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**Decolonizing the Curriculum: Philosophical Perspectives**

# 'The whitest guy in the room': thoughts on decolonization and *paideia* in the South African university

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## ABSTRACT

This paper will reflect on the possibility of epistemic decolonization, particularly in terms of curriculum, as a transformative educational process in the context of the South African university, and with respect to my own positionality. The argument will centre around two difficult interdependent positions. On the one hand I will argue for the university's task as transformational, even offering, via Cornel West, the 'salvific' possibility that knowledge offers those who seek it. To develop this claim, I will draw on and develop the notion of *paideia* though the work of Plato and Heidegger.

On the other hand, within the postcolonial African university, the question of decolonization in the tertiary space cannot be elided, particularly since the 2015 #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall movements. The university is a powerful colonial relic, and it can be used to reinforce and perpetuate epistemic violence through unreflective or unconscious pedagogical and curriculum decisions. Here I draw on decolonial thinkers such as Santos, Mignolo, Maldonado-Torres, and Mbembe: I argue for a *reckoning with* the forces of coloniality, and advocate for epistemic justice and criticality, as part of the decolonizing project. In conclusion, working with ideas from Cornel West, I argue to reconcile *paideia*, as the 'turning of the soul', with the decolonizing African university.

**KEYWORDS:** decolonization, *paideia*, South African university, transformative education, coloniality, epistemic justice, criticality

## INTRODUCTION

This paper is a philosophical reflection on what I think it means to teach decolonization, in the epistemological sense, in the Global South, at an African university.

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The argument will centre around two difficult, yet interdependent positions. On the one hand, I will argue for the university's task as transformational, even offering, as the paper will show via Cornel West, the 'salvific' possibility that knowledge offers those who seek it. To support this claim, I will draw on, and develop the notion of *paideia* through the work of Plato and Heidegger. On the other hand, however, especially within the postcolonial, and in my case, African context, the question of decolonization and decoloniality in the tertiary space can no longer be elided, particularly since the 2015 #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall movements (Jansen 2017; Griffiths 2019). Here I draw on decolonial thinkers such as Santos, Mignolo, Maldonado-Torres, and Mbembe and argue for a *reckoning with* the forces of coloniality, and advocate for epistemic justice and criticality, as part of the decolonizing project. The university is a powerful, colonial relic, and it can be used to reinforce and perpetuate epistemic violence through unreflective or unconscious pedagogical and curriculum decisions. If this is done then, rather than offering emancipatory possibilities for marginalized, often voiceless students, it reaffirms and entrenches the supposed superiority of colonial (and by implication, white) knowledge, further disempowering and alienating these students from their own lifeworlds. In conclusion, drawing on the arguments of Cornel West, I argue to reconcile *paideia*, as the 'turning of the soul', with the decolonizing African university.

The fundamental question of this piece is this: can one draw on and recognize the importance of *paideia* while attempting the work of decolonial thinking? Can the tension between an ancient foundational Western conception of the meaning of education be reconciled with the decolonial turn? To answer this question, I begin initially by considering what education is for. This is a central, recurring debate in the philosophy of education. An important answer is that one dimension of education is that it is transformative. In explaining this dimension of education, I will discuss the notion of *paideia*, 'the turning of the soul', as it is developed in Plato and Heidegger. Then I will shift to discussing and problematizing questions surrounding decolonization and decoloniality with regards to education and curriculum in the African university. In the process of defining decolonization, I will draw out aspects of it which, as I will argue, align with the sense of *paideia* developed by Plato and Heidegger. However, this transformative dimension of decolonization requires a *reckoning with* the forces of coloniality. Two ways in which I imagine this *reckoning with* are through epistemic justice and criticality. Here I will provide some examples of what Zembylas calls 'decolonizing pedagogies' (Zembylas 2018: 8) that I will argue align with *paideia* in the sense of meaningful transformative education. One example will be provided by an overview of my own approach to teaching decolonization; the other will entail reflection on how the idea of *paideia* is reimagined by Cornel West, in his teaching of W. E. B. Du Bois. I will conclude by arguing for the possibility of the 'polyphonic' university, which is able to reconcile the demands of epistemic justice and criticality with *paideia*.

My own positionality is an important factor in this discussion because, on the one hand, both symbolically and in terms of embodiment, I represent the very traditional philosophy lecturer, a discipline dominated by white men (which I am) with

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PhDs in Western philosophy (which I have). However, the context in which I teach and the students whom I teach (many have never been taught by a white male before) imply that I cannot uncritically and unreflectively advocate philosophical ideas without situating them in their context and that I also have a pedagogic and curricular obligation to explore ideas that speak to, and reflect on, the life-worlds of my students. In this respect I adopt a way of theorizing motivated by a 'reflexive practice' drawing from Rowe, who identifies 'insider' positionality as a particular instance of a researcher who studies their own practice (Rowe 2014: 627). There are also some aspects of Feminist Standpoint Theory which are useful in my discussion. Here Bowell identifies two, namely that '(1) Knowledge is socially situated [and] (2) Marginalized groups are socially situated in ways that make it more possible for them to be aware of things and ask questions than it is for the non-marginalized' (Bowell 2021). How these aspects become evident in teaching and thinking about decolonization within the university will be developed during the paper. The other significant aspect that informs the context of this work is the events of #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall, which occurred in 2015 across South Africa university campuses, effectively instigating a new ongoing decolonial turn in South African academia.[1] I begin then, with my first question.

## WHAT IS EDUCATION FOR?

A central, ongoing issue in the philosophy of education is: what is education for? What is the aim of education? Theorists have answered this question in different ways. Arguably these responses can be broadly grouped according to the distinction suggested by Jackson (2012). Either education is mimetic, meaning that it serves an imitative, transmissive function or it is transformative. Mimetic education is accurately described by Freire, in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), as the 'banking concept of education' (Freire 2000: 72). This traditional model perceives students as passive ignorant receptacles for the 'depositing' of knowledge by the teacher. Students are expected to 'patiently receive, memorize, and repeat' information, and are characterized as having little, or no agency in their own learning process (p. 72).

The alternative, as we find expressed, for example, in Nietzsche's *Schopenhauer as Educator* (1874), can be characterized as transformative and liberatory, Nietzsche finding in Schopenhauer an example of a 'true educator' (Nietzsche 2007: 129), a mentor whose ideas can help an individual to flourish by enabling their self-transformation. Another example would be Freire, who argues that genuine education is the 'practice of freedom' and that it enables someone to develop a 'critical consciousness' (Freire 2000: 93, 35). This approach to education Jackson describes as a 'qualitative change of dramatic proportions' (Jackson 2012: 87). It is certainly the case that someone who thinks of themselves as a good and self-aware educator may recognize that the mimetic function is a central feature of their teaching work *but* also recognize that education can be powerfully transformative and can allow

[1] While much has been written on these events the work of Jansen (2017) and Habib (2019) offer substantive accounts of what transpired.

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students to recognize and understand structures and possibilities for their lives which might otherwise be hidden. In this light, rather than facilitating mere rote learning a teacher is powerfully placed to *do* something with their students. To explain this transformative process, and its alignment with Jackson's second characterization, I will begin by considering the ancient notion of *paideia* as the most apt way of describing what this 'doing' is.

## *PAIDEIA* IN PLATO AND HEIDEGGER

Famously, philosophy has been characterized, in the suggestive claim made by Whitehead as a series of footnotes to Plato. Whitehead writes, in his *Process and Reality* (1929), that:

> The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato. I do not mean the systematic scheme of thought which scholars have doubtfully extracted from his writings. I allude to the wealth of general ideas scattered through them. (1978: 39)

Indeed, the longer one studies Western philosophy the more one realizes that many of the central debates and questions philosophers still struggle with today can be found to be first articulated in Plato's Dialogues. One such idea is *paideia* [παιδεία], which is typically translated into English as 'education'. Thinking more about what this *something* is, this transformative dimension, led me, via Heidegger's reading of *paideia*, to Plato, confirming once again in my life, that Whitehead was right.

Traditionally the notion of *paideia* is understood as the multifaceted way Ancient Greeks were educated to prepare them to fulfill their role in the *polis*. The idea appears in Book II of Plato's *Republic* (1997) when Socrates and Adeimantus discuss the role of the guardians in ensuring the survival of their ideal city. For the city to continue to flourish, Socrates argues, the guardians must 'guard the one great thing', namely, 'their education and upbringing, for if by being well educated they become reasonable men, they will easily see these things for themselves' (Plato 1997: 1,056). Some of these 'things' Socrates refers to include recognizing that, if the offspring of a guardian is not suited for that role, they must take on another role in the city; another is the abolition of both property and family for guardians, to allow them to completely focus on and promote the common interest of the *polis* and not their own private interests. Socrates argues that the preservation of good education ensures the continuation and further improvement of future generations of guardians and citizens, affirming education's mimetic function. He has a great deal more to say about education throughout the *Republic*. However, for the discussion here I will focus on Book VII particularly.

In Book VII of the *Republic* Plato presents Socrates' exposition, of the well-known theory of forms, through the cave allegory. The allegory describes an educative process (*paideia*) whereby an individual progresses from their ignorant perception of reality as appearance, to an enlightened perception of reality. The individual's advance through the various levels of the cave, from shadow into sunlight, metaphorically expresses this transformative process. Here the allegory can be

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interpreted as advocating the transformative dimension of education, a dimension that Heidegger and West, will further develop. Socrates discusses the allegory explicitly to 'compare the effect of education and of the lack of it on our nature' (p. 1,132). While we remain 'fettered' to the world of the senses, our souls exist in ignorance of the truth about reality. The true task of education is the 'upward journey of the soul to the intelligible realm' (p. 1,135). Though Socrates appears to endorse this metaphysics, the argument for this paper is focused specifically on the individual transformative dimension of *paideia*, which Heidegger will draw out. Socrates affirms that the power to learn is possible for everyone, and that the 'instrument with which each learns is like an eye that cannot be turned around from darkness to light without turning the whole body' (p. 1,136). This idea that education, understood as *paideia*, is a fundamental reorientation and transformation, not just a modification of previous beliefs, will be a significant aspect of the discussion to come. Education then, as Socrates says, 'is the craft concerned with doing this very thing, this turning around … . It isn't the craft of putting sight into the soul. Education takes for granted that sight is there but that it isn't turned the right way or looking where it ought to look, and it tries to redirect it appropriately' (p. 1,136).

Heidegger takes up this account of *paideia* in his provocative 1940 essay, 'Plato's Doctrine of Truth' (1998).[2] Heidegger argues that what Plato describes through the allegory is the fundamental *reorientation* of a person. This reorientation is what Plato calls *paideia*, and initially Heidegger is reluctant to translate the term as *Bildung* [the German equivalent for education as 'self-formation and transformation'] without, he writes, restoring the 'original power' of the word (Heidegger 1998: 166).[3] This is because he interprets Plato's understanding of *paideia* as a fundamental transformation that 'takes place in the very ground of one's essence' (p. 166). This reorientation and transformation are a 'movement of passage, namely, from ἀπαιδευσία [*apelisia*; lack of education/ignorance] into παιδεία [*paideia*/education]' (p. 166). This sense of education, which Heidegger takes from Plato, entails that 'the soul in its entirety be turned around as regards the fundamental direction of its striving' (p. 166). While Heidegger acknowledges that the word that comes closest to παιδεία is '*Bildung*' (p. 166), he goes on to qualify what he means by drawing out two related senses of the term. One aspect of *Bildung* is character formation. However, this formation is based on the second aspect, a 'paradigmatic image', an exemplar of what this character-forming process should be guided by (p. 166). Heidegger suggests dimensions of *Bildung* reminiscent of Humboldt's

[2] In this essay Heidegger focuses on sections from Book VII of *Republic* which presents the cave allegory. He begins the essay reproducing these sections in the Ancient Greek, and then translating them into German. Then he gives a commentary on what he thinks 'this story' from Plato means (Heidegger 1998: 164).

[3] Part of this reluctance is because *paideia* is a 'deeply resonant Greek word', which can mean '"civilization", "culture", "development", "tradition", "literature" and "education"' (Thomson 2001: 253). While I focus specifically on Heidegger's qualified interpretation of *paideia* as *Bildung*, I also draw the reader's attention to more contemporary work on *Bildung*—see, for example, Biesta (2002), the special edition of *Journal of Philosophy of Education* edited by Løvlie and Standish (2002), and English (2013).

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explanation, as the 'interplay between receptivity and activity' (English and Doddington 2019: 416). This formative process requires receptivity to character formation but also the active pursuit of this self-transformation. However, Heidegger does extend the idea of *paideia* as *Bildung* further writing that:

> παιδεία [paideia] means turning around the whole human being. It means removing human beings from the region where they first encounter things and transferring and accustoming them to another realm where beings appear. This transfer is possible only by the fact that everything that has been heretofore manifest to human beings, as well as the way in which it has been manifest, gets transformed. (pp. 167–8)

The cave allegory does not suggest that the essence of *paideia* is 'merely pouring knowledge into the unprepared soul as if it were some container held empty and waiting' (p. 167). Rather 'real education lays hold of the soul itself and transforms it in its entirety by first of all leading us to the place of our essential being and accustoming us to it' (p. 167). Heidegger argues that the allegory essentially shows a direct relationship between education and truth. Real education is an encounter with the truth of being, its 'whatness' (p. 170). To put it simply, in our ordinary everyday engagement with the world we are not aware of, or attuned to, the mystery of being itself, but rather, take it for granted. This kind of existential ignorance parallels the person in the cave allegory who, while in the cave, is convinced the shadows are real. Once they eventually emerge into the sunlight (with reluctance and difficulty), they overcome their metaphysical blindness and recognize the ideal forms which shape and underpin the appearance of reality. Socrates is aware that this transformative process is not easy or smooth, that the light is initially painful and dazzling. While Heidegger's interpretation of *paideia*, and the way it is developed in this paper, rejects Platonist metaphysical idealism, Heidegger argues that this transformative process achieves an ontological clarity where we are led *back* to our 'essential being'.

Thus, Heidegger's intentionally provocative interpretation of Plato's allegory defends the possibility of a profound and authentic way of knowing about ourselves and the nature of reality, which, as long as we remain in a state of *apaideusia* (ignorance/lack of education), is veiled. Thompson's close reading of Heidegger's piece puts it as follows:

> Genuine education leads us back to ourselves, to the place we *are* (the *Da* of our *Sein*), teaches us 'to dwell' (*wohnen*) 'there' and transforms us in the process. This transformative journey to ourselves is not a flight away from the world into thought, but a *reflexive* return to the fundamental 'realm of the human sojourn'. (Thompson 2001: 254)

Thompson's argument echoes the claim Heidegger makes about *paideia*—that a 'real education' teaches us to fully recognize the truth of our *already* existing finite situatedness, and the profound *uncanniness* of our being, and being itself. This entails the realization of greater critical and reflective *presentness-to* the situated possibilities of one's own life as it unfolds.

Heidegger is making a profound ontological claim about human existence, which would require a lengthy elaboration within the context of his philosophy and is not

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necessary for the argument of this piece. Nonetheless, to address it succinctly I will refer to his last public lecture 'The Principle of Identity' (1957). Here he grapples with the claim from Parmenides, that 'Thinking and Being are one and the same' (Heidegger 1969: 27). Heidegger argues that thinking and being are, in fact, identical with each other, despite the fact that numerous commentators have historically interpreted Parmenides' claim in a metaphysical sense, that is, that our thinking about being is a correspondence between the world and the ideas that represent it (see Griffiths 2017). Instead, Heidegger characterizes this identity and relationship as a 'belonging together … . Man *is* essentially this relationship of responding to Being' (Heidegger 1969: 25; 31–2). While we seem to experience the existence of the world as something separate from our thinking about it, Heidegger rejects this metaphysical stance entirely, affirming that thinking and being are, indeed, one and the same, a 'belonging together'.

This brief account does not really do justice to Heidegger's argument, but it reiterates the idea that a genuine education is profoundly transformative. To understand Heidegger's Parmenidean interpretation is to grasp a radically reimagined understanding of the history of philosophy, and with it, a complete rejection of metaphysics. We are led back to our 'essential being', to truth we *already* are, but, because we initially find ourselves in a world of appearance and difference, we are unable to perceive this. Hence, as Thompson writes, there is a 'reflexive return', a recognition and reconceptualization of what a human is, in this educational process. Essentially what Heidegger proposes is a revolutionary 'education odyssey' which brings us 'full circle back to ourselves, first by turning us away from the world in which we are most immediately immersed, then by turning us back to this world in a more reflexive way' (Thomson 2001: 254). As the argument develops below, I will develop how aspects of these ideas support epistemic decolonization and the possibility of a 'genuine' education, while also articulating some of the difficulties of this approach. In conclusion, I will return to the notion of *paideia*, as it is taken up by West, and reconcile it with the decolonizing African university.

## DECOLONIZATION AND THE POSSIBILITY OF A 'GENUINE' EDUCATION

In this section I will elaborate on some aspects of the decolonial debate, particularly as they pertain to the South African tertiary space. Then I will draw the argument back to the question of *paideia* and defend the position that *paideia* can be reconciled with decolonization in terms of how a decolonial pedagogy promotes epistemic justice and criticality. Decolonization as an epistemic, conceptual theory, what we could call 'decolonial theory', is not new. In the African context we see strong proponents of it in individuals, such as the Ghanaian philosopher, Kwasi Wiredu, whose *Philosophy and an African Culture* (1980) and *Conceptual decolonization in African philosophy: Four essays* (1995) develop his notion of 'conceptual decolonization'. Another important contributor is the Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o, whose well-known *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African*

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*Literature* (1986) remains an influential text. Frantz Fanon's work[4] on the political decolonization of Algeria, such as *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), and his penetrating psychanalytic analysis of the condition of the colonized, described in *Black Skin, White Masks* ([1952] 2008) remain essential texts in decolonial theory. An important contemporary African decolonial theorist is Cameroonian Achille Mbembe, who has written on the nature of the 'postcolony' (2001) and recently published a collection of essays on decolonization (2021), and whose powerful piece 'Decolonizing the University: New Directions' (2016) is prescribed reading in a number of my courses.

In the South Africa context, since the end of apartheid, decolonization of the curriculum within the university has been ongoing, as Jansen describes in detail (2017). However, in 2015 the university landscape in South Africa was massively disrupted and significantly challenged by the interdependent movements of #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall. These movements had global reverberations, leading to university protests in many parts of the world. The protests concerned various issues, such as the legacy of colonialism, as well as discrimination and marginalization within the university because of race, gender, language, and economic status. In South Africa the protests ended in 2017 when the then President of the Republic, Jacob Zuma, announced significant measures to ensure free university education for poor and working-class students. However, these movements have also prompted and renewed an ongoing 'decolonial turn' in South African universities (and across the world, in some respects). The idea of the 'decolonial turn' is explained by Maldonado-Torres, in that it:

> does not refer to a single theoretical school, but rather points to a family of diverse positions that share a view of coloniality as the fundamental problem in the modern (as well as postmodern and information) age, and decolonization or decoloniality as a necessary task that remains unfinished. (Maldonado-Torres 2011: 2)

Issues such as transformation, social justice, access to universities and, significantly, curriculum critique and revision are amongst those that have received, and continue to receive, renewed scrutiny in our tertiary spaces. Indeed, elsewhere Maldonado-Torres describes the #FeesMustFall movement as 'a major earthquake that moved the foundations of South African consciousness and society [and] brought back the idea of decolonization as an incomplete project' (p. 14).

Maldonado-Torres is correct when he describes 'decolonization as an incomplete project' in South Africa. Not only is it incomplete but it is, in certain significant ways, 'incompletable' if we accept that fundamental to political decolonization is the removal of the colonizer. This has certainly been the case in much of what was the previously colonized world since World War II. The colonizer leaves, and often this is a violent process, as Fanon (1961) noted. South Africa remains then a great and strange experiment in the creation of a new kind of democratic reality. Not only did the colonizer stay, but they reimaged themselves as 'Afrikaners' and, in Heidegger's sense, began to 'dwell' here, as a white African

[4] Fanon was born on the island of Martinique under French colonial rule.

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tribe.[5] One legacy of their long presence in South Africa has been the creation of many of the best ranked universities on the continent. However, the problem with these universities, as Grosfoguel argues, is that they remain ongoing instances of 'global coloniality' (Grosfoguel 2011: 13). Grosfoguel argues convincingly that the powerful remnants of colonization's legacy remain firmly embedded in the life-world of postcolonial countries. Whether it is because of geography, tribal divisions, nationalism, religion, language, legal and economic systems, agriculture, political structure, or education, the influence of colonization continues to shape how these countries operate and, especially in the case of Africa, is the reason why these countries exist as they do.[6]

Thus, as Wolff points out, one cannot 'decolonize the university without keeping in mind that the university as we know it is itself part of the colonial heritage. … Strictly speaking, '"decolonizing" the university requires doing away with universities' (Wolff 2016: 453). Nowhere is this position seriously advocated, indeed Mbembe argues that such a move would be disastrous, further disadvantaging Africans already competing in a globally connected world (2016). Nonetheless, it would be disingenuous to remain unconsciously wedded to the 19th-century Humboldtian model of the university and its 20th-century manifestation in South Africa. To do so would be to perpetuate an ongoing epistemic colonization, what Santos calls 'cognitive injustice' (Santos 2018: 137). While I argue elsewhere (Griffiths 2019) that #FeesMustFall was a protest motivated by commitment to 'economic decolonization' (that is, access to the university itself and the economic emancipation its qualifications offer), in achieving fee concessions students willingly returned to submitting themselves to 'the necessary epistemic violence that structures and dictates hegemonic global coloniality' (Griffiths 2019: 145). In other words, they returned to a learning space that aims to be globally competitive and relevant, that expects evidence of mastery of academic writing skills and conventions in English (the language of teaching and learning in the tertiary space in South Africa), and that will, for the most part, expect students to absorb ideas that have formed Western identity and consciousness. Hence, the question of what epistemic justice is, remains a vexing but necessary aspect of the decolonial debate. And addressing this requires far greater criticality directed at the edifices and knowledges that perpetuate coloniality. The reason for this, as I will argue, has everything to do with *paideia*, that *genuine* education is a reflexive return to *yourself* and the recognition of what you are in terms of your own situated identity, and what the historical forces are that have shaped you.

This brings me back to the two interdependent positions I sketched briefly at the beginning of this piece. A fundamental (but not, I think intractable) difficulty is balancing the necessary claim of epistemic decolonization with the idea of a 'genuine education [as *paideia*]' that remains internationally relevant and globally recognizable. Is such a *decolonized* education possible? Or are the edifices which structure

[5] Giliomee's (2010) work depicts this well. For brevity I am including all white South Africans in this characterization though, in significant ways, we are different (see Griffiths and Prozesky 2010).

[6] See Pakenham's (2003) comprehensive work.

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the nature and understanding of formal tertiary education already too deeply embedded in Western and colonial epistemes? Must we accept Ancient Greek ideas about the nature of the curriculum and pedagogy? And does the Enlightenment German conception of the Humboldtian research university mean that, in post-colonial Africa, to enter the realm of formal tertiary education is to submit, necessarily, to a cognitive colonization and dissonance that amounts to epistemic violence and the fundamental distortion of, and disregard for, the life-world and consciousness from which many students come? Does the very use of language like 'genuine education', 'transformative education', and *paideia* embed us in a Greco–Cartesian conception of the individual, a *subject*, that implies individualism, autonomy, rationality, and free will? These traits, so central to Western identity, have been aggressively foisted upon colonized peoples, tearing them out of their own ontological grounding and epistemologies, and often resulting in 'marginalised, schizophrenic postcolonial subjects' (Griffiths 2019: 145) both entangled with and yet displaced by colonial power structures (Mbembe 2001). Yet, as I have alluded to above, I will argue that it is still possible to balance the necessity of attaining a globally relevant education while at the same time being cognizant of and taking seriously epistemic decolonization as a pedagogic and curricular obligation. Below I will reflect on two dimensions of what I think is crucial in meaningfully furthering this obligation, namely epistemic justice and criticality.

## RECKONING: EPISTEMIC JUSTICE AND CRITICALITY

How do we continue the 'incompletable' project of decolonization while the university remains haunted by its colonial ghosts? Despite the renaming of buildings and the removal of statues, the significant demographic transformation of students and staff, and more accommodative language policies and curriculum, the university is an institution deeply rooted in its Western, colonizing past, and this spectre continues to haunt it. Furthermore, in South Africa the university and education generally were actively used as instruments of apartheid. While some of the more liberal universities resisted this oppressive and discriminatory use (even as others actively enabled it), it remains undeniable that even their very structures were built through the exploitation and expropriation of black bodies, as miners and labourers; and many of these buildings (such as the one in which my office is located) remain exemplars of what architects call 'apartheid brutalism'. South African universities remain haunted by the civilizing, Eurocentric vision that white men in Africa used, in an attempt to safeguard their legacy and demonstrate their intellectual dominance, to enable them to continue to bear what Kipling so unironically called 'the white man's burden'.

Yet, despite this, it is precisely these ghosts which decoloniality argues must be reckoned with, and even exorcised, as far as this is possible. To get a better sense of what this means, Maldonado-Torres defines decoloniality as 'the dismantling of relations of power and conceptions of knowledge that foment the reproduction of racial, gender, and geo-political hierarchies that came into being or found new

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and more powerful forms of expression in the modern/colonial world' (Maldonado-Torres 2016: 440). Attempting this means, for Mignolo, that decoloniality offers a 'pluriversal epistemology of the future' which recognizes the centrality of an individual's 'locus on enunciation' (Mignolo 2007b: 158–9). It recognizes and struggles against the 'irrationality of the rational, the despotic residues of modernity' (Mignolo 2011: 93). A significant aspect of this 'residue' is the European development of a sense of self which 'was supposedly a primal, mythical exemplification of wisdom itself' (Gordon 2008: 5). Yet, the underbelly of this 'love of wisdom' was colonialism, slavery, and wars driven by religious and racial intolerance, and now rampant, global capitalism.

The important work of decolonization is, then, to continually uncover and expose this underbelly. This work of uncovering centres around, as I have suggested, two aspects: epistemic justice and criticality. One way to address this uncovering is to use the university itself as the site to tell the story of what Mignolo calls the 'colonial difference' (Mignolo 2002: 61). The colonial difference is the reinscribing of the 'difference between centre and periphery, between the Eurocentric critique of Eurocentrism and knowledge production by those who participated in building the modern/colonial world and those who have been left out of the discussion' (Mignolo 2002: 63). Alcoff explains that this concept aims 'to reveal and displace the logic of the same by which Europeans have represented their others' (Alcoff 2007: 87). By rejecting 'sameness' and 'universal' discourses, such as a 'liberal world order' (Young 2021: 182), which are, in fact, Eurocentric and rooted in Hegelianism, one opens up the possibility of acknowledging pluriversal epistemologies. This means recognizing that 'knowledge is socially situated' and that the marginalized are situated in ways that can make their contribution to knowledge more valuable, in certain contexts, than that of the non-marginalized. This supports Mignolo's 'loci of enunciation', a concept constituted by the 'intersection of epistemology and the politics of location' (Mignolo 1999: 238)—that is, from where *I* speak.

It is evident that the events of #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall forcibly reinscribed this 'difference' in the South African consciousness through students' using their own 'loci of enunciation'. These events resist the erasure that the logic of sameness and the homogenizing force of global coloniality exert, instead confronting us with the fact that our universities no longer serve their colonial ghosts, but rather that their geographic and political location precisely necessitates a reckoning with them. This work of *reckoning* is the ongoing task demanded by epistemic justice and criticality. It means that an academic has real power to shape the curriculum discourse and content to better reflect the lived worlds of their students. Indeed, this shaping could offer students an education more genuine and transformative than the one they may have expected to receive. The university then, despite its legacy, can also be an ongoing critical project of itself, rather than just a gatekeeper that can perpetuate cognitive and institutional injustice.

Given my own positionality, I work within and without coloniality, taking a stance which, while not ironic, is consciously iconoclastic in some sense.

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Students are exposed to theories of decolonization, and we consider the six different conceptions of the decolonization of the curriculum that Jansen describes: decolonization as decentring European knowledge; decolonization as the Africanization of knowledge; decolonization as additive–inclusive knowledge; decolonization as critical engagement with settled knowledge; decolonization as encounters with entangled knowledges and decolonization as the repatriation of occupied knowledge (2017). These range from 'soft' approaches to decolonizing the curriculum to more radical 'hard' approaches which essentially argue for a nativism. We consider work by Fanon (1961), Mbembe (2016), Gordon (2008), Oluwele (2005), Ramose (2003), and Waghid (2014), and I try to imagine with them what form an African philosophy of education might take in the wake of the 'decolonial turn'. Part of this criticality is to clear away some of the ambiguity surrounding a word like 'decolonization' itself, which was so central to #FeesMustFall and was used to serve many ends, ranging from curriculum redress, to issues about land redistribution, and the demand for removal of statues on university campuses, and extended to the demand for the removal of academics and students who were not black from the South Africa tertiary space, to name just some issues. Jansen's (2017) work deftly and insightfully discusses some of these concerns. Some other examples can illustrate this wide-ranging critical approach. One I adopt is from Gordon (2008) who, when introducing students to Africana philosophy, gives them a series of epigrams from pre-Socratic philosophers as well as African traditional sayings. Students need to determine which are Ancient Greek and which are African and, of course, they cannot. Gordon's point is to undermine the prejudice that philosophy is an exclusively Western activity rooted in the pre-Socratic tradition. Another example is to briefly consider the film *Five Fingers for Marseilles* (Matthews 2017) in relation to Jansen's definition of decolonization as 'encounters with entangled knowledges'. This film follows the genre of the 'Western', but it is set entirely within the African context, and the dominant languages in the film are Xhosa and Sesotho. The film provides a striking visual example of 'entanglement' in its blending of narrative conventions, characters, and languages to create a decolonial neo-African Western. Lastly, one of the themes in the course is school violence in South Africa, which we consider in a philosophical and sociological way. However, a task for the students is to discuss and analyse school violence by drawing on *Ubuntu*, which challenges them to think about this unfortunate South African reality through an African moral principle.

I believe that this kind of varied curricular approach can enable a transformative education that fosters a sense of criticality but also has a strong decolonial impetus. The course content connects to, and also challenges, the life-worlds of my students, prompting them to reflect more on their own colonial (and decolonial) situatedness. The course aims to interrogate and contest assumptions they might have while at the same time challenging them to think more deeply about their own postcolonial subjectivity in, to quote Nakata et al., 'the ever-changing face of the ongoing "Western" knowledge presence' (Nakata et al. 2012: 126). Thus, in the spirit of Ngugi wa Thiongo'o, our work is to try to 'decolonize the mind'. Yet, in

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spite of this, I remain haunted by Lorde's claim (2003) that the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house or, as Shakur puts it, 'Nobody is going to give you the education you need to overthrow them' (Shakur 2016: 181). My course follows rigorous assessment and pedagogical practices, timetabling, tutorial group teaching, reading demands, and other tertiary conventions that you would find at almost every other university in the world, and it is all conducted in academic English. As I mention here and have discussed elsewhere (Griffiths 2019), students, after the major concession achieved by #FeesMustFall (namely, free education), willingly returned to the university to continue to submit themselves to the ongoing epistemic violence that is necessary to join a global workforce, in a world that demands advanced, professional, internationally recognized qualifications, in our case the four-year Bachelor of Education degree.

To return then to the central question: can one achieve *paideia* while attempting the work of decolonial thinking in terms of epistemic justice and criticality? Perhaps, so I would like to argue, epistemic justice and criticality may be two sides of the same coin. As Santos points out, if there is one institution in the world where the production of independent, plural knowledge can be generated, where the potential exists for paradigmatic solutions, it is the university. He describes this university as 'polyphonic', meaning:

> a university that exercises its commitment in a pluralistic way, not just in terms of substantive contents but also in institutional and organizational terms. A polyphonic university is a university whose committed voice is not only composed of many voices but, above all, is composed of voices that are expressed in both conventional and nonconventional ways, both in diploma-oriented and non-diploma-oriented learning processes. It is a university that vindicates its institutional specificity by operating both inside and outside the institutions that have characterized it so far. (Santos 2018: 277)

This powerfully expresses the necessary pragmatic approach to a reimagined, decolonizing university, one that can unflinchingly *reckon with* the remnants of coloniality, and thus remain committed to its own critical transformative project while at the same time qualifying people to work in the world and give students critical access to accreditation and a meaningful career path.

## 'COME ON *PAIDEIA*!'

In closing I want to share a thought-provoking example of how this polyphonic reimagining might look, how the decolonial and *paideia* can speak, in fact, to the same desire for transformational education, by borrowing Cornel West's preacherly phrasing, 'Come on *paideia*!', which he uses in connection with his teaching of W.E.B. Du Bois (2017). For Maldonado-Torres, Du Bois is a central figure in instigating the 'decolonial turn in the early 20th century' (Maldonado-Torres 2011: 2). West taught a course on Du Bois at Dartmouth College (Hanover) in 2017, and it is the recording of these lectures that I will refer to (2017). He begins by focusing on Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk* ([1903] 2007). The first lecture is just remarkable, not only because of how West grapples with Du Bois, but also because of his own energy and performativity. The opening point he makes about Du Bois is the centrality of Athens and the notion

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of *paideia*—what West calls 'deep education', which was even for Du Bois 'salvific' in enabling in him (and no doubt West) the 'formation and cultivation of a critical self', 'the formation of attention'. So, the Socratic dictum, 'the unexamined life is not worth living' (Plato 1997: 33), becomes—for Du Bois, according to West—the central principle which guides his need to discover for himself what he is and what America really is and means for African Americans at the beginning of the 20th century.

The point West is making is that the spirit of *paideia* is transformative, and even salvific, that regardless of its original Athenian context, the core idea aligns, for West, not with a narrow, elitist, and Eurocentric conception of education but rather with the fundamental transformation of the soul. West uses phrases such as 'turning of the soul', 'finding out who you are', and 'getting a perspective' on yourself (2017). There is a part when he talks about going to 'Socratize grandma', to, as he might put it, '*paideia-fy* grandma' (2017). One of the central reasons for this desire for *paideia* is what West calls 'black catastrophe'. What he means is that black existence, in this case, that of African Americans, is characterized by catastrophe: from slavery to Jim Crow to the present campaign of #BlackLivesMatter. He speaks about the catastrophe of white supremacy for African Americans, a catastrophe also reflected in the South Africa context, particularly with regard to apartheid, but also in Africa as a continent, with regard to colonization. What Du Bois partly wants to achieve through *The Souls of Black Folk*, as West points out, is to reach a white audience, to enable them to gain some intellectual insight into 'blackness catastrophe', a catastrophe created and enabled by white people. The underlying point is to see that Du Bois and West can harness a central purpose of the university, namely, *paideia*, the 'turning of the soul', by developing criticality in students, and this can be done significantly through a sense of epistemic justice in the prescribed curriculum.

West's approach strongly parallels my own work in attempting to reconcile *paideia* with decoloniality. What centrally underpins both concepts is their transformative dimension, which is also agentic. As Plato, Heidegger, and West describe, *paideia* is an educative process which irrevocably changes a person, developing their freedom, conscience, and reason, and enabling them to develop a critical perception of who they are and of the structures in which they are embedded. This, in turn, enables them to act more meaningfully and purposefully. Similarly, decoloniality, in the work of Mignolo (2007a) and Quijano (1992), entails a twofold approach to understanding the coloniality of power. The first is *analytic*, an analysis and recognition of how, and in what ways, coloniality has silenced and repressed a people's life-world. The second is *programmatic*, and this necessitates a reckoning with and contestation of the forces of coloniality. Thus, in both *paideia* and decoloniality there is an epistemological equivalence in how this transformative dimension emerges. In some respects, this is unsurprising as both concepts are still themselves Western theoretical apparatuses, but exploring them together enables the pluralistic 'polyphonic' dimension of the university of which Santos (2018) writes to express itself, by allowing both ancient and recent ideas to create generative possibilities for thinking about how in the world we find and understand ourselves.

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An obvious criticism might be that despite, say, what West appears to be achieving with Du Bois, is it not the case that he is, in fact, turning souls into white souls? After all, these are students at Dartmouth, an Ivy League university. My students attend the University of the Witwatersrand, consistently ranked as the first or second best university in Africa, depending on which ranking table you care to believe. Students have suggested to me that Wits is the 'Harvard' of Africa, and even getting accepted at Wits is seen as significant culture capital. So, again, while I worry about *paideia* and decolonization and my own positionality, most of my students are really worried about affording the cost of and passing their degree, getting a job, and for many of them, paying back the 'black tax' to their families for the sacrifices they have made to enable these students to get a university degree. #FeesMustFall, as I argue (2019), was fundamentally about economic decolonization, and access to the university as a way of eventually attaining a decent income and a way out of poverty. Thus, there is an ongoing, necessary pragmatic tension when thinking about the decolonization of the university, something about which, for example, Mbembe (2016) is explicit. We must acknowledge the claims of access, economic, institutional, and epistemological, with the need to produce graduates who have the necessary abilities and skills to work meaningfully in the world. However, in keeping with the spirit of the 'polyphonic' university, this does not detract from its own critical project, and the pedagogic obligation I have to recognize and speak to my own positionality, that I am critically able to self-differentiate and recognize the powerful, hegemonic status of the white, male PhD-bearing lecturer, trying to balance and reconcile the claims of *paideia* and decolonization. If I can use my academic autonomy and freedom to, in the spirit of Maldonado-Torres, 'dismantle relations of power and conceptions of knowledge' and to disrupt and challenge 'racial, gender, and geo-political hierarchies', then that is a step on the way towards the epistemic justice and criticality that the decolonizing, African university should cultivate.

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