CIRCoRe: Mapping the decolonising education imperative at Stellenbosch University

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Introduction

While the work of decolonising education at Stellenbosch University is taking place within pockets of the institution, this workshop aims to create a map of these fragments, in order to build a co-ordinated and institutionalised approach to decolonising education at Stellenbosch University. To this end, the workshop interrogates understandings of decolonisation within the context of the South African higher education system, and explores how to broaden the conversation's reach and impact, thus moving the decolonisation imperative from the margins of the university to its centre.

Background

This discussion took place against the backdrop of Stellenbosch University codifying its approach to transformation and decolonisation of education.

Drafts of major academic policies are being workshopped at the university, including the university's Transformation Policy, Teaching and Learning Policy and Academic Renewal Policy. The 2017 Decolonising Education Task Team Report is also available and is a key framer for discussions on this subject (see: https://www.sun.ac.za/english/transformation/Documents/SU%20Decolonisation%20Task%20Team%20Final%20Report%20with%20Annexures.pdf).

Language on decolonising education and the curriculum - Prof Aslam Fataar

Prof Aslam Fataar introduced the proposed language that Stellenbosch University (SU) would us to broadly inform to decolonising education and curricula imperative on campus (see Addendum A), and led a discussion aimed at assessing the language document's goals, strategies and potential effectiveness. The goal is to develop consistent language and conceptualisations that allow SU to inform its practices and policies.

At its core, the task is to frame decolonisation of education at SU as part of ongoing debates in "intellectual liberation and epistemological relevance". Framing the debate itself as legitimate, urgent and relevant to all university stakeholders is central to realising this goal.

Decolonising education and curricula would foster a culture of agency in classrooms, and a culture of reflexivity over individuals' intellectual paradigms.

With many at SU either hesitant or resistant of the decolonisation agenda, finding people who represent the decolonial work in non-threatening ways in their respective spaces at the university was mooted as a means of foregrounding the decolonial agenda. This would also serve to ameliorate the impact of ambivalence towards the urgency of the decolonial mission, enabling work-arounds in a system that often frames other issues as more critical.

Introducing the decolonisation agenda to a sceptical community would require a non-adversarial approach that presents an alternative frame to the "sense of loss" that SU associates with the decolonisation agenda.

This approach would make broad buy-in more likely.

Key points raised during this discussion included:

- Decolonising education aims to critically evaluate and expand the knowledge canon of universities by integrating of a range of knowledge systems into the university curriculum.
- By embracing a pluralistic approach, decolonising education recognises and incorporates various critical knowledge traditions from, for example, indigenous communities and indigenous knowledge systems, and knowledge from Chinese, Hindu, Indo-American, Arab, Asian, and Western cultures.
- A decolonised and transformed curriculum should meet the needs of all students and be fundamentally inclusive and comprehensive in nature.
- Practical examples of decolonised/decolonising curricula at SU would help demystify the notion and ultimately allow decoloniality to take root in more spaces across the university.
- Many staff and students are hesitant about embarking on a decolonial scholarly mission, with the large corpus of reading material it necessitates appearing quite formidable, particularly for some academics in STEM fields, where the relevance may not be immediately obvious. However, grappling with complex theory is a cross that universities are equipped to bear, and theories of decoloniality certainly do not exceed the analytical capacity of SU students and staff.

Decolonising education praxis: examples from across campus – below are ('not-so-verbatim') summaries of the presentations made SU colleagues.

1. **Context, focus and perspectives generated by the 2017 SU decolonising education task team – Melanie Petersen and Debbie Blaine**

The task team of 2017 was instituted based on a request from the directors and the management. So what I'm going to share is, I'm going to try to sort of share the spirit of the work of the tasking because the tasking at the time also experienced difficulty and so we had to push back against what was experienced as a very managerialist request from the directors management team and where the expectation basically was almost like you would have to come up with a very sort of like reductionist response. So in responding to the request, the task team was very adamant that decolonization or decoloniality was not a method to be taken lightly, but that it is a multifaceted process that encompasses complexity and requires collective engagement. It is not about adopting a particular viewpoint, but rather that it is an ongoing journey of exploration delving into a multiplicity of interpretations and discourses. So the tasking was very clear that its mandate was not to solve all decolonization issues, but instead to serve as a campus barometer of gauging the paths of change at the university at the time. So this process would require deep intellectual engagement, which extends beyond the curriculum and also includes an interrogation of the processes, cultures, and identities that underpin our educational framework here at the university.

So fostering dialogue and partnerships was viewed as crucial to this process. The task team was of the opinion that it is crucial also to for students to be drawn into meaningful debates around these matters. In doing so the co-curriculum also becomes a valuable space which can foster interaction among our diverse student body, academics and support staff and I think the colleagues from what the student communities environments can. I mean, I'm also now a residence head. We find many of these things actually happening within our student communities, but it seems as if within the staff component or across, we're sort of behind the students. Open, so another thing that was important, that got us important by the task team, it was to open spaces, to create open spaces would be for people to have the freedom to speak in ways that would unearth the deep historical and emotional roots of colonisation and the psychological pain, fear, alienation, guilt, and otherness that people still experience and lots of what has been said already has alluded to this.

So this foregrounds then questioning the what, the how, and the who. What are we teaching? Is our curriculum relevant to the world our students are entering into? Who teaches? Who is being taught? How did disciplinary knowledges evolve over time? Whose voices matter in these, and what counts knowledge within these disciplinary spaces? At the SOTL Conference of 2016, a lecturer made the following statement, "what we teach is so enmeshed with who we are, so changes in the curriculum would be superficial unless we ourselves have the opportunities and the will to transform our body of knowledge, our attitudes, and our being in the academia".

So in summary, the task team emphasised the importance of embracing the transformative journey of decoloniality. It's not a solitary endeavour, but a collective commitment. As an institution, we must define and engage with this complexity, recognizing that it cannot be neatly encapsulated in isolation. Our curricula and pedagogy must emerge from shared dialogues, engagement, and meaning-making, bridging gaps with those who still bear the weight of colonial exclusion. So decoloniality is not the task of only a few, it rests upon every member of our university community, from senior management to students.

And yes, it demands time and effort, emotional resilience and resources, but it is a necessary voyage, one that can shape our future towards a more equitable and enlightened academia. So it is in this spirit that the tasking offered tentative recommendations for this institution to consider as we shape an academia that honours diverse voices and dismantles historical injustices.

Some of the recommendations that the task team made:.

So the first one was restitution and accountability of the university. And what's meant by that was that we need to acknowledge our past, create spaces we call reconciliation and restitution, and create opportunities for restoration that avoids alienation.

What does it mean? From the report, Stellenbosch University as an institution was housed on principles embedded in oppressive ideologies that favoured an elite minority at the expense of a disenfranchised majority. Now that's something that nobody can deny. That is clear. The consequences of this institutional past continues to manifest in the psyche of relationships among people forming the capitalist community some 20 years after democratic change.

The next one was revisiting transformation. There is zero mandate for decolonization at SU. These recommendations were made six years ago, and a core recommendation was that it should be a grassroots level and it should be enabled by management.

Decolonisation should be core to SU's transformation process. They mentioned people, programs and places. It needs to be deliberate and explicitly included in the transformation process.

How does that then become operationalized or implemented? If decolonization is understood as the liberation of the mind of colonial shackles before anything else, then we cannot truly transform if we have not been liberated from past mental constraints. So that the theme of decolonizing the mind is not coming up again.

The third one was the role of management. The recommendation was that management needed to play an enabling but not a controlling role. They needed to create the safe spaces for different types of engagement, especially for marginalized groups, and that it must be continuous and ongoing. And then the quote, Managements must be seen to be willing to respect these groups, and this is

missing. To sit in uncomfortable spaces and engage with difficult emotions and pain of the people.

They need an empowering, inclusive, and humanizing environment, a space of ubuntu where everyone matters. To do this, serious reflection on the institutional climate and structures that exist and that continue to sustain a hostile environment for those suffering under colonial oppression is required. But this is denied as a reality by many people in leadership positions - that there is a climate and structures that is hostile. It is just not acknowledged or seen.

Recommendation four: understanding colonial terminology. The intellectual labor of learning and engaging with those courses around topics such as decolonization cannot be delegated to capacity to commissions or other members of the university. And what are we doing there?

Recommendation five: Resources, support and staff. This was just to provide the financial and human resources to do this work.

Recommendation six: Spaces for engagement, they need to be made available and different types of engagement that needs to be supported. The students, staff, management, support staff, and so I think those last three are more operational side of things but if you don't have the other things, it's not very important.

2. Decolonising science research as a medicinal plant-based researcher – Nox Makunga

Decolonising science is not necessarily a topic that's only relevant to Stellenbosch University, but it is globally relevant. *Nature* published a paper containing a decolonising science toolkit. This is not necessarily literally decolonising science in the lab, doing field work, and then ultimately to scientific output.

How many people of colour might be sitting in that waterline? Where do the women actually sit in the waterline? And are people from the global south of the world actually included or have these researchers from the north done what I call parachute science? Go into the commons, pick up some plants, thanks for helping me, and then buzz off and go and write a *Nature* paper?

The movement to decolonize science calls for the scientific community to break free from knowledge production dominated by colonial nations. In South Africa, for example, we've got an incredible biodiversity and much of this biodiversity is not always studied by South African scientists, but studied by other people. Even when studied by South African scientists, which South African scientists are actually studying that work?

If you go back in time in history and you look at the times of Jan van Riebeeck and the Dutch Lithuania Company, you'll see that the first persons to actually record medicinal plant knowledge were not necessarily people of colour, although they were being assisted by the Aboriginal people of the time. And this is also again taken from some historical books, where Papi, who was one of the first ethnobotanists, he

said, in a gravel harbour for a refresh, that is when they landed in the cave, of which we had great need because of our sick, and those sick were actually tended by the Kwe Kwe and the San people. And plants that find themselves in other parts of the world,

The first records of plants being lodged in the Netherlands included our bulbs and this is something that still continues today. So our biodiversity which we have as riches lands in other parts of the world. How do we actually then exploit this knowledge that is associated with this plant as a South African researcher who happens to be black? Consider how our cultural diversity equates to the different indigenous knowledge systems that actually exist in South Africa, and then how that biodiversity can actually interact with biochemical diversity and potentially form economic goods. This is not just for me as a scientist, but for our communities who actually hold this knowledge as custodians of the knowledge that's been passed over during time.

I always make my students aware of the fact that we have this incredible biodiversity with Africa having about 85% of its endemism, but much of that material sits in products as raw material that are exploited in Europe. It's important, especially for scientists who rarely interact with social scientists, to understand the historical context of how this ethnobotany actually came about. This makes them aware that we aren't necessarily sitting in society and just focusing on the books, but actually trying to expand that world into other realms that they don't necessarily study.

There are many opportunities in terms of the bioeconomy, and it is central to the government's new decadal plan. And if you look at the way in which natural products research has been conducted in South Africa, you will see that there's a definite demarcation in relation to 1994 and how this started to increase. This is because the exploitation of medicinal plants was outlawed by the Witchcraft Act of 1965. Scientists need to be aware of these kinds of issues.

If you look at scientific outputs in relation to decolonization and look at who's publishing in the area, you'll see that we have about 65% of that conversation coming out of the social sciences. My area of specialization is not even represented there. So there might actually be a problem, and the best way perhaps to address this is to somewhat have better conversations with scientists.

I do a lot of work across the disciplines. I do a little bit of ethnobotany, so I've had to learn a little bit about social sciences, but at the same time I do some sophisticated work that's linked to plant biochemistry. I've had to learn to work within these two worlds that seem very far apart from each other. But if they're able to meet, this would be for the betterment of society as a whole.

3. Decolonising science education - Hanelie Adendorff

In science, we are refocusing on the notion of the 'knower'. When the course of decoloniality hit us, we in science thought - especially in the association of academic development - we're going to quickly put together a toolkit, and then we're simply

going to tell everybody how to do this. But we learned that it wasn't as simple as that. We had no idea what decolonising science education would look like. Initially, we thought it would be bringing in examples, and then progressing into deeper work using theory, but it was not as simple as that.

If I stand in front of a microbiology class and I bring in an example from an indigenous community, knowledge owned by someone else, what am I really doing? Am I just making it subservient to my paradigm again? We have to delve deep to understand exactly what this might mean in science.

We rely heavily on theory, which sees the world through the lens of knowledge and knowers.

In that world of knowledge and knowers, we have legitimate knowledges and ways of knowledges becoming legitimate, and people talk about legitimate knowers and ways in which we see a knower as legitimate or not. And this is where there's quite a substantial difference between how science makes meaning or gets to legitimacy and how social sciences and humanities does it.

Science, generally, employs a hierarchical knowledge structure. So we build one thing upon the other. I'm going to start from the top down. Technology, for example, comes from abstract mathematics, complex materials science, complex software engineering, electronic engineering, which builds on abstract mathematics, which right down to the fundamental rules of calculus. These are fairly abstract things.

Science generally adds; it never subtracts. So when it comes to curricula, I can't just remove something, as it were. So what can we do then?

Let me try and take an example from something I know absolutely nothing about. I can imagine that in literature we can replace some of the Western works with works from other areas. As we would make that knowledge, that canon, more diverse. We will bring in completely different ways of doing it which would strengthen what we're doing.

There's been an argument that the social sciences - true or not - tend to have become a little knowledge-blind. They tend to overlook the knowledge. I don't want to go into that, but I think what Max and I got to is that science doesn't tend to. It is knower-blind. It sees the knowers in its classrooms as decontextualized knowers. So that, then, to some degree, is where our thinking went next, is where do we go from there?

We did some work in 2018 and 2019 in the faculty where we brought together groups like this and we discussed the possibilities of decolonial approaches in science. We were quite humbled by how people responded because the big thing that came out of it was this difficulty in navigating the language. It's getting access to it. When I started reading decolonial literature, it was really difficult for multiple reasons. It is humbling. It asks that I self-reflect and say, what part do I have in this?

That, then, the one part: to create the space in which that could happen and then to just make sense of it. So, where are we at the moment in our thinking? A key thing I can promote from our understanding at the moment is the importance of having a conversation that spans where science no longer stands on its own island, but it really starts to not only converse, but eventually interact with humanities, with social sciences, with indigenous knowledge systems, and with other ways of knowing, of knowledges in other areas.

We need a diversity of knowers in science who bring different ways of approaching the same problem, who can bring different ways of making knowledge, different epistemologies eventually. How do we bring the different ways of knowing to students into our classroom? We will begin by refocusing on the knower, and working from there.

4. **Research and teaching on decolonisation, critical feminism and ubuntu – Precious Simba**

We are all here by virtue of something that gives us legitimacy and access to this space. For many of us it's because we have PhDs or some sort of qualification that allows us to speak into this space. But when it comes to decolonization, I like what Mahmood Mamdani talks about, that decolonization can be defined simply as doing something else. In doing something else, we have to acknowledge that the solution we're looking for, to resolve this muddy water that we're standing in, is not in the water that we're actually standing in. It is 'elsewhere'. In going to that elsewhere, the challenge then becomes that we need to accept some epistemic humility and understand that we cannot always be the norm.

If we can embrace that fact, then we can come to the place, the elsewhere, that we are really trying to get to.

The moral question of whether or not to decolonise is something that we all accept. But how to decolonise is the thing that we are here for?

The issue is that the privileges and the systems we're trying to break down are the same privileges by which we give us access to something, to this space. If we can embrace that, then I can make a proposal of Ubuntu into the space. And by Ubuntu, I come to Ubuntu from a different angle. And the angle that I come to Ubuntu with is not the one that I can cream off the top to say Ubuntu is egalitarian for example. Ubuntu is not egalitarian.

In almost all societies where Ubuntu is held, there are hierarchies of power. But it is how power is passed from one body to the next that gives Ubuntu its exigency in the world. How do we allow power to pass through and between knowers and unknowers? This is something that I have been trying to play around with in my own classroom, so I speak of Ubuntu as a philosophical framework of encounter.

How does Ubuntu show up in social encounters? It shows up in the ways that power is present between different worlds. I will demonstrate. In some encounters, I am a grandmother, a legal mother. In my 30s, I'm a grandmother. And I'm respected as

such, as a grandmother. In those encounters, I am given the power of a grandmother. There are encounters in some Umuti societies where any embodiment can say, I bless you.

There's a concept that I introduce at the very beginning of my classes, which is the sawubona. Sawubona is the root of Zulu greeting, it literally means we see you. If we are truly listening to some of the ramblings that have been going around the university, whether by students, by staff members, people of colour, it is the need to be seen by the university.

And doesn't just mean I see you. It means we see as a community, and that is one of the foundations of Ubuntu.

One of the things that I've done in my classroom in my last minute is de-centering the power and allowing my students to come into the class as knowers and for them to take that power to be knowers.

That is because the environment in the class allows for power to move between me and the students, such that at some point I am the knower, and at some point, they are the knower. At some point, they bring the knowledge into the classroom, which allowed for us to create an exciting new assessment method where they centre their own knowledge and their own understanding of the module's content. This has played out in ways that I did not anticipate. But at the end of the year, what we get to is they've been given an opportunity for what they call their oppositional consciousness, even though I didn't think it was, but they took it as such. So, for me, those are the opportunities that are in the group.

5. **Decolonisation and the Teaching and Learning policy – Marianne Bester**

The policy begins by referring to the vision of the institution, making particular reference to the four values of compassion, accountability, respect, equity and excellence. It also makes the point that teaching, learning and assessment (TLA) as an integrated practice is of the utmost importance, as we aim to be a research intensive university, and that the institution strives to serve societies for all its endeavours, including facilitating student learning.

The policy then makes reference to the assessment policy that was already revised in 2021. This draft SU Teaching and Learning policy (2023) gives effect to SU's vision and core values in all accredited and non-accredited teaching-learning-assessment endeavours at the University. The policy highlights that we place a high premium on the equity of the success of all students. Additionally, the policy promotes quality, includes the teaching, learning and assessment practice, within a framework of care.

There has been a lot of research done in this regard and this has been a focus of the institution for quite a while. SU has also embraced the rich potential of the increasingly diverse student body and the policy acknowledges the different forms of curriculum - formal, co-curriculum and extra-curriculum. It also references the

graduate attribute statement, which foregrounds a holistic development of all SU graduates.

Stellenbosch University's graduate attribute statement focuses on graduates being engaged citizens, dynamic professionals, enquiring learners, caring individuals, and digital knowers.

We also consider the notion of systemic transformation, which is covered in the draft transformation policy, and includes the transformation of SU's academic programmatic offerings to emphasise decoloniality and indigenous knowledge systems.

Within the context of this policy, decoloniality applies to pedagogy and curricula as an inherently plural set of practices that aim to interpret the dominant power of knowledge making in educational practices in higher education. Here we draw on the work of Kathy Luckett and others, thus promoting an epistemically diverse curriculum with a dynamic interaction between conceptual and contextual knowledge.

The policy also refers to a movement away from seeing teaching and learning, and assessment as two separate practices, integrating these practices into a process involves both academics and students, and seeing students, therefore, as co-creators of knowledge within the particular context.

Furthermore, it emphasises lifelong learning, and we included a range of different types of learning opportunities. We emphasise that decoloniality involves epistemically, diverse curricula and teaching-learning-assessment as an interplay of minds among academics in their teaching role, students and disciplinary content in real-life contexts.

Lastly, the policy program focuses not just on the 'what' of knowledge, but also the 'how' of the knowledge, and the 'who' that is involved in the process.

Promoting continuous academic, programme and module review, redesign and renewal responsive to policy, economic, sociocultural, disciplinary and learning-centred contexts, emphasising decoloniality and indigenous knowledge systems whilst also foregrounding SU graduate attributes to prepare students to thrive within local, regional, national and global spheres through multilingual and multicultural mindsets.

However, we are still, in a way trapped, in my opinion, in a very technicist approach to curriculum. It is important for us to break out of this approach in order to recognise and use the opportunities available to us.

Prof Fataar indicated that he would personally like to underline that last point about the necessity of confronting this technicist approach and breaking out of it to promote continuous academic, programme and module review at SU.

6. Teaching, learning and curricular dimensions of decolonisation – Jean Farmer

In looking at education, but also looking at developing a program for academics in the curriculum, in the overall transformation of the curriculum, my critique is that Stellenbosch University has for many years been navel-gazing and imagining that it can't learn from other African institutions.

If we look at the websites of institutions like Dar es Salaam, University of Senegal, University of Kenya, and even University of the Western Cape, which is right here close by, why are we not engaging with the institutions around decolonization? If I ask the question of academics, what principles, norms, and values, and worldviews inform your selection of knowledge for your curriculum? What do you centre and what do you marginalise? In what ways do you articulate your own social and intellectual position, from which you speak when you are lecturing? For whom do you design your curriculum? Who's your ideal student, your imagined student? And often you would get that even if it is a black student, it would be a child like my son, who has come from an ex-model C school.

I would like to pose a number of these questions to academics and encourage people to work along with other institutions, with black institutions, because there's knowledge there.

A big part of decolonisation is acknowledging that this information is all around us. It's online. We can have meetings with people close by. The dimensions of the curricular decolonization are structural, they're systemic, they're epistemic, they're personal, and they are social.

Our consideration must be in acknowledging and recognizing how all of these dimensions don't grow at Stellenbosch University, because we talk about things in the same circle. It's like stirring the same ingredients in the same pot year after year expecting a different kind of dish.

If we're looking at issues of funding, the lecture halls are built on land that has been stolen, the systemic, epistemic acceptance of the context within which we teach, and how we never raise those issues for our students, which contributes to our students feeling excluded, and to others always feeling included.

Issues as simple as getting to campus and attending events, being able to attend classes from 08:00 in the morning until 17:00, means some students have to get up at 04:00 in the morning to get here and returning home by 20:00. So, decolonisation is a continuous sociopolitical movement which must challenge Eurocentrism at institutions, and Stellenbosch University is such an institution.

We have institutions on our doorstep with whom we can engage. We have to get rid of these colonial notions of our own power as a historically white institution. There's a need for academia to move beyond identifiers of the issues, because we know what the issues are. The time is to engage and change.

How do we engage around those issues? How do we actually make the changes? We need to move towards the what and the how and the what.

How do we get lecturers and students to incorporate these into our learning and teaching? How do we foreground the pertinent issues so that no one is left behind - students with disabilities, black, white, LGBTQI+ students?

The idea would be to start with the individual and address our own fragility around these issues. Many of us think that if I shift, I'm going to have to give up such a large part of who I am. But who the heck are you that you can't give up a part of who you are to make space, to accommodate someone else? Only one. That's all.

Once we have addressed the personal issue of: What does it mean to be African? we can ask the bigger questions: What does it mean to be an African university? What does it mean to include the relevant African content and methodologies and replace the Eurocentric ways of teaching, learning, and assessment. These could range from introducing and addressing challenges in our micro-contexts to the bigger curriculum. So, we don't ever have the excuse of saying that this won't fit into mathematics OR We can't decolonize mathematics. If you decolonize your mind as a mathematics lecturer, you are one step forward to having decolonised your country.

7. Exploring decolonisation of a B.Sc module at SU – Rhoda Malgas

I will start with examples from my classroom.

In my first lecture, an exercise asks of my students to please research the examples of the 'fathers' of environmental ethics. Usually, all the examples that you get in Google are from the United States.

We then have a follow-up lesson in the next week about African thought in environmental ethics and we juxtapose them. This is one example.

I also use a timeline-based exercise. We create two groups, each with a timeline marked with masking tape on the floor. On one side of the line, you have world events, on the other side you describe the conservation ethic of that period. Some timelines start in 1652 (perceived time of colonialism), others start in the Jurassic Age. Students may choose any start time but must end in 2023. So, we start to foreground knowledges of different students in the class, talking about where your grandparents and great-grandparents and your five generations and seven generations ago parents were in the landscape or not at the time.

You may remember a paper that Nicoli Nattrass wrote at UCT [purporting to explain why black students were supposedly less likely to choose science]. UCT is my alma mater. We wrote a rebuttal paper back, and we used this paper as an example in the classroom, because my white students, who have made up more than 90% of them of my classroom here for 15 years now, probably don't get that many black students (us authors included) have a problem with this paper. We read the paper critically and then discuss why it's problematic.

We invite local kids into our labs. I suppose that's one kind of pedestrian way of advertising conservation ecology. However, the students who are presenting these classes are first-generation graduates – the first ones in their families or communities to enter university. We were told that these students are unlikely to choose conservation ecology because, as top science students at their schools, they had other more attractive choice. But here they are taking conservation and presenting it to others, so we have proven them wrong.

Students share knowledge from their locales and communities, and in this way, learn about each other's farming systems, recognising similarities and exchanging ideas.

This is an opportunity for our students to get exposed to people who are different from them, but who do very similar things in agriculture.

One student of mine graduated from Forestry a few years ago, and he has done a guest lecture for my students. One way that I decolonise in my class is by bringing somebody that my students would never expect to be teaching them, to teach in my class, like a farmer. Now, he is an aspiring lecturer, he's now doing a PhD at King's College in London. He is from the Eastern Cape. He arrived with the clothes on his back and a suitcase, and is now doing very well for himself. Simply for me, when I stand in front of a class, I realise that for many of my students, this is their first encounter of any kind of diversity in a teacher figure or lecturer perhaps since kindergarten.

For many, he (the Forestry graduate) is the first black person to have taught them in their entire lives.

For me, this is a decolonial act.

Another former student teaches indigenous plant use to my class. When teaching, she acknowledges the knowledge that she has about the indigenous species and references the people that she got the knowledge from. What these students learn then is that there are knowledge systems outside of conventional scientific sources; there are knowledge systems outside of our scientific knowledge systems.

Critically, they also learn how you can cite this knowledge. If you can cite knowledge as you would for a paper, you can also acknowledge the knowledge bearers of the knowledge that you have understood.

So that is another example.

I must leave with these few quotes. My commitment to decolonization has less to do with the theory and other things that my learned colleagues talk about, simply because I don't have the time to read all of that. However, I want to leave behind a course curriculum that has a visible decolonial orientation. So, I try to work towards not decolonizing the course or decolonizing the degree so much, but rather setting up a course that triggers decolonising the minds for my students and myself. I hope that that is clear.

It is notoriously difficult for us as a species to see ourselves in a system. Our eyes are in front of us. A lot of other species, like springboks, have their eyes on the side, so they can see themselves in the system. Our eyes are in front of us, so the best way that we see is together. There's more field of view covered when we are together. It's a biological thing.

For that reason, we need each other to see ourselves in the system. But if everybody is like ourselves – if the class is the same – then there are things that we cannot see and we create blind spots for ourselves.

I believe in taking my class into my students' lived experience and bringing their lived experience into the classroom. Our students often blame other people for environmental (and social) ills. For people in the middle class who have two cars and pools, but it's the squatters that are responsible for wastage and pollution, right? But we have no problem, you know, buying coffee cups and contributing to pollution and other ways. It's always somebody else's problem. So I spend a lot of time in my class making problem ownership a thing.

And we have to take responsibility because what are we going to say when there is no fresh water in the Western Cape? Are we going to blame the poor? When we run out of water to drink, we will all have run out.

Lastly, in our search for innovative responses in the Anthropocene, which is what we are calling our human-dominated era in world history, it is to our detriment to leave anyone out. How do you know that a person from an area that you may never have considered a centre of science isn't the person who might hold the answer for an anthropogenic crisis? For those reasons, it is imperative to foreground decoloniality in both theory and practice. It is an imperative for our planet as well as for ourselves.

8. Decolonisation, Social Impact, and restitution at the Luckhoff school – Renee Hector-Kannemeyer

I'm tackling the reimagining of belonging within the institution. My focus is the methodology and the approach used to engage communities that have lost the space that we are on now. 2,500 people lost their homes, their schools, their businesses, their sports fields, their rivers. A university that exists within a town cannot exist without engaging with communities.

Communities of colour were removed from this area. A quote from Professor Chris Brink, the Rector and Vice-Chancellor of Stellenbosch University in 2006 is as relevant today as it was in 2006.

He said: "To this day Stellenbosch is a divided town. There is the white Stellenbosch of Mostertsdrif and 'Die Boord'. There is the brown Stellenbosch of Cloetesville and 'Die Vlei'. And then there is the black Stellenbosch of Kayamandi and 'Die Brug'. But there was a time before all this, when there was 'Die Vlakte'. There was a time and a

place where people from different backgrounds and beliefs lived freely among one another here in Stellenbosch. Within two blocks from where the University is situated today there was a community where the lines of racial divisions were less rigid, and which already represented in embryonic form the kind of society for which we are striving today in this country. And there was time when the people of 'Die Vlakte' were deliberately and brutally separated, to be slotted into separate compartments according to a system that was considered at the time to be the solution to a 'problem'. There was a time when students from Stellenbosch University assaulted brown people in Andringa Street. There was the complex and unpleasant case of a school building, had once represented the hope of a community becoming the property of the University."

I co-wrote a chapter in a book with a community activist that passed away two years ago. His words are important to bring into this space. He says: "Stellenbosch has a submerged history that refuses to be buried. It resurfaces at hard times were recorded as if the stones in the walls themselves are crying out for justice."

It takes us quite a long time to hear and see and feel the pain and loss and the trauma experienced by people outside the dominant culture in this space. The work is really centred around identity in place, and how the places where people work and live and the spaces where children play are fundamental to development of community and individual identity. It's a space of belonging and togetherness and collective participating and sharing activities, which is a crucial element in the formation of identity. And so when that identity is lived away from people, the connection back and the journey back home is a journey towards self and a journey towards recapturing that lost identity.

It's long been recognized that people are places and places are people. There was a local activist that spoke about the parking lot, you know, the article that says this parking lot was my home. When people drive past it, you don't understand what they mean in terms of place identity and that kind of fundamental loss of, 'who am I'?

The forced removals from the Vlakte, which was described as a vibrant community, with vibrant businesses, in which people had large properties and lived for generations. There was no real reason for commissioning such a traumatic loss, because it was not a slum area.

The houses and buildings are still standing today, it's utilised by the university, accommodations, guest houses, but people are still segregated.

There is a moral and ethical responsibility of the institution towards the surrounding communities. What is the right thing to do, at a very basic level?

It's moving from the usual 'redress as symbolism' to usual redress as restitution, and using critical participatory action research as a methodology on how to create spaces, equal voices and equal agency, and make a point for social justice.

How do you change people's lives? How does the work meaningfully impact people's lives and dismantle these structures of oppression? The process and methodology needs to be co-defined by the local community. This methodology, participatory action research, is founded on a multiplicity of identities, varying world views, and it's a messy process.

Working communities and people have different roles. It's not a homogeneous community with one voice and one sector, we all raise our voice. But the necessary work is to dismantle the colonial power structures that exist.

This work is at vice-rector level, so people can change the work. But we enable spaces, a parallel space, where communities have equal voice, equal agency, to say, what do you want to do with the books? Who are the role players here? And what are the things that need to be in place in the mantle of this work to actually become restorative? And so it was this piece to decolonize the university and community relationships. There is not a power hierarchical dominant colonial conversation that we're opening up that space to a new way of being a people-agency anyway and its redefined community-university partnerships. And it really defines community, university and partnership. And so I have a minute, I think, to go through that. But, yeah, I won't be able to go through all of that that I want to.

The university is committed. As others have said, it's not that they are against decolonising. But it's the 'how' of how to do it that is lacking. And then we wait to see whether it works itself out. And the university commits itself and recommits itself to transformation initiatives and symbolism over time, but it's not transformative. It doesn't lead to the betterment of people's lives.

And the union is in the practice, it's in the doing, it's in the journey, it's in opening space up of voices, what the opinions are. Sometimes I think the institutions say, we will do this for you, this is the big plan. Actually, people want to be part of creating and co-creating their own future and their own inspiration in the movement. I'm gonna have to stop there, but it's also about making warming up universities a restitution statement, what does that mean? And how do communities identify and reshape that restitution statement in a way that is going to benefit all parties, especially in Staten Island. So that we have the rector very passionate about restituting, but it's how we do it that has to be sustainable and meaningful, and centres the people that are most disadvantaged by this loss.

Critical reflections

By way of summary and reflection, participants shared comments and posed critical questions in the workshop's closing session. Below is a curated selection of these inputs.

- In regard to decolonising education at SU and elsewhere in the global south, which is about critical emancipation, key questions to continually pose to ourselves include: Who are the authors, and what are we teaching? What are the kinds of conversations we are able to have? How do we unlearn our own

privilege? It's about relationality. What are the climates in which we are able to have these conversations? Do we see each other? It's about socioeconomic conditions and sociomaterial conditions. And so I think one of the things I want to stress is that one of these cannot stand for any of the others. And many of the points of difference in the room, I think, have to do with the fear that one might be replacing the other. So content or critical emancipation cannot replace relationality. So my question would be, how do we hold together all four of these things in our decolonial projects and pursuits? And then maybe just two other things. It strikes me that the decolonial work is profoundly interdisciplinary, and that these conversations become incredibly valuable when we work outside of our disciplinary silos. Second, decolonial work can happen from the ground up, but it would be profoundly quicker if it was led with purpose from the top.

- A term that stood out in these discussions was humility, especially systemic humility. From what I'm hearing in science, this work requires collective response and responsibility, collective account and accountability, for anything to move forward, really. Something else that strikes one is the perceived fear of what decolonisation means. On one occasion, I posed a question to a speaker at a conference, asking what the conflict with the terms decolonisation and decoloniality were. This wasn't responded to, but the discourse was, instead, quickly shifted to the inclusivity conversation. It's concerning that there's a perceived fear of it. The last thing I'd say is, the last point I would say is, it's okay not to be the lead in the dance. It's okay for other people to take the lead. And I think that's a bit of fear that people that have held the space or always been the knowers of the drivers of change to have an end point in mind. And this seems to be an unknown process.
- Part of the task is to find language to legitimise students' and staff experiences of racism and alienation that can't necessarily be neatly quantified.
- Systematising the showcasing work by people involved in decolonial conversations is important to build the subject's legitimacy within the Stellenbosch University community. Inviting people into the conversation and then growing the conversation will be key to demystifying the aura of decolonisation.
- Decolonisation and transformation are also about "growing our own pipeline", such that new generations of progressive scholars emerge from SU's classrooms.
- Students are "terrified of moving away from the ways of learning they are used to in high school; they do not [all] see themselves as capable of taking ownership; they do not feel empowered; co-creators of knowledge; as knowers. That fear is a huge part of the resistance to decolonisation, as both the [ultimately empowering] modes of teaching and decolonial discourse can feel alien to students whose formative schooling required far less independent enquiry and forging beyond comfort zones.
- It is possible that people in positions of management do not always appreciate the importance of decolonial work in fields outside of the social sciences, leading to the systematic marginalisation of this work and of the researchers

themselves. This can cultivate a sense of recalcitrance and alienation from the university's centre.
- A session for sceptics of decolonisation might prove useful as a means of understanding the reluctance or hesitance, and where concerns and perceptions can be aired and ultimately addressed.

Conclusion - Prof Aslam Fataar

Decolonising education at Stellenbosch University will allow the university to play its role in pushing forward substantive decolonisation of society.

The points that were made about content, concepts and theory, are fundamentally constitutive. It makes up this conversation. For this, we need language. It's the failure of language, or sitting with old language, that has trapped us.

At the centre of this is the development of concepts and theories and so on. The challenge is our ability to understand that the communication of this language is the first point of alienation in our strategic understanding of the world.

We thus need the language and the concepts, but the moment we communicate it, we alienate 90% of our stakeholders. So, in addition to good language, we need inclusive and persuasive communication.

Secondly, we need, at the ethical and the strategic level, to engage with the relational and psychological complexity that's in front of us. It's the human being in front of us, those who are our staff, those who are our students, those who are in the community, that they are positioned in a very palpable way emotionally to this conversation.

We all are emotionally invested, negatively or positively or otherwise, to this kind of conversation. On behalf of this conversation, we need to attend to the way the emotion and the body is positioned in this conversation.

Thirdly, our normative orientations are framed by critical emancipation and social justice. Why, fundamentally, are we in this space? We are not here to frivolously de-centre the Western curriculum. I'm talking the individualistic, atomistic, symbolic and tick box ends that these debates are often co-opted for; they are co-opted to symbolise to the world that we've changed and to hide from view how we have not changed.

We are committed to protecting, to promoting a university that promotes societal improvement and the public good. This is a public university, publicly supported, which plays a particular role in society to help us work through and engage in improvement of that society, improvement of the public and improvement of the public space and public state of being. That is entirely different and more difficult to the technicists' approach.

These are the bigger dimensions that we're speaking about. So if we are relationally sensitive, it is because we're calling in all our ages and mobilising the entire university to fight the good fight. That is why we are here, that is why this work and the methodologies employed must be all-inclusive.

Then the fourth point that you make is about the material conditions into which we speak. The Khampepe Report showed that governance and leadership structures at Stellenbosch University do not always provide the necessary buttress against ant-progressive developments.

The task, then, is to engage the system to lay the foundation for progressive work to be more than mere promotional material.

Two academics in the Faculty of Management and Medicine and Health Sciences are doing work on social responsiveness and social justice in the health professions curriculum. This is a very difficult disciplinary context.

They have developed a six-year programme that reframes the entire curriculum for social responsibility and social justice, and they are writing about it, which - perhaps unfortunately - is the point at which this work is taken seriously.

But there is something to be said about academic writing, which secures the university as a space for scholarship.

Lastly, we need to work strategically. Given the system and the individual in the middle, there is a growing phenomenon of what I call pedagogical politics. This means joining up the conversation, taking the conversation to the system, and announcing our decolonial work to each other. We should identify opportunities to work together in cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary ways. This is how we grow that pedagogical policy. This must reach the level of the curriculum and curriculum policy, as a fundamental means of preparing students and staff. Ultimately, this work must inform how we build a caring and socially just university for all students, staff and the community at large.

ENDS

Addendum A

Language on decolonising education and the curriculum for insertion into the draft Transformation Policy

Decolonising education aims to critically evaluate and expand the knowledge canon of universities. It seeks to incorporate diverse knowledge systems previously marginalised in the university curriculum. With an emphasis on human rights and social justice, it fosters an inclusive understanding of humanity, recognising the complexities of our interconnected world, including challenges such as poverty and social inequality, climate change, racism, discrimination and exclusion, artificial intelligence, and technological

advancements. Decolonising education advocates integrating various knowledge systems, past, present, and emerging, into the university curriculum.

By embracing a pluralistic approach, decolonising education recognises and incorporates various critical knowledge traditions from, for example, indigenous communities and indigenous knowledge systems, and knowledge from Chinese, Hindu, Indo-American, Arab, Asian, and Western cultures.

Critical Africa-centred epistemology, which includes African history, philosophy, science and relational knowledge frames such as ubuntu, ujamaa and ukama, is at the heart of this educational reframing. Recognising the plurality of critical knowledge traditions serves to promote an intercultural perspective that challenges the idea of one superior knowledge system and aims to foster respect for all cultural and knowledge backgrounds.

Stellenbosch University seeks to provide a comprehensive education across disciplines that facilitates discussions about our colonial past, current-day conditions (including livelihoods), and potential futures. It also seeks to locate knowledge in South Africa, Africa and globally. Careful knowledge selection work to decolonise the curriculum is required in the curriculum processes of specific university programmes and modules.

In rejecting an uncritical and passive acceptance of current approaches to knowledge, decolonising education aims to emphasise the provisional, and, hence, open and contested nature of all knowledge. The imperative to decolonise education necessitates urgent conversations within university departments and academic support environments to critically engage with, and where relevant, integrate diverse knowledge systems into the university's curriculum, science, research, and social impact platforms, as well as the university's pedagogical and assessment strategies.