

Chapter 13

Indigenising the University Curriculum in Southern Africa

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ABSTRACT

The academic landscape in higher education institutions (universities) in southern Africa (countries in SADC)) remains highly influenced by western epistemologies. This is despite the fact that these academic institutions are situated in independent states. The research and teaching activities in universities are entrenched within western theories and knowledge disciplines that are presented as neutral, universal and singular. The implication is that while we celebrate political independence we are still entrapped in continuing coloniality. This points to a need for reframing the curriculum to prioritise the interests of Africans. This chapter explores possible factors that contribute to the continued alienation of indigenous knowledges in southern African universities. It argues that in order to achieve the indigenisation of universities in Africa there is a need for a decolonial process to subvert and decentre western epistemologies by offering African Indigenous epistemologies and African-centred standpoints as alternatives in research and teaching processes in the academy.

INTRODUCTION

African indigenous communities (including indigenous ethnic minorities) comprise the majority of people in southern Africa compared to the colonial settler communities (ACHPR & IWGIA, 2006; Shava 2008). Their knowledge systems, which have emerged from long-term processes of interaction with their lived environment, provide the cultural capital for their livelihood sustenance. These indigenous knowledges are embodied in indigenous peoples' practices and embedded their culture, and are also transmitted through their local/ indigenous languages (Shava, 2013). However, despite being in the post-independent era in southern Africa, the knowledge of indigenous peoples still remains excluded,

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marginalised and subjugated in the formal education arena by continuing coloniality of introduced western knowledge systems that uninterrogatedly claim mastery in every imagined discipline. This is more evident in university contexts where western epistemologies, research approaches and knowledge generation processes still continue to dominate.

This chapter emerges from the authors' concerns, as indigenous scholars, at the continued exclusion and marginalisation of African indigenous knowledges, research approaches and practical applications in mainstream education and research processes in university contexts in colonially independent southern Africa (the Southern Africa Development Community) as well as the rest of the continent. This is particularly so because universities play a pivotal role in informing society through theory and knowledge generating research processes as well as transfer of skills, values, ideas and traditions through education and training. The chapter aims to map out and critique the existing colonial/western/Euro-American knowledge landscape in southern African universities and to propose ways of enhancing the representation of indigenous knowledge in order to transform/decolonise the existing academic landscape and usher forth possibilities for an inclusive, plural knowledge landscape in the academy (university teaching, learning and research landscape).

MAIN FOCUS OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter first explores the resilient and hegemonic colonising epistemologies and their related western theoretical perspectives with emphasis on their effects on knowledge representation and generation in the southern African university landscape. It calls attention to structures, systems and processes that perpetuate western colonial epistemologies while subjugating, marginalising and excluding the indigenous knowledge of local communities in southern Africa. It then explores the coloniality of higher education disciplines. Finally, the chapter suggests the necessary role of indigenous knowledges in decolonising the university academic (teaching and research) landscape and proposes the role of indigenous scholars as necessary decolonial agents in the academy.

RESILIENT AND HEGEMONIC COLONIAL EPISTEMOLOGIES

Nyamnjoh (2012) correctly contends that African education is a victim of a resilient colonial and colonising epistemology. This is more evident in African higher education with its dependence on western pedagogic approaches and theoretical perspectives on the basis of the rhetoric that universities need to be competitive internationally (Nyamnjoh, 2004; 2012). However, such a stance perpetuates the perception that African indigenous knowledges are inferior and invalid in the academy, let alone in all sectors of society, thereby contributing to the continuing epistemicide of indigenous knowledges.

Commenting on the impact of western derived education systems, Hoppers (2001:74) contends that:

Curriculum experts and teachers in schools around the African continent, drilled in the insulting premise that, prudent subsistence and absence of visible signs of material consumption is equal to poverty, and that being illiterate in the Western alphabet is equal to being a complete ignorant, routinely take young recruits into the school as if their minds were a tabula rasa. Years of inadequate and eschewed training, systematic and indiscriminate cultural 'detoxification' based on the understanding that the transition

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