

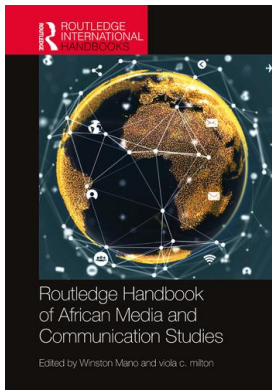
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### **Decolonising media and communication studies**

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# Decolonising media and communication studies

## An exploratory survey on global curricula transformation debates

*Ylva Rodny-Gumede and Colin Chasi*

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### Introduction

In 2015 and 2016, higher education institutions in South Africa were faced with widespread student protests calling for free access to higher education and broad-based transformation and decolonialisation of curricula. This triggered a nationwide debate around the lack of transformation and prevailing legacies of colonialism in higher education in the country. Such discussions are not necessarily unique, or isolated, to South Africa. Yet little is known about how these debates play themselves out within varying national, regional and international contexts, and importantly within different disciplinary fields.

It is generally accepted that the field and discipline of media and communication studies is becoming increasingly globalised and internationalised (Livingston 2007, 273). By media and communication studies we here refer to the broader discipline of communications, which we take to include subject fields such as media studies, journalism studies and strategic communication. At the very least there seems to have emerged a scholarly “consensus on the need to internationalize media studies . . . in an era characterized by an acceleration of globalization processes” (Ndlela 2007, 324). However, when scholars in the field speak of ‘global’ or ‘international’ scholarship, they rarely speak of theory of global or universal origins, diversity, inclusivity and significance. They instead tend to refer to theory from the global North (Willems 2014; Rodny-Gumede 2013; Freedman and Shafer 2010; Ndlela 2009; Curran and Park 2000; Sreberny 2000). The ‘global’ rarely means ‘universal’ (Sreberny 2000) and moves towards internationalising scholarship and the curriculum seemingly become exercises in extending the reach of a largely Westernised field of study rather than working towards a curriculum inclusive of a wide range of scholarship that goes beyond the Western cultural sphere of influence.

Instead of understanding the global South on its own terms and despite calls to “‘dewesternize’, ‘decolonize’, or ‘internationalize’” the field of media and communication studies, the global South continues to be theorised from the vantage point of the global North (Willems 2014, 8). While scholarship in the global South as well as the global North in recent years has started to pay more attention to the polarisations of North and South, Chasi and Rodny-Gumede (2016)

argue that such moves towards a recognition of a supposed changing global order and attempts at 'de-Westernising' (Curran and Park 2000) and even 'Southernising' (Rodny-Gumede 2015, 2013) of the discipline, have through Manichaean juxtaposing of North and South but reinforced the insularity of the discipline. Instead ideas of the global North continue to be the norm upon which the discipline is founded elsewhere.

This has the result that scholarship of the North as well as the South have "failed to acknowledge the agency of the global South in the production, consumption, and circulation of a much richer spectrum of media culture that is not a priori defined in opposition to or in conjunction with media from the Global North" (Willems 2014, 7).

This failure comes at the expense of recognising the fidelity for relevance of scholarly work, theory and experiences from the global South (Rodny-Gumede 2013; Comaroff and Comaroff 2011; Sreberny 2000, 114–115). Opportunities are thus tragically lost to see that the global South is not simply a victim of the North. The global South can, instead of being cast in victimhood terms, be seen "as a part of the world that has agency, a place from which we can start theorizing the human condition" (Willems 2014, 8). The renewed emphasis and calls for the decolonisation of all spheres of society, including higher education, have but emphasised the need for rethinking how scholarship not only maintains a Western domination of the field but also how it originates in, as well as perpetuates colonial legacies. As Moyo and Mutsvairo (2018, 29) say, the decolonisation of higher education and knowledge production is intimately linked to the false claims of universality of Western knowledge and the inherent Western geo- and body politics of knowledge production.

Through an exploratory reading of views on curricula from around the world, we ask whether the increasing calls for, as well as moves towards, the internationalisation of the media and communication disciplines also constitutes a move beyond the global North towards a truly global media and communication curricula that also recognises and encompasses the global South. And if so, we ask whether such curricula constitute a move towards a decolonisation of the curricula whether it is taught in the global North or global South. Thus, we seek to understand how decolonisation is understood and what constitutes the elements of decolonisation of the curriculum in differing contexts, as well as the challenges that confront efforts to decolonise the curriculum.

To do so, we engage local and international scholars from within our own discipline of media and communication studies, whose work variously safeguards and produces ideas of quality and relevance in higher education, around questions of, as well as meanings ascribed to, transformation and decolonisation of the curricula. We do this to contribute to disciplinary debates on transformation and decolonisation, and to contribute to the production of curricula that challenge the insularity of scholarship from the North, whether real or perceived. We seek to find ways in which to assert, as well as develop, media and communications curricula "symbolic of change, innovation, unity as well as diversity, rebirth and the development of adult learners to meet the challenges – locally and globally – of tomorrow" (du Plooy 2006, 190). In significant part we do this by drawing on the views of colleagues who kindly engaged with us through the survey, we provide an exploratory analysis that is firmly grounded in our own understanding of scholarly debates that foreground moral imperatives to produce a transformed and decolonised media and communication studies curricula.

In fairness to ourselves, we are not merely setting forth a select few views on the curricula. Instead, undergirding this chapter is the view that discourses on decolonisation do, and should, reaffirm "values and principles of integrity, social justice, fairness, and excellence" (du Plooy 2006, 189). We hope to hereby contribute to new processes that variously humanise ourselves and others involved in disciplines we research and teach in. In brief, our aim is threefold. First,

we explore conceptualisations of decolonisation and what the elements of decolonisation of the curriculum are as well as the challenges posed to a decolonisation of the curriculum. Second, we hope the discussion will contribute towards the production of a decolonised curricula. Third, in doing so, we hope to contribute to a process in which we humanise ourselves as well as colleagues in the discipline.

## Decolonisation debates

We are well aware that we write from a Southern African context lodged within centuries of colonialism and later apartheid and its aberrations. Here, as elsewhere where colonial relations have held sway, both colonisers and the colonised have left marks on each other (wa Thiong'o 2012, 51). One could fancy that the colonised appropriate the best of what their coloniser imposes, to produce an ideal new synthesis (*ibid.*). But, then, one also has to contend with the view that the history of both colonies and of postcolonies involves repetitions and gross distortions of native cultures, customs and traditions, along with the entanglements, appropriations and deformations of the modernity that drove Western colonialism (Mbembe 2001, 25). The latter view is likely at stake in debates on transformation and decolonisation that continue to hold sway in Southern Africa today. For, throughout the region, amidst public concern about the stubborn persistence of colonial legacies, scholars as well as university leaderships continue to rethink their engagements with students and other stakeholders in ways that can be expected to change the structural and epistemic orientations of the higher education system. In this context, processes are underway to rethink the place of higher education in relation to political, economic, social and cultural developments and trajectories hereof.

Partially as a result of the influence of global movements that bring together new combinations of peoples, ideas, goods and services (wa Thiong'o 2012, 52), we also know that debates, on transformation and decolonisation, are of global relevance. In the West, when transformation issues are at stake within the discipline, diversity is couched as a question of dealing with new flows of people, goods, ideas and services that bring previously marginal international influences to bear (*cf.* wa Thiong'o 2012, 52). With regards to internationalisation, Livingston (2007) argues that it is not always clear what internationalisation means, and while it might mean the "exchanging knowledge and understanding across borders", equally it could mean a strive towards "achieving a shared consensus regarding theories, methods and approaches". If the latter, Livingston (*ibid.*) argues that internationalisation stands the risk of

becoming a Trojan horse, smuggling in the priorities or perspectives of some at the expense of others. Indeed, the more ambitious one becomes for the internationalising effort, the more sceptical voices come to the fore, concerned that the perspectives of the already-powerful dominate over that of others.

To paraphrase Grosfoguel (2008, 64), such projects instead become exercises in ensuring that we all think epistemically alike, *i.e.* aligned to Western dominant thought in whatever discipline or field we might be. In this regard, internationalisation projects fail to become projects of diversification and de-Westernisation (Curran and Park 2000, 3).

Global debates about the transformation of the media and communications curriculum are not new, and date back to the UNESCO International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems established in 1977 and the subsequent *Many Voice One World*, or the so-called MacBride report (UNESCO 1980), that called for democratisation of media and communication technologies. Importantly, the report warned against universally adaptable models,

an argument also furthered in the 1982 Grünwald Declaration on Media Education (UNESCO 1982) which explicitly states that while “responsible” educators will not ignore international media developments and instead “work alongside their students in understanding them”, they should not “underestimate the impact on cultural identity of the flow of information and ideas between cultures by the mass media”. This statement reflects the need for a curriculum that reflects local realities as a basis for the analysis of global frameworks and developments rather than the other way around (cf. Rodny-Gumede 2013).

Neither are debates on transformation and decolonisation unique to South Africa or to post-colonial domains. Academics around the world need to continuously engage with questions of the relevance of curricula amidst changing global world orders. Across the world scholars face the need to rethink what is taught, including how scholarship and curricula can undo lingering colonial legacies and contribute to a humanising development. Arguably, the groundswell of pressure for change indicates it is time we recognise that experiences and scholarship of the global South are not only equal to those of the global North, but also necessary for the advancement of our discipline as a whole and more humanising bodies of scholarship. The theoretical point is that we need to find ways to rethink higher education and scholarship not only in South Africa and the greater postcolonial world, but also in the global North. In doing this we recognise that higher education programmes and research from the global North continue to be standard bearers, or markers of the norm for curricula and scholarship worldwide. At the same time, and to make the point, deliberately or otherwise, dominant Western scholarship reflects and treats Northern histories as though *the rest* either do not exist or only exist to the extent that they either aid or do not interfere with Northern doctrinal theorisations (cf. Chasi and Rodny-Gumede 2016; Willems 2014). To this end, and in the process, Western scholarship denies globally shared humanities, shared histories and shared futures (Chasi and Rodny-Gumede 2016).

There is little for us to gain here in tracing out all the similarities and differences between projects of internationalisation and de-Westernisation in the initial conceptualisation of the concept as set out by Curran and Park (2000). We do however note that Waisbord (2015) argues that the project of de-Westernisation entails much more than merely broadening the geographical scope of enquiries to also consider case studies from the global South, and that to think so narrowly of de-Westernisation might lead to a consolidation of our enquiries into balkanised forms of area studies. Instead Waisbord argues for a cosmopolitan approach to de-Westernisation and for an openness to studying a range of global problems and academic issues in such a capacious fashion that “rather than being restrained by geographical divisions, de-Westernisation should help to expand analytical perspectives and bring theoretical and comparative questions to the forefront of media studies” (ibid, 178).

And equally, while the projects of de-Westernisation and decolonisation of media and communications scholarship and the curricula are not comparable, there are overlapping concerns. An independently, projects of transformation within the discipline have neglected aspects of transformation lodge within the global South and many postcolonial societies in particular, where colonialism has left have left incommunicable scars on society and its citizens. The legacies of colonialism and the continuous inequities it has created has made sure that state formation, politics and socioeconomic development in the postcolony have remained premised on race. In the postcolony, “race continues to be a marker of social difference, hierarchy and pain” (Frassinelli 2018, 4). The formal end of colonialism or apartheid and its aberrations in southern Africa did not bring an end to the socioeconomic injustices, power hierarchies and suppression of indigenous and local knowledges that these systems created (ibid). This has also come with particular implications for women, and the particular bounds of black women, and the male dominance of the discipline is hard to ignore (Orgeret 2018, 352).

The call for the decolonisation of media and communication studies as Wasserman (2018, 50) argues inevitably is concerned with “the shared experience of a colonial subjection, struggles for independence and continued geopolitical and economic marginalisation in the era of globalisation suggest that a study of media on the continent should include a focus on the lived experiences of Africans in relation to such media, embedded as these are within unequal local and global power relations”. Decolonisation efforts are thus efforts to break with Western modernity and to search for alternative modernities (Mignolo 2011). And beyond, in the words of Fanon (1963, 36), decolonisation is a programme of completely changing the world. Fanon talks about complete disruption, a disruption that within our discipline is yet to be felt, let alone realised.

Thus it is not the querying of colonial legacies and the challenging of them we are concerned with, however defining such efforts and the moments they have created have been through the work of African scholars such as Nyamnjoh (2011; 2005), wa Thiong’o (1986), Fanon (1963), instead what concerns us is the impact, or lack hereof, that the decolonisation project has had on the discipline. The transformational issues that are at stake when envisioning decolonisation, as du Plooy (2006, 189–190) sets out, have serious implications for everyone involved in higher education, and the media and communication discipline in particular. Most importantly, decolonisation presupposes transformations in intellectual discourses, in the formal and informal content of teaching/learning and in research endeavours and services to the community. It presupposes of such significance that the whole of the societies in question – including businesses and industries – come to address African needs in ways that are consistent with African values, worldviews and mindsets (Chasi 2018, 2015). And we add that decolonisation speaks to the emergence of new conceptions of the global–local nexus that more justly serve the needs and aspirations of people without subordinating some to centres that are not composed of their own needs. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (1993) insightfully argued that decolonisation involves challenging the dominant and dehumanising Western centre. He contends that it does this by bringing to the fore complementary, supplementary, separate and related centres that take as their starting, or centering points, local experiences and perspectives of people from all over the world so that there emerge with multiple, complementary and competing centres (ibid). wa Thiong’o (2012) talks about a ‘Globelectic’ approach to the curricula founded on a mindfulness of reading texts from within their context, i.e. a curriculum fit for the purpose that it serves. Globelectics or the ‘politics of knowing’ entails the development of a new dialectic in which the curricula is “approached from whatever times and places to allow its contents and themes to form a free conversation with other texts of one’s own time and place and to allow it to speak to our own cultural present and to read it with the eyes of the world and to see the world with the eyes of the text” (ibid, 38). A most important matter is that education should be centred on the needs and experiences of those it serves, the point of departure must always, as wa Thiong’o (2012, 57) says, be “from here to there”. When this happens, education serves the ends of social justice. Social justice in education has often focussed on classroom pedagogies and educational practices to combat different forms of oppression such as racism and sexism. This needs to be taken further to recognise that as educators we have a role to play in dismantling all forms of oppression and the barriers and pain they create. Educators should be in the business of creating new and more just social orders both in and beyond classrooms and universities, and because justice truly knows no borders. We should be involved in generating more socially just curricula, teaching environments, education systems and environments in the global South as well as in global North.

Thus, the fundamental aims of projects for the decolonisation of knowledge and of the curriculum must be linked to broader aims of ensuring relevance of curricula and teaching

practices – challenging as well as changing normalised misanthropic orders. Decolonisation aims at overcoming legacies steeped in, as well as enforced through, the remnants of, and continuations, of our own (and global) histories of slavery, colonialism and apartheid with their aberrations that manifest throughout the world. Decolonial educators thus facilitate debates and research that etch out new notions and possibilities for more relevant universities that reflect and produce social justice.

Decolonial practices trigger debates around how we should better form, reform and adapt curricula in the different contexts in which these curricula are served. Most pertinently, the Western dominance has been taken as a colonial legacy, and as such calls have been heard for a decolonisation of the curriculum. In some instances, such calls have been expressed as a need for an Africanisation of the same (Motsaathebe 2011; Mano 2009; Nyamnjoh 2005). In other instances, decolonisation is equated with a more generalised idea of localisation of content to fit specific needs in the context that it serves. What remains constant is that such calls are for recognising that a broader transformation of the curriculum has to take place in order to challenge dominant and Northern epistemologies and ideas of truth within the media and communications discipline, and to thereby dare scholars to see the inherent insularity of the ways in which the discipline has continuously created and re-created an epistemology lodged in archaic, patriarchal and decidedly racialised ideas that principally emanate from, and favour, the West (Chasi and Rodny-Gumede 2016). As scholars of media and communication studies, we see that epistemologies and disciplinary foundations that guide teaching, research and resource allocations are increasingly being challenged. A feature of these fields is that our scholarship must confront how people live and express their modes of existence through communication in ways that are variously mediated. So, to think of humanising the world from the perspective of studies of media and communication is not just to question how people and scholarship are diminished and denied dignity and worth. It is also to call to question how scholars have thus far claimed to engage with humanity.

Our starting point, as set out earlier, is that perspectives emanating from the global South have for long been neglected in media and communication scholarship in both the global North and global South. No more evident is this than in media and communication studies curricula, where scholarship as well as theories of communication and media studies of the global North are taken as the norm for the development of the curricula in the global South (Chasi and Rodny-Gumede 2018; 2016; Rodny-Gumede 2015; Mano 2009). We know that the problem faced by scholars in differing disciplines, including media and communication scholars, particularly in the global South, is that curricula as well as literature from the global North are often copied/mimicked/repeated without change or without critical engagement. In the interest of advancing a decolonial perspective, with specific focus on media and communication studies, we will shortly go on to discuss views on current curricula from differing contexts, being particularly mindful of contending and complementary accents given to debates around transformation, diversification and decolonisation in various settings. Before this, let us briefly introduce the survey from which we draw the views to follow.

## The survey

The findings are drawn from a survey sent out in the first quarter of 2016 to a broad scholarly community through 65 personal emails as well as through the email lists of the International Association for Media and Communications Research (IAMCR) and the South African Communications Association (SACOMM). In total, 31 responses were received and 30 were subsequently coded and recorded. The respondents represent 34 different universities (some

respondents are associated with more than one university) from 14 countries (Australia, Brazil, China, Finland, France, India, Kenya, Nigeria, Norway, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States and Zimbabwe).

Through the survey we sought answers to the following questions: What are the most pressing issues/debates with regards to questions of curricula and the relevance of curricula in different national/cultural contexts? Is Manichaean juxtapositions of global South and the global North a feature of debates around the curriculum, and if so, are such debates centred around a need to broaden the scope of scholarship, methodologies, course contents and teaching materials to encompass scholarship from the global South? To what extent are curricula centred on an epistemological approach that is inclusive of a diverse set of scholarship from a wide range of national and cultural contexts? What are some of the ways in which scholars from around the world understand and define the idea and call for a decolonialisation of curricula and knowledge production? And, what are the challenges of decolonising the curriculum? These questions correspond to the closed- and open-ended questions we posed to surveyed scholars. Respondents were informed that their identities would be held in confidence. As such, we have anonymised the identities of respondents in the text of this chapter, because we know these discussions are sensitive and, in some contexts, even shunned. We have ourselves seen the consequences of articulating the need for decolonisation in various forums and how divisionary these debates can be.

As noted earlier, we consider this study to be exploratory in nature. The findings, from the sample we use, cannot claim to be representative of what global or local bodies of media and communications scholars think about the issues we are discussing. Thus, we are cautious to use the data to make generalisations. Nevertheless, we hold that the information gathered and analysed does provide insights into, and in some instances even a rich understanding of, issues pertaining to the weight and meanings ascribed to the decolonisation of media and communications curricula. We hope that it can be used to start a discussion around varying takes on transformation, diversity and inclusivity of the media and communication curricula and contribute to further research.

We are also aware that discussions with samples and populations of academics can only constitute a start to what must become larger transformative conversations. After all a “university is not only a teaching/learning environment, it is also a life-world in which lecturers and learners meet in a context which is broader than the parochial didactic relationship” (du Plooy 2006, 206). Lecturers and researchers in higher education do not function in a political or social void, so our ability to conceive of and implement decolonising changes will have to entail “collaboration with diverse role-players, especially the adult learner” (ibid).

Our approach of engaging with our local and international survey participants is a significant but small nod to the serious need to heed Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (1993) and recognise, produce and respectfully represent multiple centres in our scholarship. We do this while trying to centre our own otherwise marginalised location in the world. However, we are very cautious of the need to not engage with the survey responses in a way that juxtaposes responses from the global South with those of the global North in a Manichaean zero-sum fashion. Instead, by being constantly self-reflexive about our positionalities as scholars of the South, we have attempted to ensure that our pursuit of a more just educational enterprise does not result in a reading that constantly, apologetically and even vengefully and unjustly pits scholarship from the North against scholarship from the South. We do not assume that all that is of the North is harmful and that all that is of the South is good and desirable. But admittedly we look to the data with the systematic objective of understanding how a decolonial agenda that is transformative towards inclusiveness and justice can be promoted and enabled through the curricula. To do otherwise,



we contend, would be to deny the multitude of factors that play a role in scholarly engagements with, and developments around, curriculum development.

What follows is a discussion of the responses to our survey questions and some of the more salient themes that can be discerned.

## **Views on the decolonisation of media and communication curricula**

In what follows various themes are identified as we seek to reveal, explore and interrelate views on curricula that arose from our reading of the responses to the survey. These themes are evidently not distinct and unrelated. Instead, as they speak to the same core concerns about decolonisation, they also variously speak across and into each other in ways that the reader is encouraged to enjoy and find additional insights from. We do however hope that our thematic organisation of what we found makes parsimonious sense of what we found while giving heuristic order to these findings.

### ***A 'Western' bias in how curricula are established***

The responses from all respondents emphasise that there is a clear 'Western' bias in how curricula are established, as exemplified by these responses: "In South Africa despite calls for transformation we still follow the same curricula as in the U.K. and the U.S. and we use the same teaching materials" (Respondent 13, South Africa) and "we are still beholden to a curriculum that is mainly European and 'Western' with little relevance to South Africa and the students we teach" (Respondent 23, South Africa). From African contexts other than South Africa, respondents equally emphasise that: "We follow a very Westernised curriculum in Kenya, local content is not valued" (Respondent 11, Kenya). Significantly, respondents from outside African equally lamented this state of affairs saying, for instance: "Journalism education in the US tends to be very US-centric" (Respondent 17, U.S.) or that "we almost only use US and British textbooks. . . . And experts from the global South really only come to us if they work elsewhere in the global North" (Respondent 5, U.S.). The point is not necessarily that there is a total absence of curricula materials that come from or that reference the South. Rather, it is that when the 'South' is factored in, it is done so in ways that are still mainly ad hoc and in separate courses or modules, and as "African examples as an exception and maybe even appeasement or to tick a box" (Respondent 30, Zimbabwe).

What is emphasised by the South African scholars is the imperative of striking a balance between influences, experiences, as well as a canon of scholarship from both the global South and the global North. This is also connected to an idea of not falling into or pandering to isolationist approaches that say reject all supposed Western ideas. This sentiment is well reflected in the following response:

I am not saying we can or should completely discard the canon of literature that has informed much of the discipline, but it needs to be contextualised and new scholarly arguments and texts brought to the fore.

*(Respondent 23, South Africa)*

Rather than accepting Manichaeian juxtapositions or zero-sum curricula gamesmanship, what is asked for is a "more nuanced debate that does not assume that everything from the north needs abandoning and everything from the south is now relevant" (Respondent 16, South

Africa). The realisation here, which is echoed in the responses of many of the other southern African respondents, is that our scholarship is enhanced in its interactions with preceding bodies of scholarship. One function of a canon is that it elevates scholars by enabling them to learn from an organised and prearranged body of knowledge so that they conceptually stand on the shoulders of those who have preceded them. The nuanced thought is that scholarship from the South is part of human cultural evolutions of knowledge and is best developed when it plays, intermingles, interbreeds and freely cohabitates with other epistemic sources and forms.

While the balance between imperatives and scholarship is emphasised, this does not justify any minimisation of differences that are found between what scholars see. Differences in the historical positions that people occupy are significant; they yield valuable varieties of epistemic products. When different people, with their unique biographies, stand on the shoulders of scholars who preceded them, they will not see the same things in the same ways. Together with the call for a finer and fairer contextualisation of scholarship and literature, that recognises the legitimacy of different paths and places in which knowledge is sought and produced, a nuanced thought is that there are elevating prospects for all humanity wherever there is respectful meeting of knowledge practices that have different pedigrees, wherever people lift each other up so that each can see further than before. This value is lost wherever curricular remain colonial to the effect of blocking students from seeing from their own historical perspective, or from vantage points that value their own contextually encountered needs and concerns. Something of this is seen in responses from colleagues teaching in similar postcolonial contexts to that of South Africa who bemoan a lack of contextualisation by which local knowledge is neglected as universities fail to adequately train students to think critically about and from their own contexts. As this respondent says:

there is a critical gap especially that of training students to be problem solvers within their unique contexts. Most ‘western’ theories have not been properly contextualized for the students to make sense of their relevance in their setting.

*(Respondent 11, Kenya)*

And:

I think one of the most pressing issues is about the curriculum reflecting the economic (industrial) political, social needs of the community in which it is tailored for. . . . It is about whether the current curricula connect the learner to his/her context of existence, or it is a perpetuation of the colonial system by ‘softer’ means?

*(Respondent 3, Zimbabwe)*

We note such responses as an affirmation of how hermeneuticists and semioticians have long established the way in which texts are given different meanings in different historical contexts, by different people giving differing meanings to and conducting differing readings of texts. Realising this, and appreciating that canons can be made and unmade, arranged and rearranged, we note that what many scholars who are located in postcolonial contexts are calling for are *acts of appropriation of the media and communications canon that involve bringing old and new texts into conversations*. They are, in some respect affirming the fact that it is the readers, i.e. the scholars and students of today, whose interpretations are being facilitated and maybe also validated through this process. Part of the point is to recognise localities in the global South as points of reference alongside other histories. In one instance this entails recognising, for instance, that “Africa and

South Africa has a rich media and journalistic history that is all its own, and our teaching should draw on that extensively” (Respondent 27, South Africa).

There emerges a deep appreciation of what canons are and how they enable us to draw on archives of texts-of-practice that are developed by the intersecting paroles and histories of a South African and African “rich media and journalistic history that is all its own (sic)”. Giving epistemic value to experiences, perspectives, practices and texts from the South is a vital political step that at base is about giving recognition to previously denied and marginalised peoples, their capabilities and their readings.

Nothing is left uncontested. How decolonisation is achieved, how imperatives are balanced, and how roles and weights are given to Manichaean juxtapositions between North/South, African/Western/European, global/local – these and more core issues are all contested. Beyond historical antagonisms between North and South, or the West and *the rest*, and beyond their “impact on the local identifications/definitions” (Respondent 1, South Africa), there is the overarching imperative to transformatively advance scholarship that is, as one South African respondent says, not “reactionary and mediocre”, i.e. that valorises “local knowledge and its global relevance” while “critically examining, from a situated perspective, any important idea and theory, no matter where it comes from (Respondent 13, South Africa). It should “mean looking at the whole world from a critical perspective rooted in our own African context” (Respondent 13, South Africa).

What meanings then are ascribed to relevance and contexts in which curricula is developed?

### ***The need to recognise context***

The need for a revised curriculum whether articulated as ‘decolonised’, ‘localised’ or ‘Africanised’ is at the forefront of debates in South Africa and southern Africa. These debates are also tied up with wider debates around how “we problematize binaries of African/European/the West, in ways that does not reinforce, re-essentialise or also ignore intra-African/intra-Western differences and hierarchies” (Respondent 12, South Africa). This also applies to “binaries of constructions that homogenise racial groups, whether Black/White or African/Western” (Respondent 12, South Africa).

It is clear from the South African scholars surveyed that such debates are about the need for recognising the African and indigenous scholarship which is excluded from the curricula. This is in the interest of (1) addressing injustices of the past and (2) making curricula fit for the served contexts. What is clear from the responses from the South African scholars surveyed is that the imperative for localising and decolonising the curriculum has resurfaced as one of the most important aspect of transformation in higher education: “without a doubt the decolonisation debate is the most pressing one” (Respondent 19, South Africa) and “The decolonisation of the curriculum is a priority and we can no longer ignore our own context” (Respondent 23, South Africa). In addition, there is “urgency to support localised/Africanised content” (Respondent 1, South Africa).

With regards to debates around the curricula and the relevance of curricula in different national contexts, we know from the recent events that have rocked the South African higher education landscape that issues around transformation and a decolonisation of the curricula has been made a priority. Most South African universities have also formalised these discussions through university-wide structures such as their senate bodies and departmental teaching and learning committees. This also comes through in the responses from colleagues in the region and from scholars working in societies where the colonial experience has and continues to shape higher education and the curricula.

### ***Defragmenting the hold of colonial epistememes***

Independent of context or region, our surveyed scholars link the debates around the curricula to practical skills and employability of graduates. However there are variations in how this is interpreted from within local contexts. Our African respondents, in particular, argued that valuing employability and competitiveness does not entail accepting ‘wholesale’ or ‘without change’ ideas, epistemologies or schema from the North. They argued for “defragmenting the hold of colonial epistememes” (Respondent 16, South Africa) and for the emergence of “knowledge production that is sensitive to contexts and that thus addresses the history of South Africa” (Respondent 12, South Africa). They thus spoke for a curriculum:

that undermines the power of canons, that integrates scholarship from around the world without assuming that source/location equates to value, that emphasises the importance of people speaking for and about themselves and their communities, that includes the voices of women, queer people, people with various genders and sexualities, people of colour, disabled people.

*(Respondent 15, South Africa)*

And that:

address issues that are relevant to students in the global South. Issues that have to do with governance in the African context for instance without just using the western concept of democracy, poverty, capitalism issues of ethnicity and identity should all form core of the curriculum to minimize ‘confusion’ and some sort of identity crisis of future generations.

*(Respondent 11, Kenya)*

Most pertinently there seems to be a divide between the global South and the global North, with regards to the need for transformation and the reasons behind such transformation. Overall, scholars of the South emphasise breaking with Western hegemony and colonial legacies and the need for redress and social justice to higher extent than their global North counterparts who emphasise issues with regards to a changing media landscape as central to debates around a curriculum ‘fit for purpose’.

### ***Questions around employability of university graduates***

And, while there is a stronger emphasis on the decolonisation of scholarship among scholars in the postcolony, the debate and considerations around the curricula outside of the postcolony are to a higher degree centred on issues around skills, employability in the context of a discipline as well as higher education landscape which are heavily influenced and challenged by rapid technological changes. Two colleagues, from Finland and the U.S. respectively, argued that “the most critical question is the employment of university graduates. . . . Job places of permanent employment is declining, the number of short contracts is growing” (Respondent 6, Finland) and “questions of curriculum have focused on what to teach students to prepare them for the changing journalism landscape . . . and how the curriculum can be adapted to include more technical components” (Respondent 17, U.S.).

This is not to say that these issues are not important or that they should not be considered in any context. Neither, is it to say that the decolonisation debate cannot be disassociated or delinked from debates concerning technological developments and the relevance of the

curricula with regards to the employability of the students. However, as seen in the response from this respondent from India, the decolonisation debate demands that we contextually re-evaluate and rebalance the relative weight given to developing practical skills vis-à-vis focusing on theoretical knowledge – and even then while thinking carefully about what knowledge counts and why:

We debate the relative value of developing practical skills versus more theoretical knowledge to a higher degree than a localized curriculum however.

*(Respondent 7, India)*

And:

Local content and context are important and so is the global. Media studies and the media is heavily influenced by global forces, however this does not mean that we do not use local examples. The Indian media sector is big and also counts many regional perspectives that have to be included in the curriculum.

*(Respondent 7, India)*

This is all linked to globally shared concerns regarding the employability of graduates amidst a rapidly changing media industry. Scholars are constantly seized with the need to evaluate what this means for the training of media and communications students.

### ***What could constitute decolonised curricula***

This is expressed in questions around what could constitute decolonised curricula, as well as diversity in the curricula and to what extent the curricula is centred on an epistemological approach that is inclusive of a diverse set of scholarship from a wide range of national and cultural contexts. While the need for decolonising and revaluing African and Southern experiences is broadly shared by South African scholars, there are differences of interpretation and accentuations which are resultant from ancillary debates around the meaning of words such as ‘local’, ‘de-Westernised’, ‘decolonised’ and ‘African’. These words remain unclear and are sometimes confusedly used interchangeably. How these expressions are applied and how meanings are ascribed to them remains a source of contention. One respondent explains this thus:

That we need change I think is beyond dispute and as much as we might still find colleagues resisting change, the transformation of what we teach and how we teach is unavoidable and the demands of our students are clear. The ‘what’ and ‘how’ remains a question though, is a decolonised curricula a more localised curricula, or an African curricula? I see it as a curricula that takes account of varying influences and factors that have a bearing on the contemporary local as well as global political, social, financial, environmental landscape etc.

*(Respondent 23, South Africa)*

Amidst fraught postcolonial histories and politics, contestations over readings of transformation is not so strange. Overall though, the scholars of the South that we surveyed mainly took decolonisation as meaning “social justices and redress” (Respondent 7, India), “enforcement of human rights” (Respondent 18, Brazil) and as referring to work that aims to “de-hegemonize higher education” (Respondent 10, Nigeria). In contrast, our respondents from the North

rarely accentuate the colonial heritage and the need to decolonise as a means of undoing historical injustices and human rights abuses.

For our respondents from the global North, focus tended to still seemingly fall on the perceived ‘global’ and ‘international’ aspects of media and communications and technological developments. This is to say, “we are more inclined to speak of the ‘internationalization’ of media studies, by which we mean including non-European and non-Anglo-Saxon perspectives” (Respondent 2, Sweden). It is also to intimate that there is strong merit to “expanding the canon to go beyond Anglo-American scholars and include research and scholarship from other contexts especially the developing world” (Respondent 17, U.S.). So while “decolonisation is a good and accurate label for an important part of the gigantic tasks of defeating cultural (and political and economic) racism and imperialism in higher education, it would be a slightly less important sub-task” (Respondent 5, U.S.). This can be further explicated in terms of there being, among scholars from the North, “a tendency to concentrate on new technologies – gadget research [so that what emerges is] a very isolationist approach that defies an understanding of [other] historical contexts” and issues with their political and ideological considerations (Respondent 8, Norway).

To be sure, though, it is important to state carefully that our respondents from the North recognised that there is “need to mainstream equity, diversity and inclusion across all courses” (Respondent 4, U.K.). One spoke of the usefulness of courses that advance “cultural diversities” (Respondent 5, U.S.). Another said it is important to build decolonised curricula as a matter of “getting rid of stereotypes of thinking, which naturally inherent to those who know little or very little interested in other cultures or know only from books and movies” (Respondent 6, Finland). Yet another respondent from the North made the fundamental point that decolonisation can in these ways be thought of as a way “to redress the structural – often racially inflected – inequities that are the product of longer processes of colonialism within the institutional spaces of the university” (Respondent 4, U.K.). Seemingly, such discussions at British universities sometimes emanates from a need for being more inclusive of students from the former British Colonies with debates at British universities “framed in the context of globalization and the changing demographics of student populations at British universities” (Respondent 4, U.K.).

Yet other scholars challenge the idea of decolonisation, seeing it as “opportunistically led by people who feel discriminated because of their race, colour etc. [but have yet to] provide evidence that they can also perform at the highest level” (Respondent 24, UK) or even “[a]s a very isolationist approach that defies an understanding of historical contexts. Authoritarian and one that does not see the relationship between an historical political process and ideological concepts” (Respondent 8, Norway).

Such differing views also talk to the challenges faced by those who work to change the curricula and those who work towards a decolonised curriculum.

### ***Challenges facing the decolonisation agenda***

Part of the challenge facing the decolonisation agenda is that it is working to end something that has served some people well, even within the context of the generally marginalised South. Not everyone in the colonised world has been disadvantaged in the same way by the dominance of Western scholarship. Those who have been content to take up prominent roles in the ‘global echo chamber of ideas’ have been content to observe how they are cited and repeated – when they know that they themselves have merely echoed Western myths and misconceptions about Africans and about peoples of the South. To the extent that decolonisation is aimed at ending cycles of racism, exclusion and power imbalances, it threatens to unsettle established economies

of priority and prestige. To this end, a decolonised higher education works against means and norms of “corruption, sexism, racism etc. in the workplace” (Respondent 12, South Africa). It is difficult to know “how to kill patriarchal sexist and racist colonial attitudes” (Respondent 16, South Africa), because this entails imagining and producing a whole new world that is beyond our ken.

For academics, administrators, managers and policy makers, decolonisation is challenging because it restacks and resets frames so that new stakeholder relationships arise as important where they were previously marginalised. Sometimes this means that decolonisation broaches new relational frontiers with the consequence that in certain instances curricula building and teaching are hamstrung by a severe shortage of both a scholarly canon and a substantial enough scholarly community to advance the requisite change. As this South African respondent says:

I find it difficult to decide on new/other ‘truths’ when I myself have been schooled in the old truths. To recurriculise implies that whoever works with it, knows enough of the roots of our science, the inherent prejudices, traditional and current postcolonial and non-Western theory or paradigms and the relevance thereof in a 2016-and-beyond South Africa. There are precious few academics that have the competence to address that.

*(Respondent 14, South Africa)*

This is emphasised not only by South African scholars but also by other scholars teaching and researching from with the context of the postcolony:

In order to prepare relevant curricula for the global South in general and Africa in particular on journalism and media studies, I faced severe short of experts who can participate in this debate. I am writing this based on my experiences of teaching in Eritrea.

*(Respondent 9, India)*

This is also emphasised by this U.K scholar who argues that much of the research done on African media and communications does not necessarily emanate from African scholars or localities:

The decolonisation of curricula heavily depends on the availability of knowledge produced elsewhere. While in recent years, there has been quite a sharp growth in research on African media and communication (including a number of new journals), not all the research could be referred to as ‘decolonised’, and much work applies Western concepts to the African context rather uncritically.

*(Respondent 4, U.K)*

In all respects, decolonisation brings with it the need:

To bring in local examples and to recognize that we are not the US or Europe. We need to develop the curriculum to talk to our own nation and the problems we are facing. We need to start a national dialogue that raises questions of importance to us. And we need to have examples and learning material from around the world not only the US literature or European literature.

*(Respondent 18, Brazil)*

In this conversation the previously marginal are radically made new centres of decision-making that must be engaged with respectfully. So, for example:

We need to respect the value of the experiences of our students, as well as their expectations and perspectives on issues. And for those of us who bring privileges of gender, race, class etc. into teaching and into the debate about transformation, we need to be particularly aware of our own position.

*(Respondent 27, South Africa)*

The latter also talks to how decolonisation debates brings to the fore the need for us as educators to become more self-reflexive. Without us necessarily having chosen this, we increasingly find ourselves positioned also as ‘students’ in the sense of having to learn new ways of relating to existing as well as discarded or forgotten scholarship and methodologies. No more so than in relation to our own students who show that we must go beyond our own miseducation, often shaped by ‘Western’ cognitive schema, perspectives and epistemologies, no matter how challenging and in addition from the perspective of one who is aware of the need to teach scholarship that is relevant to the deep and neglected needs of marginalised peoples of the South and other marginalised peoples, whose development needs do not need to be exaggerated to gain acceptance, there is something “offensive” about teaching from a curricula “fraught with Westernness or Europeanness . . . packed with stereotypes about third world countries and individuals and sings praises for the Western/European (so-called) modern societies” (Respondent 12, South Africa).

Thus, decolonisation implies saying ‘no more’ to historical legacies and social injustices that emanate from slavery, colonisation and apartheid which are then enforced and perpetuated through Westernised impositions and influences that disconnect the merit of education from needs and realities found in postcolonial contexts. Thus, the question is, as quoted earlier, whether “the current curricula connect the learner to his/her context of existence or is it a perpetuation of the colonial system by ‘softer’ means?” (Respondent 3, Zimbabwe).

The problem of how to decolonise is not just related to a real or perceived offensiveness of commentary and content, it is also one related to the productive and institutional consequences of the processes that, in the postcolony and wider global South, subordinate universities and their curricula to neocolonial positions and orders. Whereas universities may be ideally imagined to ceaselessly produce innovative research, and whereas scholars are expected to teach in ways that deliver and are informed by virtuous cycles of innovative insights, in many cases scholars find that, in their universities, they are instead made to adapt and to relay “models copied from the global North – that . . . renders the copiers inferior” (Respondent 10, Nigeria). This experience of undergoing cycles of repetition and duplication “stifles the creativities of the global South higher education system and perpetuates a hegemonic stance” (Respondent 10, Nigeria) in often viciously misanthropic cycles.

The decolonisation of the curriculum relates to a whole set of resource issues, pertinently summarised by this scholar:

The issue of decolonisation is intricately linked to resources and cannot just be treated as an ideological issue. For it to be addressed, there is a need for a radical change in the structural inequalities between scholars and universities in different parts of the world. It would require more resources (i.e. time away from teaching and research funding without conditionality) to enable scholars in the global South to produce research, while at the same time, it would require scholars in the global North to engage more seriously with knowledge produced in/on the global South and to acknowledge that their own research on the global North is partial and contextual. . . . this is not unrelated to the conditionalities



attached to certain types of research funding and the rise of what Mandani has called ‘consultancy culture’.

*(Respondent 4, U.K.)*

There are impediments to transformation that are caused by the increased commodification of higher education that “has eroded the very focus and role of higher education in developing societies” (Respondent 11, Kenya). A South African respondent says:

the underlying question is whether the university can still be thought as a space for critical thinking and the pursuit of knowledge (or an approximation of it); or whether we should resign ourselves to the idea of the university as a managerial, top-down, commodified, branded, ranked, corporatized and securitised institution. If the latter, the question of decolonisation would be at best window dressing.

*(Respondent 13, South Africa)*

Universities are not islands apart from other forces in the world. The possibility of decolonisation of curricula is tied to how other operations in the world determine what is feasible or not. Internally, within national boundaries, universities are subjected to economic and other pressures that drive the composition of curricula in various directions, even without these forces being fully deterministic. “With the current funding crisis in South Africa resources are going to be crucial. If not forthcoming we are unlikely to be able to bring about change” (Respondent 26, South Africa). Externally, Southern states and their universities are bound up in international, multilateral and global dynamics that carry and perpetuate colonial momentums. Just one tip of this is that “there are huge discrepancies in funding and the support received by scholars at African universities compared to their colleagues in the West” (Respondent 30, Zimbabwe). Largely, the global South continues to consume information the global North dumps. This is seen in how “course literature is imported from the north, for the simple reason that it is often cheaper than developing new scholarly material” (Respondent 18, Brazil). At the same time, generally, the global North does not cease to extract and process knowledge from the global South for its own ends. In consequence, “[t]he lack of necessary handbooks to support curricula based on a local/African epistemology will probably continue to hinder the Africanisation of curricula” (Respondent 1, South Africa).

Overall decolonisation remains a challenge, not only from perspectives of diversification and transformation of contents in the curriculum and the weight given to such a project, but also in terms of the question of how resources are to be found for purposes of actualising such projects. This is particularly pertinent if such projects are to be driven from comparatively under resourced universities in the global South.

## Concluding remarks

Postcolonial universities have generally adopted Western communications and media scholarship, root and branch. This adoption is deep-rooted in the ways in which it is fed and grounded in national and international systems of governance and capital that determine much of what is visually observable at the surface. Those who fight for decolonisation of higher education must find ways to uproot systems which are currently in place and to replace these with new kinds that are democratic and answerable to previously denied and marginalised publics. It is then that we can begin to see the emergence of a university “whose identity is true to its contextualised existence. . . . [For] to decolonize is to move towards one’s own realistic, responsible essence”

(Respondent 14, South Africa). The resultant decolonised university is an ideal that humanises by making universities better reflective of both the differences, similarities, limitations and possibilities presented by peoples and their concerns.

Our exploratory survey shows a broad consensus around the need for transformation of the media and communications studies discipline, and the curricula in particular. However, how such transformations are defined and envisioned and how they relate and are interpreted from perspectives of a decolonisation agenda is contested. And where the African scholars surveyed as well as many other scholars from postcolonial societies emphasise the need, and actual calls for, curriculum transformation and a decolonisation of the curriculum, scholars from the global North seemingly emphasise slightly different issues influencing debates around the curriculum. Not unexpectedly, these differences come through in the relative weight given to debates around a decolonisation of the curricula premised on human rights, social justice, equity and redress versus an emphasis on broader inclusivity and diversity of scholarship from the South, that may or may not address deeper issues of colonial legacies and injustices, as well as debates centred on technological developments, quality assurance and employability of graduates.

The debate about decolonisation, to the extent that it entails questions of relevance, resourcing and the meeting needs, also has to be read as a confirmation of the relative weight given to debates around transformation of the curriculum, i.e. whether broader transformation debates are centred around the need for inclusivity, diversity and an undoing of a 'Western'-centric worldview shaped by, and enmeshed in, legacies of the colonial project. In this regard, the survey responses do reflect a disjuncture in the way that 'transformation' needs are interpreted as well as reflected in the curricula from within differing national, regional and international contexts. This is, as emphasised earlier, reflected through the way in which South African scholars, including many other scholars of the 'South', emphasise the need and moral imperatives for decolonising the media and communication discipline, including the curricula taught. However, such responses do not take away the additional needs for, and practical concerns around, transformation of curricula debates centred on a rapidly changing world order impacting on the higher education landscape, including the curricula, from perspectives of new technological developments and how such developments are read and emphasised, independent of geographical, political, or sociocultural location. We also note with concern the lack of discussions around gender and intersectionality in the responses and seemingly also in broader transformation debates.

Rethinking of curricula in communication and media studies ultimately converges with and requires the raising of a most pressing question: What is the university today, and what is its role in the context in which it operates? More precisely, the underlying question is whether the university can still be thought as a space for critical thinking and for the pursuit of knowledge (or an approximation of it); or whether we should resign ourselves to the idea of the university as a managerial, top-down, commodified, branded, ranked, corporatised and securitised institution. If the latter, the question of decolonisation would be at best a form of window dressing. This is confirmed wherever one sees the violent repression, by managerial and politically connected academic powers who are what are now claiming decolonisation as their own, of movements that put this demand on the agenda (Respondent 13, South Africa).

For those who look at the transformation of curricula, the South African lesson can be read to suggest that there is need to guard against losing the energy and focus that arise in moments of national strife and extended global interest in questions of transformation and decolonisation. To not produce more humanising curricula in such moments would be to affirm the worthlessness of the 'black pain' and of sacrifices of many for an education that meets their and our needs.

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