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# Decolonizing knowledge in South Africa: Dismantling the ‘pedagogy of big lies’

Savo Heleta

## Abstract

*The colonial and apartheid knowledge systems and Eurocentrism have not been sufficiently questioned, let alone transformed, during the first two decades of democracy in South Africa. The movement to decolonize higher education was launched by students in 2015. The fact that the students are at the forefront of the campaign for decolonization and not the university leaders, academics, and administrators tells a lot about the state of higher education in post-apartheid South Africa and the continued maintenance of the hegemonic status quo when it comes to the knowledge, teaching, learning and research at the country's universities. Decolonization of knowledge is crucial in order to rewrite histories, reassert the dignity of the oppressed and refocus the knowledge production and worldviews for the sake of the present and the future of the country and its people, as well as the rest of the African continent. The dismantling of the ‘pedagogy of big lies’ rooted in colonialism and apartheid will require a complete reconstruction of the epistemological model. The decolonized curriculum must place South Africa and Africa in the center of teaching, learning and research and incorporate the epistemic perspectives, knowledge and thinking from the African continent and the global South and place them on an equal footing with the currently hegemonic Eurocentric canon.*

**Keywords:** decolonization, knowledge, education, transformation, colonialism, pedagogy, Africa, South Africa

Widespread calls for decolonization of knowledge at South African universities have been long overdue. The movement to dismantle the Eurocentric hegemony and decolonize higher education was launched by students in 2015 and has been maintained by them and a small number of progressive academics even since. The fact that the students had to mobilize and campaign for

decolonization of the curriculum rooted in colonial and apartheid oppression and dispossession,<sup>1</sup> and not the university leaders, academics and administrators, tells a lot about the state of higher education in post-apartheid South Africa and the continued maintenance of Eurocentrism and the hegemonic status quo when it comes to the knowledge, teaching, learning and research at the country's universities.

Eurocentrism is the belief in universalism modeled after the European historical experience and shaped by the enlightenment.<sup>2</sup> Decolonization of the Eurocentric curriculum was supposed to be one of the key priorities after 1994 if higher education were to contribute to fundamental transformation, social cohesion and addressing the difficult past.<sup>3</sup> Decolonization of knowledge implies the end of reliance on imposed knowledge, theories and interpretations, and theorizing based on one's own past and present experiences and interpretation of the world.<sup>4</sup> However, to this day, the curriculum at South African universities continues to favor and reproduce Eurocentric knowledge and worldviews while other knowledges and worldviews are ignored, sidelined and/or devalued. The Eurocentric knowledge remains the "regime of truth,"<sup>5</sup> displacing all other knowledges. This "omission" is ideological<sup>6</sup> and is aimed at maintenance of structural domination. Macedo calls the use of education for this purpose "the pedagogy of big lies."<sup>7</sup>

While the black majority had achieved political freedom in 1994, structural inequalities and injustices remain stumbling blocks for the emancipation and empowerment of many black South Africans.<sup>8</sup> After the euphoria about democracy, reconciliation and equality, many have come to a realization that the historical inequalities, rooted in racist oppression and dispossession, remain part and parcel of the country's social fabric today.<sup>9</sup> In such an environment, it is not surprising to come across people who refer to the "rainbow nation," as the country has been known for the last two decades, as "post-apartheid apartheid South Africa,"<sup>10</sup> where many things have not changed. Conscious of the promises made since 1994 and the lack of change in so many spheres of life—including in the institutions of higher learning— young black South Africans see the current situation as a "historical reality susceptible of transformation."<sup>11</sup> They are not afraid to confront and

disrupt the status quo and will not stop until they see real change in the society and at universities.<sup>12</sup>

This article will show that the colonial and apartheid knowledge systems and Eurocentrism have not been sufficiently questioned, let alone transformed, during the first two decades of democracy in South Africa. The dismantling of the ‘pedagogy of big lies’ will require a fundamental change of the current epistemological model.<sup>13</sup> The decolonized curriculum must place South Africa and Africa in the center of teaching, learning and research, incorporate the epistemic perspectives, knowledge, and thinking from the African continent and the global South, and place these perspectives, knowledge, and thinking on an equal footing with the currently dominant Western canon. Decolonization requires revisiting, unlearning and rewriting the existing dominant histories, theories and approaches that were imposed by the colonialists and opening up to all other “bodies and traditions of knowledge and knowledge-making in new and exploratory ways.”<sup>14</sup>

### **Colonialism, domination and knowledge**

This section will briefly discuss colonialism and domination through knowledge as well as South Africa’s colonial and apartheid past in regard to knowledge, academia and the higher education system. Colonialism included the invasion and takeover of foreign lands, subjugation of indigenous peoples, economic exploitation, and the use of knowledge and education to dehumanize colonized populations, diminish their cultures and humanity and maintain structural domination.<sup>15</sup> Across the world, people’s histories, lives and dignity were interrupted and destroyed by colonial oppression.<sup>16</sup> Tuhiwai Smith argues that

Imperialism and colonialism brought complete disorder to colonized peoples, disconnecting them from their histories, their landscapes, their languages, their social relations and their own ways of thinking, feeling and interacting with the world.<sup>17</sup>

Colonialists knew very well that “knowledge is power.”<sup>18</sup> Thus, “knowledge and culture were as much part of imperialism as raw materials and military strength.”<sup>19</sup> Kelley points out that “colonial domination required a whole way of thinking, a

discourse in which everything that is advanced, good and civilized is defined and measured in European terms.”<sup>20</sup> European epistemology and patriarchy were exported to the colonies “as the hegemonic criteria to racialize, classify and pathologize the rest of the world’s population in a hierarchy of superior and inferior races.”<sup>21</sup> Colonial education and knowledge systems played a key role in promoting and imposing Eurocentric worldviews while erasing and subjugating indigenous memories, knowledges, and worldviews. As Fanon points out, colonial education was used to distort the past and destroy the future of the colonized.<sup>22</sup> Education also contributed to the exploitation of the colonies for the material benefit of the European colonizers.<sup>23</sup>

Colonial powers ensured that the educational institutions in the territories under their control propagated Eurocentric ideologies and values. Mamdani argues that “colonialism brought not only theory from the Western academy but also the assumption that theory is produced in the West and the aim of the academy outside the West must be to apply that theory.”<sup>24</sup> Across the colonized world, and particularly in the settler colonies, higher education institutions established by the colonialists became “simultaneously both one of the most important channels of social distinction for the settler minority and for its local allies, and one of the most odious instruments” for subjugation of the colonized peoples.<sup>25</sup> These institutions were a crucial “part of the historical processes of imperialism. They were established as an essential part of the colonizing process, a bastion of civilization and a sign that a colony and its settlers had ‘grown up.’”<sup>26</sup>

During colonial rule, South Africa was “conceptualized as a white man’s country” and a major “civilizing influence” in Southern Africa.<sup>27</sup> The notion of a white country on the southern tip of Africa continued unabated even after the British lost control of South Africa to the Afrikaners in 1948. In the eyes of the white minority, the country was a European province in Africa, with no relationship with the rest of the continent.<sup>28</sup> While British colonialism and apartheid differed in many aspects, their ultimate goals were the same: maintenance of the hegemonic white power, exploitation of the country for the benefit of the whites and oppression of the black majority.<sup>29</sup> For More, apartheid was a “colonialist, capitalist, religious and racial ideology designed to ensure the domination and subjugation of the majority of black

people by the minority white European settlers.”<sup>30</sup> He stresses that while apartheid officially started in 1948, when the Afrikaner Nationalist Party came to power, racist oppression that became known as apartheid was built on British colonial policies and practices.<sup>31</sup>

In South Africa, colonial colleges and universities were established by the white settlers “who saw them as both symbols and disseminators of European civilization.”<sup>32</sup> These institutions have traditionally modeled themselves after the universities in Europe.<sup>33</sup> Their role was to promote Eurocentrism and white supremacy and develop the white youth to maintain and further expand the settler society.<sup>34</sup> There were also a number of institutions run by the Christian missionaries that offered education to black South Africans. However, the education they offered was inferior when compared to the education offered by white colleges and universities.<sup>35</sup>

Both the colonial and apartheid authorities relied on the Western and Eurocentric knowledge and scientific theories, hypotheses and preconceptions to justify racism and promote the primacy of the “European civilization in South Africa.”<sup>36</sup> Subreenduth explains that the notion of “white superiority and black inferiority was packaged in various dialogues through curricula, textbooks, resources, material and structural elements.”<sup>37</sup> When the apartheid regime took over in 1948, the “conception of race and the politics of race” continued to shape the higher education system. Institutions were designated for the exclusive use of particular racial groups—from white institutions for Afrikaans and English speakers to black, colored and Indian institutions.<sup>38</sup> The apartheid government viewed education as a key sector tasked with the reproduction and maintenance of a racialized hierarchy, with the white minority on top.<sup>39</sup>

All South African universities were “profoundly shaped by apartheid planning and by the respective functions assigned to them in relation to the reproduction of the apartheid social order.”<sup>40</sup> While there was a difference between Afrikaans- and English-medium universities, the entire higher education system “served to construct and maintain the social, political and economic features of the apartheid order.”<sup>41</sup> Both the Afrikaans and English South Africans shared a “culture of racism.”<sup>42</sup> For the majority of whites, white superiority was an unquestionable

norm.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, in academia, many “shared whiteness—a belief in white hegemony in South Africa.”<sup>44</sup> The historically white Afrikaans-medium universities gave full support to the apartheid regime<sup>45</sup> and provided “ideological underpinnings” for the oppressive racist system.<sup>46</sup> English-medium universities, while claiming to be the opponents of apartheid and agents for change, enjoyed the white privileges and benefits that the apartheid system gave them. This way, they played an important role in maintaining racial segregation and oppression of the black majority.<sup>47</sup> The English-medium institutions cared primarily about their own institutional rights and privileges; genuine opposition to apartheid and the struggles, rights and emancipation of black South Africans were not their priorities.<sup>48</sup>

During colonialism and apartheid, the separation of white and black education was “part of a wider world of unequal access to resources, and thus unequal quality of education.”<sup>49</sup> This was a deliberate policy choice by the white minority regimes aimed at dehumanizing, disempowering and marginalizing black South Africans.<sup>50</sup> Historically black colleges and universities<sup>51</sup> were established to train black people to serve first the colony and then the apartheid state. Black institutions did not provide their students with the knowledge and skills for critical thinking, innovation and intellectual leadership. Their focus was on administrative and technical skills necessary for the maintenance of the apartheid system, including the homeland structures.<sup>52</sup> The governance systems, intellectual and academic agendas and the curricula at black universities were imposed by the apartheid state and driven mainly by white academics and administrators who graduated from conservative Afrikaans universities.<sup>53</sup>

### **Post-apartheid ‘pedagogy of big lies’**

The knowledge disseminated at historically white universities in South Africa “reflects the cultural heritage” of the white minority and aims to serve and propagate its interests. The “white knowledge, connected to European ‘universal’ knowledge, has become a ‘totalizing discourse’ that has silenced and marginalized local knowledges.”<sup>54</sup> What is striking about this statement is that it was written in 1996 and still to a large extent resembles the higher education system that has undergone two decades of “transformation.”

In 1994, South Africa emerged from centuries of colonial social, economic, and political oppression of the black majority and decades of racist apartheid rule and isolation, with the higher education system “deeply entrenched in apartheid.”<sup>55</sup> To date, the most significant transformation in higher education has been the change in student demographics, with black students and women being the majority of the student body today. However, transformation in academia has lagged behind, with white academics still being in the majority.<sup>56</sup> Another failure has been the lack of curriculum transformation.<sup>57</sup> Curricula at universities remain Eurocentric, rooted in colonial and apartheid knowledge systems, and disconnected from the realities and lived experiences of black South Africans.<sup>58</sup>

At many universities, and particularly at the historically white universities, whiteness—defined by Dei as a “system of domination and structure of privilege”<sup>59</sup>—continues to dominate institutional cultures.<sup>60</sup> Whiteness remains the unspoken set of rules and norms that keeps the institutions going in a specific direction. The legacies of apartheid-era dehumanization and marginalization of black South Africans through education have been “absorbed, wittingly and unwittingly, into relationships within educational arenas which mirror and depict hierarchies of power, cultures of compliance, fear, as well as the suppression and loss of voice” in the post-apartheid period.<sup>61</sup> After 1994, black staff and students were allowed to enter the “white” spaces, but they have been and continue to be expected to conform and not question or disrupt the status quo. This has had a profoundly negative impact on curriculum transformation as the curriculum “is intertwined with the institutional culture and, given that the latter remains white and Eurocentric at the historically white institutions, the institutional environment is not conducive to curriculum reform.”<sup>62</sup>

The lack of fundamental epistemological and curriculum change in the higher education sector was not accidental. The discussions about the transformation of higher education after 1994 did not include any significant deliberations about the curriculum and Eurocentric hegemony. According to Ahmed Bawa, the CEO of *Universities South Africa*, “in the mid-1990s, we were in the throes of a negotiated settlement, and there was a strong view that we should not rock the boat and especially not damage confidence in the historically white universities.”<sup>63</sup> These universities were basically allowed to continue with business as usual when it comes



to the maintenance of whiteness, hegemonic institutional cultures, and the Eurocentric curriculum.

More than two decades after the end of apartheid, South African academia still to a large extent belongs in the Western and Eurocentric camp ideologically and epistemologically. For most white academics, to use Hall's<sup>64</sup> notion, the West and Western (or today's more popular global North) are seen as good, desirable, developed, civilized and modern, while the rest of the world (or the global South)—even though they geographically belong to it—is seen as undesirable, underdeveloped, uncivilized, chaotic, and bad. In Western discourse, Africa, in particular, continues to be portrayed as misery, starvation, instability, conflict, and savagery, with the continent in constant need of Western assistance without which it cannot function. As Bush points out, the “white ‘dreams’ of Africa . . . [continue to] perpetuate visions of backwardness, difference, and exoticism.”<sup>65</sup>

Instead of challenging these discourses and misconceptions, South African universities continue to reproduce them, with stereotypes, prejudices, and patronizing views about Africa and its people remaining the order of the day.<sup>66</sup> The academy still assumes that Western knowledge systems are the “only basis for higher forms of thinking.”<sup>67</sup> Many academics rely primarily on Western interpretations to teach about the continent while ignoring knowledge about Africa produced by African academics and intellectuals. As Mamdani highlighted in 1998, “students are being taught a curriculum which presumes that . . . Africa has no intelligentsia worth reading.”<sup>68</sup> This is still the norm today. This should not come as a surprise since for decades, South African universities were part of a system that saw Africa and Africans as not more than “alien savages, biologically and mentally inferior, undeveloped, lazy, irresponsible, and dangerous.”<sup>69</sup>

During apartheid, institutionalized racism “pervaded all spheres of South African life but conceivably had the most profound effect on education.”<sup>70</sup> The legacy of this can still be seen at the universities, and especially at the historically white institutions, which remain “Westernized” in the sense that they are local instantiations of a dominant academic model based on a Eurocentric epistemic canon. A Eurocentric canon is “a canon that attributes truth only to the Western way of knowledge production.”<sup>71</sup> The higher education system remains a “reflection

of [socio-economic] inequalities, which are not merely a legacy of the apartheid past, but are daily being reproduced in the here and now.”<sup>72</sup> At many institutions, apartheid-era power relations continue to exist between the dominant white administrators and academics on one side and “others” that include black administrators, academics and students on the other side.<sup>73</sup>

Racist theories and preconceptions about white supremacy and black inferiority were key in justifying colonialism, apartheid, segregation, dispossession, and oppression of the black majority by the colonial and apartheid regimes in South Africa. As noted above, the colonial and apartheid universities were instrumental in promoting and maintaining these racist systems. Since 1994, the country’s universities have failed to critically and comprehensively interrogate South Africa’s and their own past.<sup>74</sup> The curriculum at most universities—when it touches on the past injustices and racism—tends to portray colonialism and apartheid largely as forms of social relations between “modern” and “traditional” groups of people rather than as highly oppressive, discriminatory, and unjust systems whose legacies continue to be felt by many today.<sup>75</sup>

The universities and the academia have also failed to engage with what Macedo—writing about similar failures of education in the United States—calls the “intricate interplay of race, ethics and ideology.” For him, this “serious omission is, by its very nature, ideological, and constitutes the foundation for . . . the pedagogy of big lies.”<sup>76</sup> Many in the South African academy have neglected to critically reflect on the country’s history of oppression and their own role in the maintenance of white supremacy, whiteness, domination, dehumanization, and past and present injustices and inequalities. This way they kept “reproducing and not questioning dominant mechanisms designed to produce power asymmetries”<sup>77</sup> along racial and class lines. The outcome of such education has been the following:

The higher education system, rooted in colonial and apartheid exploitation and racism, has obliterated nearly all the linkages that black students may have with the prescribed texts, propagated narratives, debates and learning on the one side and their history, lived experiences and dreams on the other side.<sup>78</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the existing university curriculum in South Africa continues “to be a source of alienation” for the majority of the students as it does not speak to their experiences and needs or “reflect the philosophical, social realities of their communities.”<sup>79</sup>

### **Where to from here?**

Colonialism and apartheid were oppressive, exploitative, and unjust racist systems. It is not surprising that the education, knowledge and knowledge production in these systems had been used to maintain white supremacy and structural domination. What is disturbing and bewildering, though, is that not much has changed in South Africa since 1994 when it comes to the colonial- and apartheid-era knowledge systems and curriculum at universities. The Eurocentric curriculum continues to degrade and dehumanize black South Africans. The existing curriculum does not contribute to a much-needed fundamental transformation and social justice in this deeply unequal society, where inequality is rooted in the centuries of racist oppression. White academia, in particular, has failed to examine its own contribution to racist oppression, exclusion, exploitation, and the white supremacy project. Instead, through epistemic racism, violence, othering, and the “pedagogy of big lies,” it has continued its unrelenting assault on black students and black South Africans in general. Through this, academia have denied black students an opportunity to liberate their minds and reach their dreams and aspirations through education. Eurocentrism in higher education has also contributed to the maintenance of structural imbalances and deeply embedded inequalities in the economy and society.

Dei writes that “all knowledge can be located in the particular social contexts from which it emerges. Such location shapes the ways of knowing and understanding the social and political relations at play in constructing social realities.”<sup>80</sup> In South Africa, the dominant and hegemonic colonial and apartheid-era knowledges, which continue to shape the ways of knowing and understanding of social, political, economic, and other relations, continue to construct the everyday realities in the country. This is *the problem* that the decolonization project aims to address and rectify. Given South Africa’s history, decolonization of knowledge is the most important task facing the university sector today. Higher

education must be fundamentally transformed in order to rewrite histories, reassert the dignity of the oppressed, and refocus knowledge production and worldviews for the sake of the present and the future of the country and its people, as well as the rest of the African continent.

Decolonization for Fanon is about reclaiming the humanity that was violently taken away by the colonialists.<sup>81</sup> While in his writings Fanon refers mainly to political decolonization, this fits well in the current debates about decolonization of knowledge and curriculum. Knowledge is key for reclaiming the humanity and undoing the past oppression and exploitation in post-apartheid South Africa.<sup>82</sup> Decolonization is about reconstructing Africa from the historical, civilizational, political economy and political standpoint perspectives.<sup>83</sup> Ngugi wa Thiong'o writes that decolonization of knowledge is about African people seeing themselves in a relationship with their surrounding and fellow Africans around the continent, as well as in relation to other cultures and peoples around the world. He calls this "a quest for relevance."<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, decolonization aims to engage with the "plurality of experience and perspective" in each and every culture and part of the world instead of blindly following the Western universalism and the notion that Europe and the West are the center of the globe and of all global knowledge.<sup>85</sup> The knowledge decolonization project aims to bring "to the foreground other epistemologies, other principles of knowledge and understanding and, consequently, other economy, other politics, other ethics."<sup>86</sup> This process is about opening "up space for the possibility . . . of 'another world' in which many worlds will co-exist."<sup>87</sup>

While the debates about decolonization of knowledge have been going on for decades on the African continent, Latin America, and elsewhere, similar debates have until recently been non-existent in South Africa. Before 2015, only a handful of South African academics wrote about decolonization of knowledge and curriculum. Because of this, there are many highly misguided views in the academia and the society about the meaning and goals of the decolonization project. Many see decolonization of knowledge as turning back the clock, going back to the Stone Age, isolation from the rest of the world, and teaching only about South Africa and Africa at the universities. All this is unfounded and misplaced if one considers the global literature on

decolonization of knowledge. Decolonization is not about neglect of any form of knowledge, including the Eurocentric knowledge; it is about bringing Africa to the center of everything that African universities do.<sup>88</sup> In the South African context, Africa must be at the center of epistemology, knowledge, teaching, learning, and research. This does not mean that decolonization will lead to localization, isolation, or only Africanization of the curriculum. Universities still have to develop graduates capable of functioning in the complex and interconnected world. Decolonized curriculum would “sensitize students to the place of, and the issues surrounding South Africa on the African continent and in the world at large.”<sup>89</sup> However, the curriculum “must be free from the Western epistemological domination, Eurocentrism, and worldviews which were designed to degrade, exploit and subjugate people in Africa and other parts of the formerly colonized world.”<sup>90</sup>

The dismantling of the “pedagogy of big lies” rooted in colonialism and apartheid will require a complete reconstruction of everything<sup>91</sup> that the universities do and stand for—from institutional cultures to epistemology and curriculum.<sup>92</sup> The decolonization project must lead to an academia that challenges the Western and Eurocentric discourses and misconceptions that see the African continent as not more than backwardness, misery, starvation, and savagery. Transforming apartheid-era institutional cultures at historically white institutions will be key if genuine change and decolonization are to take place. Most importantly, decolonization at universities must encompass more than a change of the materials used to teach. While adding literature from the African continent and the global South is crucial in the decolonization project, it is not enough; the attitude to the materials used in the curriculum is as important.<sup>93</sup> This, however, presents a challenge. Universities can prescribe new readings and other materials, but what about the academics’ attitudes to the readings and to the new ways of thinking? As noted above, many in the South African academy still see Eurocentric knowledge as superior to all other knowledges. Are these academics willing to change? Are they ready to unlearn, learn, and fundamentally transform as academics and individuals? Are they ready to openly reflect on their role in the past oppression, subjugation, and dehumanization of black South Africans? If not, the country will require new generations of

academics and administrators to reach senior university positions in order to fundamentally transform the higher education sector.

Grosfoguel writes that Eurocentric education and knowledge are “fundamentalist,” as they are premised on the notion that they are the “only one sole epistemic tradition from which to achieve Truth and Universality.”<sup>94</sup> While being critical of this in the current debates on decolonization, we must ensure that what comes out of the process of dismantling the colonial and Eurocentric education and the “pedagogy of big lies” does not become a new form of fundamentalism and hegemony. The new pedagogy and curriculum must engage in critical and diverse epistemic questioning of *all knowledge* while placing South Africa and Africa at the center. Decolonized curriculum must be relevant, appropriate, and meaningful for local, national, and continental settings as well as for functioning in our complex, interconnected, and unjust world. The curriculum must strike the right balance that considers the past and current injustices, structural domination, oppression, and exploitation in South Africa, Africa, and the world, as well as the skills and knowledge needed to overcome these in the future. Moreover, a decolonized curriculum needs to “reconstruct the African story based on its past, in a manner that does not seek to engage in a feel-good, nationalist historiography but challenges the prevailing climate of falsehoods, distortions and outright lies” about the continent and its peoples.<sup>95</sup>

## Conclusion

As Fanon wrote in the 1960s, “each generation must discover its mission, fulfill it, or betray it, in relative opacity.”<sup>96</sup> The current mission of young black South African university students is to expose the “rainbow nation” myth and the lack of transformation in society, in the economy, and at the country’s universities. The students understand that knowledge is power and that those who control the knowledge and curriculum will control the economy, the society, and the future itself. They also know that “if you want a different reality, a different world, you have to change the one you have.”<sup>97</sup> No one else will do it for them, not even those who have made promises in the past and those who were supposed to do it, but for whatever reason, did not. To quote Freire, South African student activists, together with a small number of progressive

academics and administrators, are no longer willing to “accept the passive role imposed on them” and “adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them.”<sup>98</sup> They must continue with critical engagement and activism until institutional cultures and curriculum at universities are fundamentally transformed and decolonized.

The decolonized curriculum must place South Africa and Africa at the center of teaching, learning, and research, incorporate the epistemic perspectives, knowledge, and thinking from the African continent and the global South, and place them on an equal footing with the currently dominant Eurocentric canon. Instead of waiting for years on institutions and administrators to figure out and approve a “decolonization framework,” come up with an implementation plan, and then possibly even implement it at some point in a distant future, decolonization of the curriculum should be approached from the bottom<sup>99</sup> by progressive academics and students. Progressive academics have an opportunity to decolonize their own curriculum with the help of the students. They can do this through a creation of an educational space where academics and students jointly work on critical understanding of the past and present and in the process create relevant knowledge for the future.<sup>100</sup>

The opposition to genuine transformation and decolonization is deeply entrenched within the university structures and will do all it takes to hold on to power and influence. Currently, there is very little interest or willingness to decolonize the curriculum and dismantle the “pedagogy of big lies” due to the presence of established hegemonic structures, power relations and institutional cultures that stem from the apartheid days and hinder any serious possibilities of disruption and dismantling of the status quo. Many at universities do not want to change anything; some still do not understand what all the debates are about; others are only interested in superficial change that would allow business as usual to continue; and those in the academia and administration who want to change are the minority. Despite all the challenges, student activists and progressive academics and administrators will have to maintain a nonviolent and intellectual struggle until the curriculum and knowledge at universities are decolonized. This struggle will be a long and arduous one. But however difficult the road ahead, there are no alternatives if the South African higher education sector is to be relevant.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Achille J. Mbembe, "Decolonizing the University: New Directions," *Arts & Humanities in Higher Education*, 15, no. 1 (2016): 29-45. p. 32.
- <sup>2</sup> Mahmood Mamdani, "Between the Public Intellectual and the Scholar: Decolonization and Some Post-Independence Initiatives in African Higher Education," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 17, no. 1 (2016): 68-83. p. 70.
- <sup>3</sup> Sharon Subreenduth, "'Why, Why Are We Not Allowed Even. . .?': A De/Colonizing Narrative of Complicity and Resistance in Post/Apartheid South Africa," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 19, no. 5 (2006): 617-638. p. 627.
- <sup>4</sup> Mamdani, "Between the Public Intellectual," 81.
- <sup>5</sup> Stuart Hall, "The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power" in *Formations of Modernity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Bram Gieben (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 318.
- <sup>6</sup> Donald P. Macedo, "Literacy for Stupidification: The Pedagogy of Big Lies," *Harvard Educational Review*, 63, no. 2 (1993): 183-206. p. 186.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>8</sup> Savo Heleta, "Decolonisation of Higher Education: Dismantling Epistemic Violence and Eurocentrism in South Africa," *Transformation in Higher Education*, 1, no. 1, a9, (2016): 1-8. p. 1.
- <sup>9</sup> Caroline Suransky and J. C. van der Merwe, "Transcending Apartheid in Higher Education: Transforming an Institutional Culture," *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 19, no. 3 (2016): 577-597. p. 577.
- <sup>10</sup> Mabogo P. More, "Locating Frantz Fanon in Post-Apartheid South Africa," *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 52, no. 2 (2014): 127-141. p. 127.
- <sup>11</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 1970, 30th edn.), 85.
- <sup>12</sup> See Sisonke Msimang, "The old is dying and the young ones have just been born," *Africa is a Country*, May 15, 2015, accessed July 2, 2016, <http://africasacountry.com/2015/05/the-old-is-dying-and-the-young-ones-have-just-been-born/>; Lovelyn C. Nwadeyi, "We all have a responsibility to disrupt the status quo," *Mail & Guardian*, June 29, 2016, accessed June 30, 2016, <http://mg.co.za/article/2016-06-29-we-all-have-agency-and-we-must-use-it-to-disrupt-the-status-quo>.
- <sup>13</sup> Tebello Letsekha, "Revisiting the Debate on the Africanisation of Higher Education: An Appeal for a Conceptual Shift," *The Independent Journal of Teaching and Learning*, 8 (2013): 5-18. p. 9.
- <sup>14</sup> Department of Education, "Report of the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions," Final Report (Pretoria: Department of Education, 2008), 41.
- <sup>15</sup> Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972, 2000 edn.), 43; Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonising Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. (London: Zed Books, 1999), 21.



- <sup>16</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, 19.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.
- <sup>20</sup> Robin D.G. Kelley, "A Poetics of Anticolonialism," in *Discourse on Colonialism*, Aimé Césaire (New York, Monthly Review Press, 1972, 2000 edn.), 27.
- <sup>21</sup> Ramón Grosfoguel, "The Epistemic Decolonial Turn," *Cultural Studies*, 21, no. 2-3 (2007): 211-223. p. 217-218.
- <sup>22</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1961, 2004 edn.), 149.
- <sup>23</sup> Birgit Brock-Utne, "Formulating Higher Education Policies in Africa: The Pressure From External Forces and the Neoliberal Agenda," *JHEA/RESA*, 1, no. 1 (2003): 24-56. p. 26.
- <sup>24</sup> Mamdani, "Between the Public Intellectual," 81.
- <sup>25</sup> Armando Alcántara, Silvia Llomovatte and José E. Romão, "Resisting Neoliberal Common Sense in Higher Education: Experiences From Latin America," *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 23, no. 2 (2013): 127-151. p. 139.
- <sup>26</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, 65.
- <sup>27</sup> Barbara Bush, *Imperialism, Race and Resistance* (London: Routledge, 1999), 139.
- <sup>28</sup> Steve Biko, *I Write What I Like* (Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 1978, 2004 edn.), 148.
- <sup>29</sup> Subreenduth, 618.
- <sup>30</sup> More, 129-130.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.
- <sup>32</sup> Tamson Pietsch, "Empire and Higher Education Internationalisation," *University World News*, issue no: 282, July 20, 2013, accessed June 19, 2016, <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20130718115637589>.
- <sup>33</sup> Brock-Utne, 24.
- <sup>34</sup> Neo Lekgotla L. Ramoupi, "African-Centred Education and African Languages: Content and Curriculum in Post-Apartheid Education and Training in South Africa," Briefing no. 56, August 2011 (Pretoria: Africa Institute of South Africa), 5.
- <sup>35</sup> Subreenduth, 622.
- <sup>36</sup> Bush, 141.
- <sup>37</sup> Subreenduth, 625.
- <sup>38</sup> Ian Bunting, "The Higher Education Landscape Under Apartheid," in *Transformation in Higher Education: Global Pressures and Local Realities in South Africa*, ed. Nico Cloete, Peter Maassen, Richard Fehnel, Teboho Moja, Helene Perold and Trish Gibbon, (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004), 35-36.
- <sup>39</sup> Subreenduth, 617-618.
- <sup>40</sup> Saleem Badat, "Higher Education Transformation in South Africa Post 1994: Towards a Critical Assessment," Solomon Mahlangu Education Lecture,

Constitutional Hill, 12 June 2007 (Johannesburg: Centre for Education and Policy Development), p. 6.

<sup>41</sup> Trish Gibbon and Jane Kabaki, "Staff," in *Transformation in Higher Education: Global Pressures and Local Realities in South Africa*, ed. Nico Cloete, Peter Maassen, Richard Fehnel, Teboho Moja, Helene Perold and Trish Gibbon, (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004), 123.

<sup>42</sup> Bush, 145.

<sup>43</sup> Saul Dubow, *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 5.

<sup>44</sup> Chika Schoole, "Internationalisation of Higher Education in South Africa: A Historical Review," *Perspectives in Education*, 24, no. 4 (2006): 1-13. p. 5.

<sup>45</sup> Bunting, 40.

<sup>46</sup> John Davies, "The State and the South African University System Under Apartheid," *Comparative Education*, 32, no. 3 (1996): 319-332. p. 323.

<sup>47</sup> David Jobbins, "South Africa's Universities: Force for the Future or a Signal of Failure?," *The Round Table*, 91, no. 363 (2002): 53-66. p. 58; Schoole, 5.

<sup>48</sup> Davies, 324; Bunting, 45.

<sup>49</sup> Mamdani, "Between the Public Intellectual," 72.

<sup>50</sup> Denise Zinn and Carol Rodgers, "A Humanising Pedagogy: Getting Beneath the Rhetoric," *Perspectives in Education*, 30, no. 4 (2012): 76-87. p. 76.

<sup>51</sup> This refers to the black, colored (mixed race) and Indian institutions.

<sup>52</sup> Neo Lekgotla L. Ramoupi, "African Research and Scholarship: 20 Years of Lost Opportunities to Transform Higher Education in South Africa," *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies*, 38, no. 1 (2014): 269-286. p. 270.

<sup>53</sup> Davies, 322;

<sup>54</sup> National Education Policy Initiative, "Framework report" (Oxford University Press: Cape Town, 1996), 6.

<sup>55</sup> Jobbins, 55.

<sup>56</sup> Department of Education, 53; Department of Higher Education and Training, "The 2015 Durban Statement on Transformation in Higher Education," Pretoria: Department of Higher Education and Training, October 17, 2015, accessed June 25, 2016, <http://www.gov.za/speeches/2015-durban-statement-transformation-higher-education-17-oct-2015-0000>.

<sup>57</sup> In 2007, Badat wrote about higher education transformation between 1994-2007. He mentioned many transformation initiatives, from policy formulation, academic structure, quality assurance to reconfiguration of the institutional landscapes; decolonization or transformation of the Eurocentric curriculum was not mentioned. See Saleem Badat, "Higher Education Transformation in South Africa Post 1994: Towards a Critical Assessment," Solomon Mahlangu Education Lecture, Constitutional Hill, 12 June 2007 (Johannesburg: Centre for Education and Policy Development).

<sup>58</sup> Ramoupi, "African Research and Scholarship," 271; Heleta, 4.

- <sup>59</sup> George J Sefa Dei, "Introduction: Mapping the Terrain – Towards a New Politics of Resistance," in *Anti-Colonialism and Education: The Politics of Resistance*, ed. George J Sefa Dei and Arlo Kempf, (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2006), 12.
- <sup>60</sup> Suransky and van der Merwe, 593.
- <sup>61</sup> Zinn and Rodgers, 276.
- <sup>62</sup> Department of Education, 91.
- <sup>63</sup> In Sharon Dell, "Universities Hope For More Stable Academic Year," *University World News*, issue no: 444, January 27, 2017, accessed February 10, 2017, <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20170127121807438>.
- <sup>64</sup> Hall, 277.
- <sup>65</sup> Bush, 274.
- <sup>66</sup> Heleta, 3.
- <sup>67</sup> Department of Education, 91.
- <sup>68</sup> Mahmood Mamdani, "Is African Studies to be Turned Into a New Home for Bantu Education at UCT?," *Social Dynamics*, 24, no. 2 (1998): 63-75. p. 74.
- <sup>69</sup> More, 130.
- <sup>70</sup> Subreenduth, 621-22.
- <sup>71</sup> Mbembe, 32.
- <sup>72</sup> Blade Nzimande, "Higher Education is at Critical Juncture," Speech delivered at the Higher Education Transformation Summit in Durban, South Africa, October 15, 2015, accessed July 12, 2016, <http://www.politicsweb.co.za/politics/higher-education-is-at-critical-juncture--blade-nz>.
- <sup>73</sup> Subreenduth, 630.
- <sup>74</sup> T. O. Molefe, "Oppression Must Fall: South Africa's Revolution in Theory." *World Policy Journal*, 33, no. 1 (2016): 30-37. p. 32.
- <sup>75</sup> Mbembe, 32.
- <sup>76</sup> Macedo, 186.
- <sup>77</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>78</sup> Heleta, 4.
- <sup>79</sup> Letsekha, 8.
- <sup>80</sup> Dei, 3.
- <sup>81</sup> Fanon, 2.
- <sup>82</sup> Mbembe, 32.
- <sup>83</sup> Mamdani, "Is African Studies," 67-68.
- <sup>84</sup> Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers Ltd., 1981), 87.
- <sup>85</sup> Mamdani, "Between the Public Intellectual," 70.
- <sup>86</sup> Walter D. Mignolo, "Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of De-Coloniality," *Cultural Studies*, 21, no. 2-3, (2007): 449-514. p. 453.
- <sup>87</sup> Ibid. 469.
- <sup>88</sup> Mbembe, 35.

<sup>89</sup> Department of Education, 21.

<sup>90</sup> Heleta, 5.

<sup>91</sup> Despite the widely held beliefs in South African academia, decolonization is not limited to the humanities and social sciences only but needs to be extended to all academic fields. Even fields such as mathematics (Brodie, 2016) and science must be decolonized. Science, in particular, “is not fundamentally European in origin.” This is contrary to the racist narratives that claim that “non-white” peoples have not contributed to knowledge and science throughout history (Prescod-Weinstein, 2015). Furthermore, science curriculum must engage in the debates and learning about the links between science and colonial and racist exploitation. Critical engagement about this must go hand in hand with teaching science to the students. See Karin Brodie. “Yes, Mathematics Can Be Decolonised. Here’s How to Begin,” *The Conversation*, October 13, 2016, accessed October 15, 2016, <https://theconversation.com/yes-mathematics-can-be-decolonised-heres-how-to-begin-65963> and Chanda Prescod-Weinstein, “Decolonizing Science Reading List,” *Medium*, April 25, 2015, accessed October 15, 2016, <https://medium.com/@chanda/decolonising-science-reading-list-339fb773d51f#.x7q9apwt6>.

<sup>92</sup> To this, Ramoupi (2011, 11) adds the issue of language of instruction and the continued dominance of English—as well as Afrikaans in some cases—at South African universities. He argues that transformation in the higher education sector that does not include incorporation of African languages in the curriculum, teaching, and learning will be incomplete and will continue to disadvantage black students. He further adds that the “neglect of South Africa’s African languages in the curriculum and content of education . . . [is a continuation of] subjugation, conquest and denial of social justice to the majority.”

<sup>93</sup> Ngugi, 105.

<sup>94</sup> Grosfoguel, 212.

<sup>95</sup> Kgalema Motlanthe, “The Role of the African Intelligentsia in Post-Mandela Africa,” *The Thinker*, vol. 60, 2014, p. 21, accessed July 11, 2016, <http://www.thetinker.co.za/resources/60%20MOTLANTHE.pdf>.

<sup>96</sup> Fanon, 145.

<sup>97</sup> Ziauddin Sardar, “Foreword to the 2008 Edition. I Think it Would be Good if Certain Things Were Said: Fanon and the Epidemiology of Oppression,” in *Black Skins, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon (London: Pluto Books, 1967, 2008 edn.), xviii.

<sup>98</sup> Freire, 73.

<sup>99</sup> Mignolo, 492.

<sup>100</sup> Freire, 69.

