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Decolonial possibilities in South African higher education: Reconfiguring humanising pedagogies as/with decolonising pedagogies

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This article is an attempt to bring theoretical concepts offered by decolonial theories into conversation with ‘humanising pedagogy.’ The question that drives this analysis is: What are the links between humanisation and the decolonisation of higher education, and what does this imply for pedagogical praxis? This intervention offers valuable insights that reconfigure humanising pedagogy in relation to the decolonial project of social transformation, yet one that does not disavow the challenges—namely, the complexities, tensions and paradoxes—residing therein. The article discusses three approaches to the decolonisation of higher education that have been proposed and suggests that if the desired reform is radical, educators within the sector in South Africa will need to interrogate the pedagogical practices emerging from Eurocentric knowledge approaches by drawing on and twisting these very practices. These efforts can provide spaces to enact decolonial pedagogies that reclaim colonised practices. The article concludes with some reflections on what this idea might imply for South African higher education.

Keywords: decolonisation; decolonising pedagogy; higher education; humanising pedagogy; South Africa; transformation

Introduction

Calls for decolonising South African higher education are not new. The colonial structures of African universities have been critiqued for decades now, certainly prior to the latest and current movements such as seen in South Africa, especially #FeesMustFall (see for example Alexander, 2002; Mamdani, 1996, 2016; Mbembe, 2001, 2016; Nyamnjoh, 2012). Although decolonisation means different things to different people in different contexts, as well as having different dimensions such as the political, economic, cultural, material and epistemic (Maldonado-Torres, 2011), decolonisation can be broadly understood as

an umbrella term for diverse efforts to resist the distinct but intertwined processes of colonisation and racialisation, to enact transformation and redress in reference to the historical and ongoing effects of these processes, and to create and keep alive modes of knowing, being, and relating that these processes seek to eradicate (Stein & Andreotti, 2017:370).

Under this broad umbrella of decolonisation, there exists a number of complexities, tensions and paradoxes that emerge in different decolonisation efforts (Andreotti, Stein, Ahenakew & Hunt, 2015). For example, a paradox that haunts decolonisation efforts in South Africa is how higher education institutions continue to reproduce an epistemological hierarchy wherein Western knowledge is privileged over non-Western bodies and traditions of knowledge and knowledge-making (Higgs, 2016; Mamdani, 2016; Mangcu, 2016; Mbembe, 2016; Morreira, 2017). One such tension is whether decolonising higher education is (in)commensurable with other social justice and transformation projects, not only in South Africa but also internationally, particularly in relation to the extent to which decolonisation has to become a global project.

Although there have been increasing efforts to explore what decolonisation means at the level of university curricula (e.g. Heleta, 2016; Higgs, 2016; Le Grange, 2016; Lockett, 2016), there has been less theorisation of what decolonisation might imply for higher education pedagogy and praxis. I argue that there is a political and pragmatic need to reflect critically on what it means to decolonise higher education pedagogies in South Africa by means of transformative education discourses and practices that reclaim humanity in knowing and knowledge-making. Given the complicity of existing higher education institutions in epistemic ‘othering’ (Keet, 2014), it is important to generate new pedagogical language and praxis that go beyond the normalised grammar of the colonial structures of African universities.

This article attempts to bring theoretical concepts offered by decolonial theories into conversation with what is referred to as ‘humanising pedagogy.’ Humanising pedagogy is understood, here, from Salazar’s (2013) perspective, as a form of pedagogy that has its roots in Freire’s notion of humanisation and focuses on the pursuit of one’s full humanity. My argument is that Freirean-based humanising pedagogy can benefit considerably by looking more closely into insights from ‘decolonial thinking’ (Mignolo, 2011). The question that drives my analysis, then, is: what are the links between humanisation and the decolonisation of higher education and what does this imply for pedagogical praxis? I respond to this question to arrive at valuable insights that reconfigure humanising pedagogy in relation to a decolonial project of social transformation; one that does not disavow the challenges—namely, the complexities, tensions and paradoxes—residing therein. I will argue, then, that even ‘noble’ ideas such as Freirean-based humanising pedagogies need to be constantly scrutinised to avoid becoming complicit with the rhetoric of the status quo. Needless to say, decolonial theories and pedagogies themselves are not exempt from such scrutiny.

I begin with a brief synthesis of insights from decolonial perspectives and its implications for higher education. I then introduce different decolonial discourses in South African higher education, highlighting three possible responses around decolonisation. This section is followed by presenting how a particular form of pedagogy, namely, humanising pedagogy, partakes in these responses by sometimes reproducing the colonial order. Finally, I conclude with some reflections on how humanising pedagogies might be reconceptualised through the lens of decolonial perspectives, and what this might imply for South African higher education.

Decolonial Perspectives and Their Implications for Higher Education

I begin with an important distinction that is made between colonialism and coloniality (Grosfoguel, 2007). The term coloniality refers to “the continuity of colonial forms of domination after the end of colonial administrations, produced by colonial cultures and structures in the modern/colonial capitalist/patriarchal world-system” (Grosfoguel, 2007:219). Maldonado-Torres (2007) also describes coloniality as a system that defines the organisation and dissemination of epistemic, material and aesthetic resources in ways that reproduce modernity’s colonial project. In other words, colonialism is understood as a temporal period of oppression that has come and gone, while coloniality refers to the underlying logic that places peoples and knowledge into a classification system that valorises all that is European—something which is still very much with us today. A similar distinction can be made between decolonisation and decoloniality. Decoloniality refers to the everyday and ongoing efforts to challenge persistent forms of coloniality, whereas decolonisation is mostly tied to the historical period after World War II in which various movements by indigenous peoples and their descendants across the Americas, Africa and Asia began to challenge external colonialism (Mignolo, 2011). Given that decolonial scholars emphasise that indigenous, enslaved and colonised peoples have resisted colonialism from its inception more than 500 years ago, one might also argue that decolonisation is very much an ongoing process.

In general, decolonisation is a concept that takes on different meanings across different contexts, yet it basically highlights two important ideas (Mackinlay & Barney, 2014): first, it evokes a historical narrative that resists Eurocentrism and acknowledges the contributions of colonised populations across the globe; and, second, it emphasises a moral imperative for righting the wrongs of colonial domination, and an ethical stance in relation to social justice for those peoples enslaved and disempowered by persistent forms of

coloniality. Colonisation of the land, argues Mignolo (2011), goes hand-in-hand with the geopolitics of knowledge, specifically the domination of Eurocentric thought that classifies regions and people around the world as underdeveloped economically and mentally. In other words, Mignolo asserts that colonial expansion was also the expansion of Eurocentric forms of knowledge.

In particular, Mignolo’s (2003) concept of *colonial difference* emphasises that the colonial system of power and domination continues to underpin Western modernity, articulated through ideas of difference that originated in colonialism. Quijano (2007) argues that the ‘colonial matrix of power’ (in Mignolo, 2011:ix) consists of inter-related forms of control, such as patriarchy, racism and colonial capitalism. Decoloniality challenges social categories such as race, gender and sexuality as inventions of colonial capitalism that hold symbolic and material significance for how individuals and groups experience the world (Lugones, 2010). Thus, decoloniality, or what Mignolo (2009) calls the ‘decolonial option,’ favours analyses, art forms and actions that practice *epistemic disobedience*; that is, they move away from the categories of Eurocentric thought to engage with ideas that have been marginalised and discredited as uncivilised and barbarian. As Mignolo (2011:xii) writes about Eurocentric thinking: “Such a system of knowledge (the ‘Western code’) serves not all humanity but a small portion of it that benefits from the belief that in terms of epistemology there is only one game in town.”

Informed by decolonial theory, Santos (2014) also highlights that the struggle for global social justice is inseparable from the struggle for *cognitive justice*, namely, the recognition of epistemic diversity (Fricker, 2007). Therefore, to promote global social justice, Santos suggests that we also need to begin interrogating the construction of cognitive injustice in all educational contexts, policies and theories. Santos is particularly concerned with critiquing the marginalisation, silencing, and delegitimation of Southern, Third World, and indigenous knowledges. According to Santos (2014), the South symbolises people’s suffering and struggles against capitalism, colonialism and imperialism. His notion ‘epistemologies of the South’ marks the unique epistemologies that have emerged from the South, highlighting in this manner that the South is not just a geographical, but rather an epistemic and political marker—a source of unique knowledge emerging out of the experience of various forms of oppression. Epistemologies of the South, argues Santos (2014:92), have been consistently delegitimated, a process that he calls *epistemicide*, namely, ‘the murder of knowledge.’ As he writes:

Unequal exchanges among cultures have always implied the death of the knowledge of the subordinated culture, hence the death of the social groups that possessed it. In the most extreme cases, such as that of European expansion, epistemicide was one of the conditions of genocide. The loss of epistemological confidence that currently afflicts modern science has facilitated the identification of the scope and gravity of the epistemicides perpetrated by hegemonic Eurocentric modernity.

When it comes to higher education in particular, these decolonial perspectives highlight the complicity of higher education (Keet, 2014). Modern universities, from their very inception, were complicit in and benefited from colonisation—from the colonial cataloguing of non-Western knowledge and the production of knowledge in support of scientific racism and other racialised and colonial classifications to claims about the universality of Western knowledge (Stein & Andreotti, 2017). Western epistemological dominance occurs not only in higher education within the West, but also in the non-West, where western institutions are often viewed as the model for the ideal university (Nandy, 2000). Decolonisation, then, means challenging all forms of coloniality that still persist in higher education and that are complicit in colonial oppression. Decolonising knowledge involves collective, systemic and systematic processes of dismantling the ways in which higher education discourses and practices perpetuate cognitive injustices—from the systems of access and management in universities, the systems of authoritative control, standardisation, classification, commodification, accountancy, and bureaucratisation reflected in the organisational structures, the teaching methods and assessment mechanisms of students and faculty alike, the research practices and publishing norms, to the curricular content and design of courses (Mbembe, 2016).

In sum, decolonising higher education can best be understood as a political, social, and epistemic process and project that implies a critical examination of dominant structures of knowledge and their relationship to power—as they operate and are reproduced in and through various forms—thus, recentering knowledge in the intellectual histories of colonised people. This project and process also entails the inclusion of the histories and experiences of colonised people, and active engagement with subjugated knowledge. Understanding the historical trajectories of knowledge production as a process that does not reside exclusively in the West (embedded in the context of colonialism), but includes numerous standpoints from the South, can help educators and students in higher education institutions “recognise the mechanisms that privilege European/Western epistemologies and ‘forget’, silence, repress or ‘damn’ ‘other’ epistemologies” (Andreotti, 2011:392).

Decolonisation in higher education, therefore, is a way of thinking and doing that forces European thinking and knowledge to confront its coloniality and its consequences; it seeks to move beyond the logic and structure of colonial systems of power and knowledge.

Decolonial Discourses in South African Higher Education: Three Responses to Decolonisation

It has been argued that since their inception, South African universities adopted Western models of academic organisation, which largely excluded the knowledge of colonised people (Heleta, 2016; Higgs, 2016; Le Grange, 2016). Prior to 1994, there have been serious attempts within the transformation agendas of several past and present higher education initiatives to changing highly problematic institutional cultures as well as their colonial structures and practices. Some examples include the work of Alexander (e.g. see Alexander, 2002) and Motala (e.g. see Motala & Vally, 2017), academics within the higher education sector such as Archie Mafeje, Mahmood Mamdani, Catherine Odora Hoppers, (among several others) and movements such as ‘People’s Education’ in the 1980s.¹

Following the end of apartheid, the discourse of transformation in higher education has come at the centre of debates, focusing initially on the need for greater access (including epistemological access) for more black students (Vorster & Quinn, 2017). As Vorster and Quinn point out, though, “South African universities have been using a discourse of transformation while not engaging in significant structural and cultural changes beyond changing staff and student demographics” (2017:37). Although progress has been made over the last 20 years (including instances where universities that have consistently tried to challenge a narrow view of transformation), perhaps the concept of ‘higher education transformation’ has not paid enough attention to changing highly problematic institutional cultures as well as their colonial structures and (pedagogical) practices.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) argues that the worst form of colonisation in Africa is an epistemological one; that is, the colonisation of imagination and the mind that is hidden in institutions and discourses that govern the modern globe. Given the Eurocentric nature and practices of the disciplines and universities in African higher education, it can be suggested that there is a systematic marginalisation of that which is designated ‘African’ (Keet, 2014). Such a designation of ‘African’ as incomplete, mutilated and unfinished (Mbembe, 2001) constitutes a form of epistemic ‘othering,’ argues (Keet, 2014), placing that which is designated as ‘African’ unworthy of epistemological recognition. The issue, then, as Keet (2014:27) emphasises, is not simply about access

versus non-access, “Neither is it just a matter of student academic support, or simply a function of teaching and learning regimes or institutional cultures.” Rather, it has to do with Eurocentrism and epistemic violence that still persists in various forms in South African universities.

The decolonial discourse, then, is a welcome development as long as it does not remain a form of rhetoric—“not because it does not have the resources or imaginative capacities, but because the social structure of the academy will disallow it to become a productive reference point” (Keet, Sattarzadeh & Munene, 2017:4). The treatment and travels of the concept of higher education transformation since 1996 in South Africa, explain Keet et al. (2017), provides a glimpse of what may happen to the decolonial too, if it fails to convert calls for decolonisation into a renewal of cultural traditions and a transformation of social practices and structures at all levels of higher education. Calls for the discourse of transformation to be replaced by a stronger discourse of change, such as the decolonising discourse, are suggested to disrupt the structural and cultural stasis in higher education (Vorster & Quinn, 2017). Yet, it is clear that if decolonising discourses are taken at face value, there is the danger that they themselves become an empty rhetoric.

The main issue, therefore, in my view, is not whether decolonisation needs to replace transformation or whether transformation is a much broader and complicated process than decolonisation. The term we choose is important as long as the political project of decolonisation (or transformation) goes beyond simply admitting our coloniality of being (Maldonado-Torres, 2007) in higher education and takes action, little by little, to dismantle the epistemic injustices that persist in the higher education system of post-apartheid South Africa (Keet, 2014)—such as the refusal of basic social and economic rights to black students. Keet et al. (2017) admits that there is an uneasiness and awkwardness in present discourses on higher education in South Africa. This awkwardness, Keet et al. (2017) suggest, emerges from the complicity of higher education in perpetuating epistemic injustices, leaving the coloniality of knowledge untouched while adopting the aim of transformation only at the level of rhetoric.

Many questions, then, emerge around the decolonial possibilities for higher education transformation: To what extent is it possible to decolonise South African universities without larger social transformation? If universities continue to reproduce a colonial order of knowledge and therefore the existing social system, what approaches might dismantle this colonial order? Is it even possible to produce alternative knowledges (e.g. ‘African’ knowledges) without essentialising them or eventually assimilating them into Western

epistemological frameworks? There are no easy responses to these questions, yet I want to briefly sketch three approaches to the decolonisation of higher education that have been proposed (Stein & Andreotti, 2017).

The first response would be what Andreotti et al. (2015) call ‘soft-reform,’ that is, interventions that focus on increased access and the inclusion of marginalised groups (e.g. Black, low-income students and faculty), and the supplementation of existing curricula with non-Western perspectives. Rather than decolonisation, the goal is enhanced diversity in ways that do not significantly challenge existing power relations and structures (Stein & Andreotti, 2017). For example, when it comes to the university curriculum, it has been suggested that this ‘additive’ approach—that is, the addition of new items to an existing curriculum—is promoted by South African universities that want to maintain the status quo (Heleta, 2016). Eurocentric worldviews are still dominant in the university curriculum, but an ‘African’ voice is inserted to claim that transformation is taking place. In reality, though, there is no recognition of coloniality at the structural and institutional levels, and the uneven distribution of power and opportunity across race is not problematised. The end result of this approach is the continued dominance of Eurocentric perspectives, because the addition of the ‘African’ voice is very likely going to be ghettoised from other mainstream disciplines (Heleta, 2016).

The second response would be ‘radical-reform’ (Andreotti et al., 2015), namely, an approach that advocates for fundamental changes and argues that the changes made through soft-reform are “tokenistic, incomplete, insufficient, and/or inadequate” (Andreotti et al., 2015:33). Radical-reform emphasises the decolonisation of higher education as a consciousness that rejects the values, norms and worldviews imposed by the colonisers, and a commitment to empower marginalised groups, address Eurocentrism at all levels of higher education (e.g. as it is enacted through institutional structures and logics that consistently reproduce racial and economic hierarchies), and redistribute material resources (Stein & Andreotti, 2017). This, of course, raises the question: how long does it take for consciousness to develop, what, if anything, can catalyse this development, and in what forms is this ‘new’ consciousness manifest? For South African universities, this set of approaches would entail reframing the purposes of the university and what it means at all levels—for example, administration and leadership, research, scholarship, curriculum, pedagogy, and so on (Vorster & Quinn, 2017). The space for radical-reform involves demands for significant institutional transformation and redress for historical and ongoing participation in violence

(e.g. renaming buildings or removing statues) and tuition-free education for all students.

Finally, the third response could be what Andreotti et al. (2015) call ‘beyond-reform,’ that is, a set of approaches that go beyond those previous in recognising the fundamentally violent and unsustainable system within which the university is embedded. These approaches

suggest that modern existence is dependent on colonisation and racialisation for its continuation, and therefore consider the limits of the kinds of transformations that are possible within higher education “as we know it,” especially as long as it is funded and regulated by the nation-state and capital (Andreotti et al., 2015:373–374).

Andreotti et al. (2015) point out that, for some, these approaches might imply the need to completely dismantle the university system as we know it, as this has been an integral part of the historical conditions of colonialism; for others, the academy may be a space of contestation in which decoloniality can in fact take place.

Decoloniality, then, implies praxis (Stein & Andreotti, 2017). Identifying the epistemological and ontological hegemony that structures the existing university and enabling epistemological and ontological access to a range of knowledge demand paying attention to the pedagogical practices of students and educators—that is, not teaching methods in the strict sense, but rather pedagogies as processes, practices and paths of struggle that oppose ongoing colonisation on an everyday basis and seek to reclaim humanity beyond its colonial legacies. To show what this means and what challenges emerge, I take on a popular form of critical pedagogy, namely, Freirean-based ‘humanising pedagogy,’ and discuss its convergences and divergences with decolonial pedagogy and praxis. I choose to focus on Freirean-based humanising pedagogy and praxis for two reasons: first, pedagogy and praxis in general bring to the fore questions of decoloniality’s ‘how’ (Stein & Andreotti, 2017) rather than limiting the conversation to curriculum content; second, I want to turn attention to the idea that even ‘noble’ ideas and practices such as humanising pedagogy might be complicit with colonial aims, if they are not constantly interrogated.

Humanising Pedagogy: Contributions and Limitations

Humanising pedagogy is a form of critical pedagogy (Freire, 2003; Giroux, 2004; McLaren, 2003) grounded in Freire’s conceptualisation of humanisation and pedagogy as a counter-practice to dehumanisation in education (Salazar, 2013). Salazar traces the roots of humanising pedagogy to the notion of humanism—a central component of Freire’s philosophy, guided by the idea that humans are motivated by a need to reason, which shapes their experiences towards achieving per-

sonal and collective self-actualisation, thus developing their full humanity. Humanisation “is the process of becoming more fully human as social, historical, thinking, communicative, transformative, creative persons who participate in and with the world” (Salazar, 2013:126). According to Freire (2003), the process of humanisation fosters transformation and liberation of the oppressed, thus the transformation of the world is, essentially, its humanisation. Freire’s ideas on humanisation were influenced by Marxist humanism, which challenged the societal structures and systems responsible for reproducing social inequalities and creating a pedagogy of inhumanity.

In addition to the conceptualisation of humanisation, key to Freire’s project is his understanding of the term pedagogy. Freire (2003) highlights pedagogy in a much broader sense than merely a teaching method; he emphasises that pedagogy is the entanglement of philosophy, politics and practice which demands that educators engage themselves and the students in transforming oppressive social conditions. In this sense, then, all pedagogy is political and functions as ‘public pedagogy’ (Sandlin, O’Malley & Burdick, 2011), that is, as a form that constantly involves pedagogical encounters with others. This broadened conception of pedagogy includes public sites of pedagogy, offering opportunities for educational researchers, practitioners and activists to mobilise alternative forms of counterhegemonic learning (Burdick & Sandlin, 2013). Humanising pedagogy, therefore, is a way of living in the world rather than a collection of technical pedagogical practices (Salazar, 2013).

In general, humanising pedagogy is described by Freire (2003) as a revolutionary approach that engages educators and students in mutual humanisation through a problem-posing process and dialogue that are aimed at *conscientizacao*, or critical consciousness. Critical consciousness is understood as “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (Freire, 2003:17). This process of critical reflection and action, Freire suggests, can transform oppressive structures that prevent the realisation of one’s humanness, thus facilitating liberation for all (Salazar, 2013). Educators, therefore, are responsible for creating the conditions suitable to promoting a more fully human world through their pedagogical practices.

In the South African context, humanising pedagogy has been embraced as a practice of facilitating rehumanisation at schools and tertiary institutions in the aftermath of apartheid (Delport, 2016). For example, Zinn, Porteus and Keet (2009:113) define humanising pedagogy as “a radical pedagogy, not a ‘soft’ one, and its humanising interest is linked to focusing on both

structural and psycho-social dimensions of human suffering, and human liberation.” Also, for Fataar (2016), a humanising pedagogy should address the notion of knowledge redistribution—that is, it needs to provide recognition of students’ knowledge, literacies and identities, thus emphasising participation. Zinn, Adam, Kurup and Du Plessis (2016:71) describe humanising pedagogy as a mechanism to facilitate rehumanisation in South Africa, while admitting that there is “a diversity of perspectives around the concept of a humanising pedagogy [...] given the variety of lived experiences and histories.” Zinn and her colleagues engage students in a process of enacted reflexivity through a participatory mode of inquiry; they emphasise that such processes have the potential to contribute to transformative learning. Finally, Roux and Becker (2016) explore the conditions for, and the possibilities of, dialogue for humanising postapartheid higher education. Roux and Becker propose two conditions for dialogue as humanising praxis, namely: acknowledging the situated selves; and the ontological need for, and right to, voice. They argue that dialogue as humanising praxis presents possibilities for the disruption of oppressive situations, and that therefore, dialogue as humanising praxis presents possibilities for a new historical community.

Despite these promises by humanising pedagogy and its emancipatory rhetoric, however, Freirean-framed pedagogies have been critiqued over the years. For example, some scholars point out that Freirean pedagogy is grounded in European humanism and Enlightenment assumptions (Bowers & Apffel-Marglin, 2005). Freire is also critiqued for his essentialist understanding of the oppressed, and his failure to take into account both the complexity of the nature of oppression, as well as of the interchangeability of roles between oppressor and oppressed (Mayo, 2004; Schugurensky, 2011). Thus, it is suggested that humanising pedagogy as a form of critical pedagogy not only entails problematic dualisms (e.g. oppressed/oppressor; empowered/disempowered; dominant/subordinate), but also fails to imagine alternative manifestations of criticality that go beyond rationalistic and teleological assumptions. These limitations include, for example: the overly romantic and idealistic notions of the equalisation of roles between teachers and students; the dichotomies between teachers’ schooled, dominant knowledge and students’ experiential, subordinate knowledge; and, the conviction that students’ knowledge is a form of false consciousness (Bartlett, 2005, 2010). Others have also suggested that in its overly rationalist assumptions, Freire-based humanising pedagogies overlook the complexity of students’ emotional investments in particular social positions and

discourses (Amsler, 2011; Boler, 1999, 2004; Zembylas, 2013).

Some of the most productive critiques of Freire-based humanising pedagogies have come from scholars who have adopted decolonial and indigenous perspectives. Maori scholar Smith (1999) discusses how critical approaches have failed because they have not taken into consideration the local characteristics of oppression; she, therefore, argues for the need to localise critical theory so that it understands oppression within the indigenous framework of values, language and ways of living. In addition to this, Grande writes:

Revolutionary critical pedagogy remains rooted in the Western paradigm and therefore in tension with indigenous knowledge and praxis. In particular, the root constructs of democratization [*sic*], subjectivity, and property are all defined through Western frames of reference that presume the individual as the primary subject of ‘rights’ and social status. (2008:238)

More recently, Gaztambide-Fernandez (2012) as well as Tuck and Yang (2012) emphasise that it is important to acknowledge the significant differences between critical theory and pedagogy, multiculturalism, and cosmopolitanism, on the one hand, and decolonising projects, on the other. Reflecting on her work with Freire over the years, Walsh also acknowledges certain limitations: “I began to see coloniality and the lived colonial difference as constitutive of pedagogies otherwise, pedagogies that modernity, Western critical theory, and even you Paulo, did not directly consider or address” (2015:13). Freire’s situating of the work of liberation in the minds of the oppressed, as a humanist self-critique is different from decolonising projects that always position the work of liberation in the particularities of colonisation and the structures of the colonisation process. Under Freire’s paradigm, explain Tuck and Yang, “it is unclear who the oppressed are, even more ambiguous who the oppressors are [...] Freire positions liberation as redemption, a freeing of both oppressor and oppressed through their humanity” (2012:20). A decolonial critique, however, places colonialism at the centre of its intervention—which is absent from being named explicitly in Freire’s discussion, thus “implying either that it is an unimportant analytic or that it is an already completed project of the past (a past oppression perhaps)” (Tuck & Yang, 2012:20).

In general, these critiques of Freirean theory and pedagogy with which I concur, emphasise two important ideas that need to be taken into consideration in reconfiguring humanising pedagogy as/with decolonial pedagogy: first, the assumptions underlying humanising pedagogy cannot be taken for granted, but rather they need to be revisited, especially in contexts that are to be decolonised such as the South African context;

second, a careful analysis of Freire's limitations and contributions is vital and productive for supporting different social justice projects. Rethinking humanising pedagogies, therefore, must include a deeper understanding of the dynamic interplay between oppressed and oppressor, as well as the complexity of the nature of oppression. Humanising pedagogies could benefit from complementary theoretical perspectives such as decolonial thinking. The last part of this paper takes on the task of showing what humanising pedagogies as decolonising pedagogies could mean in South African higher education.

Reconfiguring Humanising Pedagogies as/with Decolonising Pedagogies

So far, I have suggested that an important step towards the decolonisation of higher education in South Africa is to identify the different manifestations of epistemic injustice at various levels, including pedagogical practices. Putting in conversation humanising pedagogies with decolonising discourses, the goal is to reconfigure those pedagogical practices through which higher education continues to operate as a site of colonial power (Mackinlay & Barney, 2014). Even though some recent work in South Africa has made important progress in recognising colonial power and privilege through some manifestations of humanising pedagogy, it is important to continue scrutinising the paradigmatic assumptions of humanising pedagogies and their manifestations and implications in specific contexts.ⁱⁱ

As Walsh reminds us, we need to recognise that "decolonial praxis and decolonial pedagogy were not the specific purviews of Freire. While Freire offered much for understanding praxis as pedagogy and pedagogy as struggle, method, and praxis, his limitations from a decolonial perspective cannot be overlooked" (2017:369). What I am arguing here, then, is for the importance of taking into account the methodologies and/or pedagogies that derive from the lived experience of colonialism and the struggles for decolonisation within. There are extant examples of the way in which this is receiving experimentation by current progressive education workers and scholars in South Africa (e.g. Fataar, 2016; Zinn et al., 2016). It is important for ongoing research in this area to further 'unearth' the way in which these efforts constitute a valuable part of the struggles of various institutions at this moment, in order to respond critically to decolonisation calls. A fundamental question that can be raised, therefore, is: how can humanising pedagogies in South Africa function as/with decolonising pedagogies? Here I want to share two ways this may happen, where the doings of decoloniality, pedagogy, and humanisation can come together (Zembylas, 2018).

The first way is to draw from various theoretical frameworks (e.g., postcolonial studies, critical race theory, and Black feminist theory) so that spaces are created to re-contextualise knowledge from non-Eurocentric perspectives. As Tejeda, Espinoza and Gutierrez (2003:21) suggest, decolonising pedagogy can be understood as a practice that

must be guided by a conceptually dynamic worldview and a set of values that make it anticapitalist, antiracist, antisexist, and antihomophobic. It is informed by a theoretical heteroglossia that strategically utilizes [*sic*] theorizations and understandings from various fields and conceptual frameworks to unmask the logics, workings, and effects of [...] colonial domination, oppression, and exploitation in our contemporary contexts.

A major assumption of a decolonising pedagogy is that there is recognition of the "direct and material relation between the political processes and social structures of colonialism on the one hand, and Western regimes of knowledge and representation on the other" (Tejeda et al., 2003:24). Humanising pedagogies, therefore, can become decolonising pedagogies, when they involve a reframing of pedagogical practices and theoretical frameworks so that they are forced to explicitly confront coloniality with the aim of dismantling colonial practices. Humanising pedagogies as decolonising pedagogies have to move beyond Freirean approaches not only because Freirean approaches highlight the human as the unit of liberation whereas decolonising pedagogy has to denaturalise the categories of the Human and Humanism (Yang, 2015), but also because the knowledge emerging from the counter-narratives of various agents in colonial/colonised settings has to be foregrounded rather than backgrounded (Zembylas, 2018). Working from the assumption that decolonising pedagogies engage this terrain of knowledge in ways that have thus far not been sufficiently addressed by Freirean-based approaches, decolonial thinking and praxis can help humanising pedagogies pay attention to the geopolitics of knowledge production in order to enable learners to face coloniality at its multiple and complex manifestations and to work through its unmaking.

In higher education, this task would imply pedagogies that pursue the development of human relations that resist coloniality and struggle to transform the conditions of human existence at all possible levels. Such pedagogical practices require a profound commitment to solidarity as a decolonising strategy that reconceptualises humanisation as a site of relationality and interdependency by recasting day-to-day relations and encounters with difference (Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2012). As Gaztambide-Fernandez suggests, "educators are called upon to play a central role in constructing the conditions for a different kind of encounter, an

encounter that both opposes ongoing colonization [*sic*] and that seeks to heal the social, cultural, and spiritual ravages of colonial history” (2012:42). It is within this frame of mind that humanising pedagogies can function as decolonising pedagogies in higher education. This mode of engaging in decolonising practices requires solidarity that unites racialised, indigenous, poor, and sexualised people across their differences in struggle against colonial power and privilege.

The second way through which the doings of decoloniality, pedagogy and humanisation can come together is to recognise and take an active stance against the multiple ways in which knowledge production in the neoliberal order is implicated in the material conditions of coloniality and its persisting effects (Tejeda & Gutierrez, 2005). For example, as noted by several scholars in South Africa (Heleta, 2016; Higgs, 2016; Le Grange, 2016; Luckett, 2016), decolonising the university curriculum would entail the inclusion of the histories and experiences of colonised people and active engagement with subjugated knowledge so that the dehumanisation of the other is exposed and humanisation is highlighted. Yet, work at the curriculum level is not enough. As previously pointed out, the radical decolonisation of higher education implies making subjugated knowledge key points of reference in engendering pedagogies of solidarity that reject colonial privilege, while confronting how Eurocentric supremacy continues to inform what legitimate knowledge is (Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2012). Given this, the following questions may be raised about the reconceptualisation of humanising pedagogies so that they can become decolonising pedagogies:

- What would a humanising pedagogy look like when taking seriously the pedagogical task of rethinking the human without hiding the epistemic violence of colonial knowledge and practices of knowledge?
- What would a humanising pedagogy look like that acknowledges the contribution of Western knowledge but goes beyond and provides intellectual and pedagogical spaces of decolonial praxis—such as strategies of counter/storytelling, healing, and reclaiming of people’s identities and spaces (Zavala, 2017)?
- Finally, what would a humanising pedagogy look like that ethically addresses the complex and sometimes contradictory histories of different peoples in (post)colonial settings, while it enables us to change our relationship to colonial/colonised modes of signification and relationality?

There are no easy answers to these questions, yet it is important to raise difficult questions, if we are going to be able to develop intellectual and pedagogical spaces that might right the wrongs that have been exposed. As Andreotti (2011) argues, between colonial agendas and their interruption lies a space of negotiation and opportunity that is full of risks as well as possibilities. This space is extremely valuable for those in higher education,

not only in South Africa but also in the South more generally, who are committed to work through the discourses and practices of Freirean approaches by confronting their visible and invisible complexities, tensions and paradoxes, and creating new openings for decolonisation.

Conclusion

My intention in this article has been to address the need to pay attention to decolonial possibilities in South African higher education through a focus on pedagogical practices and discourses. In so doing, I have critically explored the call for humanising pedagogies and the challenges involved in such attempts, and I have suggested ways to reconceptualise humanising pedagogies as decolonial pedagogies. Decolonial pedagogies, as theorised and explicated in this article, challenge some aspects of Freirean approaches such as humanising pedagogies. Thus, I envision that efforts toward the decolonisation of higher education in South Africa will need to the development of intellectual and pedagogical spaces in which different strategies may be taken up as a form of hacking (Andreotti et al., 2015:27):

System hacking involves creating spaces within the system, using its resources, where people can be educated about the violence of the system and have their desires re-oriented away from it. This requires ‘playing the game’ of institutions at the same time that rules are bent to generate alternative outcomes.

In the service of their own empowerment, writes Khoja-Moolji (2017), the powerless take whatever they can from the discourses, practices, and spaces of the dominant societies. Thus, higher educators in South Africa will need to interrogate the pedagogical practices emerging from Eurocentric knowledge approaches by drawing on and twisting these very practices. These efforts can provide spaces to enact decolonial pedagogies that reclaim colonised practices.

Notes

- i. Going even further back in history, there have been the consistent and radical critiques of South African education by organisations such as the Teachers League of South Africa (which, for decades up until only a few years ago, published eight journals a year), and publications such as ‘Education for Barbarism’ by IB Tabata, ‘The Contribution of the Non European Peoples to World Civilisation’ by BM Kies, ‘The role of the Missionaries in Conquest’ by Nosipho Majeke (a pseudonym) that go way back to 1950s and 1960s. I am indebted to one of the anonymous reviewers for suggesting that these attempts for transformation need to be acknowledged.
- ii. Given the extent of the anti-racist, anti-colonial struggles in education and society that are part of South Africa’s history, and the wide acceptance of Paulo Freire’s work with indigenous peasants in Brazil and indigenous oppressed communities elsewhere in the world such as Guinea Bissau, and other parts of Africa, it is understandable that there may be some hesitation to critique humanising pedagogies and critical pedagogies more generally. I hope that my analysis here, which adds to critiques that have been around for

some time in the literature, is not interpreted as an attempt to undermine the struggles undertaken by indigenous scholars who have been integrally involved in struggles in their countries. Indeed, Freire's work itself was significantly influenced by the work of Fanon, Cabral, and other African revolutionaries and scholars. Yet, revisiting his work through the lenses of recent theorising on decolonising theories and pedagogies will only enrich the value and impact of humanising pedagogies. On the other hand, one needs to acknowledge that there are also simplistic and/or romantic versions of decolonising and decolonial theories and pedagogies that require constant critical reflection and analysis too. Simply 'adding' a decolonial lens and aspect to humanising pedagogies does not necessarily mean that we will have a more progressive and radical pedagogical praxis.

- iii. Published under a Creative Commons Attribution Licence.

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