

Decolonising Africa's Higher Education Against Violence and Social Injustices

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ABSTRACT

This article explores ways of decolonising higher education for social justice to prevail. The study begins with a description of, decoloniality, as a framework informing higher education systems in Africa. Challenges confronted by African governments as they endeavour to decolonise ingrained systems are, discussed in the paper. The study employed a descriptive research design informed by qualitative research methodologies to create and come up with a comprehensive and accurate representation of, decoloniality in Africa's higher education. The study is, guided by the assumption that almost all Southern African States have similar challenges of social injustices in Education. The findings of the research are that, higher education in Africa is fraught with challenges emanating from inequalities, access equity and quality education. The poor who cannot afford affluent schools and universities remain disenfranchised while the rich are able to send their children to expensive universities with adequate teaching and learning resources. If principles of justice and freedom were, observed as tenets of, decoloniality in Africa's universities, the racial and ethnic conflicts that characterised the universities could not have taken place. The #RhodesmustFall of 2015 by the students is one such example of the violent underlying demand of freedom from the students largely motivated by colonial legacies in education. Among the demands by the students was, "the decolonisation of the curriculum, and socially just pedagogies and equity of access" (Postma, 2019, p. 7). Decoloniality as a democratic philosophy appears to be, weakened in higher education by alarming incidences of violence, corruption and lack of resources.

Key Words: Decoloniality, Education, Curriculum, Justice, Social inequalities.

INTRODUCTION

Education in Africa is, confronted with a myriad of challenges and obstacles that hinder efforts at achieving a just education for the continent. There are several barriers to attaining, a just education and these are the focus of discussion for this paper. One such challenge is the need to transform education to enable it to be a vehicle of peace and justice. In order to achieve such transformative education in Africa, there is need to decolonise the education systems in the continent. Decolonization of education is far from being a political rhetoric alone but is a necessary educational overhaul of the curriculum that should result in reimagining, repurposing and reconstructing the existing epistemologies. Decolonised education should aid in the correcting the state of affairs. As an educational framework, decoloniality ascertains that the presence of coloniality is rampant in most states that went through colonisation and that it is felt everywhere. Decoloniality is defined by Maldonado-Torres (2007) as the dismantling of relationships of power and conceptions of knowledge that foment the reproduction of racial, gender, and geopolitical hierarchies that came into being or found new and more powerful forms of expression in the modern but colonial world. Through decolonised higher education, Africa should mark-out its own space in the global competition and constant tensions.

The process of transforming the education system is an endeavour of attaining positive social and global justice in the world more so the developing nations such as Zimbabwe. This paper seeks to clarify the decolonisation

of the higher education system in Zimbabwe against violence and social injustices. The paper is motivated by rampant incidents of violence around the country. The recent resurgence of bullying and violence in schools spilling outside the school boundaries to even rivalry between schools is a cause of concern in the nation and the world over particularly so in Africa. This has motivated the decolonisation wave across the various sectors of life with education taking centre stage as it is the main mode of instruction shaping the generations from one generation to another. Albert Bandura the founder of the Social Learning Theory premised that the nexus of nature and nurture is key in shaping character of a person, which is a result of perceptions built by the interaction of nature and nurture. It is important to note that coloniality never ends but continues to configure, mutate, to reconstruct its matrices of power and beginning to name that is extremely complex. Walsh (2021) also acknowledges the need to rethink the colonial matrix of power that exists in universities and begin to create other ways of learning, of knowing, of thinking, of sensing, of being, of doing that are interconnected.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework underpinning this study is decoloniality theory, which is dismantling the colonial matrixes of power. According to Gatsheni-Ndlovu (2018) it has three key units which are, coloniality of being, coloniality of knowledge and the coloniality of power. The key issue in these three units is the epistemic deprivation that originates from social classifications of people into hierarchies which results in pyramids where the top is the rich and political affluent people. They exclude political aspirants from power. This is colonial legacy, that almost all African states inherited. In this regard, Gatsheni-Ndlovu (2018) calls for the decolonization of educational curriculums, and further suggested that in Africa, 'epistemic freedom' is required, which is the right to think, theorize, interpret the world, develop own methodologies, and write from where one is located and unencumbered by Eurocentrism. He calls for cognitive justice, contextual production of knowledge, and 'moving the center' from Europe to multiple centers, (Gatsheni-Ndlovu, 2018: 3).

It is important also to note that the decoloniality and decolonisation of higher education is context specific and cannot be, applied in the same way across different sectors and societies of the world. According to Grosfoguel (2007), decolonial thought had its genesis in the establishment of modernity and coloniality itself, as a natural reaction to the colonial imposition. Hence, it had multiple origins in the multiple processes at various points of colonization among which the Americas, Asia, and Africa can be, found (Grosfoguel, 2007). In the Americas, it was born from the indigenous and afro-Caribbean thoughts while in Asia and Africa was a contraposition to the consequences of the British and French empires (Grosfoguel, 2007). It should also be, noted that the concept is a revolutionary, which the powers be, are also using it to reform and have new forms of colonialism. This was seen in the fight of independence where the Africans were invited in the lower echelons of the United Nations which was more of an invitation without the veto power. Walsh and Mignolo's book on decoloniality states some important ontological differences between 'decolonisation' and 'decoloniality'. While decolonisation is linked to Anglo-Saxon postcolonial theory and refers to nation-state formation, decoloniality is linked to South American decolonial theory and refers to the need to free people from the colonial matrix of power that holds on the three layers of coloniality: power, knowledge and being. Decoloniality focuses on the epistemic reconstruction while decolonisation focuses on the state development. Mignolo et al (2018), state that, 'an effective decolonization of life will be possible only through hermeneutic liberation, but epistemic reconstruction requires altering the terms, and not only the content, of the conversation.' According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 'a contemporary African Renaissance and fight to complete an incomplete decolonisation/decoloniality. The movement's difficulties in achieving a common understanding of decolonisation practices, however, sheds light on the multiple layers of reflections and debates regarding the complexity of the building of decolonial projects.' The epistemic practice of decolonial thought can be traced to the colonial period for example in the Hispanic viceroyalties with Waman Poma de Ayala's and Otabbah Cugoano's works. These are, "... decolonial political treaties that due to the coloniality of knowledge, did not come to share the discussion table with the hegemonic political theory of Machiavelli, Hobbes, or Locke" (Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 28). Decolonization is typically viewed as something from the past, classified as anachronic and as a tool for political strategies, however, from this perspective, it is a concept and action that reaffirms globalization (Lara, 2015). Further, Mignolo and Walsh argued that, Decoloniality denotes ways of thinking, knowing, being and doing [which imply] the recognition and undoing of the hierarchical structures of race, gender, heteropatriarchy and class that continue to control life, knowledge, spirituality and thought, structures that are clearly intertwined with and constitutive of global capitalism and Western modernity. (2018, p. 17). Walsh Panel discussion on April 26, 2021 says, 'it is against

colonisation. Is rooted in a living memory and a living reality, a lived reality and then the recognition and then the refusal and the continuing configurations and mutations of colonial power’.

The decolonisation of, higher education speaks to the fact that decoloniality seeks to “open up, and advance radically distinct perspectives that displace Western rationality as the only framework and possibility of existence, analysis and growth embracing the South rationality by shifting the coloniality of power matrix creating an environment that will enable all citizens to be able to shape their existence in a free non manipulative society that is free of malice, exploitation and oppression. For Goldin & Suransky (2024), most universities are orientated around western knowledge regimes that mute many other ways of knowing and ordering the world. Significant inroads have been made when writing on decolonising education but less is known about the effects of the colonisation of state institutions and the disturbances, interferences, and disruptions to organising, sharing, and creating knowledge in public spheres outside of these same universities. Mills (1997:1, 3) has observed “white supremacy” to be “the unnamed political system that has made the modern world what it is today,” where “racism is itself a political system, a particular power structure of informal or informal rule, socioeconomic privilege, and norms for the differential distribution of material wealth and opportunities, benefits and burdens, rights and duties.” The contract that governs the world is not the social contract of the bond of “we the people” but a racial contract. The above observation by Mills (1997) shows the enduring longstanding effects of colonisation even after military and political decolonisation.

Research method

This research employed a descriptive research method to create and come up with a comprehensive and accurate representation of decoloniality in Zimbabwe’s higher education. Descriptive research is usually defined as a type of quantitative research, though qualitative research can also be used for descriptive purposes. This assisted the researchers by providing a thorough description of the population or phenomenon, capturing relevant attributes and features of decolonization of education and democratic citizenship education. Additionally, the issue of pattern identification enabled the researchers to identify trends and patterns that emerge within the decolonial philosophy and democratic education, which then, contributed to deeper insights on the equality of opportunities in education. We employed observations, case studies, and interviews in data collection. These methods helped us to identify trends in Southern African universities. This showed that descriptive research is a valuable methodology that enhances understanding of complex issues by providing detailed insights into specific subjects and on this instance was concept of decoloniality and democratic social justice.

Global violence pedagogy

Violence is common the world over due to clash of civilisations which has been emancipated as way of breaking away from the announced western civilisation which was prevalent during the colonial era. The #RhodesmustFall of 2015 by the students is just the tip of an iceberg of the violent underlying currency of freedom for the masses which has largely been pushed by mis-governance by the African leaders who inherited the Western system of governance. Among the demands by the students was, “the decolonisation of the curriculum, and socially just pedagogies and equity of access” (Postma, 2019, p. 7). The socially just pedagogies and equity of access speaks directly to the governance structure which is viewed from the Western lens and colonial in nature. Chiramba and Motala (2023:516) say, “We use the theory of decoloniality as a lens to explore how students may be liberated from material and economic poverty, irrelevant knowledge and ways of disseminating knowledge that do not allow them to flourish.” Symbolic transformation is attributed to pushing violence in the world and thus the need for decoloniality in totality where tangible results are realised by those in the lower socio-economic ladder which has not been so for the past 4 decades after independence from colonial rule. The concept of symbolic transformation includes policies, strategies, renaming roads and lecture halls and recruiting black staff and Vice Chancellors among other actions which show the observable face of transformation (Maringe & Chiramba, 2021). The above observation speaks even to the governance of most third world countries where independence just pronounced a parliament managed by the natives and a President or Prime Minister who is native but with no real power and just following on the footsteps of the colonisers in a way being vehicles of the imperialists and this has seen the ruffled feathers that have been aroused by the recent shift in the Sahel region where Burkina Faso is leading the fight for freedom from structural epistemologies that have existed since the collapse of colonisation with no tangible results on the lives of the Sahelians and Africans

at large. In support of this Kotter (2009) argues that the reason why transformation always fails is that it only goes as far as, for example, formulating new policies yet true transformation is expected to go beyond that to implement the policies and alter the effectiveness of systems and processes. Malema in June 23, 2019 in his lecture he argued that decolonisation of education does not mean that people should be taught in their native language but the values placed at viewing the English as the best race to be emulated by the Natives and Africans. In his conclusion he mentioned that Blacks should love themselves and that begins in the mind, and as such it will be easy for blacks to love fellow blacks. So everything that is evolving in the education system should be accommodative of the different races and be relevant to the race in question giving value at equal level to every race. Zimbabwe and Namibia have already modelled their education systems along the 1999 recommendations of the Nziramasanga Commission which advocates education for coexistence, an education that is informed by values of Ubuntu.

Despite the efforts of advancement in the decolonisation agenda universities in Zimbabwe, several challenges and limitations persist in achieving a truly decolonised education system. A significant hurdle is the prevalence of a Eurocentric curriculum, which heavily favours western epistemologies and perspectives while neglecting and marginalising indigenous knowledge systems, histories, and cultures. One can reflect on how language barriers significantly challenge decolonisation efforts in Zimbabwe. Although predominantly a second language to the majority, English still dominates as the primary language of instruction at all levels of learning. English being the official language of instruction at secondary and tertiary level possess challenges to the majority of students who learn it as a second language and therefore cannot articulate concepts well when enrolled at university because English is not a language of their wider community. Binaries of exclusion are visible when English is used as a pre requisite for either enrolment of learners into institutions of higher learning or as a requirement for employment to public institutions (Zembere 2021) Zembere further argues that such access is embodied by possession of English proficiency, which is scarcely the mother tongue of or the lingua franca for the rural communities in which the students develop; yet, it is the sole language of instruction, research and academic discourse in the university. In the light of such challenges, Zembere (2021) recommends that there must be renewed investment into transforming the social and school environment of rural school learners. The bureaucratic requirements for admission into higher education, such as especially higher fees for science programmes, must be reviewed so that they should cease to function as tools for filtering out rural-based students. This exclusion and undervaluation of African languages hampers meaningful inclusion and recognition of indigenous knowledge and scholarship. Unfortunately, knowledge production and dissemination systems in African higher education are primarily influenced by western standards and methodologies, presenting another obstacle. As a result, African ways of knowing and knowledge creation, rooted in oral traditions, experiential learning, and community practices, often receive limited value and recognition. This perpetuates unequal power dynamics between western epistemologies and African knowledge systems.

Mutongoza et al (2023: 102) further observed that, 'lack of sufficient funding and resources for decolonisation initiatives poses a significant limitation because meaningful transformation requires financial investment in research, curriculum development, training, and support for scholars and students engaged in decolonisation work. Insufficient financial resources can impede the implementation of comprehensive and sustainable changes. The broader socio-political context, including historical inequalities, socio-economic disparities, and power dynamics, also challenges decolonisation in higher education. The lack of resources allowed the Blacks to swallow this 'garbage' as they needed resources to equip the schools as most of these funds on child rights came along with equipping schools and also affording pupils an opportunity to eat at school. The recipe has failed in the West and they dumped it to Africa. Zimbabwe has recently been in the news with at least 4 losses of children at school due to largely indiscipline as the homes are no longer able to scold children nor the schools as well after passing on of the no corporal punishment to school children act, so as to please the child rights watchers and get more funding to support the schools. Muronga et al, (2023), argue that, "When marginalised students are denied the opportunity to be educated in a way that honours their cultural heritage and histories, it leads to a deep sense of alienation, low self-esteem, and a bastardisation of their identities." A child who has low self-esteem as alluded to by Malema in his 2019 lecture is prone to be violent and that person cannot love him/herself which is a key element of human existence. Kotze (2018, p. 113) summarised what was said to characterise exclusion in the 2015/2016 student protests.

South African universities were cast as untransformed, crippled by institutionalised racism and curricula unsuitable for an African context and advancing a political project of African knowledge. Instead of facilitating social change and transformation, the claim is that South African universities continue to oppress the African through prioritising European and Western literature and Euro-centric views, and that this is evident in whose voices find expression in curricula and in the classroom. They favour European, American, and Anglo-Saxon authors and thinkers in philosophy and English classes as well as celebrating the advances in science by Westerners while glossing over African achievements.

The exclusion of the African child in the education system allows the child to feel out of place hence the best way to be heard is through violence as evidenced by the #RhodemuFall and also the #Blacklivesmatter mantras which had a series of violence acts in South Africa and United States of America respectively. Maringe and Chiramba (2021) view epistemological access as a “triadic concept comprising cognitive access, access to relevant knowledge of the greatest worth and the opportunity to equitably reap the benefits of an education. What they note as a gap in the literature is that, whilst the cognitive and equitable benefits dimensions have been extensively explored, we know very little about the notion of access to knowledge of the greatest worth.”

Citizen pedagogy

“The colonial experience reduced education to a tool of communication between the coloniser and the colonised. Emphasis on the individual and de-emphasis on community and culture resulted in ideological dissonance. Despite post-independence attempts to reverse this, vestiges of post-coloniality in contemporary education remain and perpetuate a myth of inferiority of indigenous knowledge and methods,” (Adebisi 2016). The above observation summarises the confusion that colonialism brought to the social system of the natives and ravaged it and left the natives viewing themselves as second class citizens against the whites and as such the epistemology has continued despite the unilateral declaration of end to slavery and colonial power which saw the independence declarations of the various native states across the world. In tandem Rodney (1972) argued that “The colonial relationship functioned through acculturation mechanisms such as ‘assimilation’ and ‘association’, predicated on presumed African inferiority; these mechanisms were justified by treaties that disempowered and fervent evangelising, as well as arguments that alluded to both imperial profit-making and humanitarian munificence.” It would be prudent at this point to understand the concept of citizen pedagogy to the decoloniality of higher education. According to Reyes (2019), ‘Pedagogy of and towards decoloniality works to get at the roots of why things are the way they are, as well as works toward transformative possibilities that center the experiences, voices, and authority of historically minoritized peoples.’ The minoritisation of peoples is social injustice which results in the withdrawal of citizenship of a community. Drawing from the case study of Zimbabwe in the years from 2000-2008, when minorities from Malawi and Zambia had their citizenship rights “constitutionally” withdrawn on the pretext that they were supporting the opposition political parties in Zimbabwe. This explains that in Zimbabwe, citizenship narrowed to partisan dictates. This is unjust and socially exclusionary. Our explanation of the anti-democratic patterns in Zimbabwe serves to highlight how the system prevented democratic participation. This is an indication that higher education in Zimbabwe has failed its transformational agenda because of the deep seated undemocratic practices in the country. Failure to democratise higher education ultimately results in the failure to decolonise the education system. This view is supported by Steyn’s (2000) argument that it is difficult to achieve democracy in a state that is characterised by gross human violation of human rights, distinct inequalities and social injustices. Scheff (1990), Seligman (1997, 2000) and Goldin (2003) all recognised the impact of emotions in situations that are characterised by exclusion, unevenness, and inequality. The absence of democratic values like tolerance, empathy, respect for others, openness and recognition of human dignity could have negative effects on social transformation and democratic education.

This shows how violence can be pushed because of established systems that are heavily measured against the West and not the African systems where education is not about having a school certificate but learning from others within the community and embracing Ubuntu culture. This is the same violence that we witnessed on women and men relations where the traditional customs were overridden by the west which is deemed to be more acceptable and the African culture primitive especially the proper African polygamy culture and the West ones of small houses ‘side chicks’ which has brought much misery to the marriage sphere. In tandem Fomunyan, (2019), argues that, ‘Inclusivity is also about creating spaces for other alternative indigenous knowledge of the marginalised and the voiceless groups by ensuring that they co-exist with other knowledge without being

squeezed to fit into the structure of the dominating European and Western knowledge canons'. It is further argued that, 'the modes of assessment and feedback and research protocols need to be overhauled so that they respond directly and are accountable to community needs rather than academic standards, hierarchies, and career ambitions (Mantz, 2021)'. In this vein Ruth will not have been violated her citizen rights and exposed to the social injustice that she suffered from had the involved institute taken an understanding of the African context of education. Holmes & McKenzie (2019) reminded us that when power relations manifest themselves within groups, they affect our feelings and we struggle to express what the "proper" emotion is that we are feeling'. This was the case with Ruth as she tried to explain how she felt after the disappointment which she suffered from in an independent South Africa that still used the colonised epistemology of assessing and evaluating competent employees for a salary scale which was oblivion of the African indigenous knowledge system in spite of factual evidence. This was tantamount to reinvention of slavery where the West benefitted from free labour from Africa, and other native nations. Feelings of overwhelming shame, for instance, can create chaos and what Seligman (2000) called an experience of "cosmic disruption" (2000, p. 83). We all have a human need to be appreciated for our effort. This will not stop us from doing my best [but] I just hope this hiccup does not happen again because it is really depressing and it is demotivating, and I feel really bad. I don't know what the matter is with me that the university doesn't like what I can give maybe they think I can't give anything. (Ruth, personal communication, May 2023).

CONCLUSION

Decoloniality calls for a critical study of all perspectives as legitimate equal objects of knowledge without undue privileging and prejudicing some perspectives. Viewing decoloniality as a rebel is not ideal and it is that kind of superiority mind that the Western powers have over developing nations that has kept the world in conflicts. Until such time when humanity will value each other as equals and desist from the 'animal farm' notion that some animals are more equal than others, the world will continue to be confronted with challenges. It is prudent that the education system must prepare people to knowing their history and understanding the world in their own way. This is possible if education is modelled along democratic citizenship education principles of equity, quality and equal access

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