



(De)coloniality and South African academe

Toks Oyedemi

To cite this article: Toks Oyedemi (2018): (De)coloniality and South African academe, Critical Studies in Education, DOI: [10.1080/17508487.2018.1481123](https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2018.1481123)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2018.1481123>



Published online: 06 Jun 2018.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



(De)coloniality and South African academe

Toks Oyedemi

Communication and Media Studies, University of Limpopo, Sovenga, South Africa

ABSTRACT

The colonial nature of South African universities remains a source of debate among students and academics. Decolonization as rethinking academic institutional practices seems less controversial; the specificity of how to decolonize the academia is the core of divergent arguments and contesting ideologies. Consequently, many suggestions and methods for the decolonization of South African universities have been proffered. Although some of these suggestions are pertinent, a critical question about what should South African academe decolonize from needs to be engaged. This requires a critical, theoretical and intellectual discourse of coloniality in order to rethink the academia in South Africa. Drawing from Anibal Quijano's critical discourse of *coloniality of power*, this paper (re)visits the nature of coloniality, explores approaches to decolonization and situates these understandings to the academia in postcolonial South Africa. A polycentric approach to decolonization is supported with a goal of decolonization as innovations.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 20 May 2017

Accepted 23 May 2018

KEYWORDS

Academia; coloniality; decolonization; South Africa

Introduction

Decolonization is a recurring discourse in Africa, as in most of the world's regions where Euro-American coloniality has produced ascendancy of Eurocentrism as a global cultural hegemon. For over five decades, many politically 'independent' African states have clamored for decolonization as a genuine obligation in erecting identity, while artful political actors have resorted to it as expediency for political survival. The euphoric amnesia of coloniality amidst celebration of freedom in postcolonial South Africa has been confronted with the realities of inequalities, uneven benefits of neoliberalism and unequal access to resources. As a result, the call, albeit genuine, for decolonization has emerged as a clarion discourse to address inequalities. For the Born Frees – those born in post-apartheid epoch, their yearning for access to quality and affordable education cannot be separated from the decolonization of the academia (Ismi, 2016; Mancu, 2016).

Decolonization as rethinking academic institutional practices in South Africa seems less controversial, the specificity of how to decolonize the academia is the core of divergent arguments and contesting ideologies (cf Crowe, 2017; Mamdani, 2016; Mbembe, 2016). This notwithstanding, suggestions for a process of decolonization of the university has been proffered (see Mbembe, 2016). On the other hand, some have

questioned the need to decolonize erstwhile colonial and apartheid universities, calling instead for the creation of new elite African universities (Isaacs, 2016).

While acknowledging the diversity of theoretical narratives and practical approaches to decolonizing the South African academy, there is also a need for continued critical, intellectual and practical discourses about coloniality and the academy in South Africa. This paper attempts to do this by (re)visiting the totalizing nature of coloniality, engaging discourses of decoloniality and finally exploring how these understandings of coloniality and decoloniality help shape a rethink of the academia in postcolonial South Africa. In doing this, I do not propose that the arguments here are totalizing prescriptives for a final ‘decolonized’ academy. Rather, acknowledging that decolonization is a process not an event, what follow are contributions to and the recognition of the diversity of intellectual works on decoloniality and the discourses about decolonizing academic institutions, with the specific intent of confronting the colonial nature of South African academe.

The matrix of coloniality

Coloniality is totalizing. It is a social totality of domination manifested in cultural and economic spheres. Considering the problematics of postcoloniality as a concept, particularly the debates around the meaning and implications of the prefix *post*, ‘coloniality’ offers a relatively unequivocal meaning. It refers to the global Eurocentric (Euro-American) domination that are covertly political but overtly social, economic and cultural. Coloniality occurs in the previously colonized spaces and in spaces not historically colonized but have been subdued by allure of Eurocentrism. For about 500 years, coloniality as a parallel phenomenon with European modernity continues to shape global structure of economic and cultural relations of power.

Coloniality is the situation where, although overt political colonization has been eliminated, the relationship between European/Western/American culture and the others continues to be that of colonial domination (Quijano, 2007). The end of colonialism as a political order did not bring about the end of European domination and exploitation, nor did it bring about the end of a structural configuration of power of Euro-American domination of the ‘Others’.

To understand the matrix of coloniality, I draw on Anibal Quijano’s (2000, 2007) seminal theory of *coloniality of power*. Coloniality of power presents a model of power on three core axes. One is the creation of an ideology derived from a ‘natural’ difference between the colonizer–oppressor and the colonized–oppressed based on the body and codified in the idea of *race*. The other is an exceptionalism of a *culture* that encapsulates the ways of being and knowing codified in Eurocentrism. The third is the establishment of a structure of economic power through the control of labor, resources and products on the basis of capital and global market system of *capitalism*.

Race and the coloniality of the body

Racialization of the body is a core constituent of coloniality. The social construction of race forms a key element in social classification of the colonized and the colonizers, with a resultant effect on a relationship of power that created superior and inferior

groups, supported with pseudoscientific ‘evidence’ to invent race and justify racial hierarchy. As Quijano (2000) argues, the idea of race was a way of justifying and legitimizing domination after the European conquest. The conquered and dominated peoples were then situated in a position of subordination, as a result their human traits and cultural features were considered inferior to the European epitome. This was supported with another invention, ‘White’, to describe the Europeans, who by virtue of this ‘whiteness’ became a ‘superior’ and ‘pure’ race. In certain colonial spaces, to maintain this superiority and purity (whiteness) mixing with inferior race (read: Black) was banned in order not to ‘dilute’ whiteness. Read for instance, the English intellectual and statesman, James Bryce’s lecture in (1902) delivered at Oxford University on *The Relations of the Advanced and Backward Races of Mankind*. He declared,

Now for the future of mankind nothing is more vital than some races should be maintained at the highest level of efficiency, because the work they can do for thought and art and letters, for scientific discovery, and for raising the standard of conduct, will determine the general progress of humanity. If therefore we were to suppose the blood of the races which are now most advanced to be diluted, so to speak, by that of those most backward, not only would more be lost to the former than would be gained to the latter, but there would be a loss, possibly an irreparable loss, to the world at large. (p 36)

Race and racial differences eventually created binaries of coloniality: civilized/primitive, advanced/backward and superior/inferior. Race influenced access to labor, wealth, land and education. In South Africa, the apartheid experience is a result of the invention of race and whiteness, which was then used to oppress and dominate the larger Black population. Race stands in the center of colonial structure of the idea of cultural superiority and economic domination in the system of capitalism. As Mignolo (2011) argues, hidden in the European idea of modernity is the expendability of human lives to the benefit of increasing wealth, which was justified by the racial ranking of human beings. Race, slavery and human as property are all tied to the transformation of land as property and its seizure and ownership. Race and racial categories differentiated between who could own land and would be forced to work on it. Race is core to a critical study of coloniality.

Eurocentrism and the coloniality of culture

The ideology of the supremacy of European culture is another element of coloniality. Eurocentrism defines the notion of Western culture as exceptional and its global propagation as unavoidable for modernity and civilization. The European culture and ways of producing knowledge and meanings became imposed on the dominated and the colonized, and all existing patterns of knowledge creation were relegated. The Euro-American patterns of knowledge creation and culture were mystified and eventually became hegemonic as global cultural practices. Quijano (2007) observes that the European culture was made attractive yet distant because it provides access to power. As a result, cultural Europeanization became the aspiration to be modern, civilized and knowledgeable with a goal of reaching the same material benefits and power as the Europeans. Cultural colonization is perhaps the most destructive aspect of coloniality because it tends toward permanence in social understanding of self, social practices and

knowledge creation. In Africa, the European cultural coloniality was intensely destructive. It largely destroyed indigenous patterns of arts, knowledge creation, expressions and cultural visualization of African ways of life. The imposition of the European culture deprived Africans the recognition in global order of culture; it was relegated to the exotic, a romanticized cultural expression worthy of appreciation in its exoticized colonial gaze, but below the norm of culture exemplified by the European epitome (Quijano, 2007).

Eurocentrism's most destructive impact on other cultures is its arrogation as a primary and hegemonic pattern of knowledge production. Again, Quijano (2007) explains, '... only European culture is rational, it contains "subjects" – the rest are not rational, they cannot be or harbor "subjects"'. As a result, 'other cultures are different in the sense that they are unequal, in fact inferior, by nature. They only can be "objects" of knowledge' (p. 174). Consequently, the European ways of knowledge production became the rational way of epistemic activity, where other cultures are seen as objects of study and Western culture as hegemonic way of existence in a 'civilized' society. In fact, the ideology of supremacy of European culture became synonymous with civilization. This has been successfully planted into the psyche of the once-colonized that, as Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2014) notes, the long-term impact of this social cultural engineering has 'invaded the core imaginary of the African psyche and culture to the extent that Africans today reproduce 'cultural Europeanization' without direct tutelage of Europeans' (p. 194).

Capitalism and the coloniality of labor

A third aspect of Quijano's coloniality of power is predominance of capitalism as hegemonic ideology of economic relations. Maldonado-Torres (2007) emphasizes that capitalism became tied with domination and subordination that were central to maintaining colonial control first in the Americas, and then elsewhere. All forms of colonial control and exploitation were tied to capitalism; the discovery of 'new worlds' had values for its capitalist benefits, and the genocidal murder of indigenous peoples is connected to capital. Examples of this colonial history of capitalism and domination abound: The history of colonial South Africa started as part of European capitalist network. Jan van Riebeeck, the progenitor of Dutch arrival in South Africa, was working for a capitalist multinational commercial enterprise, the Dutch East India Company. The enterprise planned to use the Cape in South Africa as a base to resupply its ships usually with milk and fresh meat from the indigenous Khoi people on their way to Asia. Eventually, the Khoi people were driven away from their land and the process of the colonization of the Cape began.

The mineral riches of Africa was perhaps the dominant reason behind imperial colonization of this region. The mass murder and mutilation of millions of Congolese forced to harvest rubber during the boom of worldwide demand for rubber remains one of the brutal occurrences of the violence of colonialism. They were enslaved and forced to meet certain quotas of rubber; failure to meet these quotas often resorted to killing, hands been chopped off and villages burnt, and the death toll of this period was put around 10 millions of Congo's population (Hochschild, 1998). The colonized in Africa were forced to work in their own land for European wealth, and the erstwhile economic

relations of the Africans were destroyed in order to compel them to participate in the European capitalist system as suppliers of cheap or free labor. Take, for instance, the discovery of gold in South Africa; it began a complex structuring of colonial interest in Africa and sourcing cheap labor among the Africans was very essential to the mining industries. Taxation was imposed on nearly all the African resources of daily living, eventually driving many Africans to the mines in search of employment (Clark & Worger, 2004; Oyedemi, 2016).

The coloniality of labor works in a racialized way, where Africans provided the menial labor, and often as expendable migrant labor in the colonial capitalist system. In fact, African bodies have often supplied the labor component of Eurocentric capitalism; the laborers themselves were also accounted for as part of wealth, property and part of the real estate that was bequeathed to offspring as in the nature of African slaves in America (Martinot, n. d.). Race and capitalism shaped much of the European system of colonial economy. Today, the Eurocentric economic relations function in a wage/labor system. All forms of economic relations are shaped around capital-salary structure within a global market system.

Furthermore, economic coloniality also works within neoliberalism, a dominant capitalist ideology that shapes global economy. This Euro-American economic policy agenda, which exalts the liberal economic ideology of 'free market', has been pushed globally as the best economic practice. Grosfoguel (2002) asserts the global economic world system is coloniality. He argues, 'coloniality at a world-scale, with the United States as the undisputed hegemon over non-European people, characterizes the globalization of the capitalist world-economy today' (p. 205). As a result, the core zones of the capitalist world-economy overlap with predominantly White/European/Euro-American societies, while peripheral zones overlap with previously colonized non-European people. The global 'best economic practice' shapes neoliberal policy guidelines, which include deregulation, trade liberalization and free market programs resulting in privatization and commodification of public institutions, goods and services. The result is the accrual of benefits to the wealthy class who owns capital.

In South Africa, the coloniality of labor continues to shape the economy. The economic structure visible in every major city of South Africa is of Black labor, Black money and White wealth. A structure where Whites owned the enterprises that mainly function with Black labor and Black consumers. The structure of the South African workforce shows that 70% of top management position is still dominated by Whites (CEE, 2016), White-headed households have an income roughly 4.5 times larger than Black African-headed households and 3 times larger than the average national income (Statistics SA, 2017).

Ways of decolonizing

Decolonization is *the process of undoing coloniality*. But how can decolonization ensue in spaces that are currently shaped by globalization aided by technology, migration, fragmented ideology of postmodern identity of race and the constantly contested terrain of global capitalism? The goal of decolonization is to decenter Euro-American ideology as the hegemonic cultural system and move toward a polycentric worldview. Before exploring decolonization as *polycentrism*, it is critical to explore prevalent approaches to decolonization.

Decolonization as de-westernization

De-westernization as a concept has been used to describe the move away from the hegemonic dominance of Western ideologies, cultures, economic control and knowledge production (Mignolo, 2012; Waisbord & Mellado, 2014). Mignolo (2012) sees de-westernization as delinking from the centrality of Western dictates of global development. He notes that de-westernization is a political concept that describes movement of national economies from the centrality of Western neoliberal dictates of the US, EU, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or World Bank. In this case, it is delinking from Western economic control, an attempt seen in the example of the economic formations of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS). Another way is seeing de-westernization as ‘options’. This implies that Western civilization, capitalism and development are all one option that has become hegemonic and benefit those that lead it (Mignolo, 2012). De-westernization then implies that this option is not the only option for human civilization but one of many.

Mignolo (2012) however provides critical distinctions between de-westernization and decoloniality. De-westernization is delinking from the dictates, control and authority of the West, while decoloniality is more radical; it aims for the end of matrix of coloniality. So, while de-westernization is critical in challenging power at the level of control, in political decisions on economic matters for example, and about who makes such decision, the economic reality is still shaped according to Western/colonial ideologies. Decoloniality as a more radical approach works toward delinking from the ideologies and materiality of *economic coloniality* (capitalism). Therefore in the case of BRICS, de-westernization as ‘delinking here does not mean delinking from a “type of economy” but from the institutions of the World Bank, the IMF and related institutions’ (Mignolo, 2012, p. 2).

Consequently, acknowledging decolonization as a process, Mignolo’s articulation bears strong validity in the sense that a decolonization process then encompasses de-westernization at the short term with an end goal of decoloniality. But it is also critical to argue, as it is done here in this current analysis, that while de-westernization approach becomes useful as an initial step in confronting certain elements of the matrix of coloniality (for instance, in the economic sphere), a radical immediate decoloniality is possible in other aspects (for instance, ending racial inequality and racialization in the colonial matrix of power).

De-westernization defined as removal of European culture, knowledge, innovations and ideologies is wrong, impractical and parochial. Frustrated by experiences of coloniality, some may call for ‘anything Euro-American must fall’. This sort of thinking has also generated cynical rebuttal that if decolonization is de-westernization as removal of European civilization and innovations, then the once-colonized can hark back to existence prior to Euro-American technological innovations in sciences, transportation, medicine and so forth. Authentic de-westernization is about de-hegemonizing the centrality of European culture, not its removal. It is about a radical challenge to a racist narrative that sees no value, history, innovations and culture in the once-colonized, such as the Hegelian view of Africa as unhistorical, underdeveloped, with no history, devoid of morality, still in conditions of nature, devoid of knowledge, civilization and political constitution (Hegel, 1956). Decolonization as de-westernization is to decenter the

hegemony of Euro-American allocation of Western knowledge and culture as the dominant universal knowledge and culture.

Decolonization as indigenization

Indigenization is a process of centralizing the local as against the foreign (read: Western) in the economic and cultural spheres of the previously colonized. The calls for indigenization of the economy have been geared toward developing local economy and making sure the economy is driven by the participation of the citizens as controlling actors and not foreign ownership control. In this ideology, the call for nationalization of sectors of the economy becomes the economic agenda. While indigenization is a rational process of decolonization, it has often been used in oppositional politics in Africa (Aminzade, 2003), or for political expediency by the incumbent political power. Indigenization is not only an economic decolonization idea; it centralizes the local identities in the cultural, social and political spheres as a way of confronting coloniality. This centralization of local identities forms the core tenet of the call for *Africanization* as a process of indigenization.

Africanization is centering African culture, identities, histories and pride. For Makgoba (1997), it is not about excluding other cultures, but it is about defining African identity and culture, and including cultures into and through an African cultural vision in a global society. Louw (2010) notes that Africanization is the common African experience that includes the postcolonial experience. The often-minimized precolonial African cultural civilization that shaped genealogy of human knowledge in geometry, architecture, arts and philosophy, and the postcolonial experiences should form how *Africanization* and *indigenization* are conceptualized.

Yishak and Gumbo (2015) discuss different approaches to indigenization. One approach is as a complete *cultural separation* from the West in order to preserve and develop local cultures and traditions. A second approach *blends* indigenous knowledge with Western science and technology, and a third approach is *restructuring* or *adapting* borrowed Western culture and knowledge to make them suit the African context. These raise many critical concerns: A complete break from Western culture serves no positive contribution for cultural development of Africa in an increasingly connected world. It is also an impossible task in a world that has become so small due to interconnection brought by migration and communication technologies with the pervasive culture they generate, and where knowledge and innovations are trans border. Adapting Western culture to African context runs the danger of perpetuating coloniality, where the social-cultural realities of the previously colonized are still shaped by cultural ideologies of the West, albeit adapted to suit local context. Religion and its spiritual practices are examples. Blending the Western with the local in a form of hybridity seems to be a realistic and practical process in the decolonization agenda. The world is increasingly becoming a mixture of cultures, races and peoples. This leads to a polycentric approach to decolonization.

Polycentrism as decolonization

Narratives about decolonization tend to identify Eurocentrism as negative phenomenon in Africa, and therefore the goal of decolonization is to install African culture and

identity. While a critical de-hegemonization of Eurocentrism in Africa is not contested, and the affirmation of African identity is undoubtedly essential, this approach tends to create a singular story of reality, a choice between Eurocentrism or Afrocentric reality. However, as Mungwini (2013) notes, the notion of a singular universe is being replaced with that of a pluriverse, and the goal is to imagine a future where different traditions coexist. For Africa, it is undeniable that Africa is a polyethnic and postcolonial society that through colonialism and migration has become home to generations of Asians and Europeans who are equally Africans. Diasporic Africans celebrate their African ancestry but also recognize their identity as shaped by their existence in Europe and the Americas. These developments have created what Quijano (2007) refers to as the heterogeneity of reality.

Decolonization for Africa, I assert here, must be the process of de-hegemonizing Eurocentrism as dominant cultural ideology and to affirm African culture and identity within the global realities of other cultures that shape today's realities. Decolonization should not be about going back to dwell in precolonial African culture; after all, culture is dynamic and not all aspects of African culture pre- and postcolonial encounters are acceptable in today's reality. So to decolonize, we must confront all aspects of coloniality and be ready to go to the past, as Mungwini (2013) notes, not in order to stay there, but solely to excavate knowledge that can be of value to the present.

Polycentrism as decolonization acknowledges multiple stories of innovations, histories, myths, cultures, modernities and bodies that shape African realities. It dethrones the ascendancy of Eurocentrism as the dominant ideology of culture and civilization for affirmation of the African histories, culture and civilization within a global sphere of knowledge and innovations that shape contemporary realities. As a result, polycentrism as decolonization offers a way to confront the colonial past and its current legacies, and points to reimagining the emergence of a new path for Africa. By doing this, Africa aims for innovations. Decolonization then becomes a *process of innovations* – technological, cultural, scientific and economic innovations that will address the perennial problems in Africa, and imagine a new Africa of tomorrow, an Africa beyond its current geographical confinement (think of space exploration and the place of Africa).

Decoloniality and the South African academe

Race and academia

The history of South African education is a history of exclusion and marginalization based on race. Not only were separate educational facilities established for different races, the quality of such education also differed with White children having quality education, while Black children are trained for basic and menial employability under the Bantu Education Act. The apartheid Minister of Native Affairs, Dr Hendrik Verwoerd, explained the rationale:

There is no space for him [the “Native”] in the European Community above certain forms of labor. For this reason it is of no avail for him to receive training which has its aim in the absorption of the European Community, where he cannot be absorbed. Until now he has

been subjected to a school system which drew him away from his community and misled him by showing him the greener pastures of European Society where he is not allowed to graze. (cited in Kallaway, 1984, p. 92)

The establishment of Black universities was to provide separate university education to Black students, often in substandard educational environment with basic infrastructure. Historical Black universities are colonial–apartheid creations; as a result, a critical step in decolonizing South African academia is to address the historical nature of the *quality of education and infrastructure at historical Black universities*. The challenges facing Black universities are largely historical, based on the past racist educational system and the current lack of bold actions to remake Black universities. Black universities are confronted with infrastructural challenges ranging from scant availability of technologies for teaching in classrooms to connection to stable Internet that allows faculty and students to access all forms of digital content. There are also challenges with the structural resources, such as buildings – from lecture theaters to student accommodation. In fact, the limited infrastructural resources in Black universities today still reflect a differential experience for students in historical White institutions and Black universities.

The demographical composition of Black student population at historical Black universities in South Africa lacks racial diversity. Because of the historical nature, challenges of infrastructural resources, and geographical locations – most historical Black universities are located in rural or semi-rural ‘Black areas’ – they mainly attract Black students from these areas. There is a need to *create a diverse student population at historical Black universities*. Equipping Black universities with modern infrastructure and offering quality education provided by diverse and qualified academics are ways of attracting diverse student population. While a forced integration policy may be draconian, reluctance to racial diversity may resort in such policy. The fact that some academics (Black and White) in Black universities prefer to send their children to historical White institution is a poignant pointer to the challenges at Black universities.

Although staffing profile is still largely White, many historical White institutions have admitted large numbers of Black students, and they constitute majority of students in most of these universities (see data at Centre for Higher Education Trust, CHET, [n. d.](#)). This is a progressive development considering the demographics of South Africa. But presence in a space does not constitute acceptance. Many Black students feel unwelcomed and remain culturally marginalized in a university culture that still reflects racist segregationist tendencies of apartheid South Africa. The exclusionary practices are experienced in many ways, either through language of instruction or an environment that is hostile for racial integration and acceptance. The first-hand accounts of students at a historical White university captured in the documentary film, *Luister*, remain poignant case studies. A Black student notes in the film that the culture is so hostile that one has to ‘die as a Black person in order to survive’ at this university (Corder, Hegewisch, Manca, & Mulder, 2015).

Black students are reminded of racist past by iconographies that occupy spaces at historical White universities. These iconographies range from names of buildings to statute of actors in the racist colonial–apartheid past. The #RhodesMustFall campaign by students at the University of Cape Town is a testament to the festering frustration not

only about lack of transformation and decolonization in South African institutions but also the continuation of symbolic oppression due to racist iconographies in the University spaces. *Iconographies need to be decolonized*. The destruction, removal and defacing of symbols of racist, colonial and objectionable experiences are powerful forms of protest. These acts often come from frustrations with continued experience of exclusion and oppression, even in a postcolonial democratic era. The #RhodesMustFall student campaign made this clear with their protest, which culminated in the removal of Cecil Rhodes' statue from the University of Cape Town. Erecting statues of figures that symbolize a new democratic dispensation is a required step toward transformation.

Racial diversity as decolonization also involves the *decolonization of the structure of South African professoriate class*. The demographic composition of academics is racially skewed; academics in the rank of professor are 75.6% white, 4.5% Coloured,¹ 5% Indian and 14% Black (van Wyk/Africa Check, 2014). When foreign-born academics are excluded, it shows that only 4% of South African professors are Black South Africans (Price, 2014), in a country where Black population constitutes 80% of the total population. One reason for this is that the country produces a minimal number of doctoral degree graduates, that is, only about 13% of doctoral degree candidates graduate (DHET, 2014). Also, this situation persists because many Black students come from poor and humble backgrounds, the demands to get a job in order to address family economic hardship after completion of undergraduate studies often discourage many from pursuing graduate studies to doctoral level. It is paramount that sufficient financial assistance should be made available for prospective Black doctoral candidates. The scholarship should provide regular financial incentive and job opportunities to support them during their training.

Polycentric epistemic culture

South African universities, as in European and American universities, are very Eurocentric in knowledge production. Euro-American knowledge production and epistemologies have been very crucial in human innovations and scholarships, as such, the goal of decolonization is not to dismiss the positive contributions to scholarship, but to de-hegemonize it. Decolonization of scholarship means tracing multiple genealogies of knowledge and displacing the centrality of Euro-American knowledge exceptionalism. It implies acknowledging African roots of knowledge in philosophy, arts, geometry and architecture prior to the Greek awakening. The ascendancy of Euro-American epistemologies has created academic cannons that arrogate scholarly truth to Western epistemic tradition (Mbembe, 2016). A decolonizing epistemic tradition takes a *polycentric* approach, where histories, innovations, myths, cultures, science and knowledge production from diverse cultures form academic scholarship within the dominance of local histories and realities. A *polycentric* culture of knowledge production becomes an approach toward epistemological decolonization; it makes way for *intercultural epistemology* and disrupts the subject-object dualism of Eurocentrism. That the production of knowledge from a particular culture can be allocated hegemony of knowledge is actually a pretense to 'impose a provincialism as universalism' (Quijano, 2007, p 177). Consequently,

Western philosophies should be studied noting African genealogy of philosophy, and in relation to Asian and Middle Eastern philosophies.

To achieve *polycentric epistemological tradition*, a rational approach to de-westernization and indigenization needs to be employed in the decolonization of the academia. De-westernization is *not*, and should not be, the blunt rejection or removal of Western epistemologies. Waisbord and Mellado (2014) note that de-westernization of the academia has various meanings. In the West, it implies

- (1) A shift in academic knowledge to *broaden* the analysis by considering experiences, research and theoretical frameworks developed in the rest of the world.
- (2) The inclusion of subaltern perspectives typically considered the ‘margins’ and ignored in Western academia.
- (3) A need to broaden academic knowledge considering the global shift in the world as driven by globalization.

Outside of the West, de-westernization is viewed as the reorientation of intellectual work and a shift against the hegemony of academic Eurocentrism, noting the inadequacy of Western theories to understand local histories and phenomena. Further, Waisbord and Mellado (2014) provide four key areas of academia that need to be de-westernized. These are relevant in this current discourse:

- *The subject of study* – subjects of enquiry and questions should be localized to reflect developments in societies where knowledge is produced, even though it may be inspired by theories or arguments elsewhere.
- *The body of evidence* – this requires the expansion of scholarly evidence beyond the Western cases. It serves no pedagogical purpose to use conclusions based only on Western evidence to reach conclusions about knowledge in Africa. Local corpus of evidence should form conclusions about local knowledge.
- *Theoretical perspectives* – The need to develop local theories that are relevant to local scholarship.
- Also there is a need to rethink *academic cultures* relating to teaching, assessment and research. The belief that academic research must follow certain rigid structure and that teaching has to be in an ‘official’ format (often a strict format of all-knowing instructor and passive learners) need a radical change.

Directly connected to de-westernization perspective is *indigenization in academia*. Indigenization should not mean a break from Western knowledge, and it should not be adopting Western knowledge to African context. As Yishak and Gumbo (2015) offer, it is primarily about creating local knowledge that can be incorporated into curriculum, and blending this knowledge with international, including Western epistemology. Indigenization is about developing local knowledge based on local evidence that provides culturally appropriate solution to local problems. This challenges the current trend of conforming to a Western ‘method-fit’ research to a more problem-solving approach to research (Gray & Coates, 2010). In addition, indigenization also implies changing the symbolic outlook of the academy. For example, what purpose does it serve to have African universities bear insignia in Latin?

Sanda (1988) asserts from a sociological perspective, there is nothing ethnocentric about research and theories that arise from focusing on the sociologists' own society without a claim of universality without being tested in other contexts. This resonates with the clamor for *Africanization* of academia, where African reality, knowledge, theories are included in curriculum design. The Africanization of academia implies that African universities are grounded in African worldview, realities and culture (Nkoane, 2006). However, being locally grounded does not equate being locally bound. It implies that local academic content, theories, experiments and research be included in university curriculum along with knowledge from other global regions, including the 'Western'. This is important, because the experience of coloniality has engendered blunt emotional clamor for Africanization of academia that relies solely on African realities. What is missing in such attempt is the truth that Africa is not a mono-ethnic society. There are various cultures, languages and social realities, including the (post) colonial experiences that shape the polyethnic tapestry of Africa. There is no singularity of African culture, even within each African state.

The core of the argument here is that the decolonization of South African academe should take a polycentric approach that recognizes that although the world has changed from the era of overt imperial colonialism, it acknowledges covert coloniality in cultural and economic spheres within a context of a far more connected world today. African academics and students are in universities in Europe and America, while Americans, Asians and Europeans are also studying and teaching in the once-colonized spaces. A polycentric academia forces a space where different knowledge traditions coexist.

A polycentric education recognizes that African scholarship should be grounded in local realities within a global context. It asserts the indigeneity of knowledge creation and equally embraces global epistemologies; it affirms local identity while dislodging the centrality of Eurocentrism. It recognizes African culture and histories but does not stay there, because culture is dynamic and a wholesome return to past culture or rejection of it is not logical for any culture. It acknowledges the colonial past and tries to dislodge its tyranny, confronts its legacies and build a future. A polycentric knowledge production emboldens Africans to bring the culture and knowledge that have historically been inferiorized into current epistemic curricula. A decolonizing polycentric production of knowledge implies

- (1) The recognition of the African genealogy of knowledge in many disciplines. Arrogating historical origins of academic knowledge to Europe (and most commonly ancient Greece) not only perpetuates Eurocentrism but it is incorrect.
- (2) Theory development based on local realities, where local academics can draw from indigenous realities toward epistemic theory development.
- (3) Local theories and theorists are included in a curriculum that also includes international theories/theorists.
- (4) Curriculum and reading materials prescribed and recommended for courses should include local authors.
- (5) Euro-American canons are included in curriculum along with local social histories, texts and theorists.

- (6) Research is not confined to strict Euro-American method and structure, but flexible enough to allow local researchers address local problem from their point of realities.
- (7) The eradication of the practice in academia that involves mechanistic assessment that hinders innovations, where students merely cram and regurgitate concepts.
- (8) Expansion of sources of knowledge beyond published text to include oral histories, audiovisual materials, visit to physical historical sites and museums.
- (9) Increased investment in education and the building of more institutions in order to avoid the current trend of huge classes that lacks warmth for a more interactive student culture, and to increase access to tertiary education.
- (10) The issue of language of instruction is perhaps the most controversial element of the decolonization debate. The goal is the use of African language as medium of instruction, but Africa, and specifically South Africa, is not a monolingual society. There are many languages in Africa, and hence provincializing universities based solely on a local language is parochialism. This will hinder interuniversity movement of students and academics, not only in South Africa but also for students attending universities in other African countries – where they could solely adopt their languages for instruction. A bilingual medium of Afrikaans and English in universities carry huge divisive apartheid legacy that may benefit the previously advantaged group in South Africa. A bilingual model of English and local language of geographic area of university is potentially possible for a polycentric academe. As a process toward this, academic texts should be created in local languages. But until academic knowledge and texts are produced in various African languages, English Language should remain a medium of instruction at universities. However, all students should study an African language in university, and writing in African languages should be encouraged.

Confronting capitalism in academia

Capitalism shapes all human relations. The end goal is to develop an economic system that is fair and just. However, the immediate goal is to destabilize the legacy of coloniality of labor and capital that currently shape South African society. A decolonizing academia is a situation where students are no longer treated as commodity, where ability to secure education is not only available to those that can pay for it and knowledge in publications is no longer a commodity but available on *open-access*. *Education is a right and not a property*. The protest for a free higher education by South African youth in 2016 remains as poignant evidence of the need to address the commodification process and the neoliberal free market capitalist ideology in the academia. Neoliberal economic agendas of privatization, commodification processes and minimal state intervention have become the economic logic of South African universities. Outsourcing and privatizing services became operational trends in universities; institutions and students have turned to private funders for economic support as a result of dwindling state support. Government's contribution to public universities

and other tertiary education institutions' income declined from 49% in 2000 to 38% in 2014 (CHET, n. d.; Makou, Wilkinson, Bhardwaj, 2016). The government spends 4.7% of revenue (0.75% of GDP) on tertiary education, which is low compared to global standard (Pennington, Mokose, Smith, & Kawanu, 2016). This subsequently put pressure on student fees and private sources of funding for universities. The increase in student fees was the reason for the #FeesMustFall protest by students in 2015/16. As Pennington et al. (2016) correctly assert, the circumstance that the Black majority cannot afford to pay university fees is evidence of continuing inequalities created by colonialism and apartheid.

In South Africa, the historical legacy of colonial-apartheid capitalism continues to shape economic inequality, and the benefits of neoliberal free market policies have accrued to minimal number of Black middle class, but largely to White South Africans who hold huge capital as a result of colonialism and apartheid. Today, White-headed household earns four times the income of Black-headed household; this means a lot of Black households may not be able to afford a tertiary education for their children, and government subsidies are not large enough to cater for all financial costs of tertiary education for children from poor households. Letseka, Breier, and Visser (2010) explore poverty, race, student retention and graduation, noting that impecuniousness and lack of finance contribute to student attrition in South African institutions. Perhaps, not surprising then that about 15% of students graduate and 50% of students drop out in the first year of university education (DHET, 2014). While a highly subsidized fee structure should be probable, possibility of free tuition and affordable access to educational services, particularly for children from poor families, should be explored. The promise by the state to implement this is a right step.

The Eurocentric economic relations of labor/wage continue to shape global capitalist system. However, in South Africa, the education system produces students whose entry into the economic system is to secure employment for wages. Universities should confront this colonial economic ideology; students should be trained to be innovative, creative and entrepreneurial. Attention should also be focused on technical tertiary education, and *Entrepreneurial Skills* should be a compulsory academic course for all students irrespective of scholarly discipline of choice. This will provide skills, empower graduates toward creating their own economic opportunities, address youth unemployment and confront the salary/labor structure. But capitalism by its very core is exploitative and produces inequalities, so while a long-term goal of decolonization is a noncapitalist alternative system, the suggestions here are immediate solutions in confronting the inequalities present in the nature of South African academe. As Ahenakew, De Oliveira Andreotti, Cooper, and Hireme (2014) assert, it is important to engage with 'capitalist modes of production to secure means of subsistence', while recognizing that, 'in the long term, human life cannot be sustained in this over-exploitative system' (p. 218–219).

Conclusion

The arguments presented here do not suggest a seamless transformation to a decolonized academe in South Africa. Such assertion will be naïve. Decolonization is not an event, but an arduous process fraught with challenges. Decolonizing the current racial, neoliberal and

Eurocentric/Westernized cultural imperatives of South African academia presents challenges that may encounter violent objections. Rearranging power dynamics is often a difficult process, as Martin Luther King wrote, ‘we know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed’ (1963, p. 1); also Franz Fanon warned, ‘decolonization is always a violent phenomenon’ (1967, p. 27). This notwithstanding, the process of decolonization is inexorable.

The argument proffered here is that to decolonize, a thorough understanding of the matrix of coloniality is required. Decolonization is not harking back to a precolonial culture and staying there, it is excavating what is relevant in African indigenous culture and histories, and moving forward. *Decolonization should be polycentrism* – that is, affirming the local within a global context. Employing ‘coloniality of power’, a theoretical critique with Latin American roots, in this South African critique evidences the argument about polycentric intellectual culture. Decolonization is about de-hegemonizing the imperium of Eurocentrism for a tapestry of intercultural connections grounded in African realities. Also, *decolonization is about innovations*. To decolonize, there is a need to intensify current efforts in scientific, economic, cultural and technological innovations toward knowledge that will shape a future prosperous Africa. It is about developing technology and knowledge that will confront current challenges of environment degradation, food security, housing constraints, electric power generation, peaceful governance, advances in transportation, medical innovations and explore new frontiers of space. These are global innovations that are currently shaping the future of the world; Africa is endowed with resources, natural and human, to shape a future trajectory of innovations for the continent. Among various approaches and theoretical propositions about the decolonization of South African academia, the thesis here proposes confronting three core elements of the matrix of coloniality – racialization, hegemonic Eurocentrism and economic coloniality of the capitalist system.

Note

1. In South Africa, ‘Coloureds’ generally designates people of racially mixed parentage or descent.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

Toks Oyedemi (PhD Communication, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA, USA) engages critical sociological questions around culture, education, media and communication. His research examines issues of marginalization, coloniality, social inequality and identity.

References

- Ahenakew, C., De Oliveira Andreotti, V., Cooper, G., & Hireme, H. (2014). Beyond epistemic provincialism: De-provincializing indigenous resistance. *Alternative*, 10(2), 216–231.

- Aminzade, R. (2003). From race to citizenship: The indigenization debate in post-socialist Tanzania. *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 38(1), 43–63.
- Bryce, J. (1902). *The relations of the advanced and the backward races of mankind*. Oxford: Clarendon press.
- Centre for Higher Education Trust (CHET) (n. d.). *South African higher education open data*. Accessed February 10, 2017 from <https://chet.org.za/data/sahe-open-data>
- Clark, N. L., & Worger, W. (2004). *South Africa: The rise and fall of apartheid*. Harlow, England: Pearson Longman.
- Commission for Economic Equity (CEE). (2016). *Annual report*. Pretoria: Department of Labour.
- Corder, D., Hegewisch, M., Manca, D., & Mulder, E., Producers. (2015). *Luister*. Cape Town: ContraBand.
- Crowe, T. (2017). Decolonizing South African universities. *Biz News – Thought Leader* Accessed February 3, 2017. <http://www.biznews.com/thought-leaders/2017/01/11/decolonising-universities-tim-crowe/>.
- Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). (2014). *Statistics on post-school education and training in South Africa: 2012*. Pretoria: DHET.
- Fanon, F. (1967). *The wretched of the earth*. London, England: Penguin.
- Gray, M., & Coates, J. (2010). Indigenization and knowledge development: extending the debate. *International Social Work*, 53(5), 613–627.
- Grosfoguel, R. (2002). Colonial difference, geopolitics of knowledge, and global coloniality in the modern/colonial capitalist world-system. *Review*, 25(3), 203.
- Hegel, J. W. F. (1956). *The philosophy of history*. Mineola, New York: Dover.
- Hochschild, A. (1998). *King Leopold Ghost: A story of greed, terror, and heroism in colonial Africa*. New York, NY: Mariner.
- Isaacs, M. (2016). University decolonization: Why not build our own? *Daily Maverick*. Accessed March 13, 2017 from <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2016-02-25-university-decolonization-why-not-build-our-own/#.WJDxwLZ968o>
- Ismi, A. (2016). South African students take on neoliberalism and the ANC. *CCPA Monitor*, 22(5), 48–50.
- Kallaway, P. (Ed.). (1984). *Apartheid and education: The education of Black South Africans*. Johannesburg: Raven.
- Letseka, M., Breier, M., & Visser, M. (2010). Poverty, race, and student achievement in seven higher education institutions. In M. Letseka, M. Breier, & M. Visser (eds.), *Student retention and graduate destination: Higher education and labour market access*. Cape Town: HSRC Press.
- Louw, W. (2010). Africanisation: A rich environment for active learning on a global platform. *Progressio*, 32(1), 42–54.
- Luther King, M. (1963) Letter from Birmingham Jail. Accessed February 02 2018 from https://liberalarts.utexas.edu/coretexts/_files/resources/texts/1963_MLK_Letter_Abridged.pdf
- Makgoba, M. (1997). *Mokoko: The Makgoba affair – A reflection on transformation*. Florida: Vivlia.
- Makou, G., Wilkinson, K., & Bhardwaj, V. (2016). Factsheet: *Funding & the changing face of SA's public universities*. Accessed May 13, 2017 from <https://africacheck.org/factsheets/factsheet-funding-changing-face-sas-public-universities/>
- Maldonado-Torres, N. (2007). On the coloniality of being contributions to the development of a concept. *Cultural Studies*, 21(2–3), 240–270.
- Mamdani, M. (2016). Between the public intellectual and the scholar: Decolonization and some post-independence initiatives in African higher education. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 17(1), 68–83.
- Mancu, X. (2016). A chink in the ANC's armour. *New African*, (558, February), 28–31.
- Martinot, S. (n. d.) The coloniality of power: Notes toward de-colonization. (Accessed March 5, 2017) <https://www.ocf.berkeley.edu/~marto/coloniality.htm>
- Mbembe, A. (2016). Decolonizing the university: New directions. *Arts & Humanities in Higher Education*, 15(1), 29–45.
- Mignolo, W. (2011). *The darker side of Western modernity*. Durham NC: Duke University Press.

- Mignolo, W. (2012). Delinking, decoloniality & dewesternization: Interviews with Walter Mignolo (Part II). Retrieved March 5, 2017 from <http://criticallegalthinking.com/2012/05/02/delinking-decoloniality-dewesternization-interview-with-walter-mignolo-part-ii/>
- Mungwini, P. (2013). African modernities and the critical reappropriation of indigenous knowledge: Towards a polycentric global epistemology. *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies*, 8(1), 78–93.
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. (2014). Global coloniality and the challenges of creating African futures. *Strategic Review for Southern Africa*, 36(2), 181–202.
- Nkoane, M. M. (2006). The Africanisation of the University in Africa. *Alternation*, 13(1), 49–69.
- Oyedemi, T. (2016). From racial capitalism to democratic capitalism: History of inequalities in South Africa and access to communication technologies. In J. Servaes & T. Oyedemi (eds.), *Social inequalities, media and communication*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books /Rowman & Littlefield Publishing.
- Pennington, A., Mokose, M., Smith, M. N., & Kawanu, Z. (2016). Neoliberalism and the crisis in higher education in South Africa. *New Agenda*, 64, 28–32.
- Price, M. (2014). Addressing the shortage of black and women professors. Accessed June 22, 2016 from <http://www.uct.ac.za/dailynews/?id=8891>
- Quijano, A. (2000). Coloniality of power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America. *Napantla: View from South* 1.3. http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic203438.files/Anibal_Quijano.Coloniality.pdf
- Quijano, A. (2007). Coloniality and modernity/rationality. *Cultural Studies*, 21, 168–178.
- Sanda, M. (1988). In defence of indigenization in sociological theories. *International Sociology*, 3(2), 189–199.
- Statistics SA (2017). Living conditions of households in South Africa. <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0310/P03102014.pdf> Accessed February 10, 2017.
- Van Wyk, A./Africa Check. (2014). How many professors are in SA? Accessed June 22, 2016 from <https://africacheck.org/reports/how-many-professors-are-there-in-sa/>
- Waisbord, S., & Mellado, C. (2014). De-westernizing communication studies: A reassessment. *Communication Theory*, 24, 361–372.
- Yishak, D., & Gumbo, M. (2015). A stand-alone, blended or restructured indigenization approach to curriculum? A critical perspective. *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies*, 10(1), 60–82.