Decolonisation of the university curriculum: The what, why and how

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Decolonisation not a new term

- Rebellion against colonial empires occurred in colonies in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries.

- The term particularly emerges post World War II – signifies the undoing of colonialism, often by means of the violent overthrow of colonial states.

- But, it also refers to undoing of the intellectual colonisation of the ideas of the colonized. This idea is captured in the content and title of Ngugu Wa Thiong'o's (1981) book, "Decolonisation of the mind"

Decoloniality

- **Idea promoted by Walter Mignolo and other Latin American scholars (some based in the USA)**
- **Colonialism involved the colonisation of the lands of colonised peoples**
- **It introduces a system of classifying people – a system of othering**
- **The logic of classification/othering – coloniality**
- **Coloniality is prevalent even though we might find ourselves in postcolonial states**
- **Decoloniality is analytic of coloniality – process of critiquing, troubling, resisting coloniality**

Decoloniality continued

- **Colonial and imperial difference**

- **"Those who classify always forget, those who are classified never forget"**

- **Epistemicide and cognitive justice**

- **Epistemic disobedience & zero point epistemology**

Who needs to be decolonised?

- **Essentially, the colonised, the othered.**
- **Why, because they would have interpellated colonial discourses.**
- **When Fanon and Wa Thiong'o wrote about decolonisation their focus was on the colonised & for Mignolo it is the colonised that must actively take up decolonial discourses – that must engage in epistemic disobedience.**

A new space for conversations in HE

- **Decolonial scholar Mahmood Mandani returns to UCT after an absence of 16 years to deliver the TB Davie Memorial Lecture.**

- **When he asked why he returned, he said, "Because Rhodes Fell"**

CAPTION OF PREVIOUS PHOTO

- **"When Cecil Rhodes' statue fell it laid bare South Africa's transformation challenges"**

Why is the space 'new'?

- "[B]ecause higher education transformation in post-apartheid has mainly been characterised by: a proliferation of policies (focusing mainly on governance, funding, quality assurance and student access and success); the merging of institutions; institutional changes (such as the introduction of strategic plans, quality assurance directorates, equity plans, etc.)" (Le Grange, 2011)

What effect did this have on curriculum?

- The effect is akin to what Allan Luke (2002, p.49) wrote about in relation to Australia:

  "We have reached an impasse in theory, policy formation and classroom work that is leading to passivity, paralysis and acquiescence to a neo-Tylerian curriculum agenda …The now dominant approach to curriculum-making in Australia is typified by lists of attributes and skills and outcomes of the new human subject …"

Canonical curriculum question

- **"What knowledge is of most worth" (Hebert Spencer, 1884)**

- **I would add, "Whose knowledge is of most worth"**

Explicit, Hidden, & Null Curriculum

- **The explicit curriculum is what students are provided such as module frameworks, prescribed readings, assessment guidelines, etc.**

- **The hidden curriculum is what students learn about the dominant culture of a university and what values it reproduces.**

- **The null curriculum is what universities leave out – what is not taught and learned in a university**

- **Decolonising means making the null curriculum explicit**

Ambroise Wonkam

Legitimating the curriculum as lived

- **Japanese-CanadianTed Aoki (1999) who argued that curriculum should not focus only on the planned (the curriculum-as-plan) but also on how it is lived (the curriculum-as-lived).**

- **"Legitimating the curriculum-as-lived will take seriously how students are experiencing the current university curriculum and using this as a basis for its decolonisation. Aoki importantly pointed out that legitimating the curriculum-as-lived does not discard the curriculum-as-plan, but legitimating the former produces a tensioned space in between the two that is a space of struggle, creativity and transformation. If understood/recognised, this transformative space could become a decolonising one where the assemblage of lecturer, student and knowledge becomes transformed into something altogether different and unknown" (Le Grange, 2018)**

Pinar's *currere*
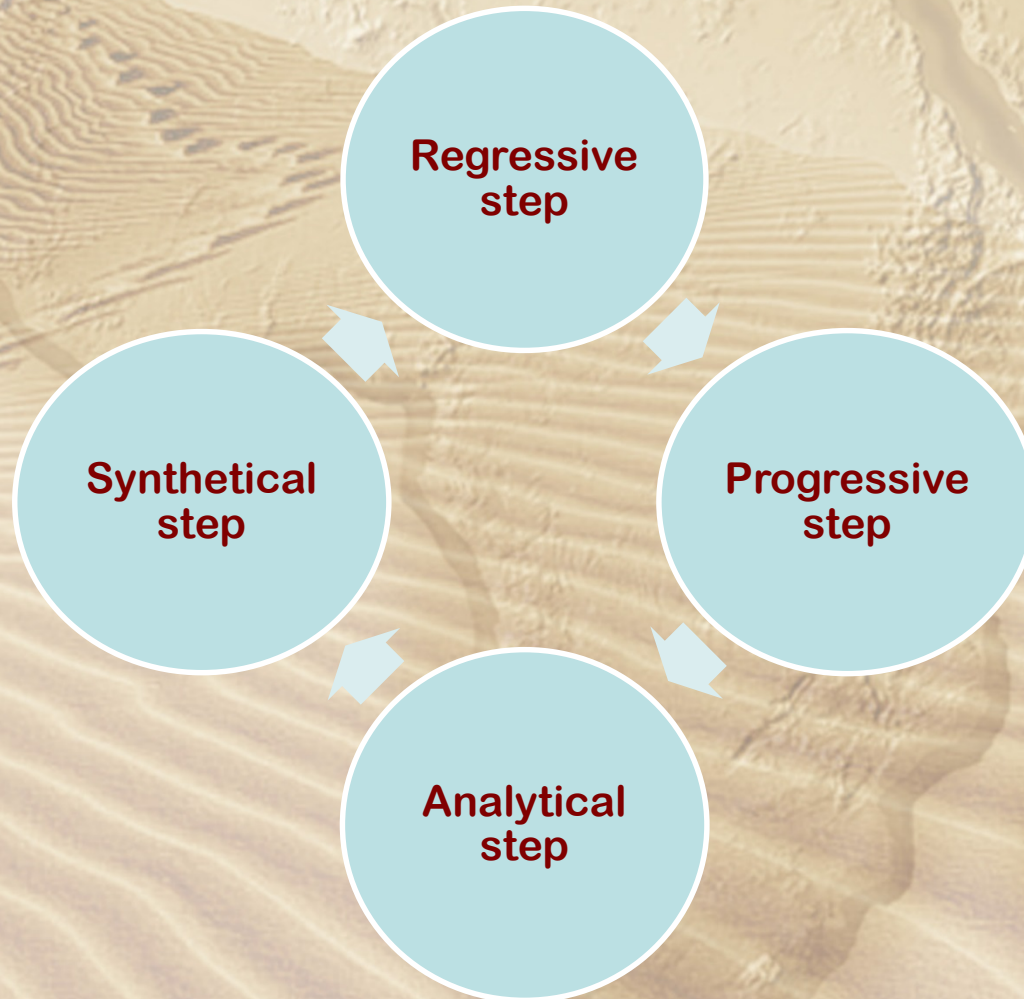
What might we do?

- **Critical examine the history of our fields/disciplines – find their cultural fingerprints**

- **Examine how our disciplines promote the logic of coloniality**

- **Examine how indigenous knowleges have exploited and absorbed into a Western cultural archive**

- **(Re)discover the lost science/knowledges of Africa**

Mahmood Mamdani's approach

- **Choose a text of the Western canon;**
- **Examine what the text says of the 'other';**
- **Analyse and describe the author's assumptions in deciding what knowledge to include in the text;**
- **to use the same information to construct a different narrative to that of the author.**

Creating new knowledge spaces

- Le Grange (2001, p.147) writes: "Aborigines in Australia's Northern Territory have for many years through their own performative modes mapped their country by identifying every tree and every significant feature of their territory.Today some Aborigines are doing the same using the latest in satellites, remote sensing and Geograhical Information Systems (GIS). By representing their local knowledge on digital maps they are able to make their ways of knowing visible in Western terms — 'a new knowledge space which will have transformative effects for all Australians' (Turnbull 1997: 560)"

Some readings

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THANK YOU