TITLE: **DECOLONISING THE CURRICULUM; TRANSFORMING THE UNIVERSITY:**
**A DISCURSIVE PERSPECTIVE**

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ABSTRACT

Central to the recent anti-colonial protests of the #FeesMustFall movement for change and decolonising the curriculum has been the discourse of black pain, institutional racism and Eurocentrism in universities. It seems as if transformation has failed and should be replaced by decoloniality. This research paper discursively interrogates the notion of decolonising the curriculum at one South African university to determine if decoloniality is the way forward. The qualitative study uses a literature review; a discursive content analysis of reports of decoloniality conversations with students and staff in my faculty; participant observation and Critical Race Theory (CRT) to explain how education institutions perpetuate and maintain racism through Eurocentric epistemology and pedagogical practices. Research findings indicate that staff is underprepared to champion a decoloniality transformation project because they themselves are products of coloniality (educated by a colonial education system), evident in their ignorance of and resistance to decoloniality. This paper highlights the challenges implicit in the #FMF movement's call for decoloniality, the biggest challenge being that it seems a new cohort of university staff is required to lead such a project. Therefore decoloniality of the university will not happen overnight; it will be a protracted struggle.

**Keywords**: Decoloniality; Transformation; Discourse; Critical race theory

**Introduction**

Awareness of the need for fundamental change in the South African higher education landscape is not new. Since the dawn of democracy in 1994, successive governments have

pledged to transform this sector (Badat 2010, 2). In 1997 the Department of Education (DOE) gazetted the Education White Paper 3: A *Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education*, for a single coordinated system. Equity and redress, democratisation, development, quality and accountability were high on the agenda. The DOE Minister established a *National Task Team on Transformation (NTTT)*, adopted the *National Framework Agreement on Transformation* (NFAT), and advocated for an institutional culture free from racism, sexism, intolerance and violence (White Paper 3, 1997). Seemingly a good foundation for the transformation of South African universities was being laid.

However, 11 years later, in 2008, South Africa was rudely awakened by the Reitz incident at the University of the Free State[1]. This incident was "...a defining moment in the post-apartheid South African higher education landscape"; it "...parodied racial integration and transformation efforts at the university" (van der Merwe and van Reenen 2016, 2). Triggered by this widely publicised incident, the DOE Minister appointed a ministerial committee to investigate "...discrimination in public higher education institutions, with a particular focus on racism and to make appropriate recommendations to combat discrimination and to promote social cohesion"[2] (The Soudien Report 2008, 9). This committee found that racism, sexism, colonial and apartheid practices remained firmly embedded in teaching, learning and research (ibid, 6), and "...epistemological transformation and the reconstructive function of the curriculum remain a key challenge (ibid, 100). Related to this was language as means of institutional communication and language as a medium of instruction. It was in the latter area that the Committee found "...the most pernicious epistemic violence is committed" (ibid, 101). A number of recommendations were made in the Soudien Report to take transformation forward, and in 2012 the DOE Minister appointed a *Ministerial Transformation Oversight Committee on Transformation in South African Public Universities*. Its brief was to monitor the progress of transformation in universities and to advise the Minister on policies to combat racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination. Unfortunately this extensive transformation

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[1] "In 2008, a video emerged of UFS [University of the Free State] [black] employees undergoing an initiation [conducted by white male students], which included having to get on their knees and eat food which had apparently been urinated into by [white] male students at the Reitz men's residence". News24 Online. 2013-01-23. 13:11. Downloaded 13 October 2017.

[2] The DOE Minister appointed a Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions to investigate transformation in higher education after the Reitz incident, with Professor Crain Soudien chairing this committee.

policy machinery did not ensure an enabling transformation environment for implementation at our universities.

A mere 3 years later, in 2015, angrily protesting students spilt onto the streets under the banner of the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall (FMF) movements, demanding free higher education. The protests continued into 2016 and underlined and drove home in no uncertain terms that coloniality, racism, academic exclusion and annually increasing fees, among other things, were so entrenched that students could no longer "breathe" in our universities (Luckett 2016, 416). Black pain emerged as the metaphor encapsulating black students' embodied reality on what they described as Eurocentric, racist and colonial campuses.

Decolonising the curriculum and free higher education became the slogans and demands of the day. The #FMF demand to decolonise the curriculum led to heated discussions among staff in my faculty: almost every lecturer wanted to know what this meant and what the students wanted. These debates and discussions echoed through the university. A few lecturers asked their students what this demand meant for them and used student ignorance to dismiss it: "Students themselves do not know what decolonising the curriculum means; they do not know what they want." It seemed as if it was mostly the student leadership such as the Student Representative Council (SRC) members who knew what decoloniality was. Some staff mockingly said that one could not "decolonise" the laws of gravity and Newton's law. "We cannot throw out Science," they repeatedly said in response to an angry student comment (reported in the press) to throw Western Science out of the curriculum. Eventually the executive management committee issued a general instruction to deans that all faculties should organise decoloniality conversations with students and staff. In my faculty the dean assigned me as project manager of this initiative; the purpose of which was to arrive at an official faculty position on decoloniality.

The instruction for faculty conversations indicates a management awareness of the need to deliberate on the complexities of the decolonisation demand within a rapidly changing, complex higher education landscape racked by student protests and demands for free tertiary education. Meister-Scheytt and Scheytt, using systems theory, aver that the university is exceptionally complex as organisation (2005, 88). There is multiple diverse role players and

stakeholders involved on multiple levels. As such management saw it as imperative that staff and students should engage on decolonisation and change in the university to chart a constructive way forward.

Using the decoloniality conversations and reports, this paper attempts to answer the following questions by focusing on one faculty in my university: has transformation in higher education failed? Is decolonising the university the way forward and does this replace transformation? Central to answering these questions, is unpacking concepts such as transformation and decoloniality.

**Transformation**

The Education White Paper 3 specifies that transformation "…requires that all existing practices, institutions and values are viewed anew and rethought in terms of their fitness for the new era" (1997, 1.1). It clearly indicates how serious the DOE was with transforming the sector through the following vision: "The Ministry's vision is of a transformed, democratic, non-racial and non-sexist system of higher education that will:

1) Promote equity of access and fair chances of success to all who are seeking to realise their potential through higher education, while eradicating all forms of unfair discrimination and advancing redress for past inequalities.

2) Meet, through well-planned and co-ordinated teaching, learning and research programmes, national development needs, including the high-skilled employment needs presented by a growing economy operating in a global environment.

3) Support a democratic ethos and a culture of human rights by educational programmes and practices conducive to critical discourse and creative thinking, cultural tolerance and a common commitment to a humane, non-racist and non-sexist social order.

4) Contribute to the advancement of all forms of knowledge and scholarship, and in particular address the diverse problems and demands of the local, national, southern African and African contexts, and uphold rigorous standards of academic quality (1997, 1.14).

The discourse of this DOE vision promises a deep commitment to transformation through words such as: equity; access; fair chances; eradication of ALL FORMS of unfair discrimination; redress; democratic ethos; culture of human rights; critical discourse; a humane, non-racist, non-sexist social order; advancement of all forms of knowledge and

scholarship. This vision, together with the Task Team and Framework mentioned above (in the Introduction), indicates on the policy level the political will of government for transformation in the late 90s. However, the transformation policy machinery in itself means nothing if it is neither resourced nor implemented. The Soudien Report found, for example, that "none of South Africa's universities can confidently say that they have transformed or have engaged with the challenges of transformation in an open, robust and self-critical manner" (2008, 116). The reason for this was not the absence of transformation policies at the time, but rather the absence of implementation. Thus racism, classism and sexism are still part and parcel of the institutional culture with little or no responsiveness to these challenges (ibid, 118).

According to Badat, the higher education transformation agenda as pursued by the government and universities is problematic in that its goals are "...in tension with one another" (2010, 7). These goals are social equity and redress, allowing for more students to access universities while simultaneously reducing their funding and failing to provide academic development for underprepared students. When encountering the tension between competing goals, government and university management use what Morrow (quoted in Badat 2010, 7-8) calls simplifying manoeuvres. One such manoeuvre is to ignore a problem. Another is to prioritise one goal above the other. A third option is to list goals in order of priority, so that when there is tension, one goal will be elevated to *the one* that will prevail. Based on this approach, a university could choose to focus on decolonising the curriculum instead of fees, or vice versa. Another might choose to ignore all problems, while others might elevate one issue and address this one issue only. At our university, simplifying manoeuvres have definitely been at play. The focus has been mostly on fees: writing off student debt to the detriment of the university budget and heeding the government call to not increase fees. However, the issue of decoloniality and Eurocentric epistemologies have not received attention beyond awareness raising here and there.

Both Badat (2010, 17-18) and the Soudien Report (2008, 91-94) state that Eurocentric epistemologies are still firmly entrenched in South African universities and call for intellectual spaces to be decolonised, de-racialised, de-masculinised and de-gendered. This Eurocentric epistemological and ontological coloniality permeating university campuses partially explain why students said during the #RhodesMustfall and #FMF campaigns in 2015 and 2016:

Getting a degree here [referring to UCT] is a form of mental slavery and colonization. We can no longer breathe! We want to breathe! We must exorcise the colonial ghost from the curriculum. We want relevant knowledge, we want to study African history, we want to reclaim our black history (Luckett 2016, 416).

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2016, 21) calls for "...understanding a deeper meaning of the concept of transformation of higher education in Africa [and in South Africa] in pursuit of an elusive African university..." However, this seems to be easier said than done. Soudien (2010, 19) states that universities are faced with 3 huge challenges regarding transformation: they fail to engage adequately with new students entering the institution; the staff profile and make-up is another problem and last but not least, is the curriculum. Clearly universities are struggling to transform and the national transformation policy machinery has proven to be insufficient to ensure implementation. On my campus transformation is completely invisible with no transformation office or staff; this invisibility extends to the institutional discourse as well. Thus it comes as no surprise that students fail to call for transformation, instead demanding decoloniality together with free education.

**Decolonisation/Decoloniality**

There is a need to clarify concepts in engaging with decolonisation. Colleagues for example, repeatedly ask whether we decolonise the curriculum or the university or both. While the curriculum can be viewed in a broad sense, I prefer to speak of decolonising the university or decolonising the higher education landscape. Discourse is important; how we speak of what we want to do, should be unambiguous. Decolonisation must include all aspects of the university; we cannot decolonise the curriculum while the university as institution remains untouched.

There are many definitions of decolonisation in the literature. Le Grange posits that "...first generation colonialism was the conquering of the physical spaces and bodies of the colonised, and that second generation colonialism was the colonisation of the mind through disciplines such as education, science, economics and law" (2016, 4). I concur with him decolonisation is a response to both first and second generation colonialism (ibid).

According to Luckett the key pillars of colonisation and colonialism were violence, economic exploitation, disfigurement of African communities and cultures, disguised as development and modernisation (2016, 416-417). Hoppers argue that colonialism robbed Africa from its sovereignty, its self-respect, its freedom and its power; it removed Africa from history. She frames colonialism as a symbolic castration through which everything African and indigenous was given a negative ontological and cognitive status (2001, 74). Ngugi wa Thiong'o asserts that a key element of colonialism was the deliberate disassociation of the language of conceptualisation, thinking, formal education and mental development, from the language of daily interaction in the home and in the community (1998, 103). Mbembe (2015) puts demythologising at the centre of decolonisation in application to whiteness and history. For him, the removal of the Rhodes statue from UCT is an example of how we can demythologise history. Beyond this, he argues for demythologising whiteness; decolonising buildings and public spaces; decolonising the classroom [curriculum], and decolonising systems of management.

Luckett (2016) argues for the interrogation of the status quo, to interrogate the relationship between the curriculum and power; we need to ask who decides what counts as knowledge; and who decides whose knowledge is valid. She suggests that we deconstruct knowledge as well as the historical development of disciplines and that we expand the colonial archive.

Decolonisation is not simply the absence of a colonial administration and government; Grosfuguel states that "One of the most powerful myths of the twentieth century was the notion that the elimination of colonial administrations amounted to the decolonization of the world. This led to the myth of the 'postcolonial' world. The heterogeneous and multiple global structures put in place over a period of 450 years did not evaporate with the juridical-political decolonization of the periphery over the past 50 years. We continue to live under the same 'colonial power matrix'...we moved from a period of 'global *colonialism*' to the current period of 'global c*oloniality*'...Coloniality allows us to understand the continuity of colonial forms of domination after the end of colonial administrations, produced by colonial cultures and structures in the modern/colonial capitalist/patriarchal world-system (2007, 219).

He explains that coloniality exists today in "...the cultural, political, sexual, spiritual, epistemic and economic oppression/exploitation of subordinate racialized/ethnic groups by dominant racialized/ethnic groups with or without the existence of colonial administrations" (ibid, 220-221). Ndlovu-Gatsheni concurs that "Coloniality is a global power structure that continues to reproduce Eurocentrism in society and academy long after the dismantling of the physical empire" (2016, 3-4).

It is coloniality that students refer to when they demand that we decolonise the curriculum; they are proclaiming loudly that neither South Africa nor its universities are decolonised because we are still *oppressed* and as such, *colonised* by dominant, global, racialised, capitalist, patriarchal countries from the North through coloniality (Grosfuguel 2007; Mignolo 2007).

From Latin America Escobar (2007) proposes the usefulness of a modernity/coloniality research programme to deconstruct colonialism and modernity in decolonising the university. He emphasizes lifting out subaltern voices in the process; those groups or populations that are socially, politically and geographically outside of the hegemonic power structure of the colony and the colonial homeland; those dispossessed by colonialism. He advocates using a different logic, a *diversality* that states that we are firstly EQUAL before we are DIFFERENT. Such a research programme works toward *an other way of thinking* as it lifts out silent voices to create a thinking from the underside.

Feris (2017) explains decolonial education as follows: "[t]he call for free, quality decolonial education over the last two years has laid bare systemic failures in the national higher education system". She says the students' call for decoloniality highlights the inability of academically eligible students to pay for their studies and related needs because they are poor; it questions the commodification of higher education; it challenges the pervasive Eurocentric epistemologies in our universities, as well as current funding models, among other things. I agree with Feris's identification of the salient issues of what we need to address through decoloniality and transformation.

For the purpose of my paper, I will use both decoloniality and transformation to name and respond to the challenges we face in the university. I also argue that central to decoloniality and transformation, is language and discourse.

**Discourse Analysis**

I use a discursive analysis of the Faculty conversations because it is useful to deconstruct social inequality and power relations (Jaworski and Coupland 1999; Wodak and Meyer 2001) which are central to both transformation and decoloniality. Discourse analysis is a broad concept encompassing different qualitative approaches to studying language. One approach is that of the social constructivist who defines language [discourse] as not neutral; our world, including our reality and our knowledge is constructed in and through language (*Lester et al* 2017, 3). Scott states that discourse is "a historically, socially and institutionally specific structure of statements, terms, categories and beliefs – the site where meanings are contested and power relations are determined (Quoted in Parpart and Marchand 1995, 2-3).

For the purpose of my paper, how language and discourse are used is central: how do staff and students speak about transformation and decoloniality? Whose voices are heard and whose are silent? Usually those voices that have hegemonic power emerge effortlessly in any given context, while those who are powerless struggle to have their voices heard. Thus in the Faculty and university context, for example, staff and management will find it easy to speak whereas students will find it harder because the first two groups have power over the students within the teaching and learning context. Management usually has power over the staff as well, and it could happen that staff voices are also silenced and/or marginalised by management (Participant Observation). However, as a rule staff would find it easier to express their voice than students; in the university hierarchy, the students are at the bottom, the staff is in the middle, and the management is at the top. This hierarchy can be turned on its head, as we have seen during the #FMF movement protests; thus this hierarchy is not cast in stone for all role players in this particular context.

Power relations are important according to Doty (1996) as she argues that the practice of representation is important when we speak of knowledge and truth in analysing discourse; she states that *'how'* questions are important to ask as they foreground power relations through power as productive; discourse can enable and constrain (Doty 1996, 2-6). When one uses the appropriate discourse it leads to recognition (enabling) at the same time that it limits (constraining) what is acceptable in a particular context. When the appropriate discourse becomes dominant "...it then excludes other ways of thinking and speaking by establishing an

apparently static, common sense, and universal understanding of truth" (Warburton 2016, 250). An example of how a discourse has become dominant, is the currently entrenched, hegemonic, Eurocentric epistemological and ontological discourse of coloniality, whiteness and white privilege in South African universities that permeates every sphere of our campuses, from the classroom to the boardroom, from the residences to the public spaces, including the art that we display, the statues that we allow, the photographs of those who are regarded as important to the institution (Mbembe, 2016): all of these constitute the coloniality of power and Eurocentrism (Mignolo, 2007) that create a stifling institutional culture in our universities where black students cannot *breathe*; where their voices are marginalised and silenced.

Using discourse analysis, I will look for examples in the conversation reports of what and who dominates and how this relates to decolonising the university. In addition to discourse analysis, I will use critical race theory (CRT) as my theoretical framework as race is central to transformation and decoloniality.

**Critical race theory (CRT)**

Critical race theory (CRT) is a useful theoretical construct for decoloniality and transformation because it seeks to explain how education systems and institutions not only perpetuate, but also maintain racism, Eurocentric epistemologies and racist pedagogical practices (DeCuir and Dixson 2004; Delgado Bernal 2002). It started in the legal studies discipline and scholarship in the 1970s, building on critical legal studies and radical feminism (Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995). Its aim was to counter the reversal of civil rights advances made in the 1960s in the USA (ASHE Report 2015, 3).

It rapidly spread beyond these fields to education through the seminal article of Ladson-Billings and Tate published in 1995. They argue that race as a social construct, unlike gender and class, has been insufficiently theorised to deal with oppression in education in America and their work set out to rectify this omission. The two state that gender and class alone cannot account for the difference in education experience and performance between black and white students, for example the very high dropout rates, the suspension rates, the expulsion and the failure of African-American and Latino males. Race as a social construct matters and as such, cannot be swept under the carpet when theorising about education injustice (Hiraldo 2010; DeCuir and Dixson 2004). The discourse of racism, black pain, figurative asphyxiation (we cannot breathe),

and student alienation in colonial Eurocentric universities resonated in the #FMF movement; thus CRT can serve as the vehicle to draw out students' subaltern voices by focusing on racism and counter-storytelling (also called experiential learning by McCoy et al 2015, 6), 2 of 5 central tenets of CRT. DeCuir and Dixson suggest that "Counter-storytelling is a means of exposing and critiquing normalized dialogues that perpetuate racial stereotypes. The use of counter-stories allows for the challenging of privileged discourses, the discourses of the majority, therefore serving as a means for giving voice to marginalised groups" (2004, 27). Whiteness as property, interest conversion and critique of liberalism, are the 3 remaining of 5 tenets of CRT (Hiraldo 2010, 54).

CRT challenges whiteness as a norm (McCoy 2015, 18) and those who claim that education is neutral, objective, colour blind, and based on merit (Delgado Bernal 2002, 108). Decolonising the university in the South African context challenges precisely this neutrality, objectivity, colour blindness, white privilege and so called merit emanating from a colonial university where racist coloniality of power, ontology and epistemology continue to reign supreme.

The aim of CRT is to advance deep structure, systemic change; and a key focus is social justice (DeCuir and Dixson 2004, 27). When applied to decoloniality, it means decolonising the university and the higher education landscape; not just the curriculum. It requires recognising "…colonial hegemony and forms of domination within academic institutions" (McLaughlin and Whitman 2001, 7).

Critics of CRT question its focus on race and racism at the expense of sexism and classism. Hiraldo counters this by arguing that "CRT scholars work to address the inter-sectionality of race and other social identities within their analysis…essentially CRT places race at the center of the paradigm; however this does not necessarily mean that other identities are ignored" (2010, 57).

**Methodology**

My research design is qualitative; I am interested to understand how the staff and students' views and experiences explain their world and its social practices. (Jackson 1995), and for this purpose, this approach seems best. According to Malterud,

Qualitative research methods involve the systematic collection, organisation and interpretation of textual material derived from talk or observation. It is used in the exploration of meanings of social phenomena as experienced by individuals themselves, in their natural context (2001, 483).

In my study, I draw on talk (the decoloniality conversations), on textual material (the reports of these conversations) and on my participant observation. Key to qualitative research is social context and issues concerning power relations and inequality; it can also include a transcendent perspective towards social change, according to Neuman (1997). This angle fits in well with my transformation and decoloniality focus; both are fraught with power (the binary of hegemonic power represented by management for example, versus marginalised, silenced voices of students) and inequality issues (for example racism, sexism, ableism).

My literature review examines the theoretical underpinnings of coloniality and decoloniality. I draw primarily on African scholars such as Achille Mbembe, Kathy Luckett, Odora Hoppers and Ngugi wa Thiongo', as well as Latin American authors such as Arturo Escobar, Ramon Grosfuguel and Anibal Quijano. For transformation I focus primarily on the DOE/Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) policy documents and reports, as these provide the impetus for transformation in higher education in post-apartheid South Africa and for South African scholars such as Saleem Badat and Crain Soudien.

I arranged 3 group conversations: one for the Faculty management team and two departmental ones. Four out of eight departments requested departmental conversations; time was however insufficient to arrange four. In each conversation, students were invited to participate through student structures such as class representatives and the Student Representative Council (SRC). I made field notes during the conversations; and the external facilitator wrote reports on each. An important part of my study is a discursive content analysis of the reports of the decoloniality conversations held with students and staff in the Faculty where I work to ascertain how students and staff speak about decoloniality and transformation. Discourse analysis is useful in probing texts and discursive practices to highlight social inequality; who dominates and has power and the central role of language (Jaworski and Coupland 1999;

Wodak and Meyer 2001: quoted in Joseph, 2009: 33). Through discourse analysis, I examine who speaks and when, as well as the unspoken, the silences in the conversations. What is not said, and the reason for the silence are as important as what is clearly stated. It is about the practice of representation: how do we produce knowledge and truth, (Doty 1996, 2-6) about coloniality and decoloniality? To unpack the practice of representation, Doty advocates asking *how* questions: "...*how* questions examine how meanings are produced and attached to various social subjects...thus constituting particular interpretive dispositions that create certain possibilities and preclude others" (Doty 1996, 4).

I find a letter and number coding system to distinguish between the conversation reports useful: for the group conversations I use C1 for the first conversation report, C2 for the second and C3 for the third. For the individual lecturer conversations, I use LC1, LC2, and LC3.

As a project manager and staff member of the conversations, I was a participant observer by virtue of my position and as such draw upon informal participant observation (PO) in this study. The conversations were facilitated by an external facilitator to enable all staff to fully participate. I decided and discussed with my manager before the conversations started that I wanted to write up a research article on this project. According to Babbie *et al,* in participant observation "...the researcher is simultaneously a member of the group she or he is studying and a researcher doing the study" (2006, 293). Thus a participant observer fulfils two roles, which can prove to be challenging. However, this approach is unobtrusive and thus can assist one to notice the previously unnoticed (ibid). My data collection was through unobtrusively written field notes; I did not do recordings as I thought that staff might feel uncomfortable with this method.

**Results and discussion**

My research sample group is very small. I analyse three group conversations with staff and students in one Faculty at my university and three conversations with 3 individual lecturers. In addition I mined the conversation reports as well as my participant observations notes. Therefore I cannot generalise my findings beyond my Faculty. Notwithstanding this shortcoming, this study clearly indicates that decoloniality is a complex task with many constraints. During the three group conversations, the following themes surfaced:

*Resistance*

The external facilitator reported that during C1, "The subject matter and the related challenges pertaining to decoloniality in higher education generally sparked discomfort, anxiety, fear and defensive responses, to the questions as to why little progress has been made in these areas". These areas refer to transformation and decolonisation (the term that we used during the conversation). The facilitator's discursive use of nouns such as discomfort, anxiety, fear and defensive responses indicate that the managers were struggling with the conversation content.

On the surface, managers seemed to engage (Participant Observation), but "...there was an underlying tone of resistance to the conversation and little active listening was demonstrated" (C1). They seemed to want the facilitator to tell them what to do [spoon-feeding], rather than engage with and explore decolonisation to advance their own understanding by using their agency. *How* (Doty 1996) do managers who have institutional hegemonic power choose being told what to do? *How* would they be able to arrive at a Faculty position on decoloniality (the intended outcome of the conversations) if they could not overcome their resistance?

Managers' resistance manifested not only in their attitudes, emotions and body language, but also in an unwillingness to stay for the entire duration of the workshop:

> One round of 'café conversations' instead of three was completed in the workshop. This methodology was meant to create opportunities to interrogate the concepts of decoloniality and arrive at elements/themes that the Faculty would be able to use to formulate a working definition on decoloniality. The workshop ended abruptly, with many participants indicating that they would not be able to return after lunch (C1).

*How* (Doty, 1996) was it possible that managers who agreed to a full day workshop, decided to terminate it midway by leaving after lunch? Could this be an indicator of their under preparedness to deal with transformation and decolonisation in a substantive way? And were they under prepared because they subconsciously 'resisted' engaging with the literature they had to read prior to the conversation? We paid the facilitation for a full day workshop and it is highly unusual for our management team to not stay until the end of an activity (Participant

Observation). Discursively this could be seen as a silencing act by the management team and the dean using their power to terminate the conversation midway.

The 2 Student Representative Council (SRC) members who attended the conversation, were silenced by the hegemonic power of the managers. They wanted to continue with the workshop after lunch but had no choice in the matter. More time would have provided them with a space to voice their ideas on decoloniality; it is ironic that the very staff who repeatedly had asked what the students meant with their decoloniality demand, silenced the students by shortening the conversation.

In C2 and C3, there was no noticeable resistance from the lecturers who attended. These employees were not part of the management team and seemed very open to learn about decoloniality. However, the entire staff complement was not present and thus one cannot argue that these two departments fully support the call for decoloniality. All staff were requested to attend and most were freed to attend, except for a few who had to do catch up after student protest and disruption of classes (C3). The absence of some lecturing staff was a silencing act similar to that of the management team. They silenced their voices through their absence from the conversation. Absence is also an act of resistance that people use when they do not wish to participate (PO).

The 3 individual lecturers displayed no resistance to decoloniality; they said they fully supported the call for decoloniality. L1 said he was also taught irrelevant knowledge as a student, and this had to change. He cited how they were taught to build a jet engine and yet 90% of his class would never work in the jet building industry (LC1).

L2 stated that decoloniality should focus on the language of instruction, because "I have witnessed the disadvantage certain students have simply because they are being taught and assessed in their second, third and even fourth language" (LC2). I make this crucial point about epistemic violence through the use of only English as medium of instruction in the Introduction to this paper (the Soudien Report 2008, 101). Despite a university language policy on multilingualism supporting the three official languages of the Western Cape Provincial Government, my university continues to use only English in the classroom.

L3 wanted to learn more about decoloniality herself; she indicated that students should be taught about indigenous cultures and histories, calling for an "all-inclusive reciprocal education" that draws on indigenous epistemologies and ontologies (LC3). Yet she also acknowledged that she had not seriously started reading and educating herself on decoloniality (Ibid).

All 3 stated that South African universities were Eurocentric and that the concept of a university was Eurocentric as well (LC1; LC2; LC3), and as such they fully supported the decoloniality call. However, they did not provide detail of how decoloniality could be implemented.

Once could argue that there are competing discourses in the faculty: there is a hegemonic management discourse of resistance competing with a staff and student discourse of support for decoloniality. These competing discourses pose a challenge to the implementation of a decoloniality and transformation project.

### Ignorance and Lack of Self-education

Staff ignorance of decoloniality and a reluctance to engage with the theory to educate themselves, emerged as a second theme. Pre-conversation reading material was distributed among the managers, but was not read, despite their expressed need to understand what the students mean when they demand decoloniality:

> There is often little willingness to listen, engage and grapple with the questions. Instead, a search to acquire the whole solution immediately tends to invade these spaces of conversations. The focus tended to veer toward immediate answers, rather than grappling with the complexity involved in decoloniality as well as its relatedness to transformation as a whole in higher education (C1).

The lack of self-education was evident in the lack of understanding what colonisation, colonialism and coloniality mean: One manager asked: "Was it [meaning colonisation] only bad?" (C1). Her discursive representation of coloniality having been benign and good (the discursive flip side of "was it only bad"?) for the natives in the colony indicates an ignorance of

colonial history and its brutal impact on colonised people. She fails to understand that colonisation and colonialism was a planned, calculated system of oppression and imperialism. Her discourse shows ignorance of the fact that the colonialists did not invent everything; that when countries were colonised, indigenous people had roads, albeit not tarred; that they lived in houses built in a manner that suited their environments and lifestyles. It is overlooked how much colonisers had to learn from the local indigenous peoples to in fact survive and "make" it in the colonies (Participant Observation).

In C2 and C3, most staff wanted definitions of the different concepts; they wanted to know how to decolonise their disciplines; how to change the literature they use for teaching; if decoloniality was meant to improve the system; was there a planned document on decoloniality (C2 and C3). Once again the discourse of ignorance, of spoon-feeding, failing to educate themselves by reading up on decoloniality, is presented similar to the management conversation (C1). It seems as if the staff lack the agency and the consciousness to know that they can teach themselves by simply reading up on the concepts of coloniality and decoloniality.

The responses of L1, L2 and L3 in terms of how they defined the concepts, indicate that they too have not read on decoloniality. L1 said decoloniality was about the curriculum and staff teaching irrelevant knowledge (LC1). L2 was of the opinion that decoloniality "...means that current students are more aware of this 'thing' called colonisation" (LC2), while L3 stated that students were more aware of the colonial influence on their education; she suggested that we draw on indigenous knowledge and ontology to include in the curriculum (LC3).

In C1, because managers failed to stay for the full workshop, there was no time to touch on transformation. However, many agreed during the introduction to the conversation that there was a link between decoloniality and transformation without explaining this fully. During C2 and C3, the staff did not focus on transformation; the emphasis was on decoloniality. The individual lecturers echoed what the managers said about the two concepts; they said that both transformation and decoloniality were important but did not seem to have the knowledge to explain how the concepts differed (LC1, LC2, and LC3). Unfortunately the student discourse was silent on this matter.

*Ignorance about the Embodied Lives/Reality of our Students*

Staff does not know the embodied reality of students in the Faculty. Staff ignorance about their students, emerged as a third theme. The facilitator asked the management group if they knew what a typical day in the life of our students was like and staff admitted that they did not know. There were two student leaders present in C1; there was an opportunity for the managers to ask them to fill us in on their reality. Sadly it was not done. This window of opportunity was not used; in fact it is rather unfortunate that during C1, the students succeeded only partially in voicing their experiences and realities:

> The student voices were somewhat 'drowned out' or interpreted into concepts or themes that selected [managers] felt comfortable to 'name' or describe, rather than an acceptance and validation of the student experience at [the university]. At one point a [white manager] 'spoke over' a student while the student was trying to explain something and a participant [a black manager] commented: 'that is exactly what happens in the classroom, what is happening right here'. 'As a black student', the manager said, 'we were not seen by white lecturers in the classroom and when we raised our hands, we were overlooked in favour of white students'. Even this example didn't appear to resonate or be acknowledged (C1 Report).

It is clear from this example how management unconsciously silenced the students; it is highly ironic that they are unaware of how their power over the students impact on a space that they created to *hear* the student voice. It is a very negative reflection on us as staff that we invite our students into a conversation and then abuse our power, albeit it subconsciously, to silence them when this was in fact a perfect opportunity to learn from them (PO).

*Institutional Failure to Prioritise Decoloniality*

A fourth theme was that we fail to prioritise decoloniality. One of the students pointed out that there is no time frame and no urgency with decoloniality and transformation at the university, and again, staff had to agree that this was indeed the case. There seemed to be no understanding that decoloniality should be one of the most important strategic objectives of the university (PO). There was also no attempt to suggest a follow up workshop to continue the conversation so that we could achieve the stated objective of developing a Faculty position on decoloniality and transformation.

*Participant Observations*

There was insufficient engagement among all role players in the Faculty to define beforehand what was meant by a decolonisation conversation; consequently staff was not prepared for the self-reflexivity that they had to engage in during the conversations regarding their own internalised coloniality. As a project manager who has worked in transformation in government and higher education before, I had no idea that these conversations would be so hard for our staff.

The outcome of the conversations should have been an official Faculty position on decolonisation; however, because of insufficient deliberation, preparation and a lack of reading the literature provided, staff did not understand the theory and concepts, and could not participate meaningfully in the conversations.

It was agreed that student representation was essential and that the class representatives and 2 SRC members would be invited to provide the student voices. However, in C2 only 1 student turned up. Unfortunately she left after being asked by a staff member who did not know that student representatives were invited, why she was there. Thus a lack of communication among staff silenced the student voice accidentally. In C3 there were 5 students present. Unfortunately they did not participate in the plenary; they could not find their voice. However, they indicated that they found the small group discussions useful, but with an insufficient focus on decolonisation.

Staff generally was reluctant to name racism. It did come up in the conversations (especially strongly in C2) that racism was seen as being central to decoloniality. However, staff did not respond to the opportunity to discuss this and what could be done to address it. Why the discourse was silent on racism as an embodied experience of staff and students in the university is an area for further research.All of the above themes and issues are serious constraints that the Faculty will need to address if it wants to move forward to a Faculty position on decoloniality, and if it seriously wants to respond to the students demand for decoloniality and transformation.

Much more engagement than three staff group conversations and three individual lecturer conversations  is needed to arrive at a deeper understanding of coloniality, decoloniality and transformation in the Faculty. There is an openness and willingness among most staff to engage with decoloniality and transformation issues despite the resistance evident in this first phase; this is a window of opportunity that the Faculty management team could use in future interventions.

**Conclusion**

Conducting decoloniality conversations with students and staff to raise awareness of what decoloniality entails, is a good beginning. However, conversations are insufficient if no ground work is done with staff and students to ensure an enabling environment for change. One serious mistake that we made when conceptualising the conversations, was failing to consult staff and students about how to frame the project. Had we done this, it would have prepared staff for what to expect, and hopefully would have resulted in less resistance. Story telling as proposed by CRT would have been a good instrument to use: we could have asked staff and students to write up their experiences of the 2015 and 2016 #FMF protests as stories and these could have been shared by participants during the conversations as a point of departure.


The research findings indicate that transformation policies and frameworks are completely invisible in our Faculty (and by implication the university) and its discourse, despite the fact that our university had a transformation office with a director a few years ago. However, he focused mostly on employment equity. This explains to a certain extent why staff had no point of reference from which to talk about decoloniality; understanding transformation imperatives in higher education assists in framing and understanding decoloniality. This does not imply that transformation has failed and has become irrelevant and that it should be replaced by decoloniality. The key issues in transformation and decoloniality overlap and are sometimes the same. Thus one could argue that there is a place for both; transformation and decoloniality can be integrated in working for change in the university landscape.

One serious challenge emerging from the study is that the current staff are under prepared and unable to lead a transformation and decoloniality project as they have been educated by a colonial system; their internalised coloniality of being manifested clearly during the conversations. Lorde (1984) argues that one cannot dismantle the master's house with the master's tools.  This research is too limited in its scope to indicate if current Faculty staff can be

trained to unlearn coloniality, how long it will take and whether they would be in a position to lead change, post training. It might very well be necessary to start a decoloniality project with a new and younger cohort of staff who has had first-hand experience of the #FMF movement, and who embraces decoloniality and transformation of the university as a project. Further research is required to tease out these issues, as well as the recommendations below, to see if they could be successful in transforming and decolonialising the university.

**Recommendations**

To transcend coloniality, the current Eurocentric epistemology and ontology in our Faculty and to start a transformation and decoloniality project, the following should be put in place:

As a point of departure for the decoloniality and transformation project, counter-story telling in all Faculties by staff and students as proposed by CRT could be used to launch the project;

the counter-story telling could use staff and students' strongest (or first) language, thus encouraging the use of indigenous languages in an academic context while also boosting multilingualism;

an institutional multilingualism project to investigate how to start using all three provincial official languages (isiXhosa, Afrikaans and English) in the university as mediums of instruction;

an opposition scholarship such as CRT based on a non-Eurocentric epistemology, embracing thinking from below, centering anti-racism, needs to be developed and implemented by all faculties; decolonialised research methodology as proposed by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013), should be central to the decoloniality and transformation project;the mandatory inclusion of indigenous and African knowledges into the curriculum; an intellectual activism to champion initiatives for profound change in the deep structure of the university;

a representative, institutional task team that reports to the Vice Chancellor to deal with decoloniality and transformation, and the work of the task team should be one of the strategic objectives of the university (Soudien 2008, 21).


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