

# EDITORIAL

## Decoloniality and justice *a priori*

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In the contemporary university landscape, a number of definitions of decoloniality have been advanced in an attempt to understand the phenomenon. While historically it was easy to define decolonisation owing to the impetus for freedom and liberation of colonised and Indigenous subjects (e.g. Fanon [1963]/2004; Sartre 1964), the term ‘decoloniality’ is more elusive. Given this elusive nature, we maintain that what we have witnessed is a form of performance without real, substantive participation of Indigenous subjects (see Almeida & Kumalo 2018; Nyoka 2013; Zondi 2016). These performances of ‘decoloniality’, which often take the form of elaborately ritualised and expensive decolonial lectures delivered by international scholars, amount to a form of ‘box-ticking’ that lacks substantive engagement with locally situated struggles, debates and dialogues. The latter appear as engagements with decoloniality but in fact do little more than shore up white ignorance and intellectual mediocrity, construed as white mediocrity<sup>1</sup> (see Darity 2013; DuBois 1932; Gordon 2011) in the academe, not only in South Africa but also globally (see Almeida 2015). As a result, these performances of decoloniality run the risk of allowing certain intellectuals to position themselves as the ‘saviours’ of Blackness/Indigeneity<sup>2</sup> while, in fact, they are reproductive of its

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- 1 When we speak of white mediocrity, we suggest the claims which buttress white fragility in decolonial conversations. But the ‘white’ in ‘white mediocrity’ should not, in our opinion, be understood in racial terms. Through their intellectual and political choices, Black scholars, too, can reproduce this mediocrity that perpetuates the marginalisation of Blackness and Indigeneity – as was pointed out by students during the 2015/2016 protest/revolt when they stated ‘*amabhunu amnyama andinzela i-worri?*’.
  - 2 We use the concept of Blackness in line with the definitions of the Black Consciousness Movement, which defines Blackness not merely as the pigmentation of one’s skin but, rather, as a political resistance against domination and oppression. In making this claim, we follow in the tradition of Steve Biko ([1978]/2004: 52) when he suggests that ‘[m]erely by describing yourself as Black you have started on a road towards emancipation, you have committed yourself to fight against all forces that seek to use your Blackness as a stamp that marks you out as a subservient being’. When we speak of the concept of Blackness, unlike the historical discourse on Black Consciousness which prioritised race at the expense of gender and sexual orientation, we position ‘Black’ as an intersectional term that also acknowledges the struggles of the Black feminist movement, queerness and queer struggles against (white and black) heteropatriarchal orders of society which relegate ‘feminised bodies’ (Kumalo & Gama 2018) to the margins of society.

marginalisation. In this way, it can be argued, 'decoloniality' as discourse and praxis runs the risk of becoming co-opted by an educational system that is sustained by its refusal to engage the question of decoloniality *substantively* and *fundamentally*. This of course does not nullify the genuine efforts of intellectuals, both Black and white, who wish to see the university redefined as an institution that is inclusive, accommodative and which may give rise to a multiplicity of knowledge frameworks.

However, the currency of the question about whiteness in decolonial efforts continues to have immeasurable bearing on how the academe is defined in South Africa, on the African continent and in the global South, and brings us back to the question, 'How do we define decolonisation?'

Tuck and Yang (2012) frame decolonisation as a form of acknowledging historical wrongs committed against Indigeneity in the Canadian context, while Grosfoguel (2007) argues for an orientation that sees decolonisation as a form of writing from a position that is aligned with the peoples of the global South. Mignolo (2009) frames decoloniality as an option among many within the global academe, while Wiredu (1998) argues that decolonisation ought to be viewed as a mode of self-actualisation for African people, suggesting the need to decolonise African religion and philosophy. In the South African context, decolonisation has at times been framed as a curriculum revisionist project (see Heleta 2016; Vorster & Quinn 2017), with Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015) suggesting that decolonisation is the future for Africa. Cognisant of the elusive nature of decoloniality, we frame the concept as the realisation of epistemic justice for peoples of the global South. This framing signals the task of developing a multiplicity of knowledge frameworks that exist coevally within the university from a variety of intellectual traditions emanating from the global South.

Developing these multiple knowledge frameworks is, arguably, the aim of decolonial intellectual traditions globally. This is aligned with recognising the knowledge(s) of 'peoples of the periphery' (Dussell 1985), not only in the South African context but globally. This aim is envisaged through the work of scholars such as Mignolo (2009) and Grosfoguel (2007, 2013), who suggest that we create a pluriversity of the university. With this in mind, the *Journal of Decolonising Disciplines* is an intellectual space that undertakes to realise the objectives of inviting critical theoretical debate and discussion that fosters a multiplicity of knowledge frameworks in the university. This objective aims to foster debate among scholars who are aligned with the intellectual and political struggles of those who have historically been marginalised and excluded from institutions of knowledge production.

The contributions in this issue are aligned with the objective of realising epistemic justice for peoples of the global South. In thinking about such justice, one might consider Alasdair MacIntyre's (1988) *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* In his analysis, MacIntyre suggests that rationality is found within traditions themselves – a position that complicates the capacity to converse about epistemic justice from divergent epistemic traditions. This difficulty arises when one considers the work of Miranda Fricker (2007: 5), who holds that we can only begin talking about epistemic justice or injustice on the basis of a 'shared ethical intuition'. In light of the reality that different colonial systems had varying impacts on the peoples of the global South, it is worth considering the divergences that exist between traditions. It is on the premise of these differences between traditions, all of which are inherently rational, that we ought to consider how we might begin to curate a space which fosters our capacity to bridge the divides between traditions. In the South African context, these differences give rise to contestation(s) that play out in the knowledge production space of the university: one mode of being is seen (granted both epistemic and ontological access) while

others are erased, negated and silenced. Keeping in mind MacIntyre's (1988) proposition that each tradition is inherently rational, the challenge with which we are then confronted is that of being forced, some would suggest, to assume a perspectivist or relativist framework. Such a framework is derived from the reality that each tradition is inherently rational, and that, owing to the varying impact of colonialism on the various knowledge frameworks of the peoples of the global South, there are divergences in our capacity to speak of the ability to attain epistemic justice as we lack a shared ethical intuition. However, MacIntyre (1988: 354) gives us a solution by suggesting that 'the rationality of a tradition-constituted and tradition-constitutive enquiry is in key and essential part a matter of the kind of progress which it makes through a number of well-defined types of stage'. Simply put, the rationality of a tradition is constituted by the epistemic progress which it has made. In the context of colonisation and forced domination – where some bodies have historically been considered more real, more human and therefore more 'legitimate' than others (see Magubane 2001) – we are compelled to think carefully and systematically through this notion of epistemic progress. For starters, because some may read and treat the phrase 'epistemic progress' as if it were neutral and devoid of political implications, it is necessary to unveil the political positions that influence and shape the trajectory of knowledge production that constitutes such progress. Any 'decolonial' enquiry should first and foremost be concerned with unveiling these historico-political influences in the quest to attain epistemic justice.

For MacIntyre (1988: 354), 'every such form of inquiry begins in and from some condition of pure historical contingency, from the beliefs, institutions, and practices of some particular community which constitute a given'. In the case of Blackness/Indigeneity, this 'given' relates to the marginal and peripheral position which Blackness has historically been made to occupy and which historically and (contemporarily) continues to undervalue the epistemic contributions of Black/Indigenous 'beings'. But does recognition of the rationality inherent in all traditions not lead to a radical incommensurability?

To resolve the relativist perspective which may arise out of the incommensurability produced by recognising different traditions, MacIntyre (1988) suggests using translation. He maintains that for those who hold that translation is a given that can yield effective communication between traditions, untranslatability is a philosophical fiction. However, one ought to consider what we mean by translation.

Perhaps translation is simply the capacity for one tradition to meet and converse with another in the form of inter-epistemic dialogue. This includes not only textual translation, but also intercultural translation involving modes of expression other than texts. The suggestion that cultural translation could be the starting point for inter-epistemic dialogue is based on the reality that textual analyses and interpretations are informed by the *a priori* cultural position within which both the author and the audience are located, and from which they speak. As Grosfoguel (2007: 213) puts it in 'The Epistemic Decolonial Turn', the task of the decolonial theorist consists in revealing the loci of enunciation of all texts, which takes the form of 'distinguishing between the epistemic location and the social location of the speaker'. This distinction is useful for two reasons: subaltern/Black/Indigenous subjects can speak from an epistemic location which continues to shore up Eurocentric perspectives even as they factually speak from the position of subalterity. Secondly, revealing the epistemic location of the author aligns with the aim of attaining epistemic justice

for the bodies that continue to be disenfranchised by the structure of knowledge in westernised universities (Grosfoguel 2013). The project of decoloniality is therefore perhaps *a priori* a project concerned with social, economic and epistemic justice. To better understand what could be meant by justice in this case, the work of Steve Biko is useful. He writes:

It is not surprising, therefore, that in South Africa, after generations of exploitation, white people on the whole have come to believe in the inferiority of the Black [wo]man, so much so that while the race problem started as an offshoot of the economic greed exhibited by white people, it has now become a serious problem on its own. (*Biko [1978]/2004: 97*)

The suspicions which continue to define how we relate to one another in the academe and the impact of this on the future generation of knowledge producers are a result or perhaps a function of our incapacity or unwillingness to engage in inter-epistemic dialogue. The raciality of the academe continues to mar our capacity to manifest the justice we have in mind when we talk about (or sometimes merely ‘perform’) decoloniality. As far as a definition of decoloniality is concerned, then, perhaps one can at least say: the *a priori* concern of decoloniality is with total justice, the realisation of which is wholly dependent on our capacity and willingness to engage each other in inter-epistemic dialogue – a point which Nomusa Makhubu and Khanyisile Mbongwa point to in the first paper in this collection. Speaking from a perspective which reveals the epistemic location of both the artist and the scholar, Makhubu and Mbongwa do two things: first, they highlight the seamless beauty of creating theory from a position that self-reflectively and critically thinks about the fact of Blackness in South Africa. Secondly, they demonstrate the power of considering justice as the *a priori* concern of decoloniality. Mbongwa recounts her role in the #MustFall protests as a graduate student at the University of Cape Town and a member of the collective Umhlangano, and describes how her art was/is informed by the aims of resurrecting and renewing interest in Black ancestral knowledge. This, she maintains, is a conscious decision which aims to see such a mode of knowing and being included in our country’s education system.

Mbongwa’s position aims to unearth the internalised and *assumed* facticity of the inferiority of Blackness by whiteness. The two interlocutors go further to argue for the usefulness of love in the contemporary struggles against coloniality by highlighting that love is rarely taken seriously as a political strategy in addressing the dire effects of colonialism and continued neocolonial domination and exploitation. Yet, key political movements of Black Consciousness and Black nationalism are centred precisely around the need to challenge racially induced self-hatred and self-loathing. Love, as opposed to fear and loathing, can be a powerful tool with which to start challenging the hegemonic position of whiteness, which thrives on the ghettoisation and marginalisation of Blackness. In ‘Radical Love as Decolonial Philosophy’, Makhubu and Mbongwa begin to create an intellectual space – a locus of enunciation – from which we can start working towards conceptualising an arena that centres Blackness/Indigeneity in theory generation in South Africa. Their work also clearly demonstrates how inter-epistemic dialogue can take seriously the historical facts/facticity that give(s) rise to the condition(s) to which Blackness/Indigeneity presently has to respond. Reconsidering MacIntyre’s (1988) notion of epistemic progress, Makhubu and Mbongwa demonstrate not only how

this progress was historically arrested by colonialism but also how decoloniality understood as an *a priori* concern with total justice can reignite that progress.

The second paper in this issue, written by educationists, considers the use of drawing as a mode of thinking through rurality in 'educational desire' and attainment (Mirza 2006: 137). These scholars write about the usefulness of drawing as a mode of theory generation from the geopolitical landscape of southern Africa. Using narrative form in positioning the centrality of 'place-identity' (Dixon & Durrheim 2000) in education, Brenda Leibowitz, Emmanuel Mqgqwashu, Choshi Kasanda, Pulane Lefoka, Violet Lunga and Rakel Kavenna Shalyefu highlight the role and usefulness of unconventional methods in thinking about research methodologies that centre Blackness/Indigeneity.

The first two contributions in this issue reveal important aspects of the way in which we can begin to think about theory generation from a place that centres the experiences of the peoples of the global South. This approach is aligned with the tradition of decolonisation; a tradition that informed the articulation of struggles such as #MustFall in the academe (Lebakeng, Phalane & Nase 2006; Moodley & Adam 2000; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015; Ramose 2007). Articulating the experiences of people of the global South serves a poignant function in beginning to counter the idea that in many instances Indigeneity and peoples of the South exist 'merely to substantiate western civilisation' (Almeida 2015: 86). The 'merely' intimates a *total injustice* which invokes as counter-praxis decoloniality as primarily or *a priori* concerned with *total justice* (social, economic, epistemic and ontological).

In line with the aims of articulating the experiences of the people of the global South, Oscar Eybers, in his paper 'A Social Realist Ontology for Developing Afrocentric Curricula in Africa', makes a significant contribution when he challenges the preponderance of whiteness and Eurocentric curricula in South African institutions. Eybers' work contributes to the debate on identity formation through curricula in the contemporary university in South Africa. This paper is aligned with the work of scholars such as Lebakeng, Phalane and Nase (2006), who decry the reality of a curriculum that centres the experiences of individuals reared in London, Manchester and Hull being taught in institutions located in Tshwane (University of Pretoria), Rhini/Makhanda (Rhodes University) and eMgungundlovu/eThekweni (University of KwaZulu-Natal). This scholarship is useful in pointing out the fact that our institutions continue to rely on theoretical importations and to develop curricula that are decontextualised and removed from the realities of South Africans – Black and white. Eybers argues that in order to move away from creating what Kumalo (2018a) calls the 'native of nowhere', we ought to centre the Afrocentric ontology of the subject which we teach in our contemporary lecture theatres in these institutions. He does this by looking at the intricacies of power manifest in the social domain as presented through a realist account of ontology.

In a further demonstration of what it means to say that the *a priori* concern of decoloniality is total justice, Emmanuel Mqgqwashu's paper, 'Education for Public Good in the Age of Coloniality', contests the notion of education for public good, arguing that this conception of education undermines the democratic gains made by South Africa. By proposing the Reading to Learn pedagogy, a derivative of the education for common good concept, Mqgqwashu reveals the emancipatory potential of education that takes the agency of the learner as the primary starting position. His model revives significant debates in education regarding the use of education as a tool for realising emancipation. Mqgqwashu's work is also useful in providing a lens through which to read the contemporary higher education landscape. It is no surprise that the commodification of

education has led to the expectation that students be ‘empty containers to be filled by the teacher’ (Freire [1970]/2003: 72), a model of education which also reinscribes the oppression of those who are situated at the margins of society. Furthermore, the commodification of knowledge production and the corporatisation of the university have posed serious threats to academic freedom and the pursuit of liberties which created the modern university as an intellectual hub that was accepting of vast and divergent intellectual traditions and that fostered a platform for inter-epistemic dialogue through what Ivanhoe (2011) terms ‘moral tradition respect’. Instead, the colonial and, to a large extent, the (post)colonial university continues to reproduce a lack of inter-epistemic dialogue and disrespect for different traditions of thought and modes of being.

Iram Yousuf considers the manifestation of the colonial matrices of power in the (post)colonial university in her paper ‘Burdened by a Beast: A Brief Consideration of Social Death in South African Universities’. More specifically, her contribution continues the scholarship which has considered the epistemological, political, ethical and social – in other words, the *total* – implications of #MustFall for the South African intellectual landscape. Yousuf speaks of a Black social death, a concept which expands Fanon’s ([1963]/2004) notion of the zone of non-being to which the Black subject is relegated by means of the colonial matrix of power. Yousuf considers how the institutional cultures of our universities perpetuate the erasure of Blackness, silencing it through discourses in which Blackness is associated with the tropes of ‘unruly vandals’ and ‘miscreants’ (the return of the ‘restless native’) who disrupt orderly white spaces. Yousuf’s contribution is useful as it reminds the reader that the struggle for ‘ontological/(legitimacy) recognition’ (Kumalo 2018b) in our institutions of higher learning is far from over.

In the one review included in this issue, Wemar Strydom revisits his earlier review of Khumalo’s (2018) *You Have to be Gay to Know God*, which was published in *Rapport*. His reconsideration of the review raises a number of questions regarding the possibilities of inter-epistemic dialogue. Strydom turns the gaze on himself as a queer white Afrikaner man reviewing the work of a queer Black (Zulu) man in contemporary South Africa. The initial challenge which Strydom surfaces speaks to how his previous review failed to exhaust the ways in which Khumalo explores the pleasures, joys and limitations of same-sex relations in South Africa. Strydom convincingly shows that *You Have to be Gay to Know God* incites inter-epistemic dialogue through Khumalo’s provocative writing, which invites questions and debate concerning queer life in the contemporary African state. The vulnerability displayed by Khumalo’s writing style, specifically in chapter six, can be interpreted as the kind of gesture that bridges gaps which continue to define South African reality. Apart from Strydom’s critique that the text reads like a long series of edited blog posts, his review suggests that Khumalo clears the space for the kind of mutual vulnerability in which inter-epistemic dialogue could become possible. The concept of mutual vulnerability is borrowed from the work of Keet, Zinn and Porteus (2009), who consider it a key principle in postconflict pedagogy.

## Politics of justice and cultural translation

In line with the aims of the *Journal of Decolonising Disciplines*, which include promoting scholarship written in African languages, we also include a translation of the core argument of the title chapter from *Philosophy on the Border: Decoloniality and the Shudder of the Origin* (Praeg 2019) in isiZulu.

The translation was led by V.J. Nkosi, a PhD candidate in the department of African languages at the University of Pretoria. It represents a tentative step in the direction of going beyond talk about epistemic justice (ironically, mostly conducted in English) towards the substantive performance of epistemic justice. The gist of the argument is that, while the meaning of the student mobilisations of 2015/2016 necessarily remains that of both protest *and* revolt, it is only by examining both components that its meanings can be fully understood. Furthermore, we suggest that examining this form of revolt, and its significance as 'Event' (Badiou), cleared an enunciative space where philosophy as Subject became more open to a contestation between its implicitly included and excluded subjectivities. This contestation further amplified long-simmering epistemological discontent within the discipline of Philosophy into a fundamental shudder that is still reverberating through higher education.

Of course, the notion of translation as epistemic justice raises complex questions about the language into which thought is translated, in this case isiZulu. To echo the earlier question raised in relation to justice in the discussion of MacIntyre's (1988) work: Whose isiZulu? Additionally, would an insistence on a pure form or the classical representation of isiZulu be a form of reactionary nationalism out of step with the times, or would it be consistent with the demands of epistemic justice? Conversely, is the use of 'modern' hybridised isiZulu inconsistent with the emancipatory ideal or does it simply amount to recognition that all languages evolve and change over time? Which canonical African figures can we invoke to legitimise our answers to these questions? It could be argued that S.E.K. Mqhayi, Tiyo Soga and Nontsizi Mqgqwetho are guiding figures representing isiXhosa, while Sibusiso Nyembezi, O.E.H. Nxumalo and W.B. Vilakazi represent isiZulu.

Although these questions are too complex to address in this editorial, we invite contributions on this debate from scholars in translation studies and sociolinguistics for publication in future issues of the *Journal*. It is our fervent belief that a vigorous debate on the further intellectualisation of African language(s) will make a meaningful contribution to decolonial theory and its *a priori* commitment to *total* justice. However, the conceptual and epistemological status of total justice remains unclear. Is it quasi-transcendental? Does such a conceptual and epistemic articulation of justice speak to the horizon of justice or is it only a figure we invoke to inspire the actualisation of possible forms of justice? We are proud to offer the *Journal* as a platform where these questions can be debated and further explored.

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