciousness as non-bourgeois and subordinated it to the historical challenges created by colonialism, such as dependency, geographical fragmentation and backward consciousness. Thinking of both concepts of the angel of history and Luxemburg's accumulation, it is possible to view accumulation as a means of pain, torture and disorientation experienced by those exploited nations, who aspire to independence and struggle to develop free ideas, cultures and political programmes independent from any colonial impact.

Juxtaposing the angel of history with Luxemburg's theory of accumulation, shows that the consciousness of the colonised people is formed not only through historical events and memories of oppression, but also by their dissatisfaction with the bourgeois accumulation of wealth, which simultaneously deprives the non-capitalist class. This absence bars the colonised from autonomous self-evolution because their awareness is circumstantial, decided by destructive historical circumstances and periods of hardship. Understanding the interplay between capitalism and

colonialism in these paradigms smooths a superior understanding of how colonialism, supported by capitalist agendas,[1] still influences the colonised during the post-colonial era through indirect remnants of colonialism.

Technique of investigation (qualitative)

Through critical analysis, this chapter investigates how colonised people face neo-imperial influences,[2] particularly during the post-liberation phase of self-building.[3] The analysis engages with scholarly articles, chapters and academic essays, constructing intersectional arguments and historical data on colonisation, which will be cited throughout the chapter. The study focuses primarily on examples from Mali, while briefly referencing colonial experiences in Congo, the Arab Gulf and German Southwest Africa. These examples, such as the case of Mali, demonstrate how elements like the expansion of Western capitalism continue to influence colonised people in the post-colonial era. For instance, these states may employ irrelevant techniques to solve their societal problems, as seen when privatisation is used to address economic crises that may stem from tribal or sectarian divisions. In other words, some societies remain influenced by values of tribalism and sectarianism, which are sometimes claimed to have resulted from colonisation (Ali 2023); as a result, privatisation, which may not align with the economic conditions of these societies, only complicates the self-building process.

Furthermore, the case of Mali should help understand why Malian political thought remained trapped in crises related to territorial security, internal divisions leading to military coups, and the lingering implications of French colonialism and the global capitalist system. This argument underlines how political consciousness in Mali is shaped by historical colonial experiences and their continued influence. The claim addresses the issue of how consciousness is designed to respond to incidents shaped by

1 Such as the unlimited profit, expansion of markets, reproduction of the system (capitalism) or more.

2 Neo-imperial influences can be perceived in the way capitalist powers exert indirect dominance over non-capitalist societies, shaping the latter's dependency on the former.

3 Self-building is a post-colonial phase, and the aim in this period is to achieve social stabilisation, independence of economic production, political independence, etcetera.

historical colonial experiences and how these incidents represent dangerous moments in contemporary Malian history, such as the lack of territorial integrity caused by operations of non-state armed groups in Sahel.

These examples also explore the specific challenges colonised people face regarding consciousness required for self-building, that is, why do colonised nations struggle to establish a resilient political economy? Addressing the issue of the colonised people's dependency and political concentrations may offer new perspectives to tackle the issue at hand. To understand this more thoroughly, we may examine the role of discontinuity between pre-colonial productivity and post-colonial resource utilisation and widen this investigation.

The case of Mali also explores the specific challenges faced by colonised people in terms of consciousness required for self-building. That raises the question: why do the colonised people struggle to establish consistent political economy? Moreover, addressing the issue of colonised people's dependency and political concentrations may offer new perspectives to tackle the problem in question. To ensure a deeper inquiry while answering it, this chapter seeks to explain the role of the discontinuity between pre-colonial productivity and post-colonial resource utilisation, aiming to broaden the scope of the investigation.

A theoretical inquiry into these three concepts (the angel of history, accumulation of capital and accumulation of power) demonstrates the consciousness burden faced by the other side (the weaker party) of the accumulation process, marked by traumatic historical events and deprivation. This chapter is, therefore, structured as follows: first, in Part I (concepts of angel of history, Accumulation of capital and Accumulation of power), the chapter establishes the correlation between the three concepts to assist in comprehending the evolution of the history of the colonised with a new insight: by applying these concepts to the colonised people's self-building process. More precisely, we will examine how colonised people, in the post-colonial era, are trapped between reflecting on the past and interpreting the future based on their incidental consciousness.[4]

4 Incidental consciousness is a form of awareness that is generated as a by-product of historical events, namely those of colonisation, that shape the awareness of those who suffer from these incidents. These incidents are in the past, and they are what shape the lens used to perceive the future.

In Part II, the empirical application will continue based on three points: A) Utilising examples that explain the creation of dependency of the colonised—in the case of Mali, there are several symptoms to note vis à vis incidental consciousness, such as the failure of peace-making, the overbearing presence of armed groups and the role of the colonial past that still complicates the contemporary political context there. This, in part, provokes the question of why Mali has faced several military coups, and whether military violence is a prerequisite for the end of Malians' self-building? B) Connecting dependency to the coloniser's accumulation of wealth, achieved by dominating the resources of the colonised, and thus, historically hindering the colonised self-building on the post-colonial level. C) Any discussion on the dependency of the colonised should reveal how dependency is rooted through what is here called incidental consciousness, rendering dependency a defining symptom of historical injustice committed against the colonised. This incidental consciousness is again shaped by obstructive forces[5] that impose a reactive nature on the colonised, trapping them in the pursuit of liberation, transitioning into social stabilisation, independence of economic production, political independence and so on. Lacking these on the post-liberation level denotes to a set of difficulties. These difficulties emerging from the inability to build the self are due to a situation of historical injustice that can be understood by comprehending the obstructive forces that are laid in the colonised nations' historical paths of self-building. First, dependency, rooted in obstructive forces, forces the colonised people into a reactive state, hindering self-building efforts. Understanding these forces is essential for addressing the difficulty of self-building in colonised nations, including the defect in resource utilisation post-colonisation.

5 An obstructive force arises due to the passage of time, without diagnosing the effects of colonialism on society. These obstructive forces appear when a state of dependency between the colonised and the coloniser emerges, where the colonised is unable to achieve either economic disengagement or independence at all levels, and remains struggling within its orbit even in the post-colonial period.

Part I: Concepts of angel of history, accumulation of capital and accumulation of power

A. Political suppression in Mali and the formation of consciousness

Benjamin's concept of 'angel of history' refers to an active entity interpreting history by considering dynamic elements like 'oppression' and 'historical materialism' from the past (Benjamin 1969: 257).[6] These essential components of the angel of history are dynamics in themselves, and they affect the trajectory of those engaged in history-making, shaping their image of the future. Benjamin, when investigating the impact of decisive factors (for example, oppression) in the past, refers to a moment of 'danger' in history (Benjamin 1969: 255),[7] and conditions of 'catastrophe', 'struggling, oppression', and 'messianic power' (Benjamin 1969: 254-260). These challenges inspire the making of history[8] and affect the oppressed people's "image" toward both the past and future. The failure of the Malian regime to consider Northern Mali's demands of development and equalisation with the South, deepened the complexities in resolving disagreement and distrust between southern and northern territories (Boutellis and Zahar 2017). What do colonialisation and capitalist production have to do with this issue? The answer is that the French colonial investment and concentration of industry was more focused in Southern Mali, creating a situation of dependency[9] for the north. Understanding France's crucial role in forming Malian incidental consciousness requires examining Mali's natural geography. Cities like Taoudenni, Timbuktu and Gao, located in Northern Mali, are in the desert while the southern cities benefit from the

6 Benjamin views oppression and the historical material conditions in which humans live as forces that greatly influence the course of human history, and these are elements, among other elements, that shape his concept of the angel of history.

7 'The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers.'

8 It inspires the collective will to create a history that matches the magnitude of suffering, honours the dignity of the self, and drives resistance to shape a truly deserved future.

9 Dependency is a state of inability to develop and build oneself due to imposed restrictions. These restrictions result from following rules imposed by the strongest, least vulnerable to internal conflicts, those with better technical capabilities and socio-economic conditions, and other situations.

Niger River and lush greenery. The colonial experience in Mali reveals how France, as the colonial power, exploited the south's natural resources,[10] creating an additional disparity between South and North and increased dependency of the whole country (Ibrahim *et al* 2018: 10).

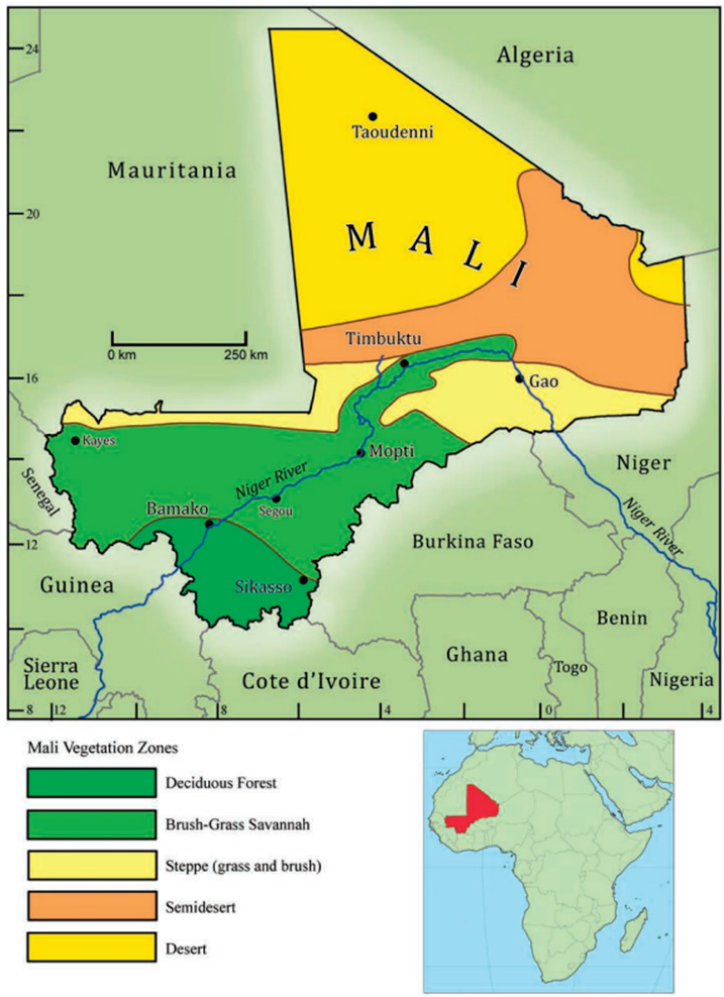


Image 4.1: Map of Mali –
Source: (Ibrahim *et al* 2018: 10)

10 See the following map for the salient geographical features of Mali (Ibrahim et al 2018: 10).

The colonial power exploits those lands in that way because colonisation operates as a foreign power focusing on exploitation without any strategic considerations to develop the colonised lands themselves. The impact of French colonisation is crystallised in the colonial remnants, such as the disparity between the North and the South, in the post-colonial level, certainly, the inequalities between the rich South and the underdeveloped North. Unfortunately, the Malian regimes followed the same colonial techniques, resulting in armed confrontations that reappeared in 2016 against armed groups from countries north of Mali. The usage of the same colonial policies of governance and the lack of trust between the ruled and the ruler appeared more in the military coups that took place in 2020 and 2021 (ISPIONLINE 2021). This presents the peak of the incidental consciousness when the colonised inherit the same plans, techniques and regulations of the coloniser without recognising they are alienated. This alienation (Marx 1977: 7-8),[11] in fact, is embedded in how the colonised lack the industrial expertise that the colonialists necessarily own. Besides, the colonised must be made aware of how this industrial experiment serves their different political agendas, which pursue socioeconomic constructions that are supposedly revolutionary and different from colonial ones, which are inwardly directed at the colonial pursuit of capital accumulation. Additionally, this alienation from the industrial system allows the colonial state to access the colonised lands even in the post-colonial era. That explains how Mali remained occupied by France in later years (Hoebeke 2013: 4-6). Analysing this situation clarifies how colonialism, as a destructive force, leaves the colonised in a structural void that results in the dependency of this colony.

Benjamin (1969) links the image of the past specifically to the

11 Alienation is often presented as a 'problem of estrangement' influenced by the philosophy of Hegel and Feuerbach. The concept was used to analyse the human "social relation", then narrowed to the focus of the working class and he connected the concept of "private property and the social system it engenders". In the context of this chapter, alienation is used in a broader sense, where it can apply to the feeling of inability to adapt to societal conditions and the need for disengagement and separation, which drives conflict, is strongly related to historical circumstances such as colonialism, as well as socioeconomic conditions that are inconsistent with the psychological conditions of society as a whole, the political ambition for independence and other factors.

working class's perception[12] of 'hatred and its spirit of sacrifice, for both are nourished by the image of the enslaved ancestors rather than that of liberated grandchildren' (260). Perhaps one might like to compare the imagined oppressed grands, who lived during the colonial era, not the free grandchildren to the Malian context.

In Northern Mali, which seems less developed compared to the Southern part, armed violence appears as a refusal of the unjust development concentrated in the South. Violence in 2006 in Southern Mali reflects the pains and the lack of trust in the South, despite the Malian government's attempt to distribute food and deepen people's productive powers throughout Mali. The cooperation that took place in 2003 was conducted between the government, Japan, Qatar and other countries (World Food Programme 2005).

The historical events, in the eyes of the angel of history, and the moment of danger, are to be understood as dynamics that construct the normativity that is driving people toward their historical goal (that is, salvation); in which historical events lead to a push towards progress. The claim is illustrated through the example of Social Democrats' concept of progression, as a political party they have a comprehensive vision on conceptions, like progression. Progression was illustrated as consequent to all humans not only 'men's ability and knowledge'. Progression is further inevitable and exists in a direct path (Benjamin 1969: 260). Benjamin (1969) uses this argument to tell how the image of seeing progression in the lens of the future appears dogmatic, even when it is viewed as straight to redemption.

Benjamin's concept of the angel of history is crucial, based on its central dimension that presents the role of the conditions like oppression and struggle in designing the image toward the purpose in the future, which becomes absolute and strategically rigid. The angel of history here facilitates understanding the image that guides the oppressed group's comprehension of reality. For example, when the colonised nations imagine liberation as a form of finalised redemption, limiting liberation *incidentally*

12 The working class was the only last class proposed by Marx to lead liberation and redeem the future of the oppressed. Hence, the image of the past is what shapes the oppressed people's vision towards the future, and it requires a mode of awareness of that image and the struggles in it, shaping the comprehension of liberation and how to achieve it.

to react to oppression without advancing to the post-liberation levels, including political independence from foreign influences and furthermore. In such a circumstance, oppression becomes a moment of danger in history, risking the colonised people's consciousness and tradition of emancipation. This limitation is done by achieving liberation only from foreign military presence. Consequently, they design their image of liberation in an obstructive way, specifically, they limit it to colonisation as an incident or as a moment of emergency in history, where they declare their independence, but remain under the colonial state's influence and fail to guarantee a solid economy. Benjamin refers to this state of emergency as an 'exception' to a 'rule' (Benjamin 1969: 257).

This limitation reveals an inability to comprehend the gap created by the obstructive forces in the path of their historical liberation. Proposing the principle of liberation at the wrong time or to the wrong practice can turn this freedom into an obstruction, such as when the colonised people suffer from exploitation, resource theft and subjugation to colonial policies restricting their independent progression, and when these sufferings result in the division of the colonised society. On this basis, one might notice that there is a deep need to establish a form of consciousness that surpasses the moment of emergency of colonialism in the history of the colonised and to make this consciousness comprehensive to resist any obstruction in the future. This is to be clarified in the next part of this chapter.

B. Mali in the context of accumulations

The colonial focus on development, investment and production in the south of Mali resulted in a long-term disparity between North and South. This disparity led the people of the northern regions to resist to gain political representation and economic development. However, the long-standing neglect of demands of people in Northern Mali, along with the suppression of northern cities like Gao, Kidal and Menaka, contributed to the emerging autonomy in the North (Chauzal and Van Damme 2015). France played a significant role in the abuses and offenses committed in the north of Mali during 2012 and 2013 (for example, the war against anti-jihadist and Tuareg groups). Nonetheless, it did not address the local people's demands and

sufferings of lack of advancement. That explains how colonialism affected the power dynamics, focusing more on the abuse of the Malian people than on preventing the emergence of more armed groups (Human Rights Watch 2017). In this regard, the concentration of power in the South came at the expense of neglect, annihilation and the deprivation of the North.

The inheritance of colonial administrative procedures also influenced the Malian economic system, especially regarding private property. France attempted to modify legal aspects to further exploit Malian lands, transitioning from 'customary tenure precepts [to] Roman legal principles' (USAID 2010: V-2). In the post-colonial era, successive Malian regimes retained these laws to maintain the principle of state control (USAID 2010). While the French colonial approach to land production and usage relied on research, laboratories and professional techniques (Bingen 1988), Malian utilisation lacked such professionalism, which contributed to further poverty in Mali (Boutellis and Zahar 2017).

Marx (1904) emphasised the importance of the maturity of material conditions. This maturity can be viewed in the transition from an agricultural mode of production into a technological—industrial one, where people, if not alienated from their means of production, have better life conditions and more advanced conditions. Marx argued that, in modern bourgeois society, the bourgeoisie treats society antagonistically, which is pathological. This pathology must be addressed. However, treating this pathology requires that 'the productive forces in [the] bourgeois society [to] develop and create with that the material solutions of that antagonism' (Marx 1904: 13). Marx seems to emphasise that treating this pathology (that is, antagonism) can be by developing the society's material conditions, where there should be no poverty, exploitation, alienation, or even a class-conflict. In the context of this chapter, colonial practices (for example, exploitation and resources theft) were catastrophic until they became obstructive through accumulation, impeding the evolution of material conditions for the colonised. Moreover, since these colonial practices are systematic, they impacted the colonised peoples as forces in their own right.

Luxemburg's (2003) concepts of the accumulation of capital and power help deepen the understanding of transformation from the catastrophic to the obstructive. Expansion, as a basis for the accumulation of capital,

relies on the interaction of four elements. First, there must be a 'surplus value' to ensure the continuity and growth of capitalist profit. Luxemburg (2003) notes that this surplus value must be 'realised, converted into the form of money, so that it can be appropriated for the purposes of expanding reproduction' (16). Second, there must be a 'commodity market' (Luxemburg 2003: 15) where the exchange of commodities reveals how the risks created by surplus value may affect the future of reproduction. The third element must directly involve the accumulation of surplus value through 'its productive form of labour and inanimate means of production' (Luxemburg 2003: 16-17). Fourth, the new proportion of commodities and surplus value must be converted into money, a fundamental condition for both reproduction and expansion (Luxemburg 2003: 16-17), which are necessary for accumulation.

There are three factors that are central to the reproduction, expansion as well as accumulation of capital, 1- money, 2- the control of the commodities and their exchange market and 3- the surplus value. These factors in themselves function as a combination of powers that are essential to allow the continuity of the accumulation of capital. Besides that, Arendt argues that the absolute accumulation of power is conditional on the absolute accumulation of capital (Arendt 1958). Therefore, the accumulation of capital and power are mutually reinforcing, each supporting the existence of the other. Although these three factors are purely economic, their impact extends beyond the economic realm. This can be linked to Marx's claim about the transformation of the entire superstructure through changes in the economic base (Marx 1904), which underscores the importance of the economic dimension in shaping a constructive situation. This idea further clarifies why France's economic focus on the southern region of Mali distorted Mali's future and created a dependent consciousness and mechanical political practice among Malian elites. In other words, the elites continued the same colonial practices by neglecting and ignoring investment in the North.

The accumulation of capital, in one way or another, must be protected by accumulation of power, even if this condition requires laws to protect the accumulation of capital; as when the capitalist's interest symbolises 'the highest law' (Luxemburg 2003: 17) in society. However, the exchange

market for money and commodities must not be subjected to any laws (Luxemburg 2003). The accumulation of power by the capitalist, where there are no laws, mirrors the accumulation of power in the 'perpetual war of all against all' (Arendt 1958: 142). Thus, gaining more tools of violence is essential for fulfilling the thirst for power. In the case of capital accumulation, this pursuit becomes purposeful to gain unlimited profits. In both types of accumulations, the situation resembles an open 'competitive struggle' (Luxemburg 2003: 426), with the most powerful party being the one with the greatest potential to win!

Influenced by mistrust, the instrumental violence between the North and the South of Mali created political context driven by the logic of the war of all against all. Consequently, Mali experienced atomisation, and the North became divided to be controlled by various powerful groups that believe in mythological thoughts and reflect the influences in resulting in political instability. The Malian government even faced conflicting local agendas, revealing the magnitude of political disagreements (Chauzal and Van Damme 2015). This situation raises the question: How did colonisation make it so extremely difficult for Mali to keep pace with the current capitalist conditions and economic development? The relevance of this point can be illustrated in how colonisation plays a crucial role in complexifying the political situation and the colonial legacy remains even in the post-colonial times.

The accumulation of capital, as constructed from surplus value or exploitation in Marx's (1977) sense, and the accumulation of power, as constructed from violence, are not sufficient on their own. Since they are two distinct forms of appetite and wealth, they must transcend the realms of violence and surplus value by morphing into imperialism. The two accumulations, now providing fertile ground for imperialism, are especially potent when capitalist and non-capitalist systems coexist, and the former seeks to extract surplus value from the latter (Luxemburg 2003). France treated Mali according to the principles of expansion and reproduction necessary to accumulate wealth for France and deprive Mali. Initially, specifically during the colonial times, Mali was viewed as a foreign land to be expanded for specific exploitative purposes, resulting in historical obstructions that prevented Mali from becoming independent.

Drawing from the angel of history, accumulation of capital and accumulation of power, the obstructive force is a complex component that arises due to historical—economic factors that aim to dominate. The domination is always functioning against the oppressed group, it could be the oppressed group's lens of understanding reality, or it could be the economic system that controls the lives of this oppressed group. In another instance, the post-colonial Mali showed incapability to understand the political reality because of 1- colonialism as a moment of danger in its history and 2- capitalism as a total obstruction governing the colonised people's efforts and resources.

In analysing the angel of history, Benjamin (1969) shows an indirect call for emancipating the oppressed consciousness from the constraints created heavily by the situation that this consciousness is subjected to. The correlation of the three concepts is to assist analysing the colonised consciousness shift from catastrophic to obstructive. By utilising these concepts, it becomes possible to explore how the colonised people's consciousness must surpass the limits made by the interplay through owning what is to be called here, substantial consciousness, rather than incidental consciousness. The incidental consciousness is what limits the oppressed people's consciousness to the constraints of the situation (for instance, the colonial governmental remnants) they are subjected to. Incidental consciousness is a factual result of colonisation, which is also a historical incident in the historical evolutionary path of the colonised people.

Part II: The colonised's dependency, the coloniser's accumulation of wealth and the colonised's incidental consciousness

A. Dependency of the colonised

The concept of dependency signifies one of the key elements in realising the incidental consciousness among colonised nations. It reflects the limited capacity of colonised people to engage in a process of self-building and self-determination. A structuralist view of dependency offers a

comprehensive diagnosis of the condition of colonised nations, where their economies are subjected to the needs of dominant powers rather than their own developmental goals. More precisely, the concept of 'dependent development' refers to a global political economy structured to facilitate 'the expansion of [the] dominant nations and [to be] tied to the needs of the dominant economy as opposed to the needs of the dependent economy' (Higgot 1987: 76).

While criticising the dependency theory, Andre Frank avers that colonised nations are 'peripheries' to the central 'European colonial powers' (Kapoor 2002: 649). Similarly, Latin American theorists, that is, Fernando Cardoso and Enzo Faletto explain the emergence of dependency on the internal class or social conflicts within the colonised society (Kapoor 2002), which find expression in the international relations between the coloniser and the colonised.

Zizek's (2009) analysis of Mali, in relation to European powers, offers a clear example of this dependency. Mali's economy is divided between the cattle farming in the north and cotton farming in the south. Although there are economic activities in both regions (North and South), Mali struggles to compete in the global market due to the technological advancements of Western powers. For example, cotton farmers in the United States receive financial support greater than the entire national budget of Mali, which makes it nearly impossible for Malian cotton producers to compete. Similarly, in the beef industry, the advanced production methods used by European powers make it unfeasible for Mali to compete with their beef and milk exports (Zizek 2009). Furthermore, due to historical factors such as colonial exploitation, Mali cannot bridge the technological gap and achieve industrial advancements necessary for competing in the modern capitalist system.

French colonial rule in Mali left lasting consequences, including a security burden that became increasingly difficult for Mali to manage, particularly after the rise of armed groups and military coups, such as the one in 2021. Despite the presence of French troops, insecurity remained widespread throughout the country, with the political landscape further complicated by the security challenges within the Sahel region (Haidara 2021). Mali, previously part of multinational forces fighting armed groups

in the Sahel, was unable to sustain the immense financial demands of these military operations (Al-Jazeera 2022).

Two dimensions appear from the previous description of the Malian case, first, the question arises: why do the French troops exist in Mali? These troops can be viewed as guardians of the French interests in Mali, such as the extraction of oil and uranium (Baig 2013). There is a signed agreement between France and Mali, which lays Mali responsible to ensure the security of its land; however, Mali proved to be unable to take the responsibility of security, either on its lands, or as a part of the responsible states for the security in the region of Sahel, and this needed 'the military intervention' from France and other countries (Baig 2013). Second, Mali struggled to show suitable management to all these internal and regional challenges, such as increasing its productivity to compete in the free market and strengthening its technical capacities that are essential to develop its socioeconomic conditions.

The Belgian colonialism in Congo serves as another clear example of how exploiting the colonised can lead into accumulating the coloniser's wealth. During this period, the Belgian colonial administration implemented brutal strategies to extract rubber from the Congolese population. Even those Congolese, who were more productive than the others, were receiving the minimum material return for their efforts, such as knives, salt and pieces of clothing. Some of these things were already given to be used for the labour itself (rubber extraction), such as the knives (Hochschild 1999). The coloniser does not lure the colonised into a new socioeconomic condition from zero, however, enforcement is what occurs when the former forcibly imposes that condition of exploitation on the latter.

Colonisation caused a rupture between the colonised people and their traditional—precolonial over land and resources, forcing them to suffer alienation. Marx's (1977) concept of alienation can be adapted to explain this situation, albeit with a modification in its meaning. Marx (1977) used the concept of alienation to describe the separation between the worker and the product of their labour, a consequence of private ownership in capitalist economies. In the capitalist system, alienation is the reduction of the labour power into an 'object/product' (Marx 1977: 68). Hence, the labour power becomes measured based on the way the capitalist sells the commodity in

the market (the exchange value). Therefore, it explains the objectification of the human effort of the worker. On the same scale, alienation becomes relevant to the description of isolating the colonised from administrating their lands and resources.

This claim applies to the way colonisation in Africa meant to create distortions within the people's socioeconomic activity on their own lands; by turning the activity on the land from farming to 'heavy industry' (Mudimbe 1988: 16). This transformation in the mode of production separated the colonised people from the actual usage of their resources, contributing to the formation of an incidental consciousness. Over time, colonisation created an obstructive historical force that stifled the self-determination of the colonised.

Marx's theory of alienation (1977) describes the objectification of labour; differently, this theory, in the framework of the colonial experience, can add the concept of self-sufficiency to the view of alienation in the colonised people's historical experiences. In this case, theory of alienation can serve to understand the dependency of colonised people.

The accumulation of power and capital by the coloniser led to the creation of a dependent and inferior state for the colonised, who were forced to adopt a consciousness shaped by the coloniser's interests. The relationship between the coloniser and the colonised was parasitic, where the coloniser maintained control over both the political and economic systems, continuously accumulating wealth at the expense of the colonised people.

The result of the passage of time is constructing an obstructive force that becomes later historical,[13] and that is when liberation is achieved by the colonised or when the colonised is peacefully granted independence. The enjoyed unilateral accumulation of power presupposes the coloniser supremacist and more fitting for power and feeds the colonial capital ingredients (that is, the process of exploitation). Foucault's (2000) idea of power is relevant here, since it highlights how those who control wealth and resources are able to produce knowledge that legitimises their dominance. By perpetuating dependence and inferiority among the colonised, the coloniser could sustain its control, reinforcing the power imbalance and

13 That means this obstructive force becomes crucial and decisive in terms of its influence.

ensuring that the colonised would remain passive and subordinate. This theory is suitable to explain how the colonial power aims to maintain a continuous accumulation, but also aiming at creating an inferior and dependent personality to the colonised, since the process of accumulation contains two contradictory positions. For the coloniser, it is required to create dependence, stupidity and the incapacity to express the side of the colonised. This grants the coloniser a space to force the colonised to adopt to a top-down- pattern of dependent consciousness. Hence, the colonised does not own in the post-colonial era substantial consciousness that is created by the free self-made engagement between the colonised people and their socioeconomic—political reality.

Achille Mbembe (2001), in his analysis of the African colonial experience, views colonialism as a set of 'hollows' (177). In one hollow, the coloniser creates a self-consciousness rooted in the degradation of the colonised, and this is what Mbembe refers to as the 'coloniser's self-consciousness' (2001: 188). This consciousness presents the colonised as inferior as Mbembe (2001) demonstrates. In the postcolonial era, this inferiority of the colonised has been observed in the colonised people's incapacity to comprehend and confront the fact that their own socio-economic and political circumstances are diminished. This inferiority becomes entrenched even after liberation, as the colonised people continue to rely on the knowledge and guidance provided by the coloniser. Additionally, the post-colonial era does not automatically lead to a liberation of the colonised consciousness, as they remain shaped by the historical trauma of colonial domination.

The example of German colonialism in South West Africa further explores how colonisation sought to transform local modes of production, societal dynamism and people's conscious cultural relations. Wilhelm Hübbe-Schleiden argued that colonialism was an art form, in which the colonisers imposed their own cultural and economic strategies upon the colonised Africans, often resulting in immense suffering and exploitation (Matasci *et al*. 2020). This transformation, though it failed, disrupted the precolonial social order, and alienated the colonised from their own history and productivity.

Despite the failure of this German colonial attempt, this attempt to alter the African socio-economic situation had profound and long-lasting effects.

It hindered the colonised people's ability to understand the nature of their precolonial socio-economic structures and how they could have progressed without colonial interference. Colonisation replaced the fundamental knowledge of local systems of production with a new, colonial framework of dependency and inferiority.

In the case of the Arab Gulf countries, the emergence of the 'rentier state' (Beblawi 1987: 384) associates with the resources this state owns, such as oil and gas. The post-colonised states, the owners of the resources, rent the national resources to the coloniser for which they receive money. This applies to states in the Arab Gulf, which only enjoyed wealth granted from the coloniser and never experienced the self-independent creating of wealth. One of the phenomena that relates to renting resources is that only a small group in society manage the resource rental, while the majority merely benefits monetarily without engaging in collective national building efforts (Beblawi 1987: 385). For instance, British companies extracted oil from post-colonial Arab states and then monopolised both the production and the knowledge of the production. In contrast, Arab rentiers maintain a reactionary inactive role in the whole process without any engagement with production or refreshing knowledge. Consequently, the Arab rentier suffers from an immature knowledge of the territorial material conditions. This example should clarify how the coloniser creates a breakthrough in the history of the colonised, and this situation suggests a re-evaluation of the history of the colonised, and to rethink the historical development that was before the coming of colonialism.

The colonised's incidental consciousness: The Malian example

Colonisation aims to isolate the colonised from history, resources, other powers and precolonial social history, thereby, facilitating the coloniser's ability to impose a new political reproduction of the colonised in a way that varies from the character that the colonised had before colonisation took place. The coloniser does a dramatic shift in the operating history of the colonised. Isolation is not only frightful to the man as an individual (Mbembe 2001), it is too for the colonised nation as a whole; as the case

when the colonised nation's collective effort is alienated from the functional dynamics of the international market, which is managed by the coloniser. In other words, when the colonised nation suffers from dependency and has no opportunity to develop. One can notice the implications of this happening by noticing how the renter state in the Arab regions try to satisfy the historically known coloniser and allow it to have a foreign hand on its local oil or resources. This renter state never experienced a free leadership of its own resources, therefore, seeing those resources liberated from colonialism fears the colonised. This fear is accompanied by other imagined fears, such as the fear of international isolation that this colonial power may establish against the colonised.

The colonised people find themselves under the veil of historically unjust conditions. They find themselves within a system in which they do not fit. More precisely, when a freshly independent state finds itself required to engage in an international market that seems like a battleground between competing capitalist countries, it faces obstructions. This case reflects a type of historical injustice according to the law of the accumulation of capital since there is the capitalist that depends on the non-capitalist (Arendt 1958), and there is also the accumulation of wealth that automatically reflects the creation of the deprivation. The deprived party simply cannot follow the policy of competition in the global market like the coloniser, through its historically accumulated capital, which enables the coloniser to be ready for that competition! The position of the colonised is already predetermined as dependent, unfree and secondary. Such a position is an obstructive force to suppress the colonised in a self-developed way. This claim applies to the case of Mali, when the French colonials labelled security as a concern, and the European powers created the challenge of competing in the free market, hence, Mali found itself alienated in a totally unexpected world.

Behind that lies the lack of a conscious practice of self-building in Mali. The political efforts to manage the country's affairs are uncertain and fragmented, adding complexity to the situation. Under the rule of a military regime (Al-Jazeera 2022), the practice of self-building cannot develop in a sociopolitical sense. Instead, it is dominated by military priorities focused on surveillance, with a top-down, undemocratic approach. First, that situation is a simulating image of liberation that guides this current

regime in Mali to think that by cutting the French Malian relationships, the "neocolonial" impact can be ended (Al-Jazeera 2022). Second, it is led by the incidental consciousness that colonisation and its remnants are making Mali burdened with competition in the free market, political instability near the borders, the problem of security and other implications. Alongside this, when knowing that Mali has had a military system since 2021, a question comes to mind: can a purely military regime adjust to these challenges and crises? The short answer is no, and people must collectively own the required substantial consciousness that presents a constructive (specifically sociological and political) strategy to guide the self-building, rather than militarisation.

Conclusion

Colonisation is conceptualised here as a significant disruption in the history of the colonised. While it is an incidental, rather than a substitutional replacement in the historical path of the colonised, it carries its own set of implications that might act as substantial barriers to the historical development of these societies. By invoking Benjamin's (1969) concept of the "angel of history", there can be a better chance to understand why colonisation should not be regarded as the definitive endpoint in the historical process of the colonised nations in the post-liberation or post-independence period. In other words, the consciousness of the colonised must move beyond this historical incident of colonialism and return to the moment where a breakthrough or a rupture occurred in this collective consciousness. Despite the presence of monumental events like colonisation in the history of the colonised, these societies remain trapped in the present, often trapped by the traumatic legacy of the past. This is particularly observed due to the coloniser's impositions, such as deprivation, dependency and inferiority, all of which are consequences of the coloniser's pursuit of capital and power.

By adopting substantial consciousness rather than incidental consciousness, the colonised masses can employ a more productive mode of resisting neo-imperialism and pursuing a constructive process of self-construction as compared to one of militarisation or securitisation. The real

mode of such a process of self-construction is reflected in the employment of the colonised masses' socioeconomic consciousness, particularly their mode of production activity and use of resources.

Before examining the outcomes that emerge from these historical obstructions, it is essential to consider the accumulation of power and capital as central forces that shape the process of history-making. The accumulation of power and capital by the coloniser signifies the depletion of the colonised's resources and the creation of a dependent entity. Thus, the practices of dependency do not end with the achievement of independence or the fulfilment of liberation. In fact, such practices of dependency can persist even in post-colonial times. One must be cognisant of the potential challenge in casting liberation based on this historical hiatus, because liberation has the tendency to lead to self-imposed limitations within the colonised societies themselves.

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Chapter 5: Mohlomi's Indigenous Knowledge System as a Tool to Decolonise the Basotho: The *Botho* Perspective

Johannes Seema

Introduction

Chief Mohlomi was a revered traditional leader and healer among the Basotho in the eighteenth century. He was the son of Monyane and the great-grandson of Monaheng, king of the Bakwena. His elder brother was Nkopane, and his wife was Mmaliepollo. Mohlomi is remembered as a visionary thinker, spiritual guide and rainmaker whose influence shaped Basotho values for generations. As a young man, Mohlomi was initiated into the customs and traditions of the Bakwena tribe in the Tebang village, a process described in various historical and literary sources. These include *Moshweshwe Moshwaila* by Mopeli-Paulus (1976), *Morena Mohlomi mora Monyane* by Guma (1960) and *Histori ea Basotho* by Ellenberger (1988). These accounts depict Mohlomi as a young initiate under the guidance of his father, Monyane, who passed on the cultural and leadership wisdom of their people.

Mohlomi travelled widely across Southern Africa and neighbouring regions, where he healed people and spread a message of peace. He became a renowned medicine-man and traditional healer, possessing advanced knowledge of medicinal plants and herbs, as well as cures for various ailments. Mohlomi was also known to have the ability to bring about rainfall.

As Ellenberger (1988: 94) notes: *'Bitso la hae le ne le tumile; esita le balepera o ne a ba fodisa'* (His name was famous; he could even cure those suffering from leprosy). Mohlomi's deep understanding of traditional medicines played a vital role in preserving many Basotho healing practices from being lost. Succeeding his father, Monyane, Mohlomi emerged as a unifier of the Basotho, who had been divided. Mohlomi also succeeded his

father, Monyane, as chief in accordance with the customs of the Bakwena clan. Mohlomi emerged as a unifying figure among the Basotho, who had been politically and socially divided. The family resided in Ngoliloe, a settlement that predated the arrival of Christian missionaries in Lesotho in 1833.

To understand Mohlomi's lineage and his significance in Basotho history, it is important to introduce the Bakwena, the clan into which he was born. The Bakwena is one of the major clans of the Basotho people. Their totem, *Kwena* (crocodile), plays a vital cultural role in affirming clan identity, establishing kinship ties and guiding traditional leadership succession.

A key episode in the history of the Bakwena clan helps to explain the divided state of the community that Mohlomi would later work to unify. This division dates back to the time of Chief Monaheng, Mohlomi's grandfather. According to Bakwena custom, when the queen gave birth to twins, tradition dictated that only one of the children could survive, while the other had to be sacrificed. The queen defied this law and fought to protect both her sons, leading to tensions within the village. Some supported adherence to traditional law, while others sympathised with the queen. Eventually, one twin, Mokgeseng, was killed in battle. The other, Monyane, survived and later fathered Mohlomi.

This moment in history not only highlights the internal conflicts that shaped Mohlomi's heritage, it also foreshadows his future role as a unifier and reconciler of divided communities. Raised with deep knowledge of Basotho beliefs and political structures—and believed to be gifted with the ability to commune with the ancestors—Mohlomi would later emerge as a leader deeply committed to peace and unity.

Mohlomi lived in the pre-colonial era, long before the onset of European colonisation in Southern Africa. According to Ellenberger (1988), Mohlomi passed away in 1842. Cultural practices such as the killing of one twin—highlighted earlier—originated during this earlier period and were not a result of colonial influence.

The aim of this chapter is to explore Mohlomi's indigenous knowledge systems—both those rooted in his use of medicinal herbs and those embedded in his teachings on *Botho* and reconciliation—as a means of

decolonising the Basotho. Finally, the chapter seeks to answer the question: Why is the life of Africans, and the Basotho in particular, no longer guided by the philosophy of *Botho*?

The study method

This study takes the form of a textual analysis. Data will be collected from two main sources: Guma's novel *Morena Mohlomi mora Monyane* (1960) and Mopeli-Paulus's novel *Moshweshwe Moshwaila* (1976), along with a range of secondary sources.

Botho values

In this chapter, the terms *Botho* and *Ubuntu* will be used interchangeably, as both concepts refer to the same idea—humanity. *Botho* is a Sesotho term, while *Ubuntu* originates from isiZulu.

It is important to highlight that the concept *Botho* can be defined from different angles and perspectives. This means that there is no single, universally accepted definition of *Botho* in literature. In this chapter, *Botho* will be examined through the lens of five core values identified by Mbigi (1997), while also considering the views of other scholars. As cited in Nxumalo and Mncube (2019), Mbigi outlines five values embedded in *Botho*: survival; the spirit of solidarity; respect; compassion and dignity.

According to Hornby (2010: 1491), survival means 'the state of continuing to live or exist, often despite difficulty or danger'. During the *Difaqane* wars, Africans—and the Basotho in particular—suffered greatly. They were displaced, impoverished and deprived of basic resources. Epprecht (1994) notes that these wars, which lasted from approximately 1810 to 1840, were triggered by widespread famine and competition over scarce resources. In the face of hardship, Africans—the Basotho in particular—relied on mutual assistance to survive. As Du Toit *et al.* (2006) argue, poverty and displacement compelled people to depend on one another, thereby strengthening communal bonds.

The Basotho endured the hardships of the *Difaqane* and other wars largely through the values of *Botho*, relying on each other for survival.

The spirit of solidarity is reflected in the Basotho proverb *ntjapedi ha e hlolwe ke sebata*, meaning that when people work together, they can overcome or defeat challenges such as poverty. Hornby (2010: 1403) defines solidarity as the 'support by one person or group of people for another because they share feelings, opinions and aims'. Among the Basotho, mutual support is expressed through open communication and shared experiences. For example, when someone has no food, they can ask their neighbours for help—and help will be given. Nxumalo and Mncube (2019: 107) assert that 'compassion promotes feelings of belonging and interconnectedness observed in African communities'.

The Basotho is characterised by *tlhompho*—"respect". According to Nxumalo and Mncube (2019: 107), 'in African communities, if one wants to achieve successful engagement with members of the community, respect and dignity are the requirements'. Among the Basotho, respect is deeply rooted in proverbs such as *Mosadi ke morena*—"A woman is a king"—which expresses that women are respected by all, even by the king. Another proverb, *Mosadi ha a na morena*—"A woman has no king"—suggests that, on some occasions, only a woman may challenge the power and authority of a king.

The philosophy of *Botho* as the theoretical framework of the study

The concept of *Botho* is expressed in the Sesotho proverb *Motho ke motho ka batho ba bang*, which translates as "a person is a person through other persons". This means 'to be a human being is to affirm one's humanity by recognising the humanity of others and, on that basis, establish humane relations with them' (Naicker 2015: 3). In Sesotho, this proverb emphasises the idea that a person's worth is realised through their interconnectedness with others.

Botho is a broad concept, and scholars have not reached a single, universally accepted definition of what it entails. Some believe that *Botho* qualifies as a philosophy, while others argue that it does not. Due to the range of meanings associated with *Botho*, Bhengu (2006) asserts that it is difficult to translate the concept into English. Similarly, Mokgoro (1998: 1)

observes that *Botho* is generally translated as 'humanness', while Maqutu (2018) supports Bhengu's view by emphasising that there is no exact English equivalent for *Botho*.

Some scholars define *Botho* as a worldview, while others argue that it is indeed a fully formed philosophy. Hountondji (1996), for example, contends that African philosophy can only exist in written form. This argument, however, overlooks the fact that the absence of writing in many African societies was not due to a lack of intellectual tradition, rather a different mode of preserving and transmitting knowledge.

Africans had a rich oral tradition that included songs, proverbs, folklore and oral poetry. These forms of expression were passed down from generation to generation and formed a cohesive body of indigenous knowledge. While these traditions were not originally recorded in written form, they were later recognised by scholars as oral "literature". The fact that these ideas were not documented according to Western standards should not undermine the philosophical value of *Botho* when viewed through an African lens.

Botho as a worldview is well expressed by Ngcoya (2009: 1), who writes: '*Ubuntu* stresses the importance of community, solidarity, caring, and sharing. This worldview [*ubuntu*] advocates a profound sense of interdependence and emphasizes that our true human potential can only be realized in partnership with others.'

Ngcoya's notion that *Botho* is a worldview is supported by other scholars. One such scholar is Murove (2014), who also regards *Botho* as a worldview. Murove (2014: 37) writes: 'Since *Ubuntu* is based on a worldview, a relationality, its main insight is consequently based on the idea that as human beings we depend on other human beings to attain ultimate well-being.'

Mbiti (1969: 96) explains the traditional way of life of Africans as follows:

> In traditional life, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes his existence to people, including those of past generations and his contemporaries. He is simply part of the whole. The community must therefore make, create, or produce the individual; for

> the individual depends on the corporate group... Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual.

Mbiti's (1969) well-known statement 'I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am' (106) encapsulates the view that *Botho* is indeed a philosophy. He argues that a person cannot exist in isolation; their strength and identity are derived from their relationship with other people. This idea is echoed in King Moshweshwe's statement: 'Man is only alone as long as he remains in his mother's womb; when he sees the light of the day he clings to the breast of her who has given birth, and from that time he lives in the society of his fellows' (Krog 2009: 107-108). A person is never truly alone—even in the womb, a child is with the mother.

Tutu (1999) views *Botho* as a philosophy of human interconnectedness and argues that those who lack *Botho*—by oppressing others—are themselves victims of their oppressive actions, just like those they harm. He expresses his ideas as follows:

> *Ubuntu* means that in a real sense even the supporters of apartheid were victims of the vicious system which they implemented and which they supported so enthusiastically. Our humanity was intertwined. The humanity of the perpetrator of apartheid's atrocities was caught up and bound up in that of his victim whether he liked it or not. In the process of dehumanizing another, in inflicting untold harm and suffering, the perpetrator was inexorably being dehumanized as well (Tutu 1999: 35).

Tutu's reflections affirm *Botho* as a philosophy. His views are supported by Gade (2012: 487), who describes *Botho* as 'a philosophy or an African ethic, …according to which persons are interconnected'.

Sibanda (2019: 19) makes the following observation regarding the views of other scholars: 'The fact that scholars like Van Binsbergen (2001) are dismissive of *Ubuntu* as an authentic Southern African philosophy of being, vindicates those like Chilisa (2012), Banks (1992), and Asante (1991) who have challenged African scholars to be Afrocentric in their research philosophy.'

Sibanda (2019), in defence of Afrocentric scholarship, urges African scholars to value *Botho* as a valid philosophical tradition. The current chapter supports this call and acknowledges that *Botho* may be both a worldview and a philosophy. These perspectives are not mutually exclusive—rather, they offer complementary understandings of *Botho's* scope and meaning.

My position regarding the perspectives of scholars who argue that *Botho* is a worldview and those who claim it is a philosophy, is that both views are valid. While one can distinguish between the two, the essential meaning of *Botho* remains intact and should not be distorted. This means that even though authors can have different views about *Botho*, the meaning of *Botho* cannot change.

Botho is a perspective that strives for ethical perfection. This means that *Botho* is about loving and tolerating other people. There can be no *Botho* without *Motho* (a person). *Botho* represents "the spirit in dust", signifying that to be human is to be an extension of the presence of God. This means that right from birth, a person possesses *Botho.* Being human means embodying and expressing the power of God. As Ramaboea (2018: 14) asserts: 'We can change many things in life, but we shouldn't interfere with Ubuntu.'

Botho encompasses values such as love, respect, tolerance and empathy. It emphasises respect for elders, respect for women, hospitality towards other people and goodwill towards all kinds of people. At its core, *Botho* is based on interdependence. This view is reflected in proverbs such as *Matsoho a hlatswana* (Mutual help). For people to prosper, they must support one another. Another well-known proverb, *Kopano ke matla* (Unity is the strength) encapsulates this worldview. These proverbs embody the collective wisdom and resourcefulness essential to the development of the community.

Campbell (2012), as cited in Mutembei (2014: 338), states that: 'The African philosophy of *Ubuntu* emphasizes linked humanity and our intrinsic connection with a complex universe. *Ubuntu* opens a space for us to understand how different parts of the universe fit together, with an understanding that 'everything is connected to everything else.'

Although Van der Walt (1997) discusses the differences between the Western worldview—which is generally individualistic—and the

African worldview—which is collectivist, *Botho* manages to embrace both perspectives, since both recognise the presence and dignity of human beings. The main distinction lies in how life is lived and valued within each tradition.

Samkange and Samkange (1980: 38–39) reflect on the meaning of *Botho* as follows:

> We know also, it [*Ubuntu*] means more than just a person, human being, or humanness because when one sees two people, one white and the other black, coming along, we say, 'Hona munhu uyo ari kufamba nomurungu' or in isiNdebele, 'Nanguyana umuntu ohamba lo mlungu' (There is a muntu/munhu walking with a white man). Now, is there a sense in which we can say a white man lacks something which we always identify in an African? Yes, black Americans, for instance, identify something they call 'soul' as being almost exclusively among black folk … Why? Perhaps because of the unique experience the black American has had passing through a particular brand of slavery: North American slavery.

Mutembei (2014: 347) argues that 'humanity in Africa through the Ubuntu philosophy will only be realised through African languages'. Sibanda (2019: 54) appears to support this view when reflecting on the proverb *Motho ke motho ka batho ba bang / Umuntu, ngumuntu ngabantu*: 'This proverb has been part of the Bantu languages since time immemorial, and unless there is another meaning to it, other than that associated with Ubuntu philosophy, it has not been revealed.'

However, the claims made by both Mutembei and Sibanda can be challenged. The philosophy of *Botho* or *Ubuntu* is not confined to language alone, but is fundamentally expressed through the lived experience of collective life, social interconnectedness and engagement with the spiritual world. *Botho* or *Ubuntu* transcends race, colour and language, because it is rooted in the shared essence of humanity.

As a way of life, *Botho* stands in opposition to inhumanity. Its values are reflected in friendliness, hospitality, helpfulness, compassion and empathy towards other people—universal human attributes that speak to our common moral fabric.

Decolonising strategy

The previous sections have explored the philosophy of *Botho* as embedded in the teachings of Mohlomi. In this section, the focus shifts to how these teachings can be viewed as part of a decolonising strategy for the Basotho.

To understand the significance of the cultural dislocations experienced by Africans during colonisation, it is necessary to consider the historical context prior to the "scramble" for Africa, which began in 1884. Before this period, African societies were largely shaped by collectivist worldviews and strong communal values. Life was centred around shared responsibilities, interconnectedness with the natural and spiritual world and interdependence within the community.

As Grieve and Van Deventer (2005: 202) explain, 'this African worldview implies that people are not separate from the cosmos, which includes the spiritual world, nature and living things, and the community in which they live'.

Colonialism disrupted these worldviews. African communities were compelled to abandon their indigenous systems and adopt individualistic Western lifestyles and values. The long-term consequence of this cultural upheaval is what W.E.B. Du Bois, in Butledge (2003: 1) calls 'double consciousness'—a condition in which individuals, particularly Blacks, live with split identities, partly shaped by their original culture and partly shaped by the norms and values of the colonisers. This fractured sense of self has distanced many Africans from the foundational principles of *Botho*, such as respect, honesty, compassion and forgiveness. Green (2005: 322) states that 'Western individualism emphasizes individual autonomy, self-reliance, and personal achievement over collective goals.'

In this chapter, the argument is that Africans—and the Basotho in particular—can be taught *Ubuntu* values through Mohlomi's perspective to decolonise themselves from their double consciousness. In this chapter, the researcher aligns with Chilisa (2012) in analysing the concept of *decolonisation*. Chilisa (2012), as cited in Nxumalo and Mncube (2019), outlines five stages that are useful in the decolonisation process: rediscovery; recovery of mourning; dreaming; commitment and action.

During colonisation, the history, culture and identity of Africans were

distorted and devalued, as the coloniser regarded them as inferior. As a result, Africans came to live a "double life", simultaneously adopting elements of European lifestyles, while attempting to preserve aspects of their Indigenous cultures.

The stages of **rediscovery** and **recovery** encourage Africans to view themselves through the lens of their own Indigenous histories, cultures and identities. These stages promote self-worth, equality and dignity. The **mourning** stage involves reflecting on and lamenting the injustices experienced during colonisation, while also recognising the need to reclaim dignity and respect. **Dreaming** is the stage at which individuals and communities envision new ways of living—such as embracing their Indigenous languages and taking pride in them.

According to Amusa *et al*. (1999), as cited in Nxumalo and Mncube (2019), the final stage—**commitment and action**—involves turning these dreams into tangible strategies for social transformation. At this stage, Africans, and the Basotho in particular, commit themselves to decolonising their minds by embracing their languages, cultures and spiritual traditions with renewed pride and confidence.

Mohlomi and his reign

Building on the decolonisation strategy discussed above, this section introduces Chief Mohlomi as a pivotal figure whose leadership model embodied the values of *Botho*. His reign offers a powerful historical case study of how indigenous philosophy can guide ethical governance, social harmony and community-building—core components of decolonisation.

The practice of initiation into adulthood was a deeply rooted Basotho tradition. The circumcision hut (*lebollo*) was typically constructed from grass and situated in the *veld* (bush land), far from the village. It was in this secluded space, during his own initiation at the age of thirteen, that Mohlomi experienced a vision that would shape his life's mission. His wife, Mmaliepollo, recounted the experience to the missionary Eugene Casalis Arbousset.

Monna wa ka o ne a e na le kopano le badimo. O ne a atisa ho mpolella

> *hore ha a le dilemo tse leshome le tharo, a le mophatong, bosiu ha thaka tsa hae di robetse, o ile a bona morulelo wa ntlo o phetleha mme a nkelwa mahodimong, moo a ileng a hlahiswa pela letshwele la batho, mme yaba o laelwa hore, 'Tsamaya, o buse batho ka lerato, mme o nke e mong le e mong jwalo ka ngwana weno feela.' A kgutla pelo ya hae e le tshweu jwalo ka lehlwa, a itlama hore o fela a tla phetha tseo a di laetsweng.* (Mopeli-Paulus 1976: 50).
>
> My husband had a relationship with the ancestors. He often told me that when he was thirteen years old, in the circumcision hut, during the night when his age peers were asleep, he saw the roof of the house open and he was taken up into the heavens where he was introduced before a great multitude of the people, then he was instructed, 'Go and reign the people with love, and view each and every one as your brother and sister.' He came back with a heart as white as the snow, he bound himself to doing what he had been told to do.

Mohlomi adopted his philosophy of *Botho* from his ancestors. He envisioned Lesotho as a beautiful land, well suited for love and peace—not for war and famine—but rather a country of abundance and prosperity. Mohlomi began his reign by building his nation into a unified and strong community, comparing it to a tightly bound bundle of wood. He did not achieve this through violence or coercion, rather by teaching his people the value of peaceful coexistence (Guma 1960). Mohlomi envisioned a nation rooted in harmony and compassion. One of his most significant sayings was: *Ho ka ba molemo, hore motho a pole mabele, ho na le hore a leoletse mohahabo lerumo* (Mopeli-Paulus 1976: 54) (It is better for a person to thresh sorghum than to sharpen a spear against his brother). Through such teachings, Mohlomi urged his people to abandon conflict and embrace peace and unity in their daily lives.

The philosophy of *Botho* and reconciliation

Peete was Lepoqo's grandfather, and he wanted his grandson, Lepoqo, to grow into a great chief—one who would be respected by all. He brought

Lepoqo to Mohlomi, asking him to strengthen the boy through traditional medicine. Peete said to Mohlomi:

> *Ke o kopa hore we hle, mpe o be mohau Mokwena ho mo beha tlhaka ya ho mo tiisa a tle a be seriti, a hlomphehe* (Mopeli-Paulus 1976: 8).
>
> Please Mokwena, I ask you to have mercy and inflict a ritual scar on him that will strengthen him so that he can have dignity and be respected.

Peete hoped that Lepoqo would become a noble and honourable man and believed that Mohlomi could empower him through traditional fortification. However, it was during this encounter that Mohlomi chose instead to demonstrate his philosophy of *Botho*.

Although Mohlomi possessed extensive indigenous knowledge of Basotho medicinal practices, he taught that there is no medicine that can make a person a great chief. Rather than fortify Lepoqo with herbs, he said:

> *Nka lerumo lena le thebe ena… o pheme hore o se ke wa tsholla madi a motho ka lerumo lena… Lesale lena, ke lesale la puso. O tla le rwala tsebeng ya hao ka ho sa feleng, mohla o ka le rolang, e tla be o rotse puso …* (Mopeli-Paulus 1976: 9).
>
> Take this spear and this shield…do not spill a person's blood with this spear. This earring is the earring of sovereignty. You will wear it in your ear forever, the day you take it off, it will be the day you will be abdicating from your reign …

Through this symbolic gesture, Mohlomi emphasised that leadership is not granted by medicine, but by character. A chief's strength lies in his heart. His advice to Lepoqo and Peete was simple, yet profound: *Pelo ke motho* (The heart is the person). This proverb encapsulates the core of his *Botho* philosophy, a true leader must possess compassion, integrity and humanity.

Nkopane was Mohlomi's elder brother, yet it was Mohlomi who assumed leadership. Curious about this, Lepoqo asked how it was possible for Mohlomi to become chief while his older brother was still alive. Mohlomi

responded: *'Motse ha o na sehlare: sehlare ke pelo…'* (Mopeli-Paulus, 1976: 10) (The village has no medicine; the heart is the medicine). This means that Nkopane did not lead with compassion or strive for the peace and prosperity of his people, hence, he failed to become their chief.

At that time, many Basotho chiefs believed that chieftaincy could be secured through traditional medicine, instilling fear in their subjects. Even Peete believed that if Lepoqo were ritually scarified, it would empower him to become a great chief. Mohlomi, however, rejected this belief. He taught that: *Morena ke sefate se dulwang ke dinonyana tsohle* (A chief is like a tree upon which all birds come to rest). This proverb, central to Mohlomi's philosophy, captures the essence of *Botho*: leadership is not achieved through fear or ritual, rather through respect, kindness and a compassionate heart.

Lepoqo adopted the name *Moshweshwe* immediately after capturing Ramonaheng's cattle. Mohlomi served as a moral compass and role model for Moshweshwe, who lived according to Mohlomi's advice and philosophy. Following the capture of Ramonaheng's cattle, Moshweshwe composed the following oral praise poem:

Ke nna Moshweshwe Moshwashwaila wa ha Kadi
Lebeola le beotseng Ramonaheng ditedu;
Le ho hola ha di eso hole,
Di ya sala di hola maisao (Guma 1983: 152).
I am Moshweshwe, Moshwashwaila of Kadi's (house),
The barber who shaved off Ramonaheng's beard;
Even to grow it has not grown yet,
It will remain growing in years to come.

In this poem, Moshweshwe metaphorically likens himself to a barber—one who removes a beard, not a warrior who sheds blood. Ramonaheng provoked Moshweshwe. Moshweshwe captured Ramonaheng and took a portion of his cattle without resorting to violence. The message embedded in the poem is a call to other chiefs to adopt similar restraint and wisdom when provoked. It serves as a lesson that war is not the only means of resolution.

Furthermore, after the incident, Moshweshwe returned some of the cattle he had taken. This act of generosity was a gesture of *Botho* and reconciliation, illustrating a spirit of goodwill rather than selfishness and greed—despite his victory over Ramonaheng.

Moshweshwe's philosophy of *Botho* and reconciliation

Moshweshwe's leadership did not merely reflect inherited customs—it was a conscious embodiment of the philosophy of *Botho* instilled in him by Mohlomi. This philosophy would be tested and revealed most clearly during times of national crisis, especially during the *Difaqane*.

According to Mopeli-Paulus (1976: 34), *Lentswe lena 'difaqane' ha se puo ya Sesotho, ke lentswe la Setebele le bolelang ho falla, ho balehela tsietsi tsa ntwa*. (This word *difaqane* is not Sesotho language, it is an isiNdebele word that means to flee from the troubles of war.)

During the *Difaqane* wars, many people fled their homesteads, and the region was struck by severe famine. The chaos and displacement caused by these wars led Moshweshwe to relocate his people from *Botha Bothe* to *Thaba Bosiu*. On this journey, Peete—due to his old age and slow pace—was caught by cannibals. Tragically, they killed and consumed him.

After some time, Moshweshwe's people captured the cannibals and brought them before him. They expected the chief to avenge the death of his grandfather, Peete, by executing the culprits. However, Moshweshwe addressed both his people and the cannibals with the following words:

> *Banna ba heso, batho bana bao e leng madimo kajeno ba ka pele ho nna le lona, ba entse hoo hobane ba ne ba kgannwa ke lephako… ba bile ba ikentse lebitla la ntatemoholo. Ho ba tlepetsa ka majwe, le ho ba hlaba ka marumo, kapa hona ho ba utlwisa bohloko bofe kapa bofe ho ke ke ha re thusa letho* (Mopeli-Paulus 1976: 28).
>
> My fellowmen, these people who are cannibals today, these who are in front of me and you now did that because they were driven by hunger… they also made themselves my grandfather's grave. Crushing them with

> stones and stabbing them with spears or even to make them feel pain of any kind, that won't help us.

Moshweshwe remained true to his character and upheld the values instilled in him by Mohlomi, who had advised him never to kill another person with his spear. His address to both his people and the cannibals had the tone and weight of a ceremonial moment. Many of his people, especially the men, expected him to command the execution of the cannibals who had eaten his grandfather. Moshweshwe, however, reframed the event: the death of his grandfather was not to be seen as murder, rather as a sacrifice. He viewed his grandfather's blood of as a symbol of purification. Through his words, Moshweshwe brought healing—not only to the cannibals, but also to his own people. In doing so, he gave full expression to the philosophy of *Botho*.

Mohlomi advised Moshweshwe with the following words: '*…ha o ahlola, o ahlole ka nnete*' (Mopeli-Paulus 1976: 56) (…when you judge, judge honestly). These words remained engraved in Moshweshwe's mind for the rest of his life. He believed that the wrongs committed by the cannibals could not be corrected by committing another wrong. Instead, doing what was right led to their reintegration and acceptance into the community, as they were also part of it.

According to Moshweshwe, individuals such as the cannibals—whose autonomy had been diminished—deserved protection. *Botho* embraces the principle of beneficence, which means that one should strive to do good and above all, avoid causing harm to others. Moshweshwe went to great lengths to protect the cannibals from punishment and harm. He even allocated land to them for settlement and cultivation, ensuring they had access to food and stability. For Moshweshwe, it would have been unethical to kill the cannibals, as doing so would have contradicted both Mohlomi's counsel and the philosophy of *Botho*.

Through his actions, Moshweshwe demonstrated the ethical values of *Botho*, especially generosity of spirit and compassionate action. He recognised that even the cannibals were rightful beneficiaries of the land and part of the Basotho nation. As Prozesky affirms (2018: 3):

> There is no other way to ensure that all our people are respected,

> understood, appreciated and helped as fully as possible, as together we create a new and lasting better future about the land.

Moshweshwe understood the painful situation in which the cannibals found themselves, and he demonstrated a willingness to view them not as enemies to be destroyed, but as partners in the rebuilding of Lesotho. The cannibals, having been dispossessed of their homes, had descended into a state of desperation and marginalisation, resembling a condition closer to that of animals than integrated members of society. Moshweshwe took the deliberate step of reintegrating them into the community.

He sought to uphold the foundational Basotho moral principle of *tlhompho* (respect) as a guiding value in his leadership, especially in matters of justice and reconciliation. By choosing not to retaliate, Moshweshwe replaced inhumanity with *Botho*, the ethic of humaneness, rather than responding to one injustice with another.

Tjhaka and Moshweshwe

While Moshweshwe was reigning from the mountain stronghold of *Thaba Bosiu*, rumours began to circulate that Tjhaka, the powerful King of the AmaZulu, was preparing to attack the Basotho. In response, Moshweshwe sent Makwanyane, along with others, to deliver gifts to Tjhaka—fattened oxen and ostrich feathers—as a gesture of goodwill. He instructed them with the following words:

> *Tsamayang le nehele morena Tjhaka, dimpho tsena, le re ho yena … a nne a hopole hore mane hole, ho na le e mong wa bana babo ya ratang kgotso ka mehla…* (Mopeli-Paulus 1976: 37). Go and give these gifts to King Tjhaka, and tell him to keep on remembering that there beyond, there is one of his brothers who likes peace every day…

Even before Tjhaka could launch an attack, Moshweshwe had chosen the path of peace. Guided by *Botho*, Moshweshwe demonstrated to Tjhaka that cooperation and unity were superior to conflict. In this encounter, Tjhaka benefited from Moshweshwe's prosocial behaviour. According to

Grieve and Van Deventer (2005: 140), 'prosocial behaviour is behaviour in which one person benefits from another's actions'. Moshweshwe's actions modelled the ethic of moral leadership and peaceful reconciliation. He conveyed to Tjhaka that leadership should not be grounded in violence, rather in moral responsibility.

Moshweshwe's leadership style is exemplified in Khoza's (2006: 28) words:

> Leadership through *Ubuntu* has a wide developmental scope that can apply in any society, which aims to promote and sustain economic growth for the sake of an improved quality of life for all.

Through *Botho,* Moshweshwe promoted African humanism, which fosters social cohesion. Swanepoel (1983: 1) describes him as 'a wise and devoted diplomat', who ruled his country for nearly half a century, protecting both his people and foreigners. Ramaboea (2018: 14) affirms: 'We need to look deep into ourselves and unleash the spirit of *Ubuntu*. We will live a peaceful life if we have *Ubuntu*.'

Lesotho remains home to different cultural and ethnic groups, and Moshweshwe's inclusive approach to leadership set a precedent for national unity. He welcomed people who had fled from their kings and offered them refuge. As Krog (2009: 32) notes: 'As a form of conflict prevention, Moshweshwe allowed groups with different cultures, such as Amahlapo from Natal and the Amavundle from the Eastern Cape, to keep their language and to practise their culture.'

Moshweshwe aspired to see joy on the faces of the people of Lesotho, believing that community well-being instils a shared sense of responsibility for the country's future.

The parallels between Mohlomi and Moshweshwe

Moshweshwe, like Mohlomi, opposed the practice of witchcraft and rejected traditional healers who claimed they could identify witches through supernatural means. Ellenberger (1988: 94) notes the following about Mohlomi:

> *O ne a sa re letho ka ditaola, mme o ne a soma ba hangata ba thetsang ka tsona jwalo ka hoja di na le nnete.*
>
> He was not impressed by divining bones, he often ridiculed those who lied when using divining bones as though they possessed the truth.

Similarly, Krog (2009: 28) writes of Moshweshwe: 'When his followers stoned to death a woman accused of being a witch, a very upset king called them together and reprimanded them.'

Both Mohlomi and Moshweshwe also demonstrated their commitment to peace by assisting young men who could not afford *bohadi* (bride wealth). In such cases, the children born from these marriages were regarded as belonging to the person who had paid the *bohadi*, reflected in the Sesotho saying: *Ngwana ke wa habo dikgomo* (The child born from such marriage belongs to the person who paid *bohadi* – the dowry).

The death of Monyane

Mohlomi once advised his father, Monyane, against waging war against other nations. On the day Monyane conspired with Ramokhele and Lijane to attack Lihoja, his son Mohlomi warned him not to proceed:

> *Ntate, ha ke dutse bosiu, ke sa robala, ke ile ka lora, mme torong ya ka ka bona batho ba bararo ba shweleng. Ke a o rapela ke hona, o se ke wa ya tswela pele tabeng eo. Oho, ntate tlohela morero oo!* (Ellenberger 1988: 93).
>
> Father, during the night when I was sitting and awake, I had a dream, and in my dream, I saw three people who had died. I therefore pray you, do not proceed with that plan. Oh, father leave off that plan.

But his father mocked him, saying: *Kgutsa ngwanana towe! Tsamaya, o ye ho kga metsi le banana ba bang!* (Be quiet you girl! Go and fetch water with other girls!) (Ellenberger 1988: 93).

Monyane belittled Mohlomi as weak and cowardly, likening him to

a girl, because in their culture, girls did not go to war, but fetched water. Unlike Moshweshwe, Monyane failed to heed the wisdom of Mohlomi's philosophy, encapsulated in the Sesotho proverb: *Motse ho ahwa wa morapedi* (A village is built by a peacemaker). As a result, Monyane was killed. Moshweshwe, by contrast, lived by Mohlomi's teachings and spared the lives of the cannibals.

Mohlomi's indigenous knowledge is also captured in the proverb: *Morena ke morena ka batho* (A chief is only a chief through his people). This proverb reminds us that leaders must love, respect and protect their people. Moshweshwe's reign was firmly grounded in the philosophy of *Botho* and reconciliation.

Before his death, Mohlomi had another vision—this time of the colonial invasion. He told his wife, Mmaliepollo:

> *Ke ne ke ratile ho ka le tlosa mona, ke le ife moo le tla bolokeha teng hobane ke bona lerole le lefubedu le etla ka matla a maholo ho tswa Botjhabela ho tla kwano. Le tla re ripitla, re ripitlehe* (Guma 1960: 140).
>
> I had wished to move you from here and take you to a safe place because I see the red dust coming here with strong force from the East. It will crush us – we will be crushed.

Mohlomi foresaw that the philosophy he had taught the Basotho would be crushed by the arrival of European colonists. His spirit of *Botho*—which taught love and hospitality, even towards strangers—influenced many Africans to welcome foreigners with kindness. When the Europeans arrived at the Cape, they were met with generosity. Tragically, this kindness may have been Africa's greatest mistake: the strangers took advantage of it and began to treat Africans as inferior, ultimately reducing them to servitude and slavery.

Conclusion

Mohlomi is remembered by the Basotho not merely as a leader, but as a moral teacher whose philosophy of *Botho* and reconciliation served as a

foundation for social harmony and ethical leadership. His guidance shaped how leadership was understood—not as domination, but as service to the people. This is reflected in the Sesotho proverb: *Morena ke morena ka batho* (A chief is a chief because of the people). Through his teachings and his example, Mohlomi cultivated the values of compassion, respect and interdependence, which later guided Moshweshwe in his nation-building efforts.

The spirit of *Botho*, as demonstrated by both Mohlomi and Moshweshwe, prioritised human dignity and communal well-being over conquest or personal gain. While such values have not entirely disappeared, they are under pressure in today's society, where poverty, inequality and individualism often overshadow communal bonds. The observation that *Botho* is fading is not a rejection of its presence, but a reflection of how modern systems—economic, political and cultural—frequently undermine it.

This chapter has argued that Mohlomi's philosophy remains relevant as both a cultural memory and a moral compass. His legacy suggests that the well-being of a nation is closely tied to the values it upholds. While it would be simplistic to claim that the revival of *Botho* alone can eliminate poverty and crime, the principles of mutual respect, care and ethical leadership remain powerful tools for fostering social cohesion. In remembering and applying the teachings of Mohlomi, there is an opportunity to rethink what it means to lead, to serve and to live well in community with others.

Mohlomi is widely recognised as an exceptional and visionary leader whose philosophy of *Botho* and reconciliation laid the foundations for trust, ethical leadership and communal harmony. These principles inspire people to support their chiefs or leaders, and in turn, guide leaders to serve their communities with integrity. The Sesotho proverb *Morena ke morena ka batho* (A chief is a chief because of the people), encapsulates a leadership paradigm based on service, rather than domination.

Mohlomi instilled in chiefs, in Moshweshwe in particular, the idea that true leadership is rooted in humility and compassion, not authoritarian rule. If contemporary society were to adopt Mohlomi's philosophy of *Botho*, we would witness greater peace, tolerance and unity within our communities.

Sadly, *Botho* is fading in today's society. Poverty and crime are symptoms

of a loss of communal values and connectedness. Where *Botho* is lacking, inequality and social fragmentation take root. Yet, if people once again embraced the spirit of *Botho*, they would strive for mutual support and dignity. Those with abundance would not squander resources while others live in poverty.

Mohlomi and Moshweshwe both demonstrated that when leaders care for the vulnerable, poverty and crime diminish. Their legacy offers a timeless lesson: a nation rooted in compassion, solidarity and ethical leadership will thrive.

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Chapter 6: Classics and Decolonising the Curriculum: A Case Study Using the Teaching of Sexuality

Susan L. Haskins

Introduction

The Classics has a reputation.[1] Thanks to the appropriation of the history, language and literature of ancient Greece and Rome by Western colonisers, the Classics have become associated with snobbish, educated, elite, white males who have felt it was their right to rule anyone that was different from them. Considering this, and the popular perception of Classics as entertainment, the question naturally becomes, what possible purpose could it serve to continue to teach the Classics? However, in a free twenty-first century South Africa, the question is even more pointed, especially since the student protests of 2016. How can teaching Classics help the project of decoloniality? Surely, the removal of the teaching of Classics, as one of the symbols of Western oppression, would be one of the best and quickest ways to decolonise the curriculum? My answer, as is the answer of many Classics scholars working in this field, is no.[2] On the contrary, Classics has a great deal to offer towards decolonising the curriculum, while also being decolonised itself. My understanding of the decolonising of the curriculum is to look not only at what we teach, but how we teach it, both in terms of teaching tools and perspective. It is an on-going process that will constantly evolve but will never be completed.[3] As such, looking backwards is vital to be able to keep changing, because it is important to learn from history. But why should South Africans learn from a foreign history and one which has been appropriated by colonisers? I will argue that Classics is 'good to think with'; in other words, it provides a useful means

1 I wish to thank the editors of the volume for their efforts concerning this chapter.
2 For example, Masters et al. 2022a; Van Schoor et al. 2022.
3 See Umachandran and Ward 2024.

of approaching and interrogating sensitive or overlooked modern issues by allowing students to engage with them in different and non-threatening ways. It also allows South Africans to examine and critique the Western world in the context it created for itself and makes it possible to see what influence that colonial context has really had on South Africans. I will use the example of unpacking the concepts surrounding sexuality in the lecture hall not only to prove the usefulness of Classics, but indeed its necessity in a decolonising, South African university curriculum.

The fight against Classics

The reputation of Classics as a tool of cultural imperialism and white nationalism in South Africa is well established. This is perhaps best summed up in Michael Lambert's book *The Classics and South African Identities* (2011) in which the author argues that the predominant experience of the Classics in South Africa has been as a bastion of European whiteness. 'Afrikaners used classical education with Afrikaans as the medium of instruction to forge a national identity that was distinct from other South African groups yet linked to their imagined European homeland' (Dominik 2013: 102). In addition, English-speaking Classicists re-enforced British imperialist attitudes of Western cultural superiority with 'Euro-centric assumptions and a patronising tone' (Atkinson 2012: 181).[4] Lambert acknowledges the positive influence on their struggle rhetoric some black South Africans have claimed from the Classics, such as Chris Hani and Nelson Mandela (Lambert 2011), who appropriated classical texts and turned them into 'resistant discourses' (Lambert 2011: 114). However, he argues that Classics was imposed on Black intellectuals and politicians by "civilising" forces, as they were a requirement for Black students to enter university, in order to have economic and political success (Lambert 2011). Although several reviewers have argued that some of Lambert's views are extreme, his language emotive and his choice of material selective (Atkinson 2012;

4 See Lambert 2011.

Claassen 2012; Dominik 2013),[5] his book nevertheless gives an accurate representation of the colonial and racist connotations of Classics in South Africa. As Lambert (2011: 112) states, the Classics at university are currently frequently perceived as 'the last outpost of white intellectual indulgence and cultural narcissism'.

A new generation of post-apartheid South African Classicists, mostly still white,[6] who feel that their subject has worth and should be kept alive, not only have to fight against this academic reputation and its resultant teaching perspectives and methods, they also have to fight the popular public perception of Classics.[7] In modern South Africa, most students drawn to the Classics at university in the last fifteen years have been white and have previously been exposed to the ancient world through purely very Western and tangential means. This includes ancient myths and history introduced as children's fairy-tales,[8] or appropriated into books and video games, like the *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* book series by Rick Riordan (2005–2009), the *Assassin's Creed Odyssey* (Ubisoft Quebec 2018) and *Hades* (Supergiant Games 2020) computer games, and myth-based fan fiction like the webcomic *Lore Olympus* by Rachel Smythe (2018) or

5 Van Schoor et al. (2022) further argue that by dividing his discussion into racial groupings, Lambert (2011) is entrenching the very identities he is trying to deconstruct. However, as the discussion of differing racial identities in relation to Classics is the point of the book, such a criticism seems unwarranted.

6 The continuing 'whiteness' of Classics in South Africa and the way in which the inability of Classicists to attract Black students and academics to the discipline will contribute to its demise, has been a persistent concern. See Whitaker 1997; Lambert 2011; Masters et al. 2022a; Van Schoor et al. 2022.

7 Classics is also in a state of decline worldwide. While Classics formed the core of all university teaching at Western universities in the nineteenth century, the subject fields which sprang from it and formed their own disciplines (Schaps 2011), as well the growing disillusionment with the belief that the classical civilisations of Greece and Rome were both the cultural ancestors of the West and superior to all other cultures (Schaps 2011; Voeltz 2011), has led to the slow demise of Classics throughout the world. In 2025-2026, the Department of Classics and Religious Studies at the University of Ottawa has been engaging in a battle to get their Classics programme reinstated. See Beard (2012), the British scholar and TV personality who asks within the Western context, 'Do the Classics have a future?'.

8 The myths of Heracles are a prime example. Among Disney's animated films of traditional Western fairy tales is the 1997 movie, *Hercules* (Clements and Musker). One of my greatest challenges is teaching students to pronounce the name correctly as Heracles.

the stories on Archive of Our Own.[9] Other possible exposures include the swords-and-sandals epics out of Hollywood that have enjoyed a resurgence since the movie *Gladiator* (Scott 2000), myth-based TV series, like *Kaos* (Netflix 2024) and music, like *Epic: The Musical* (Rivera-Herrans 2022–2024), or even the brief background given in certain episodes of the New Testament.[10] Since the shut-downs prompted by the Covid-19 pandemic, which have driven people online, more and more students are only vaguely aware of Classics through themed memes and TikTok videos. The Classics are not taught at all at public schools and Latin alone is taught at only a few private schools.[11] Students are, therefore, drawn to the Classics because of the fantasy, the romance and the exoticness of the ancient world, which reminds them of the fantasy worlds and cultures of J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* book series (1997–2007), HBO's *Game of Thrones* (2011–2019) and the books, movies and TV series set in J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth,[12] or simply because they need credits to finish a degree. They do not necessarily think it has something to offer them either academically or for use in the job market.[13] This makes the Classics seem even more diminished and irrelevant. Consequently, university departments teaching Classics are being gradually reduced through redeployment of staff and retirements, where posts are not refilled.[14] How then can an irrelevant, still predominantly white, dying subject experiencing brain-drain possibly

9 Archive of Our Own is a 'fan-created, fan-run, nonprofit, noncommercial archive for transformative fanworks, like fanfiction, fanart, fan videos, and podfic' (Archive of Our Own 2025).

10 This knowledge comes as the result of casual chats with undergraduate students taking Ancient Culture Studies over the past fifteen years.

11 For example, St. Mary's School Waverley, a private Christian primary and secondary school in Johannesburg (St. Mary's School Waverley 2025).

12 This includes the *The Hobbit* (1937) and the *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (1954–1955) by Tolkien, the Peter Jackson *The Lord of the Rings* (2001–2003) and *The Hobbit* (2012–2014) movies and the Amazon Prime Video series *The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power* (2022, 2024).

13 Modern students are often first-generation university attenders drawn towards professional qualifications (Parker 2017b).

14 For example, when I began studying Classics at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in 1998 there were seven full-time academic staff members on the Durban campus and three on the Pietermaritzburg campus. As of 2025, the Pietermaritzburg campus Classics programme has been shut down and there are only three full-time academic staff members on the Durban campus, one of whom is about to retire.

contribute to decolonising the curriculum?[15]

The fight for Classics

I will outline several arguments for the usefulness of Classics for decolonising the curriculum and the subject of Classics itself. It has by now become an adage that '[t]hose who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it' (Santayana [1905] 1920: vol 1, 284). Ancient Greek and Roman history is replete with examples of people, events, decisions and behaviours that we could, but do not, remember and learn from. However, Classics is not just about the important events in the history of two societies; it is the study of cultures, social history, literatures and languages of peoples who lived many centuries before us, whose lives are both foreign and exotic to us as well as having the familiarity of common humanity. Classics, therefore, is good to think with.[16] By examining the ancient parallels of modern controversial subjects, it is possible to gain a more objective understanding of these issues in the "fantasyland" of ancient history. These understandings can then be drawn through to the modern context and applied to a person's own circumstances. Thus, one can gain new insight into modern, controversial issues while avoiding the offensiveness of pre-judgements. It thus becomes possible to decolonise modern ideas through the distance of time.

This idea of appropriating the Classics and using it to think with, especially in terms of decoloniality, is not new. Classics scholars in South Africa have for decades been advocating studies of comparisons between ancient Graeco-Roman and modern African literatures and societies (Lambert and Masoga 1994; Mackay 1999; Lambert 2011; Dominik 2013) to gain insights into both sets of cultures.[17] However, within scholarship,

15 Lecturers also face the challenge of physical university structures, like lecture venues, that encourage the colonial idea of the lecturer as an authority figure and the student as a passive vessel waiting to be filled with knowledge. However, this is a problem faced by all university academics.

16 See Lambert 2019; Masters et al. 2022a.

17 See also Lambert (2011). It should be pointed out that Lambert (2011) is wary of this method of teaching and learning as he believes it runs the risk of instilling a sense of classical cultural superiority. However, he believes it can be overcome by consciously avoiding value judgements. See also Lambert and Masoga (1994).

studies of the reception of the Classics in South Africa, especially reception by the white establishment, have predominated over parallel cultural studies. In this respect, South Africa is starting to learn from West Africa. In 2018, the University of Ghana launched The Classical Association of Ghana at their First International Classics Conference, themed 'Classics and Global Humanities' (Classical Association of Ghana 2018). In addition to international scholars, this conference showcased the resurging and vibrant interest in the Classics in West Africa with papers presented by home-grown academic staff and post-graduate students from both Ghanaian and Nigerian universities.[18] However, their topics were not traditional Western fare. Although some papers looked at the direct reception of the ancient Greek and Roman worlds into Africa, especially the reception of ancient Greek drama into West Africa, they were largely made up of papers tackling modern African issues such as politics and political corruption, gender roles, myth creation, indigenous values and conflict resolution, by studying these in parallel with ancient examples. Speakers were not just from Departments of Classics, but also Philosophy, English, Communication and Language Arts, Religious Studies, Theatre Arts and Arabic and Islamic Studies (Classical Association of Ghana 2018). All these speakers obviously felt that Classics added to the understanding of issues within their disparate research fields. Since then, the Association has hosted two more successful conferences that have continued this trend.[19] Lambert (2014: 11) believes from his experience of Classics at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria that 'they have decolonised the Classics and appropriated what they find meaningful'.[20]

In 2022, not one, but two volumes were published, one on Southern Africa (but mainly South Africa) (Masters et al. 2022b), and another

18 See also Lambert (2014) on the resurgence of the Classics in Nigeria.

19 'Global Classics and Africa' was held in 2022 and 'Classics Beyond Borders' in 2024, the latter of which was organised in collaboration with Nigerian and international institutions and scholars (University of Cambridge 2025).

20 However, it should be pointed out that knowledge of the Classics has become a way of marking the intellectual elite in West Africa (see Lambert 2014). Indeed, one of the VIP guests at the inauguration of The Classical Association of Ghana in 2018 was a Ghanaian government minister with a background in Classics. See Okyere Asante (2022) on the history of the study of Classics in post-colonial Ghana. See McKechnie (2024) on Classics and African elitism in Malawi.

on Africa more widely (Van Schoor et al. 2022),[21] whose chapters/articles tackle a wide range of decolonial topics, including challenging and reconceptualising established Classical pedagogies and exploring alternative, decolonial ways of teaching and using the Classics. These include adapting pedagogies to the context and communities in which the Classics are taught, decentring canonical texts (Masters et al. 2022a), and both centring Africa in Classics texts while critically deconstructing the place of Classics in colonial education systems (Van Schoor et al. 2022). Two chapters specifically discuss examples of using the Classics to consider and elucidate real world issues relevant to modern Africa. Moyo (2022) explains how he used the study of Cicero's *On Duties III* to delve into issues of 'politics, social issues, or trade and economics and the area of human rights' (Moyo 2022: 163) in Zimbabwe. Masters (2022) reconsidered the matter of public monuments in South Africa after the RhodesMustFall movement led to the removal of statues of Cecil John Rhodes. She did this with her students using the material remains of the Roman Empire as a lens 'to examine more recent, local and contemporary examples of imperial and political propaganda' (Masters 2022: 168). In another publication, Lambert (2019) describes how he used the study of rapes in several ancient texts to help students understand and cope with campus "rape culture", and the cultural issues surrounding it, at Rhodes University.

Nevertheless, the study of the reception of the Classics can still be useful for decoloniality in terms of how both West and South Africans have already used it to think with. For example, over the past 70 years, playwrights have been adapting and appropriating storylines from ancient Greek drama to express their own pertinent, local, colonial and post-colonial concerns. For example, the Nigerian writers, Wole Soyinka and Femi Osofisan,[22] as well as South Africans Athol Fugard, Winston Ntshona and John Kani who staged *The Island* in 1973, which depicted the experience of prisoners on Robben Island staging Sophocles' *Antigone* (Hardwick 2003). Several other plays in South Africa have also been adapted from Greek models

21 This is a special issue of the *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, edited by guest editors, David van Schoor, Kofi Ackah and Michael K. Okyere Asante.

22 For example, Soyinka's *The Bacchae of Euripides* (Killam and Rowe 2000), Osofisan's *Tegonni: An African Antigone* from Sophocles' *Antigone* (Olasope 2002) and *Women of Owu* from Euripides' *Trojan Women* (Olasope 2012).

to express anti-apartheid or post-colonial sentiments (Dominik 2013). Hardwick (2003: 110) states that the 'reception of classical texts has been instrumental in the resistance of imposed identities and the construction of new ones' and points out the 'potential of classical texts for decolonizing of the mind (of both colonizers and colonized).' Thus, from such studies students can not only receive the opportunity to understand a part of African history, students, especially those of colour, can also be provided with an example to encourage them to appropriate the Classics for a modern South African context.[23]

Classics is useful in another way that is not only part of decoloniality, but also part of the humanities project of any university, and that is critical examination and problematisation of the world around us.[24] The history of academia in the West has been to study and critique both their own and other people's cultures, values and politics. Centres of African studies are a part of many prominent Western universities, such as Cambridge (Centre of African Studies, University of Cambridge 2025) and Harvard Universities (Harvard University Center for African Studies 2025). The West has, to a certain extent, also designated itself Africa's policeman, giving or withholding aid and support based on Western values and beliefs about Africa.[25] Masters et al. (2022a) point out that this attitude has become even more obvious during the Covid-19 pandemic. As part of the decolonising project, South African universities have made a point of trying to counteract this purely outsider perspective by critically examining Africa from an African perspective. For example, the Universities of Cape Town (Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town 2025) and the Free State (Centre for Gender and African Studies, University of the Free State 2025) also have centres of African studies. They look for African solutions to African problems.

23 See Dominik (2023) who advocates for a new methodology that combines Classical tradition and reception, which he calls 'traception'.

24 The latest iteration of this is the need to critically assess responses from LLM-based GenAI. GenAI, in its current form, poses a threat to the formation of critical thinking skills as 'some features of GenAI appear to lessen individual willingness and ability to engage in meaningful critical thinking about its output' (Larson et al. 2024: 373).

25 For example, withholding aid because of perceived political corruption (Reuters 2011) or human rights violations (Reuters 2018). The United States is now withdrawing aid on the grounds of wasteful spending and national interest, and several European countries have used this as an opportunity to follow suit (Faguy 2025).

So, the West is studying Africa and Africa is studying Africa, however, as the Latin author Juvenal said *quis custodiet ipsos custodes?* (*Satires* 6.347–348), loosely translated as "who will watch over the watchmen themselves?".[26] Who is critically examining the West from a much-needed outsider's perspective? There are only two South African organisations which study the United States, mainly as they impact on and relate to Africa (African Centre for the Study of the United States@UP 2025; African Centre for the Study of the United States, University of the Witwatersrand 2025) and there are currently no centres which study Europe from an African perspective. Between colonisation and globalisation, it is impossible to pretend that either African or Western ideologies can exist in a vacuum. It is also internalising Western attitudes about Africa to think that African knowledge and perspectives have nothing of value to offer academically to Western social dynamics, or indeed those of the world. Classics is the foundation on which the West has chosen to base its ideologies. As part of the project to critically analyse the West, it is necessary to understand their classical heritage. The ways in which Western societies have appropriated the philosophical, political, religious and cultural ideas of the classical era as their unproblematic and direct history, and used it to frame their identities, cultures, forms of government and the very notion of civilisation itself (Funder et al. 2019),[27] explains a great deal about how Western societies operate and have operated in the past.[28] By understanding the basis of Western thought, it is possible to understand how to speak to them in a way that will allow Africa to be heard. At this moment, with the rise of populism in the West, the African continent, whose countries have experienced apartheid, ethnic cleansing, conflict based on religious difference, gender violence and the continuing struggle for gender and LGBTIQ rights, is in a unique position to open a dialogue with Western societies about the dangers inherent in allowing nationalism to become an excuse for fear,

26 Latin text edited by Ramsay [1918] 1950. Translation by the author.

27 The idea and model of empire which spurred colonisation in the first place, can be traced back to the Romans (Funder et al. 2019).

28 See for example, Funder et al. 2019. See also Masters et al. (2022a); Van Schoor et al. (2022); Umachandran and Ward (2024) who also mention examples of how the Classics is currently being misused in the twenty-first century to bulwark exclusionist policies in the West.

hatred and the curtailment of freedoms.

Finally, for good or for ill, through colonisation, Christian missionary education (Lambert 2011) and globalisation, Western ideologies have entered the bedrock of the African paradigm to the point that it has become impossible to tell the difference easily between traditionally Western and African ideologies. This issue is assuming renewed relevance with the rise of large-language-model-based (LLM) generative artificial intelligence (GenAI), like ChatGPT, Claude and Grok. Many of these models have a Western bias, namely that the replies they generate are based on knowledge from, and tailored to users in, the Global North (Carman and Peters 2024; Tao et al. 2024), once again marginalising African knowledge and perspectives. This contributes to a new form of knowledge colonisation called 'digital colonialism' (Ghozali 2025; Nothias 2025).[29] I do not believe that this intertwining of Western and African thought can ever be undone, or that it will ever stop. That does not, however, mean that those who have taken on the responsibility of academia must stop trying to problematise this relationship. The process of decolonising the university curriculum will equally never be complete, because it is academia's responsibility to continually question what is African in an ever-transforming global context. Classics can play a vital role in this endeavour by bringing to light what ideas within the African paradigm truly come from the ancient Greek and Roman worlds.[30] As previously mentioned, many South African Classics scholars have already been undertaking the valuable task of looking at the reception of the Classics in South Africa. Several volumes including such articles have been published in the last fifteen years.[31] One of the more recent is *South Africa, Greece, Rome: Classical Confrontations* edited by Grant

29 "Digital colonialism" also includes the exploitation and domination of data, knowledge and people connected to marginalised and underrepresented groups by big tech companies who act like colonisers (Ghozali, 2025; Nothias 2025).

30 This bias is insidious as large language models can express themselves so well that it can be difficult for the untrained student, and even the trained lecturer, to notice it (this is just one of several problems that users of GenAI need to be aware of, including "hallucinations", logic errors and meaningless overgeneralisations [Bouchard 2025].) In collaboration with teaching students other ways to identify issues surrounding GenAI, a Classics pedagogy based in a consistently critical eye on the West, can also help to teach students to critically assess any GenAI responses and recognise these biases, especially those based on Classical ideologies.

31 For example, Hilton and Gosling (2007); Hardwick and Harrison (2013).

Parker (2017a), which includes discussions about the problematic influence of ancient Greece and Rome on South African law, education, architecture, museum studies and imperial attitudes in colonial history. However, there are also many more subtle instances in terms of how Western influences have been internalised by modern South Africans that the study of the Classics can help to illuminate.

Teaching ancient sexuality as a strategy for decolonising the curriculum

These important arguments for the value of the Classics to decolonising the South African university curriculum inform my teaching strategies in terms of my perspectives and techniques. I will now use the example of teaching sexuality, my particular research interest, to prove my point, although this is true for many other modern South African issues, including gender roles, racial and national identities and religious differences.[32]

I share my teaching of ancient cultures with another lecturer who concentrates on Ancient West Asia and Egypt. Consequently, the students get a one semester introduction to ancient Greece and Rome at first year level. During this semester I touch on political history, myth and religion and in the last few weeks, I teach social history, concentrating on social hierarchies and interpersonal relationships. Students are given a reader, written by different members of the academic staff of my Department[33] over the years, as their basic research resource. However, I do not teach from it directly. Instead, I use an inquiry-based learning approach in which I hand out a preparatory worksheet for each lecture period. On this, I list

32 For example, in third year, even though my students are studying ancient Graeco-Roman social history through an ancient novel, my perspective for studying this novel is informed by Section 9 (3)–(4) of the South African Constitution (Act 108 of 1996), in which discrimination of any form is expressly prohibited. Recently, after a discussion on the "othering" of women which took place in the ancient world, which cast women as naturally lacking in self-control, duplicitous, deceitful and greedy, we were able to use this knowledge to shed light on a discussion of the anti-abortion movement in the United States.

33 When this course began in its current form, the department was named the Department of Ancient Languages, University of Pretoria. It was subsequently renamed the Department of Ancient Languages and Cultures in 2015 and since 2018, is known as the Department of Ancient and Modern Languages and Cultures.

questions to be discussed in class. Some are based upon sections of the reader, however, others relate to the modern context which arises from this content.[34]

Below, I give a few excerpts from the Greek and Roman sexualities sections of the chapter from the reader, written by myself, entitled *Love and Life in the Ancient Greek and Roman Worlds.* These sections focus on male same-sex sexuality. Through this, I will illustrate what knowledge the students first encounter on the subject and then how I use this to encourage them to interrogate their own ideas about sexuality, especially homosexuality.

> It was an accepted part of all sexual relations that there would be a penetrator and a penetrated. The Greeks did not have any idealised concept of an equal sexual relationship in which both parties gave and received pleasure. Pleasure was purely for the penetrator. He gained his pleasure by penetrating those in subordinate positions to him, women, slaves, both male and female, and boys. As none of these types of people were sexually active men who participated in the ruling of the city-state, they were not considered to have the virility of true men. Therefore, a man who enjoyed being penetrated was automatically cast as subordinate to such men and was not considered capable of participating in the ruling body of the city. Any man who was even perceived as passive could lose his social position. To be accused of passivity was a popular but extremely harsh insult.

…

> Nevertheless, an important part of upper class life in classical Athens was pederasty, a relationship built on intellect, sexual attraction and

34 For example, during a period in which we discuss the end of the Roman Republic, I ask 'Urbanisation, overpopulation and unemployment were as much a problem in the late Roman Republic as they are in South Africa. Do you think we could ever have a situation in modern South Africa where the "dissatisfied and idle mob could easily be incited to riots" (Martin et al. 2025: 49)?'. This not only helps to debunk the myth of Graeco-Roman cultural superiority, it also encourages students to think about how and why social and economic conditions can lead to protests in South Africa.

> even romance, between an older man and a youth. As a woman was not considered capable of learning to be a reasoning, functioning adult the way a young boy was, males preferred to find their romantic love with youths.
>
> The sexual hierarchy placed these youths in a very precarious position. Although they were still young enough not be able to participate within the ruling of the city-state and could therefore be objects of male affection without yet losing their own manhood, they were also the future participating citizens of the *polis* and could not afford to be seen as passive. Therefore, a careful balancing act between activity and passivity was maintained, by the ideal that a youth allowed himself to be seduced only out of respect and gratitude to the older man and that he did not himself enjoy the act in any way. Ideally, the moment the first hairs appeared on his chin, he had reached manhood and the relationship ended.
>
> (Martin et al. 2025: 127–128)
>
> In Roman society it was still considered acceptable for a man to sexually penetrate his wife, a male or female prostitute and slaves, but the ideal of boy-love had been replaced by severe penalties against any man who corrupted a youth of good birth.

…

> At no time during this history were male same-sex relations ever considered to be wrong. The crime lay in being passive.
>
> (Martin et al. 2025: 137–138)

Firstly, the very teaching of this sexuality helps to decolonise the subject. In the past, Classics lecturers avoided teaching ancient sexuality, as it might not only contaminate young minds, it would also cast the Greeks and Romans in a negative light, breaking the illusion that the ancients were 'just like us'

(Voeltz 2011: 370).[35] This is despite the fact that understanding the ancient sexual hierarchy is vital to understanding the ancient social hierarchy, as they were interrelated systems (Skinner 2014).

Secondly, this is an entirely different picture of male same-sex sexuality than the contradictory image which students are bombarded with via media and society, of condemnation and conversion therapy on the one hand, and gay marriage and self-affirming coming-out stories on the other. Even by first year, many students have already formed strong opinions on the subject. By introducing students to a conceptualisation of sexuality completely alien to their own, their minds are opened to such alternatives. However, the stigma which might be attached to that which is substantially different from their own beliefs, and which in this case would be classed as paedophilia in the modern world, is smoothed away by the distance of time, and students are able to assess a different idea of sexuality more objectively.

Then, in the last class on the subject, I bring students back to the modern world by asking, what is homosexuality? I open this question to the class as a general discussion. I put no proscriptions on the answers. I only ask that students respect the opinions of others, while I take the role of facilitator, sometimes attempting to clarify disjointed student remarks. Finally, I always check with the students if I have accurately represented their views. Over the past fifteen years, answers have tended to fall into one of two categories. Homosexuality is when someone can only be in love with or attracted sexually to someone of the same sex. Or, homosexuality is when someone has sexual relations with someone of the same sex. At first, these answers sound very similar, but when deconstructed, students are actually voicing two contradictory conceptualisations of sexuality. The first is that sexuality is an inborn orientation and the second is that sexuality is a series of chosen acts. The idea that sexuality is an orientation tends to be held by Westernised liberals,[36] who further believe that what cannot be changed

35 For example, the supposedly "dirty bits" of ancient texts were often omitted or translated into another dead language, instead of the medium of instruction. As recently as 2010, when I started teaching at the University of Pretoria, a colleague suggested that perhaps sexuality was too contentious an issue to be teaching to first years.

36 The idea of homosexuality as an inborn, life-long orientation is very much a product of the West (Long et al. 2003), and it has been transported to Africa mainly through Western media and aid organisations (Gevisser 2010).

should be accepted, while sexuality as acts tends to be held by conservatives, including conservative Christians[37] and traditionalist Africans, who further believe that if sexual acts can be chosen, only heterosexual acts should be chosen (Haskins 2023). This ideological conflict is perhaps not a big surprise, not even to the students. It is, however, in tracing the history of the conceptualisation of sexuality in Africa as acts, and the resulting homophobia, that decolonising takes place.

In response to these student remarks over the years, I have begun contextualising student answers at the end of the discussion by introducing them to a brief history of the conceptualisation of male same-sex sexuality in sub-Saharan Africa. In the pre-colonial period, several African communities had avenues for accepting male same-sex desire (Long et al. 2003), such as through alternative identities for men who did not conform to the Western hetero-normative model (Epprecht 2004; Msibi 2011).[38] However, with the Europeans colonisers came the concept of "unnatural" acts. This concept can be traced back to the Bible[39] and the laws of the Roman Emperor Justinian. Justinian's laws on sexuality formed the basis of Church law, which in turn, formed the basis of European sexual law for centuries. The conceptualisation of sexuality as acts which informed Justinian's laws came directly from ancient Roman notions of how sexuality operated (Haskins 2023). Therefore, both the colonial law and conservative Christianity have concepts of sexuality based on ancient pagan, Graeco-Roman notions of sexuality as acts performed by active males on passive subordinates, to

37 These views are held by more than one Christian denomination in parts of Africa and are further solidified by the influence of Evangelical Churches from the United States (Haskins 2023).

38 Msibi (2011) points out that traditional sexual identities in Africa were predominately based on reproduction and gender roles, with men who played the passive part in same-sex acts sometimes identified as women. He highlights studies that show the gender and sexual identities of some traditional cultures from Nigeria, Uganda, Malawi, Senegal and the Zande people of South-Western Sudan, the Central African Republic, and the North-Eastern Congo which included, or accepted, same-sex desire (Msibi 2011). Epprecht (2004) notes acceptance of same-sex practices among the Shona, Shangaan, Zulu and Ndebele of Southern Africa.

39 The condemnation of same-sex acts in the account of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 13–19 is one of the main Biblical texts used to justify the church's position, as well as Leviticus 18:22, Romans 1:24–6 and 1 Corinthians 9–11 (Goodich 1976).

which strictly heterosexual, Christian ideology was then applied. This conceptualisation gradually became internalised in traditionalist African thinking (Epprecht 2004). It was then further reinforced by modern, Western, conservative non-governmental aid organisations (Hoad 2007), to the point that some Africans now feel able to say that male same-sex desire is unAfrican (Epprecht 2004; Msibi 2011), as it is against African culture, religion and laws (Gevisser 2010).[40]

By being introduced to this history, students are firstly given the opportunity to turn their eyes critically towards the West and its contradictory values, as well as the influence of these values on individuals, both past and present. Secondly, they are confronted with the notion that a supposedly African understanding of sexuality is actually almost entirely Western and even then, not exactly what they thought it was. While this will not tear Western values out of African ideologies, it does allow students to become aware of the basis for their thinking, and can open their minds to the possibility of trying to uncover concepts of sexuality that are wholly African. When they are fully informed, they can then decide what is best for them. This kind of awareness is only possible by tracing ideas from history. As Classics is the basis of Western ideologies, to perceive the West in Africa, it is necessary to know and understand the Classics in Africa.

Conclusion

So, are the Classics a colonial holdover with nothing to say that is worth hearing by twenty-first century South African students? Are the Classics cultural imperialism from the West? There is certainly a danger of that. However, I believe the usefulness of Classics, to think about modern, controversial issues, to turn a critical lens on the West and to become aware of colonial, Western ideas embedded within the African paradigm, is relevant to many other issues besides sexuality. If taught from a local perspective and with progressive teaching techniques, which consider South African issues and history, Classics can not only decolonise itself, but

40 This was said by President Bingu wa Mutharika of Malawi as he pardoned two men who had been arrested for taking part in a marriage ceremony in 2010 (Gevisser 2010). See Haskins (2023) for background on this issue.

also play a vital role in decolonising the university curriculum and indeed in social transformation in the country.

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Chapter 7: Decoloniality and Decolonisation Leadership Inclusion: Insights from Higher Education Experiences

Jabulani Nyoni and Leneo Toolo

Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving higher education landscape, navigating epistemological diversity within decolonial leadership has become a critical challenge. Institutions across the globe, particularly in postcolonial contexts, are tasked with creating environments that reflect the diversity of human knowledge, experiences and perspectives. For post-colonial academic institutions, the historical legacy of whiteness continues to influence leadership structures and institutional dynamics, challenging efforts to decolonise education and leadership practices. This chapter investigates how epistemological diversity in decolonial leadership is manifested in postcolonial institutions, particularly how the historical dominance of whiteness influences leadership styles, decision-making processes, and the overall institutional culture.

Despite concerted efforts to promote inclusivity and equity, many academic institutions remain bound by Eurocentric curricula and leadership practices that marginalise non-Western knowledge systems and experiences. The persistence of these colonial remnants alienates students from diverse backgrounds, often negatively impacting their academic performance and their sense of belonging within the institution. This chapter seeks to explore the ways in which decolonial leadership practices can be integrated and sustained within these environments, contributing to a more equitable and inclusive academic landscape (Mbembe 2016).

The intersection of leadership, diversity, decolonisation and decoloniality offers a rich field of inquiry. This chapter serves as a guide to understanding how these dimensions interact within postcolonial academic institutions.

Chapter focus

Despite the growing discourse around epistemological decoloniality and decolonisation in higher education, meaningful progress remains limited, leaving these ideals as largely unrealised aspirations. The persistent dominance of Eurocentric knowledge systems, coupled with the slow pace of institutional reform, hinders the advancement of social justice leadership and true inclusion. Marginalised voices, particularly from the Global South, continue to be underrepresented in academic curricula and decision-making processes, perpetuating inequities. Until higher education institutions commit to more transformative and inclusive frameworks, the goals of epistemological decolonisation and social justice leadership will remain a distant and unachieved dream (Heleta and Chasi 2024; Makhubela 2018).

This chapter explores how epistemological decoloniality, decolonisation and social justice leadership inclusion thinking manifest itself within postcolonial institutional contexts, particularly in higher education. It examines the ways in which epistemic decoloniality and decolonisation thinking aim to challenge and reshape knowledge systems, leadership inclusion, governance and general reforms. Furthermore, the chapter critically engages with how whiteness, as a construct and as a power dynamic, influences the decolonisation and decoloniality dynamics of these leadership practices, shaping the experiences of both individuals and the institution within a diverse higher education landscape.

Through a comprehensive exploration of the literature, the chapter aims to highlight the critical issues that arise from attempts to integrate decolonial leadership inclusion principles into higher education. It will shed light on the challenges of navigating these complexities and provide insight into strategies that can lead to more just and effective decolonised leadership inclusion.

Higher education social justice inclusion leadership framework

A crucial aspect of decolonial leadership in higher education is the inclusion

of the Indigenous leaders, students and employees' cadre within higher education institutions, as they represent an essential component of the transformation agenda. Incorporating their voices and lived experiences into leadership and decision-making processes challenge the dominance of Eurocentric ideologies and aligns with the principles of decoloniality and social justice. The integration of Indigenous leadership into higher education governance is not merely symbolic; it is transformative, allowing the institution to reshape itself by valuing different epistemologies and leadership practices rooted in cultural diversity (Diem and Welton 2020).

Indigenous leaders bring with them unique worldviews that are informed by a deep connection to their communities, cultures and histories. Their leadership styles often emphasise collective well-being, relational accountability and the importance of maintaining reciprocal relationships between institutions and communities. Indigenous students and employees, likewise, embody diverse perspectives that can redefine the academic landscape by broadening the scope of knowledge production and institutional practices.

The role of social justice leadership framework in inclusion and diversity leadership

The Social Justice Leadership Framework (SJLF) provides an instrumental foundation for exploring how leadership in postcolonial institutions can align with the decolonial principles of diversity and inclusiveness. SJLF is a contextually sensitive framework that acknowledges the historical injustices that have shaped higher education institutions. It calls for leadership practices that actively dismantle this legacy by fostering equitable, inclusive and diverse environments where all voices, particularly those of Indigenous groups, are heard and respected (Harris and Patton 2019).

From a neoliberal perspective, social justice is often defined as the pursuit of equitable outcomes through policies and practices that may not necessarily challenge the structures that perpetuate inequality. In contrast, the critical theories that underpin decolonial leadership, including critical race theory, feminist theory and postcolonial theory, emphasise the importance of addressing systemic inequities (Harris and Patton 2019).

These theories focus on the lived experiences of marginalised groups, advocating for leadership that acknowledges and redresses the enduring legacy of colonisation.

SJLF is particularly effective in addressing the inclusion of Indigenous leaders, students and employees, as it encourages a leadership model that goes beyond superficial diversity initiatives. It calls for systemic changes that allow marginalised individuals to exercise genuine agency in shaping institutional policies and practices. By centring Indigenous voices in leadership roles, SJLF fosters a more profound commitment to decolonial principles and the creation of an academic environment that values multiple ways of knowing and respects the sovereignty of indigenous knowledge systems (Baderin and Ssenyonjo 2010; Dixon *et al*. 2011).

The conflation of decolonisation and decoloniality of leadership offering clarity

The terms decolonisation and decoloniality are often used interchangeably in discussions of leadership transformation, particularly within the context of postcolonial institutions such as higher education. However, while these concepts are related and complementary, they differ in focus, scope and purpose. Decolonisation typically refers to the formal process of undoing colonial rule (liberty) and its associated structures, while decoloniality is concerned with dismantling the persistent epistemic and cultural legacy of colonialism that continue to shape power dynamics, knowledge systems and leadership practices. Understanding the nuances between these concepts is essential for leadership within institutions aiming to transform themselves in a genuinely equitable and inclusive manner (Nyoni 2019; Quijano 2000).

Decolonisation of leadership inclusion

Decolonisation as a concept, is rooted in historical and political processes. It refers to the dismantling of colonial institutions, the reclaiming of sovereignty and the restoration of self-governance to colonised nations and peoples. In the context of leadership, decolonisation focuses on removing

colonial power structures and practices from leadership positions and institutions. This might involve the literal transfer of leadership roles from colonial powers to local or Indigenous authorities or the formal integration of previously marginalised groups into decision-making processes.

For example, in postcolonial higher education institutions, decolonisation efforts can be seen in efforts to reform governance structures by incorporating representatives of Indigenous communities or adopting affirmative action policies to increase the representation of racial and ethnic minorities in leadership positions. Decolonisation focuses on who holds power and often operates at the level of formal institutions and policies (Fricker 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013).

Although essential, decolonisation can sometimes be limited to structural changes without necessarily addressing the deeper, more insidious impacts of colonial ideologies, particularly the colonial mentality that may continue to pervade institutions long after formal colonial rule has ended.

Decoloniality of leadership inclusion

Decoloniality, on the other hand, extends beyond the structural process of decolonisation. It is concerned with the ongoing legacy of coloniality: the ways in which colonial logics, knowledge systems and power relations continue to shape societies, institutions and leadership practices long after the official end of colonial rule. The decoloniality of leadership calls for a fundamental rethinking and transformation of leadership philosophies, practices and frameworks to challenge and dismantle colonial hierarchies, Eurocentric biases and the dominance of Western epistemologies in leadership approaches (Grosfoguel 2011; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013).

In decolonial leadership, the focus shifts from simply changing who is in charge to transforming how leadership is understood and practiced. This involves a critical examination of the knowledge systems that inform leadership practices, as well as the power dynamics that continue to privilege certain worldviews while marginalising others. Decolonial leadership is about integrating diverse, often marginalised epistemologies, including indigenous knowledge systems, into the leadership process and

creating a space where historically oppressed voices can contribute to decision making in meaningful ways.

For example, decolonial leadership in a university setting would not only involve the appointment of Indigenous leaders, it would also require the integration of indigenous epistemologies into the curriculum, pedagogy and governance of the institution. It would challenge the deep-seated colonial mentality that views western forms of knowledge as superior and create a more inclusive knowledge ecosystem that respects and values multiple ways of knowing.

Table 7.1: Key differences between decolonisation and decoloniality of leadership

	Decolonisation	**Decoloniality**
Focus	Focuses on the removal of colonial structures and the formal transfer of power to local authorities or marginalised groups.	Seeks to challenge and dismantle the deeper, lingering effects of coloniality, including epistemic, cultural and power structures that continue to marginalise non-Western forms of knowledge and leadership**.**
Scope	The topic is primarily concerned with formal political, economic and social structures.	Broader in scope, addressing not only formal structures, but also the cultural and intellectual legacy of colonialism that shape leadership and social relations.
Objectives	To restore sovereignty and create space for self-governance within previously colonised societies.	Seeks to disrupt colonial mentalities and power dynamics, fostering a pluralistic environment where diverse ways of knowing and leading are recognised and respected.
Implications for Leadership	Often means increasing the representation of historically marginalised groups in leadership roles, but may leave colonial mentalities intact.	Focuses on reconfiguring leadership philosophies to embrace and integrate multiple worldviews and challenge hierarchical, Western-dominated leadership structures.

Adapted from: Grosfoguel (2011); Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013); Nyoni (2019); Quijano (2000)

Convergence of decolonisation and decoloniality in inclusion leadership practices

Inclusion leadership in relation to decolonisation and decoloniality refers to leadership practices that actively work to destroy the colonial legacy by fostering equitable representation, participation and empowerment of historically marginalised groups, including Indigenous peoples, in decision-making processes. Although decolonisation and decoloniality offer distinct frameworks, they are deeply intertwined, and effective leadership in postcolonial institutions requires a synthesis of both. Decolonisation provides the political and structural foundation for change, while decoloniality ensures that these changes are substantive and lasting by transforming the cultural and epistemic bases of leadership (Grosfoguel 2011; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013; Nyoni 2019; Quijano 2000).

For example, decolonising a higher education institution might involve appointing more Indigenous and diverse leaders to positions of power, ensuring equitable representation in decision-making. However, without decoloniality, these leaders may still be constrained by Western paradigms of leadership and governance. Decoloniality ensures that these leaders are empowered to challenge and reshape these paradigms, creating an institution that is not only more representative, but also more equitable and inclusive in its knowledge production, teaching practices and leadership structures.

Invariably, decolonisation addresses formal and structural changes, while decoloniality focuses on the epistemic and cultural transformation needed to ensure that these changes are meaningful and lasting. Together, they provide a comprehensive framework for creating leadership models that reflect the values of equity, diversity and social justice in postcolonial contexts.

Historical and contemporary contexts of decolonial leadership

Decolonial leadership, particularly in higher education, is shaped by the enduring legacy of colonialism, which has embedded systemic racism,

Eurocentrism and exclusionary practices in academic institutions. Historically, colonial education systems were designed to propagate European knowledge, values and culture while suppressing indigenous knowledge systems and marginalising non-Western perspectives (Mbembe 2016; Nyoni 2019). This historical context established a power structure that privileged whiteness and European epistemologies, creating a long-standing dominance that continues to influence leadership, curricula, and institutional culture in postcolonial societies (Grosfoguel 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013).

In contemporary settings, despite postcolonial discourse and efforts aimed at transformation, many higher education institutions still operate within frameworks that reinforce this colonial legacy. White leadership predominates in many universities, particularly in former colonial territories, and this homogeneity extends to decision-making processes, leadership practices and knowledge production. The persistence of Eurocentric curricula and institutional cultures in these settings marginalises other forms of knowledge, particularly those rooted in Indigenous, African and other non-Western traditions. This dominance of whiteness and European epistemologies not only shapes leadership practices, it also reinforces systemic inequities that limit meaningful diversity and inclusiveness (DiAngelo 2011).

The challenge for leadership in postcolonial institutions is to actively dismantle these colonial structures. A decolonial approach to leadership calls for a critical examination of how the dynamics of colonial power continue to manifest itself in institutional practices. Leaders must address the ways in which historically privileged knowledge systems and practices are maintained through policies, curricula and institutional hierarchies. This requires creating spaces for alternative, marginalised knowledge systems to be recognised, valued and integrated into the academic and decision-making frameworks of these institutions (Helfand and Lippin 2002; Makhubela 2018).

In adopting decolonial leadership, it is essential to engage with epistemological diversity, that is, to move beyond a tokenistic inclusion of diverse perspectives toward genuinely incorporating alternative worldviews and knowledge systems into the institutional fabric. This involves questioning the dominance of Western-centric epistemologies

and exploring ways to embed indigenous, African and other marginalised forms of knowledge into curricula and leadership practices. By doing so, decolonial leadership seeks not only to transform leadership structures, but also to challenge and reshape the epistemological paradigms that guide educational institutions (Heleta and Dilraj 2024; Mbembe 2016).

This transformation requires a sustained commitment to equity, inclusion and the rethinking of power relations in academia. Leaders must be intentional in creating policies and practices that foster diverse leadership, promote intercultural dialogue and ensure that historically marginalised groups have equal opportunities to participate in leadership and knowledge creation. By embracing a decolonial framework, higher education institutions can begin to address systemic inequities and foster environments that truly reflect and serve diverse communities and their knowledge systems (Goodman 2001).

Resistance in decolonisation and decoloniality within leadership inclusion

Resistance to decolonisation and decoloniality within leadership inclusion in higher education reflects the ongoing struggle to dismantle the colonial legacy embedded in academic structures and practices. Decolonisation seeks to challenge the dominant Eurocentric narratives, while decoloniality focuses on building inclusive frameworks that acknowledge diverse knowledge systems, especially those marginalised by colonialism. Higher education leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping accessible practical education that equips students with critical skills. However, resistance to decolonial change often manifests itself in the persistence of white privilege, where leadership roles and decision-making powers remain disproportionately in the hands of individuals from historically privileged racial groups. This imbalance reinforces the marginalisation of voices from underrepresented communities, perpetuating a system where access to leadership and academic opportunities is skewed in favour of those benefiting from the remnants of colonial power structures. Consequently, true inclusion in leadership requires an intentional dismantling of both systemic racial inequalities and the deep-rooted privileges associated with whiteness (Kattz 2003; McIntosh 1997).

Leadership as a collective and dynamic endeavour

The concept of leadership, particularly in a decolonial context, must move beyond traditional hierarchical models that concentrate power in the hands of a few individuals. Instead, leadership should be viewed as a collective and dynamic process in which diverse voices are actively involved in decision making and institutional governance. This chapter draws on the growing body of literature that emphasises distributed leadership, which allows the inclusion of multiple perspectives in leadership processes. Such an approach is essential to remove the colonial legacy in leadership practices and to create more inclusive institutions (Abdi 2012).

Diversity in decolonial leadership requires a rethinking of how power is distributed within academic institutions. By embracing distributed leadership models, institutions can promote a more collaborative and inclusive approach to governance, leadership and management, ensuring that the voices of historically marginalised groups are not only heard, but also actively included in shaping the direction of the institution. This shift toward inclusive and collective leadership is critical to advance decolonial goals within postcolonial institutions (Battiste 2013; Makhubela 2018).

Reflections on social justice leadership inclusion

Leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping the academic success of students from diverse backgrounds (Leithwood and Riehl 2005; Reyes and Wagstaff 2005;). In educational contexts focused on advancing social justice, a wide array of leadership theories has emerged under the umbrella of leadership for social justice. These include transformative leadership (Brown 2006; Shields 2003), inclusive leadership (Ryan 2006), critical race leadership (Lopez 2003), critical ecological leadership (Furman and Gruenewald 2004), feminist leadership (Blackmore 1999; Grogan 2002) and communitarian leadership (Shields 2003), addressing cultural, spiritual and advocacy-focused dimensions of leadership.

However, within this diversity leadership framework, whiteness privilege often acts as a form of resistance to inclusion. It reinforces the institutional and systemic dominance that continues to shape the experiences of

marginalised groups, particularly in leadership spaces. Decoloniality, a framework that critiques colonial power structures and advocates for dismantling white dominance, is seen as a threat to the privileges historically granted to whiteness. This resistance to decoloniality reflects the challenges of implementing truly inclusive leadership in educational institutions, where whiteness is embedded in the very structures that govern decision making and policy development (Sensoy and DiAngelo 2017).

The process of decolonisation further complicates this dynamic, calling for the restructuring of educational spaces, curricula and leadership practices that continue to reflect colonial legacy. SJLFs offer critical insights into how leaders can challenge these established structures by promoting equity and inclusion. In the context of higher education reform, these frameworks are particularly relevant as they aim to address disparities in access and outcomes for historically marginalised students.

The call for decolonial practices in leadership seeks not only to recognise and disrupt whiteness privilege, but also to create equitable spaces where all students, particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds, can thrive. Social justice leadership in this sense requires a conscious effort to resist the forces of exclusion, while simultaneously advancing decoloniality as a means of fostering greater inclusion and equity in educational reform (DiAngelo 2011).

Evolving theories of social justice leadership

The evolution of social justice leadership reflects a broadening of perspectives in educational administration. Initially, many scholars in the field focused on critical pedagogy, a theoretical framework that explores the role of education in perpetuating or challenging societal inequalities. However, over time, the focus has shifted toward a more inclusive approach that advocates for broader social inclusion and diversity (Ryan and Rottmann 2009). This shift is driven by the increasing recognition of the interconnectedness of various social identities, such as race, gender, class and ability, and the need for a collective movement with a shared vocabulary.

This broadening of social justice discourse, however, has not been without its challenges. Generalisation of social justice leadership risks

diluting the importance of the specific differences that social identities represent. Although it is essential to build collective movements for equity, it is equally critical to avoid standardising social justice leadership to the point where the unique challenges faced by marginalised groups are overlooked (Furman 2012). Effective social justice leadership must strike a delicate balance between generality and specificity, ensuring that the unique needs of different communities are acknowledged and addressed.

Despite the diversity of approaches within social justice leadership, a shared commitment to identifying and addressing disparities in educational outcomes remains central. These disparities disproportionately affect historically marginalised groups, including racial minorities, low-income students and students with disabilities. By focusing on equity in education, social justice leadership seeks to create opportunities for these groups, who have traditionally been underserved and underrepresented in educational settings (Heleta and Dilraj 2024).

Whiteness superiority and power dynamics in higher education leadership inclusion

One of the most significant challenges to advancing social justice leadership in higher education is the entrenched power dynamics that continue to privilege whiteness, particularly in leadership structures. This phenomenon, often referred to as the discourse on whiteness superiority, reflects a complex interplay of historical, social and cultural constructs that have perpetuated the dominance of whiteness in decision making, hiring practices and institutional policies. Scholars such as Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) and Wolfe and Dilworth (2015) have emphasised how these dynamics persist, shaping leadership frameworks in ways that marginalise other groups, particularly in postcolonial contexts.

In South Africa and other African nations, the historical legacy of colonisation and apartheid has left deep scars on the leadership structures of higher education. Even in the post-apartheid era, the core decision-making bodies within many South African universities remain predominantly white, as highlighted by scholars like Lander and Santoro (2017) and Warmington (2020). This persistence of whiteness in leadership

perpetuates systemic inequities, preventing individuals from historically marginalised groups, including Black and Indigenous communities, from accessing positions of power and influence. The SJLF offers a lens to address these deep inequalities by advocating for leadership that actively works to dismantle oppressive systems and promote equity, inclusion and diversity within educational institutions.

The SJLF emphasises the need for leaders to critically reflect on the power structures that sustain inequality and to engage in practices that foster equity and justice for all members of the academic community. In this context, decoloniality, the ongoing process of challenging and dismantling colonial mindsets and practices, plays a vital role in reimagining leadership structures. Decoloniality calls for the active rejection of Eurocentric paradigms, including the privileging of whiteness, in favour of more inclusive, pluralistic and context-specific approaches to leadership and knowledge production. For leadership in African universities, this means recognising and valuing indigenous knowledge systems, African epistemologies and the lived experiences of marginalised groups.

Decolonisation of higher education leadership is not just about diversifying leadership teams, it is also about transforming the values and priorities that guide decision making. Decolonisation seeks to eliminate the residual effects of colonial power structures, including institutional practices that have historically excluded Black and Indigenous individuals from leadership roles. This process involves an active rethinking of curricula, policies and leadership models to create more inclusive and just academic environments. It calls for leadership that is committed to challenging the dominance of whiteness and actively promoting diversity, equity and inclusion.

In the context of higher education institutions, the dynamics of exclusion are particularly pronounced, as these institutions often serve marginalised and underserved populations. Higher education leadership inclusion involves ensuring that leadership structures within these institutions reflect the diversity of the student body and the communities they serve. This includes creating opportunities for marginalised groups to assume leadership roles and influence decision-making processes. By integrating decolonial principles into leadership practices, higher education

institutions can foster more inclusive learning environments that empower students from diverse backgrounds.

For social justice leadership to truly take hold in higher education, particularly in African contexts, it is essential to engage in both decoloniality and decolonisation. This involves not only diversifying leadership teams but also transforming the institutional cultures that sustain the discourse of whiteness superiority. By embracing the SJLF, universities and higher education institutions can begin to dismantle the systemic inequities that have long marginalised diverse perspectives and knowledge systems, creating more equitable and inclusive spaces for all.

Leadership for equity and inclusion: A call to action

The future of social justice leadership in education hinges on its ability to confront and dismantle deeply embedded power structures, particularly those shaped by colonial legacy. Leaders committed to social justice must go beyond surface-level reforms to actively foster inclusive decision-making processes, diversify leadership roles and implement policies that prioritise equity for all students, faculty and staff. This is particularly crucial in postcolonial contexts such as South Africa, where the enduring impact of apartheid continues to influence the landscape of higher education.

Central to this transformation is the concept of decoloniality, which calls for challenging the dominance of Eurocentric values, knowledge systems and power structures that persist in educational institutions. Decoloniality emphasises the need for educational leadership to recognise and uplift indigenous and marginalised knowledge systems, while rejecting the residual effects of colonialism that continue to privilege whiteness and Western epistemologies. For leaders, this means actively questioning the ways in which institutional policies, curricula and leadership practices are shaped by the dynamics of colonial power and working to transform these structures to be more inclusive and just.

Decolonisation is a critical companion to decoloniality in this process, focusing on the practical work of dismantling colonial structures in higher education and ensuring that marginalised communities are meaningfully included in leadership. Decolonisation in educational leadership involves

transforming the ways in which leadership is understood and practiced, ensuring that leadership teams and decision-making bodies reflect the diversity of the communities they serve. This is especially important in higher education institutions, where leadership must be inclusive of the diverse and often underserved populations that these institutions serve. Higher education leadership inclusion is essential to creating equitable pathways for students from marginalised backgrounds to thrive in both educational and professional environments.

The SJLF provides a guiding philosophy for this transformative work, advocating for leadership that actively engages with issues of equity, inclusion and social justice. SJLF calls for leaders to critically examine the power structures within their institutions and to work toward dismantling systems of oppression that disadvantage marginalised groups. Leaders must not only recognise their own privileges, but also work to create environments where all voices, particularly those of historically marginalised individuals, are heard and valued (Goodman 2001).

Transformative leadership, as outlined by Shields (2003), offers a model for this type of leadership, focusing on fostering critical dialogue, advocating for marginalised communities and challenging oppressive systems. Transformative leaders work to bring about systemic change by questioning the status quo and promoting a vision of education that focuses on equity and inclusion. In a decolonial context, transformative leadership requires leaders to actively seek and elevate marginalised perspectives, ensuring that diverse knowledge systems are integrated into the institutional framework.

Similarly, inclusive leadership (Ryan 2006) emphasises the importance of creating spaces where diverse voices are not only heard but also influence decision-making processes. Inclusive leaders work to ensure that the needs of all students, particularly those of historically marginalised groups, are met. In practice, this means diversifying leadership teams, creating policies that promote equity and building an institutional culture that values and uplifts the contributions of all members.

For example, in South African higher education institutions, where access to leadership roles for marginalised communities remains limited, inclusive leadership and decolonisation can work together to create more

equitable structures. Decolonising higher education leadership involves challenging the dominance of Eurocentric knowledge in vocational training and ensuring that leadership reflects the diversity of the student body. This kind of inclusion in leadership ensures that marginalised communities are not only represented, but also have the power to shape the direction of the institution in ways that align with their needs and experiences.

Ultimately, social justice leadership requires a deep and sustained commitment to equity, not just in rhetoric, but in practice. Leaders must be willing to confront their own privileges, challenge institutional norms that sustain inequity and advocate for the systemic changes necessary to create more just and inclusive educational environments. In contexts like South Africa, where the legacy of apartheid continues to shape higher education, this kind of leadership is critical to breaking down the entrenched power dynamics that perpetuate inequity. Through the lens of decoloniality, decolonisation and the SJLF, leaders can drive the meaningful transformation needed to create inclusive and equitable institutions for all (Furman 2012).

Social identities, privilege and whiteness in leadership: A decolonial perspective

The relationship between privilege, social identity and leadership has been the subject of extensive study across disciplines such as sociology, psychology, politics and education (Black and Stone 2005; McIntosh 1992). Social identities, shaped through interactions with the world, profoundly influence how individuals experience privilege and power. In leadership, particularly within educational institutions, these dynamics are deeply rooted and reinforce systems of inequality. Critical social psychology frames identity as a social construction, shaped by both individual experiences and societal structures (Allen and Rosatto 2009). Within this framework, critical pedagogy focuses on the ways in which power and privilege differentiate between the identities of the privileged, those who are seen as 'normal' or 'human' and the oppressed, who are often viewed as 'other' or 'alien' (Tatum 1997). These dynamics are particularly evident in educational leadership, where whiteness continues to be privileged, shaping

the values, policies and practices of institutions.

Scholars like Black and Stone (2005) highlight five core components of privilege. First, privilege is a special advantage, neither common nor universal. Second, it is not earned or achieved through individual effort, but rather granted based on status. Third, privilege is tied to the preferred social status or rank. Fourth, privilege benefits the recipient to the detriment of others. Finally, privilege is often invisible to those who possess it. These components of privilege intersect with social identities such as race, gender, class and ability and are deeply embedded in whiteness, which continues to dominate leadership in many educational settings.

Within this context, the SJLF provides a crucial lens for understanding and addressing the dynamics of privilege and power in leadership. SJLF emphasises the need for leaders to critically engage with their own social identities and privileges, especially those related to whiteness, and to actively work toward dismantling systems of oppression. Leaders who operate from a social justice perspective must recognise the ways in which their identities and privileges influence their leadership practices and decision-making processes (Canli and Demirtaş 2022). This includes acknowledging the historical and systemic advantages that whiteness has conferred, particularly in postcolonial contexts like South Africa (Oplatka 2014).

In South African higher education, the persistence of whiteness in leadership is a direct consequence of the historical legacy of colonisation and apartheid, which have established racial hierarchies and power structures. Despite efforts to diversify leadership, many decision-making bodies in universities and higher education institutions remain predominantly white, perpetuating systemic inequities. These dynamics are not simply about the underrepresentation of marginalised groups; they reflect the continued dominance of Eurocentric values and knowledge systems in educational leadership.

The decoloniality process, the ongoing rejection of colonial mindsets and power structures, offers a framework to challenge the dominance of whiteness in leadership. Decoloniality calls for a rethinking of leadership structures, emphasising the inclusion of marginalised voices and knowledge systems that have historically been excluded from positions of power.

Leaders must critically examine how privilege, particularly white privilege, shapes their institutions and actively work to dismantle these structures. This involves not only diversifying leadership teams, but also transforming the values, policies and practices that have historically privileged whiteness and Eurocentrism (Grosfoguel 2011; Sidhu 2008; Smith 2012).

Decolonisation, in this context, goes beyond representation. It requires a fundamental transformation of the power dynamics that govern educational institutions. In higher education leadership inclusion, decolonisation means ensuring that leadership structures reflect the diversity of the student population, which is often composed of individuals from marginalised communities. Decolonisation in higher education institutions involves creating pathways for Black and Indigenous people to assume leadership roles and influence the direction of the institution in ways that align with the needs and experiences of the communities they serve.

At the heart of decolonial leadership is the recognition that social identities and privilege intersect in complex ways to maintain systems of oppression. Whiteness, as a form of privilege, often operates invisibly, shaping leadership practices in ways that exclude marginalised groups. Leaders who are committed to social justice must be willing to confront these dynamics, acknowledge their own privileges and actively work to create more inclusive and equitable institutions (Verwey and Quayle 2012).

The SJLF provides a roadmap for this work, emphasising the need for leaders to engage in critical self-reflection, challenge institutional norms, and advocate for the systemic changes necessary to create more just educational environments. In the context of South Africa, where the legacy of apartheid continues to shape leadership, this is particularly urgent. Leaders must not only recognise the ways in which whiteness continues to dominate, but also actively work to dismantle these power structures through decolonial and decolonising practices (Furman 2012; Oplatka 2014).

Understanding the relationship between social identities, privilege and leadership is critical to advancing equity and inclusion in education. By embedding the principles of SJLF, decoloniality and decolonisation into leadership practices, institutions can begin to address the systemic inequities that have long privileged whiteness and marginalised other identities. This is particularly important in the inclusion of HE leadership,

where decolonising leadership structures can create more equitable opportunities for marginalised communities and foster a more just and inclusive educational landscape. Furman (2012) sums it up by describing SJLF as the process of changing institutional and organisational structures by actively participating in reclaiming, appropriating, sustaining and promoting inherent human rights related to equity, equality and fairness across social, economic, educational and personal spheres (Katz 2003).

The complexity of social identity and privilege

The complexity of social identity reflects the complexities involved in acknowledging and naming privilege. As Curry-Stevens (2007) points out, defining who is privileged can be difficult because focusing on one form of privilege may overshadow other forms of oppression. For example, Fellows and Razack (1998: 335) describe the 'race to innocence' in which individuals overlook their privilege to claim oppression in other areas, deflecting attention from their privileged status.

In South Africa, the historical legacy of colonialism and apartheid has established racial stereotypes and privileges in both public and private spheres. Research by Verwey and Quayle (2012) illustrate the persistence of backstage talk among white Afrikaners about Black South Africans. This form of covert racism perpetuates negative racial stereotypes, often hidden from the public. Separation experienced by privileged individuals leads to ignorance about the realities of more vulnerable communities (Hobgood 2000). This ignorance often manifests itself as arrogance with privileged individuals, if the world works the same for everyone as it does for them.

Many white people, for example, believe themselves to be kind and hardworking, with little awareness of how others, particularly people of colour, may perceive them with distrust or fear (Shahjahan 2011). They may be unaware of their day-to-day privileges or the historical processes that produced these advantages in a society shaped by white supremacy (Hooks 1990).

Fluidity and intersections of privilege and oppression

The concepts of privilege and oppression are deeply intertwined with the complexities of identity. As McIntosh (1997) highlights, these concepts are not fixed, but fluid and contextual, shaped by our multiple intersecting social identities, such as race, gender, class, sexuality and ability. Each person navigates spaces where they may have privilege in some areas and experience oppression in others. For example, a middle-class white woman may experience gender-based discrimination, but still benefit from racial privilege and socioeconomic status, while a working-class Black man may face racial and class oppression, but benefit from male privilege. This fluidity is a core aspect of intersectionality, which posits that oppressive systems are not singular but interact and overlap (Helfand and Lippin 2002).

Razack (1998) reinforced this by pointing out that we are all both privileged and oppressed in different contexts. This nuanced perspective encourages a broader understanding of how power operates, emphasising that privilege is not monolithic, but rather multifaceted, dependent on the particular social setting and the identities at play.

Harding and Whitehead (2013), however, remind us that, while it is important to recognise the plurality of privilege, we must not lose sight of the enduring significance of racial privilege. The danger of pluralising privilege is that it can dilute the focus on race, which has been a foundational axis of oppression in maintaining social hierarchies across time and space. In contexts where multiple forms of privilege and oppression intersect, race still plays a critical role in structuring access to power, resources and opportunities. Even within progressive spaces focused on diversity and inclusion, racial privilege often remains underexamined or overlooked, obscuring the specific ways in which whiteness continues to confer unearned advantages.

In the field of education, scholars have extensively explored how these dynamics manifest themselves. In teacher preparation programmes, for example, Matias and Mackey (2015) discuss how racial privilege shapes the experiences and expectations of teachers, often leaving them ill equipped to address the needs of racially diverse students. Similarly, Allen and

Rossatto (2009) examined how racial privilege in secondary education creates disparate learning environments, benefiting white students, while disadvantaging students of colour. Nurenberg (2011) further investigates these dynamics in secondary education, while Curry-Stevens (2007) and Underiner (2000) focus on adult education settings, highlighting how privilege and oppression play out in the learning experiences of adult students from diverse backgrounds.

The Privilege Identity Exploration Model (Watt 2007) is particularly insightful in this regard. It emphasises that discussions of privilege often trigger strong emotional and cognitive reactions, especially among individuals with unexamined privilege. The model identifies several psychological defences, such as denial, deflection and minimisation, that people use to avoid confronting their own privilege. These barriers can hinder meaningful engagement with the concept of privilege, making it difficult to address the inequities that persist in education and other social contexts. This model provides a framework for understanding why conversations about privilege, particularly racial privilege, are often fraught with resistance and underscores the importance of pushing past these defences to create more equitable learning environments.

Although privilege is undoubtedly complex and multifaceted, it is essential to maintain a clear focus on the specific role that racial privilege plays in perpetuating systemic inequality. Pluralism of privilege should enhance, not obscure our understanding of how race continues to shape access to power and resources, particularly in educational spaces where the legacy of racism and white supremacy persists.

Pedagogy for the privileged: Transforming allies for social justice

The concept of pedagogy for the privileged provides a powerful framework for involving individuals who benefit from systemic privilege in the struggle for social justice. In the context of South African higher education, where the legacy of apartheid and colonialism continues to shape the experiences of students and staff, this pedagogical approach takes on even greater significance. South Africa's historical and social landscape, defined

by racial, economic, and gender inequalities, offers a poignant example of how privilege systems continue to manifest themselves in education. Transformation of privileged individuals into active allies for decolonisation and social justice is necessary and urgent.

South African experience: Decoloniality, leadership, and inclusion

In South Africa, the call for decoloniality and decolonisation of higher education gained widespread attention with movements such as #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall. These student-led protests highlighted the pervasive nature of colonial and Eurocentric knowledge systems, demanding a shift toward curricula that reflect African epistemologies, indigenous knowledge and a more inclusive representation of marginalised communities. However, despite these significant calls for change, the reality of meaningful inclusion of leadership and epistemological transformation remains largely aspirational.

Decoloniality and pedagogy for the privileged in South Africa

The pedagogy for the privileged is highly relevant within South African higher education, as it addresses the role that privileged groups, particularly white students and faculty, play in perpetuating inequality. A decolonial approach challenges these individuals to interrogate their own positions of privilege in relation to race, wealth and gender. It urges them to move beyond passive acceptance of inequality and take active steps toward supporting the transformation of the university into a more equitable space (Katz 2003).

Decoloniality in this context goes beyond simply altering the curriculum; it requires a rethinking of how knowledge is produced, validated and transmitted. This involves not only dismantling Eurocentric power structures, but also empowering students and scholars from historically marginalised communities. However, without the active engagement of privileged allies, these efforts risk remaining symbolic

rather than substantive. Pedagogy for the privileged encourages privileged individuals to use their position and influence to advocate for decolonial knowledge systems and dismantle oppressive structures within academia.

Leadership and inclusion: Addressing epistemic injustice

One of the key challenges in South Africa is the slow pace at which leadership inclusion reflects the values of decolonisation and social justice. Leadership positions within universities are still predominantly held by individuals who benefit from colonial and apartheid legacy, often leaving out the voices of those who have experienced systemic oppression. A shift in leadership, rooted in decoloniality, would require the elevation of leaders who are committed to addressing the epistemic injustices embedded within the academy.

For privileged allies, social justice leadership means recognising that structural inequalities within universities, be they racial, gendered or economic, are maintained by systemic privilege. It is not enough for allies to remain sympathetic observers; they must take on the responsibility of confronting and dismantling the very systems from which they benefit (Nyoni 2019). This includes pushing for more representative leadership structures and ensuring that decision-making processes are inclusive of historically marginalised voices. South African higher education cannot be viewed as a superficial diversity effort, where the mere presence of marginalised students or staff is enough to indicate progress. True inclusion means creating an environment where all students, particularly those of historically disadvantaged backgrounds, have equal access to resources, opportunities and the ability to influence institutional culture (Nyoni 2019; Heleta and Chasi 2024).

In practice, this could involve reviewing admission policies to ensure greater access for students from underprivileged communities, restructuring the curriculum to reflect African and indigenous perspectives and ensuring that campus spaces are supportive and free of micro-aggressions or systemic barriers to success. Pedagogy for the privileged, when applied in South Africa, encourages privileged students and staff to

reflect on their role in creating an inclusive educational environment. They are asked to question how their presence and actions might reinforce the dominance of Eurocentric and capitalist structures, and to actively work toward dismantling these structures by advocating for decoloniality and inclusion within their spheres of influence (Van Gorder 2007).

Transforming allies for decolonisation and social justice

Transformation of privileged individuals into active allies for decolonisation and social justice is essential for sustainable change in South African universities. This transformation requires a shift in mindset: moving from passive acknowledgment of privilege to active participation in the struggle for justice. For example, a privileged student may start by recognising their positionality, but the goal is for them to become advocates for policy change, curriculum reform and leadership diversity. Pedagogy for the privileged aims to create a deeper sense of responsibility among those who benefit from inequality, pushing them to leverage their advantages to support marginalised groups. In the South African context, this may mean working alongside student movements, participating in institutional reform efforts, or using personal and professional networks to amplify decolonial initiatives.

Theoretical foundations and key principles

Pedagogy for the privileged draws heavily from Paulo Freire's (1972) theory of critical consciousness, which emphasises the need for individuals to become aware of the sociopolitical forces that shape their lives and the lives of others. Freire's work has traditionally focused on the oppressed, arguing that liberation can only come through their awakening and active participation in the dismantling of oppression systems. Curry-Stevens (2007) extends Freire's ideas by applying them to privileged learners, arguing that they must also undergo a process of critical consciousness to recognise how their privilege sustains inequality.

In conjunction with Freire, pedagogy for the privileged is informed

by Mezirow's (1991) *theory of transformative learning*. Mezirow's model suggests that transformative education involves a shift in consciousness, where learners critically assess their assumptions, values and beliefs. This type of learning is essential for privileged individuals, since it challenges their deeply ingrained worldviews, often shaped by unearned advantages. As Curry-Stevens (2007) noted, pedagogy for the privileged emphasises counterhegemonic pedagogy: education that actively disrupts the dominant ideologies that sustain privilege and inequality. It aims to foster transformative learning experiences that not only raise awareness, but also inspire action toward social justice.

One distinction of pedagogy for the privileged is its recognition of the unique needs and challenges faced by privileged learners. Unlike oppressed learners, who may experience the consequences of oppression first-hand, privileged learners are often insulated from these realities, making it harder for them to see the urgency of social justice work. Thus, pedagogy for the privileged requires different supports, such as facilitating emotional resilience in the face of guilt or discomfort and addressing psychological defences such as denial or minimisation of privilege (Watt 2007). These learners must be equipped with the tools to process their own complicity in systems of oppression without disengaging from the work of change.

The role of the privileged in social justice

Freire (1972) famously argued that oppressors cannot lead the charge for liberation. This view suggests that privileged individuals, as benefactors of unequal systems, are too deeply invested in maintaining the status quo to engage in meaningful liberation work. Curry-Stevens (2007), however, contends that this critique oversimplifies the potential role of privileged individuals in social justice movements. She argues that privileged learners must be placed on par with oppressed learners in educational settings, not as leaders of the movement, but as allies who can leverage their privilege to effect systemic change.

Rothenberg and Scully (as cited in Curry-Stevens 2007: 36) further argue that privileged individuals represent a significant 'cadre of potential allies' for social justice. When properly educated and guided, they can use

their relative power and influence to advocate for policies and practices that challenge systemic inequalities. Importantly, this advocacy must involve acting against their own immediate self-interest: privileged individuals must be willing to relinquish the unearned benefits they receive to support the collective good. This process of allyship involves not just understanding one's privilege, but using it to disrupt the very systems that uphold that privilege.

Political and practical implications

Pedagogy for the privileged raises both political and practical questions about the role of privileged individuals in social justice movements. Politically, it confronts the tension between the involvement of the privileged in the liberation work. Should those who benefit from oppressive systems be involved in efforts to dismantle those systems? Critics argue that the privileged may inadvertently re-centre themselves in these movements, thus, reinforcing the very hierarchies they seek to dismantle. However, proponents of privileged pedagogy assert that social justice requires the participation of all members of society, especially those with power and influence, if it is to achieve transformative, systemic change (Evans *et al.* 2000; Fanon 2004).

Practically, privileged pedagogy underscores the importance of engaging privileged individuals as active participants in social justice work, not just passive supporters. This engagement involves educating privileged learners about their complicity in oppressive systems and equipping them with the skills and knowledge to challenge those systems. Privileged individuals, when they recognise their own role in maintaining inequality and choose to act in solidarity with marginalised groups, can be powerful allies in dismantling the structures that uphold privilege and oppression (Makhubela 2018).

By transforming privilege into a tool for justice, privileged pedagogy has the potential to create a larger and more inclusive movement for social change. This approach not only seeks to educate the privileged, but also to empower them to become co-conspirators in the fight for equity, leveraging their advantages to build more just and equitable societies. In doing so, it

disrupts the traditional power dynamics that separate the privileged from the oppressed and fosters a more collaborative, collective effort toward social justice (Katz 2003).

Effectiveness of decolonial leadership

The effectiveness of decolonial leadership is rooted in the idea of challenging and reshaping leadership paradigms that have been shaped by colonialism and Eurocentric ideologies. This framework focuses on deconstructing power structures that have historically marginalised certain groups while reconstructing leadership models that emphasise equity, cultural responsiveness and social justice. Theories of decolonial leadership draw heavily from critical theory, postcolonial thought and decolonial perspectives, calling for the transformation of leadership practices to create inclusive, culturally responsive and socially just environments (Harris and Patton 2019).

At its core, decolonial leadership is about dismantling the colonial legacy in institutions, promoting the inclusion of diverse ways of knowing and empowering marginalised groups. Traditional leadership paradigms, often grounded in hierarchical and Eurocentric models of authority, are challenged in favour of leadership practices that prioritise the well-being, agency and voices of historically disadvantaged communities. The effectiveness of colonial leadership requires the creation of leadership approaches that go beyond mere representation, actively address systemic inequalities and foster respectful and inclusive dialogue that acknowledges diverse ways of knowing and being (Katz 2003; Nyoni 2019).

Decoloniality and decolonisation leadership inclusion strategies

Leadership plays a critical role in shaping the academic success of students of all ages. In educational settings that prioritise social justice, various leadership theories have emerged, each offering a unique perspective on promoting fairness and equity. These approaches, collectively known as leadership for social justice, include transformative leadership, which seeks

to challenge and change oppressive structures; inclusive leadership, which emphasises the participation of all voices; and critical race leadership, which addresses the specific needs and challenges faced by marginalised racial groups. Other models, such as feminist leadership and communitarian leadership, focus on gender equity, community well-being and advocacy. Together, these approaches aim to address the cultural, spiritual and social dimensions of leadership in the pursuit of a more just and equitable educational experience for all students (Hlatshwayo 2024).

However, in navigating this diverse leadership landscape, whiteness privilege often emerges as a significant barrier to true inclusion. This privilege maintains and reinforces the institutional and systemic dominance of white individuals and perspectives, particularly in leadership roles. As a result, efforts to create more inclusive leadership models often encounter resistance, with whiteness acting as a force that seeks to preserve the status quo.

Decoloniality, a theoretical framework that critiques colonial power structures, poses a direct challenge to white privilege. By advocating for the dismantling of these power structures and promoting a more equitable distribution of power, decoloniality threatens the historical advantages that whiteness has provided. This tension between decoloniality and whiteness privilege underscores the difficulty of achieving genuine inclusion in educational leadership, as the very systems governing decision-making and policy development are often rooted in colonial legacy (Heleta and Dilraj 2024).

The process of decolonisation adds another layer of complexity to this dynamic. It calls for a fundamental restructuring of educational spaces, curricula and leadership practices, demanding that these systems move away from colonial legacies and toward more equitable frameworks. SJLFs are instrumental in this process, offering leaders the tools and perspectives needed to confront entrenched structures of exclusion and promote equity and inclusion (Oplatka 2014).

In the context of higher education reform, these leadership frameworks are particularly important. South African higher education institutions often serve students from historically marginalised communities, making the need for inclusive and equitable leadership even more pressing. By

addressing whiteness privilege and promoting decolonial practices, the higher education leadership can work to dismantle the systemic barriers that hinder the success of these students, ensuring that all learners, regardless of their background, could thrive.

Ultimately, the call for decolonial practices in educational leadership is about more than just recognising and disrupting whiteness privilege. It is about creating educational spaces where all students can succeed, particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds. Social justice leadership, in this context, requires a deliberate effort to resist exclusion and promote decoloniality as a means of fostering greater equity and inclusion within educational reform, particularly in higher education institutions.

The role of decolonial leadership in educational and institutional settings

In educational settings, decolonial leadership plays a critical role in transforming institutions that have historically been sites of colonial oppression. The curriculum, administrative practices and pedagogical approaches used in many educational institutions continue to reflect colonial values and reinforce Eurocentric worldviews. Decolonial leadership in education seeks to address these issues by promoting curricular reform, fostering inclusive pedagogies and challenging the dominant narratives that shape the way knowledge is produced and disseminated.

Decolonial leaders in education also work to ensure that educational spaces are welcoming and affirming for all students, particularly those of marginalised groups. This involves creating policies and practices that support diversity, equity and inclusion, as well as engaging in critical reflection on the ways the colonial legacy continues to influence institutional practices. By promoting a decolonised educational environment, leaders can help dismantle the systems of oppression that have historically excluded and marginalised certain groups of students (Hlatshwayo 2024).

Epistemic strategies to advance decolonial leadership inclusion

The prevailing consensus in the reviewed literature is that the exploration of the diversity of epistemological decolonial leadership in higher education remains in its infancy (Nyoni 2019). Although the importance of decoloniality and decolonisation is increasingly recognised, empirical research remains limited (Lander and Santoro 2017). This highlights the need for further investigation and the understanding of how the inclusion of decolonial leadership manifests and interacts with diverse epistemologies in higher education contexts. Higher education leadership inclusion and decolonisation strategies may include integrating diverse epistemologies into curricula, fostering inclusive governance practices, promoting representation of marginalised groups in decision-making roles, and facilitating dialogues that acknowledge and incorporate indigenous knowledge systems.

The lack of decolonial philosophies, theories and praxis, however, hamper any efforts due to entrenched Eurocentric epistemic violent protocols and processes. Therefore, it is important to conduct thorough research and verify the effectiveness of specific strategies for implementation in various institutional contexts. Keet *et al.* (2017) admit that there is a lack of ease and awkwardness in the present discourses on higher education in South Africa. This awkwardness, Keet *et al.* (2017) suggest, emerges from the complicity of higher education in perpetuating epistemic injustices, leaving the coloniality of knowledge untouched, while adopting the aim of transformation only at the level of rhetorical euphoria.

The concept of epistemological diversity of decolonial leadership is rooted in critical theories, particularly decolonial thought. Challenge traditional leadership models that perpetuate colonial structures and Eurocentric perspectives, advocating for leadership approaches that incorporate diverse worldviews and epistemologies. Decolonial epistemological leadership seeks to reshape how knowledge is produced and managed in higher education institutions by integrating indigenous knowledge systems and non-Western perspectives (Sidhu 2008). Leaders with this approach aim to create inclusive and socially just environments that prioritise cultural

responsiveness, reduce hierarchies and promote equity within institutions.

Quijano's (2000) notion of decoloniality further underscores the transformative potential of this leadership. It involves a complete departure from colonial influences, focusing on empowering indigenous people and incorporating their knowledge into leadership structures. This presents an opportunity for South African higher education institutions to design leadership models that bridge the gap between traditional Westernised systems and indigenous knowledge systems. As Sidhu (2008) notes, decoloniality in knowledge and leadership represents a shift toward a more inclusive and representative model of higher education leadership.

Epistemic decoloniality and decolonisation strategies for higher education leadership inclusion aim to challenge and transform the entrenched colonial legacies within academic institutions, particularly in leadership roles. These strategies advocate for the recognition and inclusion of diverse, marginalised knowledge systems and worldviews, dismantling Eurocentric paradigms that dominate academic governance and knowledge production.

Considering leadership dynamics and effectiveness in diverse cultures

The findings also highlight the importance of understanding the factors that influence leadership dynamics and effectiveness within diverse cultural contexts. Leadership is shaped by the cultural environment in which it operates, and leadership approaches cannot be universal. Theoretical foundations such as Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory (including individualism-collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance and masculinity-femininity) provide valuable insights into how cultural values affect leadership styles and effectiveness (Abdi 2012; Heleta and Dilraj 2024).

In diverse contexts, leaders must adapt their strategies to accommodate varying cultural norms and expectations. The cultural intelligence (CQ) framework further emphasises the importance of leaders being culturally aware and adaptable. Effective leadership in a globalised and culturally diverse world requires a strong understanding of cultural differences,

which can impact decision making, power dynamics and team functioning (Lander and Santoro 2017).

In essence, the rise of inclusive leadership reflects a growing recognition of the value of diversity and equity in leadership practices. Inclusive leadership involves creating an environment where all voices, particularly those of historically marginalised groups, are heard and respected. By integrating diverse perspectives, inclusive leaders can foster more equitable and effective teams (Smith 2012). This multidisciplinary approach underscores the need for flexible, culturally sensitive and inclusive leadership practices. Leaders must navigate the complexities of cultural diversity to build effective and equitable leadership models that can thrive in diverse environments.

Postcolonial institutional leadership inclusion experiences and practice

The literature points to a significant ambivalence in efforts to reform leadership within postcolonial higher education institutions (Nyoni 2019; Smith 2012). Many institutions continue to struggle with the persistence of colonial leadership styles and institutional structures. Despite the growing discourse around decoloniality, the shifts in leadership practices have been uneven and often face resistance, creating a challenging environment for transformational change.

This ambivalence arises from the coexistence of decolonial aspirations and the established influence of colonial legacy. Leaders seeking to implement decolonial reforms face complex dynamics, as these institutions often hold onto hierarchical structures, power imbalances and Eurocentric knowledge systems. This resistance underscores the need for critical engagement to navigate these tensions and develop leadership practices that dismantle colonial remnants while fostering inclusive and culturally responsive leadership (Sidhu 2008) which entails diversifying epistemic foundations. It involves incorporating non-Western, indigenous and marginalised knowledge systems into the curriculum, research and decision-making processes of universities. Leadership should actively promote an inclusive intellectual environment that values diverse

epistemologies, moving beyond the dominance of Eurocentric knowledge (Helfand and Lippin 2002).

Epistemic decoloniality, the justice sought through challenging colonial knowledge systems, is vital to this effort. South African universities must, for example, modernise their engagement with indigenous knowledge systems to reshape epistemological production and leadership in higher education. This approach will support the socioeconomic practices of local communities and address the colonial knowledge violence still present in contemporary education (Battiste 2013; Woolman 2001). The need to reconfigure leadership in a way that is inclusive of indigenous knowledge and practices is central to achieving a truly decolonial higher education leadership model. Genuine reforming of leadership pathways could also help to foster leadership inclusion projects. Current leadership trajectories in academia often favour individuals trained in Western epistemologies and leadership styles. A decolonial approach requires revising the hiring, promotion and leadership development processes to ensure that those of marginalised backgrounds are not only included, but also empowered to lead with their own cultural and intellectual frameworks.

Decolonising governance structures and research

Decolonising governance structures and research is a transformative strategy aimed at dismantling colonial traces that continue to shape power dynamics, decision-making processes, and knowledge production. This approach seeks to challenge and rethink the traditional Eurocentric models of governance and research by promoting inclusivity, representation and local knowledge systems, particularly from marginalised and Indigenous communities. In governance, decolonisation involves creating structures that reflect diverse voices, values and perspectives, ensuring equitable participation and leadership. It requires rethinking policies, institutional cultures and decision-making frameworks that often perpetuate inequality (Bogotch 2013).

In research, decolonisation focuses on deconstructing the dominance of Western paradigms, methodologies and knowledge hierarchies. It emphasises the importance of recognising and integrating indigenous

knowledge, lived experiences and diverse worldviews into academic and policy discourse. This strategy fosters collaboration with communities, prioritising research that addresses their specific needs and challenges and ensuring ethical and context-sensitive approaches (Harris and Patton 2019).

Ultimately, decolonising governance structures and research paves the way for a more just, equitable and culturally relevant future.

Conclusion

The experiences of postcolonial decolonial leadership inclusion reform in higher education institutions reveal deep ambivalence and resistance to change. This underscores the challenges of dismantling the colonial legacy in leadership practices and the need for continued critical engagement and transformation (Heleta and Chasi 2024; Makhubela 2018; Nyoni 2019).

Bhambra *et al*. (2020: 513–514) assert that decolonisation as a critical process that involves interrogating, resisting, dismantling and transforming the university, is due to entrenched Eurocentric leadership theories that rebutted indigenous excellences. Decoloniality and decolonisation processes entail deep engagements with how academic institutions have historically contributed to, perpetuated and legitimised global systems of epistemic and systemic violence, inequality and domination. However, the persistent preference for Eurocentric standards, values and practices—often celebrated uncritically—seem to overshadow the transformative efforts aimed at fostering decoloniality and advancing decolonisation. This reflects a broader systemic reluctance to confront and dismantle entrenched structures of epistemic and social injustice, partly due to reliance on entrenched institutionalised whiteness supremacy and conspiracy in the positions of power undermining the paradigm shift.

We proffer that the SJLF imperatives inherent in decolonial work, highlight the need to reimagine and reconstruct institutions of higher learning in ways that centre marginalised knowledge systems and lived experiences. The experiences of postcolonial decolonial leadership inclusion reform in higher education institutions reveal deep ambivalence and resistance to change. This underscores the challenges of dismantling

the colonial legacy in leadership practices and the need for continued critical engagement and transformation. As Bhambra *et al*. (2020: 513–514) assert, decolonisation is a critical process that requires interrogating, resisting, dismantling and transforming the university's structures, which have been shaped by entrenched Eurocentric leadership theories and praxis. These theories, in turn, have long rebutted indigenous excellences, thus, upholding a legacy of exclusion.

Furthermore, this chapter critically engages with how whiteness, as both a construct and a power dynamic, influences the decolonisation and decoloniality dynamics of leadership practices in higher education. This framing emphasises how institutionalised whiteness, supremacy and conspiracy in positions of power undermine efforts to shift the paradigm (Helfand and Lippin 2002). The persistent preference for Eurocentric standards, values and practices, often celebrated uncritically, overshadows transformative efforts aimed at fostering decoloniality and advancing decolonisation (Heleta and Dilraj 2024).

The chapter highlights that decoloniality and decolonisation entail deep engagement with the ways in which academic institutions have historically contributed to, perpetuated and legitimised global systems of violence, inequality and domination. The challenges of navigating these complexities are significant, and efforts to foster inclusion within leadership are met with resistance due to these entrenched structures (Keet *et al*. 2017). However, through the critical exploration of literature, we aimed to shed light on strategies that can lead to more just and effective leadership inclusion practices.

The conscious call reinforces the imperatives of a SJLF inherent in decolonial work, calling for the reimagining and reconstruction of institutions of higher learning. Only through this process can we centre marginalised knowledge systems and lived experiences, ultimately advancing decoloniality and creating more equitable, inclusive leadership practices in the higher education landscapes (Diem and Welton 2020).

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Chapter 8: Conclusion

Mellissa Simbisai Mlambo and Dominique Wnuczek-Lobaczewski

This manuscript serves as reflections on the journey of decolonising thought and practise within the African context . This manuscript derives its basis from the Journal of Decolonising Disciplines (JDD), which provided a vital platform for interrogating entrenched colonial structures in academia, fostering critical dialogue and amplifying diverse voices committed to decolonial practices. Since its inception, the JDD has foregrounded thoughtful and provocative scholarship, adding to the rich nuance and deep challenge of the dominant, traditional, and hegemonic discourses around how we engage with scholarship, and practice. The work of the JDD came at a timely and necessary point within decolonial discourse, with the JDD serving as a pathway to building and sharing knowledge within a 'changing social context' (Reddy 2019: v). The JDD played a crucial role in problematising, critiquing, challenging teaching, research and education. Most importantly, it encouraged diverse scholarship, providing the 'epistemological case' for decolonisation and encouraging readers to reorganise, rethink and historicise decoloniality, even past our 'disciplinary boundaries' (Reddy 2019: v). This collection of chapters is an homage and departure from these intellectual and inaugural roots as a part of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation grant — 'Unsettling Paradigms: The Decolonial Turn in the Humanities Curriculum at Universities in South Africa' (2017).

To move forward, we must look back

This edited book is an illustration of the practical process of decolonisation. Decolonisation involves a process of reflection and a reckoning of our realities and research. The chapters explore our histories and our consciousness. In particular, they demonstrate tow coloniality, patriarchy and other oppressive systems have diminished and shaped what it means

to be African. These structures have forced us to forsake our identities, our memories, and have contributed to fractures in our development and self of self.

While this history is a source of discomfort, this edited book also illustrates opportunities for reconciliation, restoration and reclamation. The chapters encourage us as readers to think critically about our traumatic history, and how coloniality and oppressive systems have boxed us into disconnected silos. Rather than wallow in this knowledge, the chapters advocate for us to unburden ourselves from these traumatic shackles and legacies. We move forward by embracing ideals like reintegration, rediscovery and recovery. We find our meaning and purpose through our dreams, our commitment and our collective action. The process of decoloniality is not just intellectual, it is a practise that must be lived through. These chapters are a call to action: a call to embracing our African values, principles, philosophies and metaphysics for our survival, communities and dignity. In this way we affirm and acknowledge our humanity.

This edited book, explores overarching discussion points from previous JDD issues, including an exploration into practical interventions regarding medicine and the sustained critique on higher education. This issue also presents the final departure from the earlier issues. It provides a deep reflection on decoloniality and decolonisation with a multi-disciplinary approach to humanness, humanity and humanism and engages in the themes of education, leadership, healthcare, heritage and ancestry. Most importantly, this issue re-engages in decoloniality as a process and providing a distinction between decolonisation versus decoloniality.

In *Mobile App and Data Specifications for Afro-Colombian Ancestral Medicine Units in Bogota: Technology Affordance and Data Sovereignty Limitations*, Cáceres *et al*. look to an international healthcare initiative in Bogota, Colombia that aims to integrate ancestral medicine practices into a deeply colonial digital space. This unique case study highlights the need for interdisciplinary approaches to the practicalities of decolonisation. Using a mobile app, the authors explore the practical application of the decolonisation of digital health and data sovereignty. This again shows the expansive quality of decolonial discourse, providing insight into sidelined voices from Afro-Colombian populations. While there is an increased

efficiency through the digitalisation of ancestral medicine, there also is a trade-off, that is, added bureaucracy in data collection and the loss of agency of the traditional medical practitioner.

The chapter, *Decolonial African Posthumanism: Beyond the Eurocentric Human*, looks beyond Western humanism and looks toward decolonial posthumanism as an alternative and more inclusive approach to knowledge production. Through a comparative discussion between African metaphysics and Western metaphysics, El Fahli poses insights into the benefits of an African metaphysical framework. This chapter makes a compelling case for the benefits of the integration of African philosophy and metaphysics to transcend posthumanist discourse. The chapter specifically challenges the idea of being 'fully human', which has been explored from a Western, Greek, Renaissance idea of the 'human condition' and tradition. This universalised understanding inherently alienates other perspectives of humanity, humanness and the human condition. Even the notion of posthumanism is, in and of itself, exclusionary to the 'existence of alternative forms of humanism'. It overlooks 'rich African thought' and 'indigenous cultures and repositories of knowledge' that provide us with a diverse and deep understanding of what it means to be human. The author calls on the reader to expand the idea of humanism to include critical and decolonial posthumanism. Decolonial posthumanism expands one's understanding of the human condition and experience from a 'non-European contexts'.

In *Listening Affects: Evocations on sound/silence as a mode of decolonial thinking/being/doing/theorizing*, Singh incorporates the use of sounds and silences to explore gendered and racial tensions within institutions of higher learning. In this chapter, the author skilfully engages the auditory sense while reflecting on their position within a deeply embedded colonial academic institution. This creative approach proposes the method of Deep Listening as a collective way to foster conversations (or sounds) to allow space for the process of decolonisation. This chapter takes place on two levels: a critical decolonial self-reflection by the author and an invitation for the reader to self-reflect and engage with this research. The author is an embedded researcher, providing both objective and subjective contributions to the decolonial discourse. The author demonstrates the process of decolonisation espoused in Prof Vasu Reddy's preface in the

inaugural issue—the idea of 'decoloniality in motion'. This is a departure from traditional discussions on decoloniality, one which reflects and works toward the 'product of decoloniality', that is, the end result. In this piece, the author takes the audience through their process and imaginings of decoloniality within 'academy and academia'. This chapter is also contemplative, providing the reader with a glimpse into the 'process of questioning, thinking/being/doing/theorising' within higher education and how that process is 'in motion' and not static.

In *Historical Justice: An Interplay between Colonialism and Capitalism*, Rasras addresses the concept of "historical injustice" by looking into the interplay between capitalism and colonialism, through examples from Mali. The chapter investigates the 'colonial obstructions' that make it difficult for colonised people to fully enjoy freedom and liberation. The legacy of the colonial project has meant that colonised people have had a harder time achieving full freedom and independence and have had very little room to develop and 'self-build' in the post-colonial dispensation. The authors also explore the idea of self-consciousness and how even that has been tainted by the legacy of colonial rule. The chapter highlights the pervasive quality of colonial culture, 'plans, techniques and regulations'.

In *Mohlomi's indigenous knowledge system as a tool to decolonise the Basotho: The Botho perspective*, Seema specifically focuses on the power and influence of indigenous knowledge systems and how they can be used for the advancement of Africans broadly, and the Basotho specifically. The knowledge systems put forward by the author are the use of medicine and the succession of power in chieftaincies. This chapter shares similarities to the other chapters presented in this book, specifically in their focus on traditional knowledge systems, medicine and harnessing ancestry in the dissemination of healthcare. It also shares some similarities with the chapter on the *Decolonial African Posthumanism: Beyond the Eurocentric Human*, as it explores the idea of humanity/humanness from a Sesotho understanding.

In *Classics and Decolonising the Curriculum: A Case Study Using the Teaching of Sexuality*, Haskins explores how the Classics – Greek and Roman literature - can be used as multicultural tools to decolonises literature and develop scholarship. In this chapter, Haskins argues that the Classics are useful because of their ability to allow African to critique, problematise and

communicate with the West and the world at large. The Classics offer South African curricula, and by extension African curricula, a perpetual way to gain an insight into culture/s, 'what is African?' and how to think and understand our modern circumstances. Haskins argues that by using the Classics, we can gain an understanding of the thought patterns and speech of the West, which can in turn be used to interact with them and be heard by them. Haskins then explores their own teaching practice and how they have use the Classics to teach and decolonise sexualities in their undergraduate course. Traditionally, teaching of sexualities in higher education was seen in a negative light i.e. as a means to corrupt and pervert young minds. However, Haskins use of sexualities in inquiry based learning, shows how the Classics can be used to showcase and understand the interrelatedness and systems between ancient social hierarchy and ancient sexual hierarchy. This allows for undergraduate students to gain an understanding of sexuality from contexts that are different from what they know. As a part of Haskins interventions in the curricula, they also include discourse on sexualities within Africa, focusing on its acceptance and subversions - by texts like the Bible. These interventions allow for students think critically about the influence and drive of the West on African understandings of sexuality.

In *Decoloniality and Decolonisation Leadership Inclusion: Insights from Higher Education Experiences*, Nyoni and Toolo further speak to the dynamics between decolonisation and leadership. The authors highlight the need to address the gaps that exist within scholarship on leadership models. Through a critical review of literature, the authors highlight the need for decolonial leadership within higher education through epistemic decoloniality and decolonisation strategies. The authors posit that whiteness remains as a dominant power dynamic which remains favourable among higher education leadership. This chapter explores 'animosity and mistrust' within higher educational spaces and interrogates the history and legacy of academic institutions, how they are underlined by white dominance and how this is filtered into 'leadership styles, decision making processes, and the overall institutional culture'. The primacy of these Eurocentric institutional frameworks continue to alienate and 'marginalise non-Western knowledge systems and experiences' and students, just as

Sooliman (2020) remarked in his critique on the commodification of the university space. The chapter calls for substantive inclusion in 'leadership and decision-making' processes, and guided by the SJLF, which would reflect true systemic change and 'different epistemologies and leadership practices rooted in cultural diversity'.

Conclusion

The JDD played a key role in advancing the decolonial agenda. It provided a space, refuge and platform for 'innovative and progressive ideas' and provided the proof of the 'process and project' of decoloniality within the Global South (Reddy 2019: v).

As Sooliman mentioned in the second volume of the JDD, decoloniality is a fraught journey and continuous process (2020: 6). This discourse and journey are nuanced and intricate, filled with 'hidden tensions' and 'exciting possibilities' (Sooliman 2020: 6). The proliferation of literature, including the ones housed under the JDD, demonstrate these intricacies and complexities. From the papers we have published so far, as well as this edited book, the process of decoloniality has already begun and the question has moved beyond 'what needs to be decolonised first' (Sooliman 2020: 6). The value and importance of the conversations around decoloniality and decolonisation should continue to revolve around adding to the established scholarship. The discourse should also move beyond mere definitions and branch out even further beyond law, medicine, leadership, education and philosophy. This would showcase the plurality of the discipline and the firm commitment to the continued deepening of the conversations around decoloniality. We should continue the challenge and critique of the dominant discourse, but also be intentional in our reflection and reflexivity. After all, this provides us with a record and insight into human potential and the human condition (Sooliman 2020: 7). As one of the authors in this final issue pointed out, we should be able to sit in the tension, the uncomfortability, the knots and insolvability of the decolonial discourse. As this book highlights, the JDD's impact extends beyond the theoretical, urging scholars, practitioners and institutions to reflect on the practical and ethical imperatives of decolonising disciplines. From

rethinking methodologies and epistemologies to engaging with the lived experiences of those historically excluded from knowledge production, this issue's contributions reveal the complexity and urgency of this work. This concluding volume, therefore, not only underscores the achievements of the JDD, it also invites a continued exploration and innovation in the ongoing project of decolonisation.

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