



Editorial: Decolonising Knowledge Production in the Humanities, Social Sciences and Arts in Africa

Munyaradzi Mushonga*

Introduction

The current global system is characterised by a profound imbalance in the distribution of resources and opportunities, particularly between richer and poorer countries, as well as within those countries themselves. This imbalance is equally evident in the architecture of knowledge production, which was the subject of a colloquium in 2024 hosted by the Centre for Gender and Africa Studies (CGAS), Faculty of the Humanities, University of the Free State (UFS) under the theme ‘Decolonising Knowledge Production in the Humanities, Social Sciences and Arts (HSSA): Reflecting on a Decade of the Charter for Humanities and Social Sciences in South African Higher Education’.¹ The colloquium provided an opportunity to reflect and take stock of the state of the Humanities, Social Sciences and Arts within the broader knowledge production architecture governing the South African higher education landscape. The articles in this volume examine the embedded Eurocentric knowledge monopolies and enduring legacies from a decolonial theory perspective, as well as the challenges of combating the resulting inequalities and racial hierarchies.

The idea for the colloquium is traceable to four key moments. In about May 2024, I shared a 30 November 2015 Library Genesis letter titled ‘In Solidarity with Library Genesis and Sci-Hub’ (Barok et al. 2015) with members of the CGAS WhatsApp Group. In this letter, the authors bemoan the superprofits the publishing giant Elsevier was making through parasitic practices that exploited authors and reviewers. This provoked discussions about the asymmetries in the production and dissemination of knowledge between the Global (minority) North and the Global (majority) South, as well as the academic capitalism and parasitism therein.

* Associate Professor, Centre for Gender and Africa Studies, University of the Free State, South Africa. Email: MushongaM@ufs.ac.za

The second moment arose when Professor Hussein Solomon shared, in the same group, an article by Savo Heleta and Pedro Mzileni in which they ably demonstrated that the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) was reinforcing bibliometric coloniality in South Africa. Their analysis showed that the DHET's list of accredited journals was dominated by journals from Europe and North America, a matter that the DHET ostensibly sought to address in its own Charter, which stated that knowledge production in Africa and on Africa must be responsive to local contexts.

The third moment was when Professor Stephanie Cawood shared, in the same WhatsApp group, an article published in *The Guardian* in which the author, Arash Abizadeh, argued and demonstrated that giant publishers – Elsevier, Wiley, Taylor & Francis, Springer Nature, and SAGE – operated a lucrative scam, bleeding universities dry while achieving profit margins that rivalled those of Google. The fourth and final moment was when the Dean of the Faculty of the Humanities, Prof. Mogomme Masoga, out of the blue, called the CGAS to say that if we could host a conference on decolonising knowledge, he could underwrite the funding. The rest, as the old adage goes, is history.

The Charter for Humanities, Social Sciences and Arts and the Relevance of Decoloniality

The Charter for Humanities and Social Sciences, hereafter the Charter, was launched in 2011 by the then Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr B.E. Nzimande, with the express mandate to place the Humanities, Social Sciences and Arts on a more equal footing with the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) disciplines. The Charter recognised the supranational inequalities in knowledge production, in which STEM disciplines and ways of knowing tend to be privileged, attaining higher status and being better-resourced than HSSA disciplines. The Charter therefore made a valiant attempt to address some of these systemic asymmetries in higher education and to redefine the importance and role of HSSA for a democratic and equal South African society. Crucially, the Charter noted that the rewards system in the South African higher education sector was skewed against scholars working in the fields of HSSA, including in the National Research Foundation's (NRF) recognition system. Writing in the Foreword to the Charter, Dr Nzimande stated:

I commissioned this Charter initiative and its Report because I was convinced that we needed a robust post-Apartheid Higher Education system and because the Humanities and the Social Sciences have or ought to have a major role in defining its character, its excellence and values... My suspicion that the humanities and social sciences were being neglected and becoming weaker was what prompted me to appoint ... the Task Team to look into how the social sciences can be strengthened (DHET 2011: 5).

The Charter, therefore, became the departure point for some of the papers in this Issue. It must be said that the Charter prefigured or anticipated the 2015–16 #RhodesMustFall (RMF) and #FeesMustFall (FMF) movements in South Africa. Many of the critical issues and systemic asymmetries at higher education institutions, raised in the 2011 Charter, would become the burning issues of the Fallist movements. They placed and brought decolonisation debates in HSSA at South African and African universities squarely to the fore.

The twenty-first century has witnessed a resurgence of decolonial thought, positioning HSSA as a leader in re-humanising and re-worlding knowledge production. This shift challenges the prevailing STEM-centric narratives that often marginalise HSSA disciplines. This is why Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2007) posits that ‘modern’ education continues to operate along what he calls ‘abyssal lines’ or ‘abyssal thinking’, which tends to divide disciplines into ‘relevant’ and ‘irrelevant’. The disciplines that are deemed relevant are grouped under the acronym STEM, which stands for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, while those that are deemed ‘irrelevant’ vacillate between ‘unstable’ acronyms – HSSA (Humanities, Social Sciences and Arts), SSH (Social Sciences and Humanities), SHAPE (Social Sciences, Humanities, Arts for the People and the Economy), HASS (Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences), or NAIL (Narrative, Analysis, Interpretation and Literacies).

Yet it is not the acronym that matters most, but the need to move beyond abyssal thinking that has constructed some disciplines as more relevant than others. Reciprocal and convivial conversations, as well as a symbiotic relationship between STEM and HSSA disciplines, are important for achieving a better and shared understanding of the material and social world. There is no separate world or reality for STEM and HSSA disciplines, and ignoring the real-world perspective of either is living in a fantasy. In *The Palm Wine Drinkard*, Amos Tutuola (2014) offers a theory of general ecology by showing that nothing is static and that everything is an interaction, including life itself. The humanities and social sciences offer this variation to underscore the point that randomness outweighs essentialism,

fixity and determinism. To achieve reciprocal and convivial conversations among STEM and HSSA disciplines requires a new kind of post-abyssal thinking anchored in post-abyssal epistemologies, methodologies and pedagogies (Santos 2007). In the twenty-first century, the time has arrived to decentre STEM while simultaneously recentring HSSA disciplines until the centre itself disappears.

Increasingly, the language of higher education has adopted business and corporate metaphors, in which students are seen as clients and post-secondary education is expected to serve a utilitarian, vocational function. This is problematic in HSSA fields where many areas of study do not naturally lend themselves to a specific vocation, raising questions about 'relevance' in the name of 'graduate attributes'. The sooner we realise that universities are not for-profit entities and should not be turned into large markets or corporations, and that the one-size-fits-all formulaic prescriptions of the Bretton Woods Institutions is not the solution to the challenges confronting higher education – the better. Such mindsets risk rendering HSSA fields increasingly fragile, forgetting that they are largely responsible for facilitating higher-order human thinking, critical analysis, creativity, and the development of big ideas and ways of interpreting the world, rather than merely training for a vocation. A humanities, social sciences or liberal arts education is not only essential for the job market but also for leading more fulfilling lives and for becoming responsible citizens of the world.

Broadly speaking, neoliberal arguments position higher education as a private good, with the warped idea that 'the student is the main beneficiary of the degree [and therefore] should bear a larger part of the costs of providing it', while decolonial arguments see higher education as a public good with 'overwhelming externalities that contribute to the public good/greater good, namely civic citizenship and engagement, greater tolerance, strengthening of democracy' (Mushonga 2025: 180–1) among other benefits. It is probably this neoliberal and extractivist thinking that has turned the higher education environment into a marketplace with corporate management styles or 'punitive managerialism' that hides behind a discourse that emphasises economic efficiency, effectiveness, accountability, quality and competitiveness while perverting the real and original meaning of these (Mushonga 2025: 177). Increased corporatisation of universities in South Africa and around the world remains the single most important challenge for higher education in the twenty-first century, hence the need for decoloniality.

The Biography and Geography of Knowledge

The idea of the biography and geography of knowledge (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2017, 2018) is central to the pronouncements of the Charter. It emphasises the situatedness of knowledge within specific contexts, that is, drawing from immediate contexts and without turning away from reality. It is probably the best way for universities to dodge what Lewis Gordon (2011) calls disciplinary decadence. Knowledge is never produced in a vacuum; it is always the product of particular bodies located in particular geographies, shaped by particular histories and animated by particular interests. The Charter highlights the relegation of HSSA scholarship, which is often treated as an appendage to STEM disciplines, evaluated according to a rewards system that prioritises innovation and economic utility over critical thinking and the embodied production of meaning.

The insight that knowledge has both a biography and a geography is foundational to decolonial critique. It exposes the fiction of zero-point epistemology, the claim that objective, neutral, unsituated, disembodied and uncontaminated knowledge is possible. As Grosfoguel (2013; 2015) has shown, the monopolistic and oligopolistic production of knowledge has been concentrated historically among mainly White males of five Western countries – Britain, France, the United States, Germany and Italy – thus ensuring the invisibility, if not the erasure, of women, including White women from these countries, as well as scholars from Africa and the Global South. This has been compounded by the dominance of Western colonial languages – English, German, Spanish, French, Portuguese and Italian (Mignolo and Walsh 2018; Mignolo 2021). Broadly, this has left Africa dependent on Western knowledge systems and values, what Paulin Hountondji (1990) characterised as ‘indices of scientific dependence’.

Crucially, as Melber, following Santos (2007), reminds us in this Issue, we must not confuse the idea of epistemologies of the South with geography. While there are partial overlaps between the epistemological South and the geographical South, ‘epistemologies of the North also flourish in the geographical South ... but also because the epistemological South is also to be found in the geographical North’. This is a salutary caution against an oversimplified geographical determinism in our decolonial thinking. Decolonising knowledge production is therefore not merely a matter of redistributing epistemic authority across a map; it is also a matter of dismantling the colonial matrix of power (CMP) (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013; Grosfoguel 2015; Mignolo 2021, 2023) that organises knowledge production globally.

In the publishing industry, African publishers find themselves in a precarious position, exacerbated by the widespread characterisation of African journals and their publishers as predatory – a situation compounded by the burning desire of many African scholars to publish in international, credible journals in search of academic validation. As Heleta writes in this publication, a Eurocentric order of knowledge and a northbound gaze remain dominant factors shaping thinking about academic knowledge, institutional priorities, and the credibility of platforms for dissemination of research and knowledge. This is further compounded by what Zeleza and Olukoshi (2004a) describe as the perilous state of publishing and libraries across the African continent.

Some Key and Tormenting Questions in Knowledge Production in HSSA Disciplines

A major problem we all face in life is the failure or inability to ask the right questions. If the right questions are posed, solutions will be within reach and within our historical experiences. I wish to add that asking the right questions must also go together with asking unsettling or tormenting questions as the best way to get to the bottom of any matter. It is the precondition for any serious intellectual and political transformation. In the realm of knowledge production, both Francis Nyamnjoh (2019) and Lewis Gordon (2015) argue that asking the right questions is the first step in not only decolonising the university, but is also the only way to build a ‘questioning humanity’. That is why Frantz Fanon opens and concludes his tour de force, *Black Skin, White Masks*, with a prayer-cum-question that is simultaneously a challenge and a provocation: ‘O my body, make of me always a man who questions!’ (Fanon 1967: 7–8, 231–2).

Probably one of the most unsettling questions, challenging us to reconsider the foundations of our disciplines, was posed at the colloquium. It came from Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, who posed it during a Facebook discussion on Elisio Macamo’s presentation on the notion of ‘Sovereign Reason’:

What if the very ideas of the ‘Social’ and the ‘Human’ were conceived in modernity against that which was considered ‘non-social’ and ‘non-human’, that is, that which was rendered ‘native’ and ‘Black’; how do we then resort to ‘Social Sciences’ and ‘Humanities’ in an effort to make sense of the condition of those they wrote out of the ‘Social’ and the ‘Human’, in the first instance? This question came to my mind as I listened to Professor Elisio Macamo’s provocative seminar on ‘Sovereign Reason: Issues in African Studies’. Prof. Macamo pushed for radicalisation of critique and formulation of new questions (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2022: Facebook discussion).

This question highlights the scepticism surrounding the bodies that produce decolonial knowledge, as they were often never intended to carry epistemic value. It is in the spirit of asking the ‘right and unsettling questions’ that the questions in Table 1 are offered, not as a neat inventory of problems awaiting bureaucratic solutions, but as a living, breathing, tormenting archive of intellectual restlessness. These questions have been distilled from a close reading of the articles in this publication, while a good number of them were posed during the three-day colloquium. To varying degrees, each contributor to this volume attempts to address one or more of these questions. The questions have been sorted into seven thematic clusters, each capturing a distinct register of the decolonial imagination, and each with an overarching italicised question in brackets (see Table 1). These questions serve as a kind of epistemic North Star for the articles in this volume and for the academy in general.

Table 1: Some key and tormenting questions in knowledge production

Theme I: The architecture of epistemic injustice and the datafication of knowledge (<i>Who owns knowledge, and who pays the price?</i>)	
1	How do we level the publications playing field between the Global North and Global South, including funding disparities, and how can the share of knowledge production from the Global South be substantially enhanced?
2	Who produces knowledge, and for whom? Who controls what has been produced? And who has access to the final product?
3	Who uses any particular kind of knowledge, for which interests, and for what and whose purposes?
4	Where does knowledge come from, or how do we know what we know?
5	Is zero-point epistemology – objective, neutral, unsituated, disembodied, and uncontaminated knowledge – even possible?
6	Can non-Europeans, or more specifically, Africans, think?
Theme II: Bibliometric coloniality and the publishing industrial complex (<i>The scam hidden in plain sight?</i>)	
7	How can we transcend the politics of ‘publish or perish’ in HSSA fields, and overcome the skewed publication and recognition system between STEM and HSSA disciplines?
8	Is the inclusion of African and underrepresented regions into dominant Euro-American indexes a genuinely transformative and decolonial solution, or does it extend and legitimise those platforms? Is an adjustment of criteria the answer? Or is inclusion itself complicit in coloniality?

Theme III: Coloniality, the university, and the colonial matrix of power <i>(When was the university colonised, and what will it take to decolonise it?)</i>	
9	To what extent do HSSA disciplines remain trapped in Euro-American-centric thought and practices, and how can they be liberated from the colonial matrix of power (CMP)?
10	What is the best way to exorcise the ghosts of coloniality from the higher education landscape?
11	When, exactly, was the university colonised?
12	What would a decolonised university look like, or how can we exit the Euro-American epistemic-cum-existential prison?
13	What would undisciplinary and post-disciplinary knowledge futures look like?
14	What is the most important point of departure in decolonial work?
15	Can a decolonial idea be executed through a colonial language? Can the coloniser's tools dismantle the colonial knowledge system, and what does it mean to use them in the attempt?
16	What remains of the human subject in an age when reason is enacted by information machines, and who will define the threshold between the calculable and the incalculable, between what is deemed worthy and what is deemed dispensable?
Theme IV: Neoliberalism, corporatisation, and the marketised academy <i>(Who turned the university into a corporation?)</i>	
17	What are the implications of increased academic managerialism in higher education?
18	To what extent is the rhetoric of vocationalism, framed around 'graduate attributes', helpful or harmful for HSSA disciplines?
19	Why has corporatisation continued largely unabated in South African universities after the Fallist movements? Does it represent sectoral pushback or an intensification of neoliberal materialities?
Theme V: The Fallist movements (RMF & FMF) – legacy, limits, and betrayal <i>(Did RMF and FMF movements change anything – or everything?)</i>	
20	What lessons do we learn from the 2015/16 RMF and FMF movements?
21	To what extent did the Fallist movements interrogate hierarchies of knowledge production, and how have they reshaped debates around curriculum, access and institutional culture?
22	What theoretical and pedagogical insights emerge from the Fallist movements for ongoing transformation, and to what extent have institutional responses addressed, diluted or reconfigured the core demands of student activists?
23	Are students achieving better results in the post-#RhodesMustFall era?

Theme VI: Curriculum, identity, and the politics of recognition <i>(Whose knowledge counts, and whose life improves?)</i>	
24	How has the HSSA curriculum responded to calls for decolonisation?
25	To what extent is decolonising knowledge production centring gender?
26	Does identity matter in decolonial knowledge production?
27	Does symbolic decolonisation – renaming streets, acknowledging female role models, etc – translate into material improvement in the lives of the marginalised?
28	How do we recognise otherness without othering?
Theme VII: Building the decolonial university from the ground up <i>(What does it take to start afresh?)</i>	
29	How does one start a university in Africa? What institutional arrangements make the most sense, and what academic programmes are appropriate?
30	What does decolonisation mean in a new university like Sol Plaatje University – what must it decolonise, how, and what dilemmas does it face in the 21st century?
31	Did we jump too quickly into the global condition of postcoloniality, and along the way, sidestep the complex processes of decolonisation that needed to take place first?
32	What kind of university do we want and can afford?
33	Which way forward for the humanities, social sciences, and arts in the 21st century?

Theme I speaks to the fact that at the foundation of decolonial thought lies a diagnosis – the global knowledge system is not neutral. It has a geography, a biography, and a balance sheet, and all three are skewed. This cluster of questions interrogates the structural scaffolding of that injustice, from the economics of publishing to the politics of language to the challenge of artificial intelligence, algorithmic governance and the datafication of knowledge. Theme II highlights how academic publishing has become one of the most lucrative and least scrutinised extractive industries of the twenty-first century. The cluster of questions zeroes in on the mechanisms by which Euro-American publishing giants, indexing systems and accreditation bodies reproduce coloniality, and on the adequacy of ‘inclusion’ as a remedy. Theme III demonstrates that the university is not innocent as it was built, in large measure, to serve colonial modernity – to produce, classify and legitimise certain knowledges while erasing others. This cluster asks the hard ontological and historical questions about the university as an institution: how it was colonised, what it would mean to

decolonise it, and what a genuinely decolonised African university might look like? Theme IV captures the fact that the corporatisation of higher education is not a side-effect of globalisation, but a political choice, and a deeply consequential one. This cluster interrogates the entanglement of neoliberal managerialism with the decolonial project, asking whether the university can be decolonised while being simultaneously corporatised. Theme V speaks directly to the 2015–16 #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall movements, which shook South African higher education to its foundations and sent reverberations around the world. The questions in this cluster ask what the movements achieved, what they left unfinished, and what has been done or undone in their wake. Theme VI argues that decolonisation is not only an epistemological project but also a material and existential one. The questions here seek to bridge the gap between changing the names of streets and buildings and changing the conditions of life for those who live, walk, and struggle in those spaces. It asks whether symbolic recognition translates into substantive transformation. Theme VII offers Sol Plaatje University as a rare laboratory – a post-1994, post-apartheid institution built from scratch, with the explicit mandate to be different. The questions here draw on that experiment to ask the practical, institutional and philosophical questions that attend the project of building a genuinely decolonised university in Africa.

This long list of questions speaks to the irreplaceable importance of interrogation in the search for academic justice and the resolution of life's problems. Yet, this is not an exhaustive list of questions on the decolonial imagination. They are, rather, an invitation to think harder, question more fiercely, and refuse the comfort of easy questions and answers. The following section attempts to address some of these questions.

Towards Decolonised Knowledge Production in HSSA: A Bird's Eye View

The articles in this volume are a mixture of theory clarification and problematisation, on one hand, and theory and empirical grounding on the other. They also straddle the thematic classification in Table 1. Together, these articles constitute a sustained, multi-pronged decolonial engagement with the higher education landscape in South Africa in particular, and the African continent and the Global South in general.

Henning Melber, while acknowledging the good intentions of the Charter, including its African Renaissance approach, takes issue with its failure to question inherited structures, systems, and institutions,

and its apparent comfort with working within the colonial template, thereby confirming what Fanon (1967) calls ‘repetition without change’. He argues that while epistemological changes are a great step in the decolonisation of knowledge, they fall short of full decolonisation when cultivated within ‘the inherited structures of dominance, privilege and discrimination’. Melber draws the attention of readers and leaders in the higher education environment to the challenges that lie beyond epistemological decolonisation, proposing how to exit the Western epistemic prison. He also raises the fundamental point that decolonisation is more than epistemology – it must trouble the systems, structures and institutions that Mignolo (2021) calls the ‘colonial matrix of power’, put in place by colonial modernity. Melber also addresses an aspect that is normally avoided by many scholars: the idea of being an ‘implicated subject’. Despite falling on the privileged side of modernity, he insists on the need to dismantle ‘the past and present of White supremacy’ in tandem with ‘a self-critical interrogation’, notwithstanding being ‘privileged by such past’. He cautions against taking ‘the means to an end for the end – and [therefore] fail in our efforts towards true decolonisation’, concluding with profound cautionary reflections that draw on the work of Long, Dabashi and Fanon.

Savo Heleta makes a great intervention through the innovative decolonial grammar of ‘bibliometric coloniality’. By this, Heleta refers to the systems and structures of domination of global academic publishing by scholarly indexes and academic bodies based in Europe and North America, such as Scopus and Web of Science, and publishers such as Taylor & Francis, Routledge, Macmillan, Lexington Books, Springer Nature, Wiley, Sage Publications and Elsevier, under the guise of credibility, universality, internationality and reputability, with dire consequences for scholarly indexes and academic publishing bodies in Africa and the Global South. Highlighting this bibliometric coloniality in a separate piece with Mzileni, they write:

Our analysis shows that the DHET’s lists of accredited journals propagate and value academic journals based in the Global North as credible platforms for dissemination of knowledge, while erasing the African continent and Global South. This way, the DHET is directly reinforcing global bibliometric coloniality and contributing to the maintenance of Euro-American epistemic hegemony. We argue that South Africa, as Africa’s top producer of scholarly output, should lead the process of dismantling bibliometric coloniality and promoting African knowledge platforms (Heleta and Mzileni 2024: 1).

The major consequence is the entrenchment of Euro-American hegemony in knowledge production and dissemination, and the marginalisation of the African continent – in short, the solidification of the coloniality of knowledge. Heleta's article also illuminates the linkages between this hegemonic academic publishing, on one hand, and the neoliberalisation, commodification and corporatisation of universities in the higher education and research ecosystem on the other (see Zeleza and Olukoshi 2004a, 2004b; Mamdani 2007, 2008; Mushonga and Hudson 2020; Mushonga 2025). Just like Melber, Heleta does not only mourn this entangled bibliometric coloniality, but also goes further to suggest how to exit the Euro-American epistemic prison, thus providing the needed decolonial critique and praxis. From a decolonial standpoint, inclusion or 'decolonial washing' is not the solution, as it will only serve to solidify and entrench Euro-American hegemony to the detriment of Africa's call for epistemic justice and freedom (Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Zondi, 2016; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Instead, Africa should seek to dismantle these neocolonial and neoliberal monopolies while reconstituting comprehensive scholarly indexes, publishing bodies and university presses.

In the article 'Critical theory of the pedagogy of "Fallism" and its praxis', Wandile Kasibe makes several critical points based on his experiential involvement with both the RMF and FMF movements as a student at the University of Cape Town (UCT). He situates the Fallist movements within the broader socio-economic and political environment of South Africa, noting that the RMF movement drew inspiration from radical thinkers and activists such as Frantz Fanon, Steve Biko, and Bell Hooks, as well as from movements and philosophical traditions such as Black Consciousness, the Black Radical Tradition, and Pan-Africanism. Wandile makes a compelling case for viewing the RMF movement as a 'Fallist' philosophy with broader revolutionary and practical implications – not only for the decolonisation of knowledge but also for the socio-economic and political decolonisation of society.

'Fallism' encompassed a remarkable range of movements: #RhodesMustFall (UCT), #FeesMustFall, Decolonise Wits, Decolonise Law (UCT), Open Stellenbosch, Black Students Movement (Rhodes University), #KingGeorgeMustFall (UKZN), #KrugerMustFall (City of Pretoria), #OutsourcingMustFall, and #PatriarchyMustFall, among others. At the global stage, 'Fallism' resonated across #RhodesMustFall (Oxford and the Caribbean), #RoyalMustFall (Harvard), #LeopoldMustFall (Queen Mary University, United Kingdom), and the renaming and removal of oppressive symbols of the slave-owning Confederacy in thirty US states, the District of

Columbia and Canada. The global footprints of ‘Fallism’ are written all over the shore – a collective struggle and not a ‘one-man show’. Kasibe does well to demonstrate that the RMF was not only a student movement, but that it also involved academic, administrative and support staff, an aspect generally lost in most discourses. He argues that ‘Fallism’ presents itself as ‘an anti-colonial-capitalist vanguard theoretical framework that inclines towards a socialist model with a Black Nationalist and Internationalist posture’.

Mogomme Masoga turns his critical gaze on statutory bodies such as the DHET, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), arguing that these bodies stand in the way of a truly decolonised South African university – the rallying cry of the 2015–16 #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall movements. He sees these bodies as gatekeepers or apostles of coloniality, in which ‘the post-Fallist period has coincided with an apparent acceleration of corporatisation, evidenced by the rise of managerial discourse, third-stream income imperatives, performance-driven academic labour and executive remuneration structures increasingly comparable to those of corporate CEOs’. Like Melber, Masoga cautions against decolonisation being absorbed into institutional policy frameworks without altering underlying power relations, arguing that the aspirations of the Fallist movements find themselves betrayed by accelerated corporatisation and marketisation. Mobilising decolonial theory and critical pedagogy, Masoga teases out ‘the intellectual and political claims of the #RhodesMustFall (RMF) and #FeesMustFall (FMF) movements’ and argues for seeing these as both ontological and epistemic critique, beyond episodic protest, including recognition of their global impact as wider transnational decolonial discourses and practices. Masoga, like Mpfu, make a compelling case against the commodification of higher education and neoliberal managerialism, laying out a clear vision of a truly decolonised African university.

William Mpfu offers the decolonial theory/perspective as a philosophy of liberation capable of birthing a truly decolonised university in Africa, one that is ‘locally rooted and globally relevant and present’. He ably demonstrates how the current university in Africa functions as an implant – a Euro-American model that is fundamentally imperialist and colonial – thus exposing the darker side of Western modernity (Mignolo 2018, 2021). Drawing from Enrique Dussel (1985), Mpfu unpacks the relevance of the philosophy of liberation for Africa and the Global South, showing how it can be deployed by the formerly colonised through ‘speaking back’ and ‘writing back’ to Empire (Ashcroft et al. 2003), by openly mocking, resisting and destabilising the Euro-American

westernised and colonial university. He then unpacks the key features of a decolonised university in Africa, namely: multilingualism through the co-existence of African languages with Euro-American languages; human diversity with peoples from different geographies, cultures, biographies and religions; epistemic diversity and inclusion with different races, genders and positionalities as opposed to the Euro-American intellectual monologue; and convivial spaces and architecture without barriers to access and free of provocative statues, landscapes, ceremonies and rituals. Further features of a decolonised university include the removal of market tendencies, where students are treated as clients/consumers and education as a commodity; the valuing of all forms of life on Earth, including plants, animals, the environment and nature; and the university as a home, not only for the routinised academic, but also for public intellectuals, activists, practitioners and other thinkers concerned with life on Earth.

Pamila Gupta offers readers a nuanced and complex entry into decolonial studies by calling us to see decolonisation both as ‘a subject and object of analysis’. She calls on us to understand that with the end of colonialism comes optimism, frustration and uncertainty simultaneously; how personal things can be read to understand colonialism as an individual form of possession, and the fallout of decolonisation as one of dispossession; the stakes involved for those departing and the resentments they carry when forced to leave a place called home; the shifting moral landscape that comes with decolonisation and an inability to articulate colonial loss for some; and, finally, a focus on who and what remains – less as a form of failure or ruin, but rather potentiality. Gupta is critical of current scholarship on decolonisation that appears to focus exclusively on knowledge decolonisation to the exclusion of political and economic emancipation. She asks provocatively whether decolonisation has pushed studies of postcolonialism out, posing the telling question: ‘did we perhaps jump too quickly into the global condition of postcoloniality and along the way, somehow sidestep the complex processes of decolonisation that needed to take place prior to this shift?’

Gupta offers a five-pronged approach to the study of decolonisation: a combined historical and anthropological perspective; a closer look at the materiality of decolonisation; a recognition of decolonisation’s collective and individual traumas; a viewpoint that goes beyond the singular nation-state to involve multiple colonies and governmentalities; and a turn to more creative source materials to access invaluable experiences of decolonisation. Gupta approaches decolonisation as an old concept that has acquired a new kind of life – as two sides of the same coin.

Jesmael Mataga makes an original contribution to the decolonial discourse using Sol Plaatje University (SPU) as ‘a critical framework for understanding how a born-free South African university navigates intense pressures of transformation while simultaneously building its academic identity’. Deploying his personal experiences as the founding Dean of the SPU School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Mataga admits that ‘the prospect of building a university without the colonial/apartheid blemish was both challenging and exhilarating’. Established by the ANC-led government in 2014, SPU is one of only two post-1994 universities, alongside the University of Mpumalanga (UMP). SPU was mandated to serve as an engine of local development and growth in the economically underdeveloped and marginalised Northern Cape Province. It was positioned as a ‘developmental university’ (Coleman 1986) and, to some extent, it has evolved into an ‘anchor institution in place-based development’.

The article also shows how SPU navigated the thorny issue of language, building African languages and in particular Setswana, the dominant language in the Northern Cape, into degree programmes. True to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s (2023) powerful declaration that translation is the language of languages, SPU translated some English texts into Setswana – gigantic steps towards the kind of decolonised university for which Mpofo forcefully argues. Mataga deploys methodological triangulation (Turner et al. 2017) – government reports, institutional documents, a range of primary and secondary sources, together with an autobiographical, reflexive approach – to bring the story of SPU to life. The article zeros in on the Humanities and Social Sciences, examining how these disciplines provide fertile ground for analysing how political mandates are translated into academic practice and how a new curriculum addresses the challenge of decolonisation.

Conclusion

The quest for a decolonised higher education environment is urgent and complex. As we move forward, it is essential to recognise the interconnectedness of HSSA and STEM disciplines, fostering a more inclusive and equitable knowledge landscape that prioritises the voices and experiences of the Global South. Yet this might seem impossible without asking the right questions, and those questions are often tough, tormenting, and unsettling. Thanks to these questions, the resurgent and insurgent decoloniality of the twenty-first century has gifted us with what W.E.B. Du Bois calls the ‘second-sight’ (Hudecki 2020; Boxill 2023) in which the ‘Negro’s double-consciousness is a positive thing, giving the Black subject a kind of view on the world that is not available to others’

(Hudecki 2020: 22). This second-sight is precisely what the papers in this volume deploy, each in its own way, to illuminate the deep structures of epistemic injustice that continue to organise higher education in South Africa and beyond, and to point towards paths of genuine decolonial transformation.

The articles in this volume collectively contribute to the ongoing decolonial discourse, offering insights and strategies for decolonising knowledge production in the humanities, social sciences, and arts. They resist the reduction of education to specific disciplines and subjects, insisting that the university is not a for-profit entity and that education is a public good. They argue collectively that decolonisation is more than epistemology – it must trouble systems, structures, and institutions; it must be ontological as well as epistemic; and it must engage the material conditions of knowledge production alongside its conceptual frameworks. As Fanon reminds us, the body that questions is itself at stake. It is in that spirit that this volume is offered to the scholarly community.

Note

1. The colloquium was made possible through generous funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation housed in the Office of the Dean, Faculty of the Humanities, University of the Free State, ably supported, financially and materially, by the Unit for Institutional Change, Library & Information Services, University of the Free State, as well as a financial donation from Professor Henning Melber, former Research Director of the Nordic Africa Institute, and Extraordinary Professor at the Centre for Gender and Africa Studies, University of the Free State.

References

- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., and Tiffin, H., 2003, *The Empire Writes back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*, London: Routledge.
- Barok, D., Berry, J., Bodó, B., Dockray, S., Goldsmith, K., Iles, A., and Snelting, F., 2015, 'In solidarity with Library Genesis and Sci-Hub', *PLoS ONE*, 10(6), e0127502.
- Boxill, B.R., 2023, 'WEB DuBois and William James on double consciousness', *Journal of Social Philosophy*, 54(3): 316–32. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josp.12329>
- Coleman, J.S., 1986, 'The idea of the developmental university', *Minerva*, 24(4): 476–94.
- DHET, 2011, 'Report Commissioned by the Minister of Higher Education & Training for the Charter for Humanities and Social Sciences', Pretoria: RSA Government.
- Dussel, E., 1985, *Philosophy of Liberation*, New York: Orbis Books.
- Fanon, F., 1967, *Black Skin, White Masks*, London: Grove Press.

- Gordon, L.R., 2011, 'Shifting the geography of reason in an age of disciplinary decadence', *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World*, 1(2). <https://doi.org/10.5070/T412011810>
- Gordon, L.R., 2015, *What Fanon said: A Philosophical Introduction to his Life and Thought*, New York: Fordham University Press.
- Grosfoguel, R., 2013, 'The structure of knowledge in Westernized universities', *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-knowledge*, 11(1): 73–90.
- Grosfoguel, R., 2015, 'Epistemic racism/sexism, westernized universities and the four genocides/epistemicides of the long 16th century', *Eurocentrism, Racism and Knowledge: Debates on History and Power in Europe and the Americas*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 23–46.
- Heleta, S., and Mzileni, P., 2024, Bibliometric coloniality in South Africa: Critical review of the Indexes of Accredited Journals. *Education as Change*, 28(1): 1–26.
- Hountondji, P., 1990, 'Scientific dependence in Africa today', *Research in African Literatures*, 2(13): 5–15.
- Hudecki, A.M., 2020, "'Second Sight": Acknowledging WEB Du Bois's "Double Consciousness" as a step towards dissolution', MA thesis, The University of Western Ontario.
- Mamdani, M., 2007, *Scholars in the Marketplace. The Dilemmas of Neo-liberal Reform at Makerere University, 1989–2005*, Dakar: CODESRIA.
- Mamdani, M., 2008, 'Higher education, the state and the marketplace', *Journal of Higher Education in Africa/Revue de l'enseignement supérieur en Afrique*, 6(1): 1–10.
- Mignolo, W.D., 2021, *The Politics of Decolonial Investigations*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Mignolo, W.D., 2023, The colonial matrix of power. In *Talking about Global Inequality: Personal Experiences and Historical Perspectives*, New York: Springer, pp. 39–46.
- Mignolo, W.D., and Walsh, C., 2018, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Mushonga, M., 2025, 'The resilient epistemic empire and neoliberal constructions of higher education and the university: A case study of the National University of Lesotho', in E.T. Woldegiorgis, L. Govender and D.Z. Atibuni (eds), *Higher Education Transformation in Africa: A Quest for Epistemological Rupture*, London: Routledge, pp. 177–97.
- Mushonga, M., and Hudson, H., 2020, 'Power and resistance: Struggles over organisational transformation and restructuring at the National University of Lesotho in the 21st century', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 46(4): 655–72.
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S.J., 2013, The entrapment of Africa within the global colonial matrices of power: Eurocentrism, coloniality, and deimperialisation in the twenty-first century. *Journal of Developing Societies*, 29(4): 331–53.
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S.J., 2017, 'The emergence and trajectories of struggles for an 'African university': The case of unfinished business of African epistemic decolonisation', *Kronos*, 43(1): 5177.

- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S.J., 2018, *Epistemic Freedom in Africa: Deprovincialization and Decolonization*, London: Routledge.
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S.J., 2022, Facebook discussion on online lecture by Elisio Macamo entitled 'Sovereign Reason: Issues in African Studies', to the University of Bayreuth and JIAS, Collaborative Research and Seminar Project, 'The Changing African Idea of Africa and the Future of African Studies', CODESRIA.
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S.J., and Zondi, S., 2016, *Decolonizing the University, Knowledge Systems and Disciplines in Africa*, Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press.
- Nyamnjoh, F.B., 2019, 'Decolonizing the university in Africa', in E. Hannah (ed.), *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, Oxford: Oxford Academic.
- Santos, B.d.S., 2007, 'Beyond abyssal thinking: From global lines to ecologies of knowledges', *Review*, XXX(1): 45–89. DOI:10.4324/9781315634876-14
- Turner, S.F, Cardinal, L.B., and Burton, R.M., 2017, 'Research design for mixed methods: A triangulation-based framework and roadmap', *Organisational Research Methods*, 20(2): 243–67.
- Tutuola, A., 2014[1952], *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, London: Faber & Faber.
- Wa Thiong'o, N., 2023, *The Language of Languages: Reflections on Translation*, Calcutta: Seagull Books.
- Zezeza, P.T., and Olukoshi, A., 2004a, *African Universities in the Twenty-First Century: Liberalisation and Internationalisation* (Vol. 1), Dakar: CODESRIA.
- Zezeza, P.T., and Olukoshi, A.O., 2004b, *African Universities in the Twenty-first Century: Knowledge and Society* (Vol. 2), Dakar: CODESRIA.