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Decolonising curriculum in an African University: the case study of development studies at the University of South Africa

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Abstract

This research project is an examination of the meanings of decolonising curricula within an African university using the case study of Development Studies curriculum at the University of South Africa (UNISA). Thus, I deployed the theory of Decoloniality to examine whether the meanings of decolonising curricula at UNISA's Department of Development Studies transcend or reproduce coloniality—a power structure with multiple forms of colonialism that affect the meaning of development within the Development Studies curriculum. Through empirical study, I established that there is no singular and homogenous meaning of decolonising the Development Studies curriculum within the Department of Development Studies of UNISA due to differences in the social and epistemic backgrounds of the department's academic staff and student body. Thus, for instance, there were academic members of staff and students who viewed the current Development Studies curriculum as colonial and not serving the development aspirations, interests and agendas of the marginalised members of the society and those who viewed it as just and uncontaminated by coloniality. In this way, this research project concluded that the meanings of decolonising curriculum at UNISA's Department of Development Studies are bifurcated between those that synchronically reproduce coloniality in the curriculum thereby enabling continuity instead of change and those that have a potential to cause a diachronic effect to the existing status quo. This creates a stasis in the search for a decolonised Development Studies hence this research project recommends a more radical approach to resolving the question of curriculum decolonization at UNISA in particular and the modern university institution in general. This radical approach entails a 'reptilian' epistemic violence against the forces of coloniality—a Fanonian form of temporary violence solely

aimed at tilting the status quo of coloniality as opposed to a permanent form of epistemic violence that reproduces the same power structure of coloniality.