

# Higher Education for Good

Teaching and Learning Futures



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# 5. Why decolonising “knowledge” matters: Deliberations for educators on that made fragile

*Dina Zoe Belluigi*

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Reimagining teaching, learning, belonging, and curricula design are all very important. However, when their relation to knowledges and the interests such knowledge formations serve is marginalised from the re-membering required of such imagination, it is deeply problematic. This chapter grapples with the question of why decolonising “knowledge” matters for teaching and learning. It shares a selection of important considerations at this point in time. It draws inter-textually to deliberate about (a) why “knowledge” (singular) should be decolonised within the modern western-oriented university; (b) why the decolonisation of knowledges matters, with consideration of their relation to the formations of the self, political, social, and ecological in education; and (c) what the potential act(s) of decolonising knowledges through education holds for engendering critical and generative roles which educators should occupy. As a way into this deliberation, the chapter begins with observations of the phenomenon of what seems like either educators’ avoidance, ignorance, or passing-the-buck on the question of the transformation of knowledges in the university in post-colonial contexts.

## Introduction

Central to the authority and functions of the university are the politics of knowledge recognition, legitimation, production, and reproduction. The calls to decolonise “knowledge” and to decolonise the curriculum

remind us that education should not be passive dissemination of “knowledge”. Educators for the common good have a duty to rise to this challenge. Thus, while this chapter’s focus is on why decolonising “knowledge” matters for those operating at the micro-curriculum, the acts of decolonising necessitate extending beyond the safe spaces of teaching and learning, and beyond the university if there is indeed a commitment to serving the global common good.

The chapter is written by an educator and a researcher of higher education. The process of composing this text was one where I thought about, and for, educators’ agency in relation to the larger conditions of possibility for the decolonisation of “knowledge”. While I too have engaged in related struggles within a university in the Global North, the layers of narration in this text are underpinned by an Afropolitan orientation informed by critical personal, professional, and academic deliberations as a person who is South Africa-born and educated.

A central thematic, around which the chapter is shaped, is ethico-political responsibility. Due to the scope and focus of this chapter, this is primarily concerned with educators’ agency. This critical dialogue about the conditions of possibility is not to be confused with a transference of blame or of deficit onto educator communities who are always already overburdened and often decapacitated. Rather, threaded throughout are concerns about conditions at the meso- and macro- level; and critiques about *that* and *those* which constrain such agency, and constrain educators’ imaginaries of their agency and practices of collective resistance to such constraints. These critical discursive deliberations are informed by the sources I include in this chapter — observations and realisations from my research and learning from the scholarship of others. The resultant chapter is thus an intertextual offering to this anthology, made humbly as an homage to the works of the many educators it references, from whose contributions I believe there is much value for learning, critique, and, in turn, space for further contributions by educators.

## Relinquishing of transformative agency when related to “knowledge” within teaching and learning

I begin with observations from recent research projects which asked questions about how academics situate and construct the locus of their agency to contribute to the transformation of the university. During interviews, my collaborators and I noticed that most participants would often avoid discussing the meso and macro levels of higher education, even when prompted (Belluigi et al., 2020; Dhawan et al., 2021). Sociocultural considerations of collegial relations, academic development, governance and management of institutions, research-teaching dynamics, and issues of “knowledge” were rarely included. Where the participants of our studies demonstrated their capacity to articulate, reflect, and be critical about their agency to affect change, was at the level of micro-curriculum, that is, about the teaching-learning-assessment-methods-topics-relations within the classes that they taught. While I do not refute the importance of initiatives, documentation, and scholarship to do with the micro-curriculum, it takes joined-up approaches to academic practice and academic structures to effect substantive change across the ecologies of higher education.

Questions of agency, transformation, and the university are important because academic freedom is premised on academics’ engagement in matters related to the professional freedoms of education, research, governance (Hoffmann & Kinzelbach, 2018), socially-engaged academic freedom (Zavale & Langa, 2018), and the human rights of freedom of expression (International Labour Organisation and UNESCO, 2008). However, context plays a role in the conditioning of agents. The participants of the research projects to which I refer above were situated in South Africa and India. These are two contexts with undeniable academic unfreedoms in their histories, and where the majority of their populations were excluded from the publics of the so-called public good(s). Institutional interventions and policies were created in response to democratic constitutional obligations to address such legacies. Thus, one might expect these changes in conditions to have engendered critical consciousness of academics’ transformative agency; and that, due to such conditions, current academics would situate the locus of their agency in a number of spaces across the ecology of the

university. One might hope that this would be particularly enabling for academics from social groups which were structurally recognised as historically unprivileged, marginalised, or excluded. However, this is not what was observed. Participants almost exclusively constructed the micro-curriculum as the primary legitimated arena for them to exhibit their creativity, benevolence, and occasionally vulnerability. For those minoritised, such as Black academics in “historically white institutions” in South Africa and Adivasi academics in India, the micro-curriculum offered a retreat from the fractious dynamics of the other spaces of the university where many continued to face discrimination and misrecognition. Many expressed frustration that their transformative agency was limited to literally “embodying” compliance to employment affirmative action quotas. The majority of all the participants who were interviewed seemed to take the relinquishing of their responsibility for granted — passively entrusted to researchers, learned societies, and publishers validated by established traditions of the global institution. Of concern is that such resignation cut across both those critical and those uncritical of global inequalities in universities and in terms of knowledge production.

This is a paradox for praxis. On the one hand, most of the educators interviewed were challenging of ivory tower constructions of the (campus and virtual) classroom as a white cube where the outside world is othered. Some of these acted on their commitment to conscientise their students about aspects of the political, historical, ethical, economic, cultural, social relations, oppressions, and injustices of their societies and global dynamics. They often facilitated their students’ actions for change when facing outside of the university. On the other hand, for various reasons, they omitted utilising their academic agency to affect the ecology of higher education, and from their students’ critical consciousness. In such ways, they reproduced the dulling of active academic citizenry.

There may be many reasons for, justifications of, and influences on such avoidance of the agency to engage with structural issues — be they ignorance, collusion, self-preservation et cetera. Much academic “development” reinforces artificial distinctions between the questioning of content and form, by focusing on the professionalisation and quality assurance of teaching, assessment and (micro)curriculum design. This

may be the result of the segregations between academics’ development for teaching as distinct from that for research. However, knowledges move and morph within, and well beyond, the boundaries of the classroom. As alluded to above, “knowledge” was rarely identified by participants as a consideration for *transformation*, and even less rarely discussed with confidence when discussing their transformative agency. Perhaps the stay-in-your-lane enculturation dynamics enforced by current neoliberal employment practices had imposed borderlines on the increasingly sessional, precarious, teaching-only educator’s practice and imaginaries. Such meso-level dynamics school academics through “institutional curriculum” (Lange & Parker, 2019) norms and values, and/ or through disciplinary curricula.

Conditions such as these have impoverished constructions of academic freedom and minimised its relation to the longer struggles for freedom from such systems as colonisation, patriarchy, and local and global hegemonies (Sall, 1997). The tasking and inspiring of educators to enact their transformative leadership, to challenge inappropriate uses of power and work with collectives, including students, against structural injustices has been informed by the contestations of various proponents and traditions across time. Social movements often begin well beyond the academy, their lenses and understandings have infused various critical traditions within it, including from curriculum theory, feminisms, queer theory, post-colonialisms, and post-modernisms. This chapter is situated within the current renewal of decolonisation, and grapples particularly with *why* the decolonisation of “knowledge” matters for teaching and learning for the common good.

## Why “knowledge”?

Knowledge stratifications are commonplace within contemporary higher education. These stratifications are explicitly and implicitly practiced by those who teach, albeit with some challenge exerted by educators and scholars, as I discuss in this section. For instance, it is not uncommon that inherited value judgments about *which* knowledges matter become most visibly imposed within summative assessment regimes. Examples include penalising students for the use of first person writing or for using “non-academic” qualifiers as external referends such as work

experience.<sup>1</sup> Such practices are in part informed by the devaluing of *a posteriori* knowledges gained from experience, and privileging of *a priori* “knowledge” independent of experience. The dominant construction of the former in the modern, western-oriented university is that it is limited because it is gained subjectively and is situated in context. The latter is lauded as universal and objective. This Kantian (2007) distinction informed the denigration of value ascribed to knowledges gained from the informal education of social institutions (family, religion, group identities such as through racialisation, genderisation, minoritisation etc), from the non-human (including the so-called natural world and spiritual realms), and from individual life experience.

Against these is the elevation of knowledges gained through so-called “disinterested” enquiry undertaken for a good greater than one grouping (i.e. a public good) legitimised through academic communities (peer review, publication, etc.). That “knowledge” is then explicitly reproduced (and taught) by those given authority (i.e. teachers) through the formal micro-curriculum. Another dominantly recognised distinction of knowledges is that of the influential ancient Greek thinkers, such as Aristotle (2004), who constructed “knowledge” in terms of its appropriateness for its purpose (or “ends”/ *telos*), creating distinctions between enquiry as theoretical (for its own sake), productive (instrumental towards making something, involving planning, functional creativity and skills or mastery), and practical (a moral disposition or wisdom for judgement-making in ethical and political life that involves a relation between the two dimensions of theory and practice). The latter has informed much debate about how “knowledge” is acquired, learnt, honed et cetera.

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1 Indeed, the academic language used in this paper parallels these constructs. For the most part in this text, I have chosen not to use first person pronouns and foreground explicit discussions of how my biography and experience (as a person and as a practitioner) has come to bare on the knowledges I bring to what, to my mind, is a mostly inter-textual conceptual piece. The absence of a positionality statement related to my sociodemographics will probably be taken as grounds for critique, as has become somewhat of a convention at this point in time (Abu Moghli & Kadiwal, 2021; Macfarlane, 2021; Secules et al., 2021). I made this decision because I felt it would overshadow the argument, which is that one’s authorial choices should be informed and active, and that educators can play a role in developing their students’ and colleagues’ critical capacity in making curricular choices, as well as their own.



A reoccurring question that underpins these attempts at stratifying knowledges is *what “knowledge” should be valued in the formal curriculum?* Less acknowledged are the dynamics of power that determine who is asking, whose responses to that question are heard, the impositions of appropriateness in “should”, and the singularity of the construction of “knowledge”. Ethical contestations, about the effects on those and that un/undervalued that have raised by those within, and those beyond the university, seem to have had negligible impact.

The renewed calls to decolonise “knowledge” as part of the larger process of decolonising the university are calls to action underpinned by long asserted concerns about the unjust politics of “knowledge” legitimisation. The relation of “knowledge” to power under-girds the legitimacy of the university as a gatekeeping institution. It is that relation which ascribes it authority, and by implication, those who teach, and research become authorities and trustees of “knowledge”. Written acknowledgements of the association between power and “knowledge”, and wealth and legacies, are old:

Knowledge is power and it can command obedience. A man of knowledge during his lifetime can make people obey and follow him and he is praised and venerated after his death. Remember that knowledge is a ruler and wealth is its subject. Those who accumulate wealth though alive yet are dead to realities of life and those who gather knowledge will remain alive through their knowledge and wisdom even after death; though their faces may disappear from the community of living beings, yet their ideas and knowledge which they left behind and their memory will remain in the minds of men... (Imam Ali (559–661) in al-Radi, 1989, p. 552)

The de/legitimation of certain knowledges is an assertion of power. Those decisions, about what (in)forms the archive and the cannon (misspelt purposefully), impact on the hierarchical selections of included-excluded, centred-marginalised, un-privileged. Questions that arise are: *In whose interests are these acts? Which knowledges are misrecognised and unvalued, and why? How is this problematic rooted in binaries of colonial/ Indigenous, scientific evidence/ belief system, dominant/ oppressed?*

In raising such questions, solidarities extend across time and beyond the decolonial interest to those whose “voice” (read: expression, participation, authority) has been repressed by various systems of oppression. These solidarities include questioning patriarchy, whiteness,

ableism, heteronormativity, authoritarianism, etc., including cultural imperialism and colonialism. The global imaginary that emerged through European modernity and colonialism (Stein et al., 2019) exerted hegemonic spheres of influence through the university's various forms and functions. These influences acted on the character and politics of subordinated human and non-human subjects and contexts, for the purposes of creating or maintaining power relations of inequality and oppression. The supposed "goods" of progress and civilisation were a convenient mirage masking the gains of empires. While occupation of land, extraction of natural resources, physical violence, and the removal of language rights and freedom of belief are the more obvious forms of such hegemony, their exertion *through* the educational function and often *with* the collusion of education is of particular consideration for this chapter. The modern university, its fundamentals forged through Western Europe's aesthetic relation to the Enlightenment, enacted its subjugations, accumulation, and relations of conquest in various ways. Examples of its formalisation extend from the settler colonial university in Canada (Stein, 2020) to the apartheid's university in South Africa (Lalu, 2007).

In the contemporary global neoliberal HE order, such hegemony is most obviously visible in the material power exerted by US higher education that reproduces cultural and linguistic conformity that is particularly in that nation's interests (Marginson, 2008), while continuing to solidify and extend the interests of European whiteness. Obfuscation of the complicity of the minority world in the inequalities and suppression of the majority world was also prevalent in the goods of "development" discourses in the decolonisation period post-WWII (Kapoor, 2014), some of which continues in the positioning of those of the majority world as "lesser than" (if not explicitly "deficit") through the Sustainable Development Goals and the tasking of universities to "drive" that global agenda.

## Why the decolonisation of "knowledge" matters

Recognising these distinctions and their ramification, in what ways might the decolonisation of "knowledge" matter to teaching and learning? There is a myriad of answers to this question, depending on

context and conceptualisation. Within this section, several points raised by fellow scholars are discussed as openings for the consideration of those of us who are educators.

The first is that the decolonisation of “knowledge” is central to the conditions for academic freedom. While the decolonisation of the curriculum/university should not be seen as a metaphor which displaces the reckoning for the material restitution of and rights for land, self-determination, and sovereignty (Tuck & Yang, 2012), African intellectuals have recognised that the struggle for epistemic freedom (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018) and academic freedom (Sall, 1997) is a continuation of the long struggle for freedom, from which emerges much of the current decolonisation drive. A fundamental ethical impetus underpins these contestations towards alterity, plurality, and democracy, as means to push against the dominant violence of marginalisation, negation, exclusion, and enslavement.

This is because the concern with decolonisation is not only to do with hegemony (as I discussed in the last section), but also its creation of absence when there is presence. Mbembe (2015) articulated this when he spoke about how:

This hegemonic tradition has not only become hegemonic. It also actively represses anything that actually is articulated, thought and envisioned from outside of these frames. (p. 10)

This is the epistemic injustice of the disciplines of the modern university, which “renders the collective interpretive resources required for epistemic justice structurally prejudiced” (Keet, 2014, p. 23). Such a meso-curriculum may problematically reproduce the skewed faculties or dulled consciousness of students, academics, and collectives. De Sousa Santos (2007) offers metaphors to evoke that which characterises colonialist social regulation/emancipation, and which continues in re-presentations of knowledges. The metaphors are abyssal “lines” and “gazes” of dominant thinking. They map the sub/human by invisibilising entire knowledge systems out of the imaginary of the modern western university. The implications for the majority world, its knowledge systems, ways of being and material realities are at the core of de Sousa Santos’ interest — what he suggests is that this ordering system persists in current times and implicates us all. Beyond the

period of colonisations, such abyssal thinking colludes perversely in ways where “human principles don’t get compromised by inhuman practices” (de Sousa Santos, 2007, p. 45). Such perversions inform various formations, subjectifications, subjugations, social divisions, and stratifications. They impose subject-object relations of the “self”, to the human “other”, the individual and collective. They shape relations of the human to non-human animals, and constructions which distinguish and prioritise the human from “nature”. They are enacted through local and global stratifications of power, through such mechanisms as the state and “soft power”, elites and hegemony. They also impact on delineations of good(s) and (the) common(s) within HE discourses.

Such problematic formations play out within the factory of the university and related culture industries, including education and research. Harm, obliteration, and misrecognition of the knowledges that are “othered” by the modern university and by the political, religious, and economic systems with which it has colluded, have entailed appropriation and extraction without mutual benefit. An example is how the more explicit colonialist appropriations of Indigenous knowledges of the social and natural world have morphed in the current times of the global “knowledge economy”. Capitalist systems of subordination and of exploitation of African intellectual workers, for instance, were recently dubbed the “Black Market” of the current “research industry” by those positioned as “research assistants” in post-conflict research (Mwambari & Owor, 2019, n.p.). Similarly, those from the majority world primarily provide the invisible labour behind many of the large, profit-making academic publishers, whose authors, editors, and editorial boards continue to be primarily peopled by those based in the minority world. This economy continues to practice the “intellectual marginalisation” of those in the majority world (Obeng-Odoom, 2019), operating in the interests of the minority world rather than the global common good.

Contestations and agential negotiations are exerted by such intellectual workers (Connell et al., 2017). Working from the perspective of sociology in England, Bhambhra (2020) posits that it is insufficient to only point to the unjust gaps, omissions and silences created by the politics of knowledge production by the modern university and its culture industries. She argues that what must be engaged with is *why* knowledges are excluded and *what difference* their inclusion

would be for understanding. This is not the type of superficial “added value” reasoning for “diversity”. It is about “accounting for the connected histories” (Bhambra, 2020, p. 455) of imperialism across the geographical contexts and projects which have produced divisions and stratifications in knowledges. However, Stein and da Silva (2020) assert that where decolonisation differs to many other critiques of the university and modernity, is in its emphasis on knowledges (plural) and in the insistence of pushing against the continuation of colonial dynamics which benefit the modern western-oriented university:

[Decolonial critiques] refuse the notion that the primary violence of colonization is the exclusion of certain populations and communities from the supposedly universal promises offered by modern institutions. To name exclusion as the primary violence of this system is to 1) invalidate other ways of knowing and being, by assuming that everyone desires access to the same promised futures and direction of social change; and, 2) invisibilize the fact that these modern institutions do not simply exclude ‘othered’ populations, but rather are made possible at the expense of violence against those populations. (p. 549)

Clustered around the decolonisation of “knowledge” is critique: for justice, to destabilise the philosophical foundations of Western modernity, to problematise the politics of representation and authority within the webs of knowledge formation and legitimisation. As important to the critical project are those projects which are generative: of plural knowledges, for reclamation, repair, and recognition of what has continued despite, independent of, against or alongside the dominant “knowledge” *cannonised* and often weaponised by university. Thus, a central purpose underpinning what decolonising knowledges does, is re-membering against the problematic construction of subject-object relations *within* knowledge formation. This is the endeavour to

unsettle modernity’s dominant ontological and epistemological foundations by seriously engaging the conceptual potential of thinking with (ethical dimension) alterity and from (geopolitical dimension) exteriority. (Fúnez-Flores, 2022, p. 21)

Such re-membering involves de-membering what colonialism did and does, which is not about memory but a re-location in history (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2022) that entails recovery and reclamation of authors (in the broad sense of those who generate and represent knowledges),

authorship (as an agentially creative and responsible role), and authority (to hold the influence to inform, produce and reproduce). In addition to the possibilities within research and relations with non-academic citizens and spaces, education offers space to disrupt reproduction of “knowledge” and to foster such re-membering through critical and generative social and knowledge formations. I turn briefly to these possibilities in the next section.

### Why the educator matters for decolonising “knowledge”

A renewed call to democratise knowledge production and legitimation has been heralded to which we are asked to respond. Recognising the concerns identified in the prior section, and how avoiding decolonising “knowledge” may mis-educate students and reproduce unjust, hegemonic, and harmful subjectifications of their relations to themselves and others (human and non-human), what roles might educators play in this endeavour at the level of the micro-curriculum?

The machinations of the modern, western-oriented university come with a set of processes, many of which are assumed. First, that knowledges produced (i.e. discovered or created) by the university and legitimated through various assessment processes can then be disseminated as “knowledge”. The educational project (at university and school levels) then becomes about reproducing that produced by the university as if universal and value-neutral, with contextualisation, translation and engagement being the purposes of learning. This construction between academic research and the content taught within educational institutions is a top-down imposition of that which is validated by the powers that be within the modern university’s machinations. Presented as such, it seems to offer little agency or influence in terms of what occurs at the micro-level within the classroom, and often too its relations to the academic and non-academic world (including that related to the “third mission”, i.e. the university’s contribution to and engagement with society).

Scholarly attention has been given to how values of “knowledge” are structured, and given some wiggle room, for the teacher and student within the micro-curriculum. The tools offered to researchers

by Bernstein (1973, 1990) is one such example, looking at the relation between content and form at the micro-curricula level. He termed these “classification” (i.e. the imposition of structure, boundaries or insulation on the content of education), and “framing” as the degree of agency which teachers and students have over the form of their engagement with such “knowledge”. There has also been recognition of what de Carvalho and Florez-Florez (2014, p. 122) call the “thematic and theoretical sectarianism” of knowledges by disciplinary structuring. This follows the pattern of disciplining knowledges through the rejection of theories that belong to the canon of other disciplines and the embrace of a small group which encloses and delineates it as a distinct discipline.

Some have framed the role of the teacher as the mediator or guide to the discourse conflicts on what is powerful “knowledge” (including the author, see for instance Belluigi, 2017; De Vos & Belluigi, 2011). In such formulations, the teacher as facilitator takes on the role of making explicit the enculturation of the tacit or hidden curriculum around the politics of assessment and of “knowledge”. In the name of academic “success”, they reproduce the dominant order as a means of epistemological access for students. In many cases, this is educational development aka industrial psychology: we know the system is skewed, but for individuals to pragmatically cope, the rules of the game are made “transparent” for the purposes of being complied with. Critiques abound, pointing to the dangers of discourses of access for success (Belluigi & Thondhlana, 2022) and of product promotion (White, 2019). Pragmatically, many equity approaches limited by political will may take on such approaches to be affirmative. However, they cannot claim to be transformative (McKenna et al., 2022) if focused on the micro-curriculum without acknowledging the scale of the problematics in the ecology of HE, the institutions’ relation to its publics, and the politics of the “knowledge” project. Dominant notions of “access for success” within the disciplines threaten to ossify the norms and logics of academia and knowledge dissemination as all powerful. Indeed, even when new areas of enquiry arise, they are hailed back into the knowledge structures of the minority world through resource inequalities, workforce mechanisms and intellectual framing (Connell et al., 2018).

Despite these machinations, power dynamics, and the dominant discourses of the modern university, counter-narratives about the agency

of educators are being increasingly asserted. For instance, research on the hegemony of the global metropole in domains of knowledges by Connell et al. (2017) points to how negotiations by academics and institutions can reshape knowledge production. Once structured by colonialism and minority-majority world inequalities, trade routes of the global economy of knowledges can be criss-crossed for solidarity, learning and resistance. In their arguments for the decolonisation of universities in Latin America, de Carvalho and Florez-Florez (2014, p. 122) posit academic practice as transgression. They hold that the rules and logics which transdisciplinarity follows are not always already inscribed by those of modern academic canons. De Sousa Santos (2007), as with others, has attempted to capture this zeitgeist and to also indicate the collective nature of the struggle:

The complexity of this movement is difficult to unravel as it unfolds under our eyes, and our eyes cannot help being on this side of the line and seeing from the inside out. To capture the full measure of what is going on requires a gigantic decentering effort. No single scholar can do it alone, as an individual. Drawing on a collective effort to develop an epistemology of the South, I surmise that this movement is made of a main movement and a subaltern countermovement. The main movement I call the return of the colonial and the return of the colonizer, and the countermovement I call subaltern cosmopolitanism. (pp. 21–22)

At the level of the micro-curriculum, educators connect knowledges with learning, enquiry, critique and with the experiential and representation, in ways which can be dialogic and disruptive. For those who still have the agency to develop curricula, a paper by Andreotti et al. (2011) offers a visualisation of two lenses. On either side of the abyssal line, the lenses are related to universal knowing and relational knowing, in reference to interpretations related to the introduction of different epistemologies in higher education. They argue that when engaging with such knowledges, educators should grapple with political, ontological, and metaphysical questions.

What many working on this assert, is the importance of deliberation and of resistance. In the quotation below (Connell et al., 2017), the educator is re-membered as a “knowledge worker” who is well placed to engage in several sites of struggle from micro- to macro-levels:



Movement in a democratic direction, then, is not ordained by history. If it occurs it will be through social and intellectual struggle, as well as political and economic shifts. The approach we have suggested helps identify necessary sites of struggle. One is the situation of the knowledge workforce, always partly casualized, currently subject to increasing pressure from neoliberal governments and managements. Another is the scientific communication system, currently being commodified and concentrated in the hands of a small group of corporations, but challenged by a popular open-access movement. A third is the formation of intellectual workers, in education systems increasingly privatized and homogenized on a world scale but also active sites of cultural contestation. A fourth is the production of knowledge in social movements such as environmentalism, challenging both the disinformation spread by the fossil fuel industry and the hierarchies of knowledge in mainstream science. (p. 32)

Operative criticism (Belluigi, 2017) may be of value for educators. This is an umbrella term for various approaches of reflexive criticism which are concerned with what scholarship and authorship *signify*, by observing (and being responsive to) their reception, translation, and impact in context. Keet (2014) argues that epistemic justice is key to disrupting the epistemic injustice within disciplines. As with decolonisation, such conscientisation is a process rather than an ending, but it is of fundamental importance for critical consciousness to develop and to inform action. It is the educator’s role to facilitate operative criticism with communities of learning and academic practice. In dialogue with students in the micro-curriculum and colleagues in the meso-curriculum, such praxis holds potential to destabilise prevailing mythologies and doxa, and to recognise the contradictions and oppressions enacted through knowledge formation and social formation, where some (humans, non-humans, and aspects of the environment) are objects of others’ will and consumption.

This praxis is more radical than “access”, “equity”, technocratic critical thinking “skills”, or units of content. The intellectual, political, and moral elements of such impetus must not be reduced, simplified, or dehistoricised. There are already claims that this has happened to the radical impetus of the decolonisation drive in South Africa (Madlingozi, 2018), and in the standardisation, domestication, depoliticisation, and commodification of decolonisation discourses in parts of Western Europe (Abu Moghli & Kadiwal, 2021). Similar dulling occurred within the South African higher education system when the discourse

of constitutional “transformation” was institutionalised. Reflecting on this latter phenomenon, Lange (2014, p. 5) argues this was because of the insufficient examination of “knowledge for transformation (the knowledge that needs to be produced in order to make change possible)” over and above the “knowledge of transformation (which is the knowledge we generate about transformation itself)”. Shahjahan et al. (2022) offer directions for the possibility of a field of solidarities, growing from knowledges produced through educational research on decolonising curriculum and pedagogy. They base this on a critical analysis of over 200 hundred texts using a geopolitics of knowledge framework. What they found was that the themes that emerged were *contextual* when it came to meanings of decolonisation, of actualising decolonisation, and of the challenges which that posed in HE. Situated within and operating across contexts, educators are uniquely placed to enable such as field of solidarities by engaging students, academic and non-academic fellow educators in decolonising “knowledge”.

There is creative agency in representation, writing and acts of narration. These common-place modes of doing within the university can be enabling of the development of voice, authorship, and knowledges. The literary-academic presence is one such locus for change. Larson (2018, p. 521) described this as “an author’s textual expression of cultural, regional, linguistic, and scholarly orientation” which is disciplined within hegemonic educational processes for students, and further within academic representational processes. In addition to how educators re-present, a directly generative educational role can be played in creating the conditions for students to experience the power of counter-narratives of knowledges, to contribute to their formation and legitimation, and to extend the responsibility of authoring and authorship for the common good.

The decolonial turn offers potential for a future pluriversity that does not alienate, minoritise, or “other”. To challenge the ideology of Eurocentrism that “seeks to universalize the West and provincialize the rest” (Zezeza, 2009, p. 133), African intellectuals have been exploring Afropolitanism as one approach which positions “Africa at the centre of things, not existing as an appendix or a satellite of other countries” (Mbembe, 2021), or disciplinary fields (such as in “African Studies”). Such de-/re-centring acts as a means for African researchers to see

ourselves, and our relations to others, creatively, critically, and ethically before radiating outwards. Within this is the ethical injunction for the university’s knowledges and ways of being to not be alienating to the life experiences of Africans (Ratele, 2019).

Limitations to the agency of individuals and constraints on curriculum design are many. In contexts where political will and a critical mass can exert collective action and urgency, more openings are possible. In some contexts, this is happening through the access of first-generation students, and in turn first generation academics. Such conditions are being seized for cultivating academic citizens’ responsibilities to end the miseducation of the mis-recognition of the modern, western university to engage with just knowledges, and for educators to enact their roles as stewards and trustees of knowledges for the common good.

## Conclusion

The relation of the curriculum to *which* knowledges are selected, foregrounded, and thereby (re)produced through what is taught and what is learnt is not a marginal concern. In a time when the social justice imperatives of “public good” have been all but emptied out and reduced to only a few publics within nation-bound stratifications and geopolitical priorities, there is too much importance to avoid engaging with the common good of knowledges. While many dominant voices in decolonisation drives are understandably concerned with the human, these too must not be separated from the entanglements of the university’s knowledges with the violences done to non-human animals and environments which have led to the age of the Anthropocene and environmental melancholia (Lertzman, 2015). Decolonisation thus extends dominant notions of the common:

It is about humankind ruling in common for a common which includes the non-humans, which is the proper name for democracy. (Mbembe, 2015, p. 10)

The common goods of knowledges are situated, extended, delineated, and connected in their relations to the human and non-human subjectivities impacted in the classroom and beyond, across the globe.

The call to “decolonise the curriculum” is inclusive of the formal, informal, and hidden aspects of the micro, meso and macro-curriculum, particularly when calls are linked to “decolonising the university”. This chapter has argued that the segregation of the micro-curriculum of teaching-and-learning from these wider relations is a cause for concern. Decolonising endeavours can be too easily compartmentalised, creating gaps in our academic practices which allow for the domestication of academic practice and even the commodification of this discourse. Such individual or institutional profit is gained to the detriment of decolonisation serving the global common good.

This chapter offers some deliberations about why *teachers* should actively engage their critical and generative agency within higher education when it comes to the decolonisation of “knowledge”. Creating the environments to critique “knowledge” by facilitating the development of critical consciousness within students’, colleagues’ and one’s own processes of enquiry and learning about the university, is within educators’ sphere of influence. Doing so would contribute to destabilising the reproduction of the hegemonic ordering of knowledge delegitimation within the micro-curriculum. It would open space to engage with knowledges marginalised, misrecognised, excluded, or destroyed without requiring their appropriation or assimilation, but rather relations of curiosity, desire, doubt, and recognition.

Academics have power (and responsibility) as trustees of education and of knowledges. Exercising this with ethical humility may better serve to build the critical consciousness of academic citizens to the injustices of that/those harmed, to recognise and assert what should be reclaimed from that appropriated, to commemorate that which has resisted or continued despite the modern university, and to work with those (within and beyond HE) who can strengthen that made fragile.

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