

# Ongoing efforts to decolonize academic curricula in the field of academic development in South Africa



African art

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Makhanda | South Africa

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# Our driving research question

How is it that even when a number of us - academics - apparently agree about the importance of decolonizing academic curricula (Heleta 2016; Voster & Quinn 2017), our practices still deviate from what we preach?

# Agenda

1. Why is this project important?
2. Literature review + Conceptual Framework
3. Methodological approach
4. Findings & reflections



Mountains surrounding Makhanda, the lands where amaXhosa people live and where our university is located. The picture was taken in July, 2020 after a fire.

Why is this project important?

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Lit review + Conceptual f.

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Methodology

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Findings & reflections

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# Why is this project important?

## 3 reasons

### I. Decolonization as a theory of justice

Our understanding that an important number of the societal wounds – racism, classism, sexism, environmental crisis, corruption - are deeply tied to coloniality

#### → Colonization/Coloniality

Processes and mechanisms that have allowed the (re)production of a system that systematically favours the superiority of Western-European, white, middle-upper class, men, heteronormativity, Christianity, capitalism, and the power of human over nature (Grosfoguel 2002; Quijano 2007)

→ **The colonial matrix power** (Quijano, 2007) → we are not exempted from reproducing it

## 2. Knowledge gap: Lack of theorization on curricula design (Hlatshwayo 2020)

Knowledge production	Module design	Teaching and learning
Knowledge from the global South	Ideological and discursive space	Re-centering African epistemic traditions
Coloniality	Taken for grantedness	Reclaiming the Black archive
Decoloniality	Implicit assumptions	Flipping the classroom
Ubuntu	Lifeworlds	More student-centered approaches
African philosophy	<b>Knowledge gap</b>	Virtual learning
Pan Africanism		Tackling “dead white men” in curricula
Subaltern studies		
Afrocentricity		
African renaissance		
Curriculum borders		
<b>Production</b>	<b>Recontextualization</b>	<b>Reproduction</b>

Epistemic device



Why is this project important?



Lit review + Conceptual f.



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Findings & reflections



### 3. Different colonialities / positionalities

**Anthea**→ South Africa (apartheid; racially stratified society, complicit institutions)

**Roxana**→ Chile (erasure of the category of race; highly stratified society by class, aspiration to become western, global, upper class)



Source: <https://warriorpublications.wordpress.com/2014/10/31/comic-what-is-colonialism/>

Why is this project important?



Lit review + Conceptual f.



Methodology



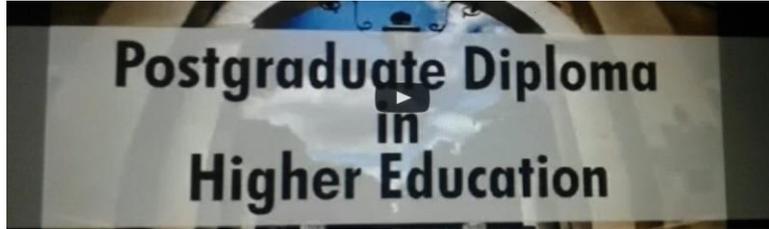
Findings & reflections



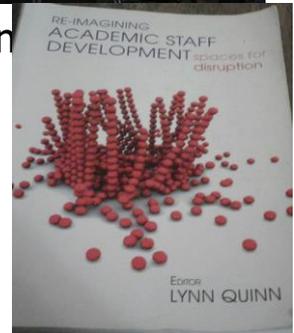
# The colonial legacy in the field of academic development (1/2)

- Academics have a central role of in the decolonisation project (Heleta 2016; Hlatshwayo 2020; Vandeyar 2019)
- Academic staff developers supporting teaching and learning through professional development initiatives - ideal to contribute to the decolonial project
- Renewed critique against academic development (Behari-Leak et al. 2018; Manthunga 2011; Vorster & Quinn 2017)
- #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall student movements
- **Failure to respond to the current HE context and demands to decolonize the curriculum, a lack of political activism, a shift in focus from HE as a social and public good, and mechanistic and reactive responses to the crisis in HE**

# The colonial legacy in the field of academic development (2/2)



- **The predominant philosophical view of the programme** - based on epistemological access, disciplinary knowledge, criticality, reflexivity and praxis, and SoTL- tend to favour the existing knowledges (Vorster & Quinn 2017)
- Decolonization is seen as one of the different strands of the programme



# Conceptual framework

Our ongoing efforts to make visible the colonial relationships and how our actions in the professional and personal realms (de)invest from these relationships



Gray Dam area, 3 km away from Rhodes University

Why is this project important?



**Lit review + Conceptual f.**



Methodology



Findings & reflections

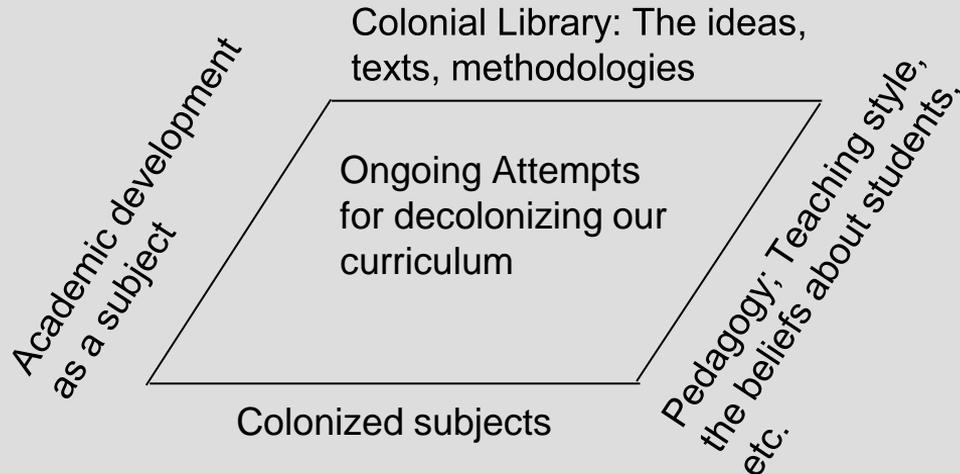


# Globalized economy / patriarchy

South African higher education → legacy apartheid system

Rhodes – Historically White University

## A space in which we can make changes



Why is this project important?

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Lit review + Conceptual f.

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# Recognizing the colonial structures and relationships → the space to make changes

- Deep roots of **the colonial library** (Matthews 2018)
- Academics as colonized subjects (Hlatshwayo 2020; Vandeyar 2019; Maldonado-Torres 2007; Fanon 2004)
- **The object of study is not exempted from (re)producing colonial legacies** (Garuba in Heleta 2016)
  - The voices (bodies) and the ideas included in the curriculum may (re)inforce epistemic injustice (Santos 2007; Heleta 2017; Zembylas 2019)
  - Our field of academic development does not necessarily call into question the hierarchical order existing in the university, rather it seeks to provide the powerful knowledge to groups that have been historically disenfranchised so that they can participate in academia

# Methodological approach

- Our positionality: acknowledgement of the marginalisation of certain voices in the system and our responsibility as academics teaching in a programme, designed to support teaching and learning
- Reflective practice following auto-ethnographic techniques
  - o Memo-ing before, during and after class
  - o Long-extended conversations before and after our classes
  - o Articulating our fears
  - o Praxis → aiming to change curriculum

Why is this project important?

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Lit review + Conceptual f.

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**Methodology**

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Findings & reflections

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# Findings and reflections



View from Oldenburgia trail, about 15 km away from Makhanda. Oldenburgia trail is one of the most common trails visited around Makhanda.

Why is this project important?  
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Methodology  
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**Findings & reflections**  
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# Ongoing efforts to decolonize our curriculum

Inherited curriculum that highlighted the voices of Australian and UK scholars in the scholarship of teaching and learning of two modules:

- Learning & Teaching
- Evaluation of Teaching and Courses

Ongoing efforts:

- Systematic audit of existing curricula, considering content and context;
- Increase the representation of voices of South African scholars, recentring voices rather than challenging the concepts taught (limited and superficial approach);
- Make explicit the colonial entanglements and our limited knowledge (e.g. asking participants about the decolonial discourses in their disciplinary fields);
- A humanizing pedagogy (hooks 1994) and “pedagogy of compassion” (Vandeyar 2019:789) → fostering relationships and open-door approach;
- Special Zoom session on how to decolonize curricula

Why is this project important?



Lit review + Conceptual f.



Methodology



**Findings & reflections**



# The external and internal barriers to de-invest in colonial relationships

- **Context:** It is not just about the predominant existing knowledges in academia, but also the rush/productive mode of academia (Naidoo 2018) → the erosion of the capacity to critique in academia
- **Self-censure mechanisms:** fear of resistance and being judged or seen less serious
- **Our own desires** to be legitimised in the field and our institution
- **The ongoing efforts to unpack our colonized selves** → the importance to find community to make sense of these processes

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Methodology



**Findings & reflections**



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