IN SEARCH OF PARAMETERS FOR THE IMPERATIVE OF THE DECOLONISATION OF THE CURRICULUM

Introduction and background

At the meeting of 28 November 2016 of the Council of Stellenbosch University, the university management was requested to consider the matter of *Decolonisation of the Curriculum* and make recommendations as to how the university should respond to this matter. Below is an excerpt (in Afrikaans, followed by the English translation) from the minutes of the Council meeting of 28 November 2016:

> *"Die bestuur word versoek om by 'n volgende geleentheid 'n voorlegging aan die Raad te maak oor die kwessie van dekolonisering van die kurrikulum, die interpretasie wat hulle daaraan heg, wat hulle voorsien in die toekoms hieromtrent gedoen sal word, en ander tersaaklike aspekte."*

English translation:

> *"The management is requested to make a presentation to Council at a future meeting on the matter of Decolonisation of the Curriculum, the interpretation that they assign to it, what they foresee will be done about it in future, and other relevant aspects."*

The submission in this document attempts to offer parameters for dealing with the challenge of the decolonisation of the curriculum at Stellenbosch University (SU). The aim is to make the document highly accessible, practicable and actionable, amidst the risk of over-simplification in the light of so many views, positions and perspectives on notions like decolonisation, decoloniality and postcolonialism.

This attempt is structured as follows:
- Building on appropriate literature and discussions on these themes, a brief and cursory analysis of post-colonialism, decolonization, decoloniality, curriculum and decolonisation of the curriculum is offered in the first part of the submission.
- In the second part of the submission guidelines that are derived from the foregoing brief analysis are offered for addressing the imperative of the decolonisation of the curriculum, after placing it within the broader imperative of institutional transformation.

Processes for exploring the theme of decolonisation

At the outset it should be noted that dialogue on decolonisation and related issues has been occurring amongst students and staff of the SU campuses with varying intensity over the past few years. Furthermore, it is a hotly debated issue on several other South African university campuses too, especially during times of student protest. Decolonisation is a theme that is

intentionally debated in other parts of the world as well. These debates should be welcomed at tertiary institutions with their culture of innovative academic freedom, as a means to drive transformation. Several faculties have particular deliberations on how the curricula of their academic programmes and pedagogic processes, should be changed from a decolonisation perspective.

Another approach is for the governing and managing bodies of a university to select the theme of decolonisation for formal investigation, and an analysis of the implication thereof for the institution. This process was initiated by the Council of Stellenbosch University at their 28 November 2016 meeting. This systematic approach should not be viewed as an alternative to (spontaneous) debates mentioned in the previous paragraph. The systematic approach rather strengthens and deepens the spontaneous approach, and ensures that the gains of the spontaneous discussions are optimally utilized by the institution.

The request from Council was tabled at the Committee for Learning and Teaching (CLT) meeting on 9 February 2017 since it relates directly to the academic offering of Stellenbosch University. The CLT decided that a task team should be convened to respond to the request from the Council of SU. Each faculty was asked to nominate a representative to serve on the task team, and representatives were also sought from the Student Affairs Division, the Transformation Office and the student body. The RMT (Rectors' Management Team) then formally constituted a Task Team on the *Decolonisation of the Curriculum* at their meeting of 7 March 2017.

At the first meeting of the task team on 23 March 2017, the following proposed terms of reference were accepted:

- Engage with the brief from Council, particularly regarding their request to SU management for 'the interpretation that they have' on the matter of *Decolonisation of the Curriculum*, since this is a complex issue with a multiplicity of interpretations and discourses that need to be explored.
- Explore the matter of the *Decolonisation of the Curriculum* through intellectual engagement which goes beyond just the curriculum, and includes an interrogation of the processes, cultures and identities at the university which underpin the curriculum.
- Consider how to draw students into this debate and facilitate partnerships between the student community, the academics and the support staff.
- Make recommendations on how the university should proceed with the *Decolonisation of the Curriculum* and the broader feelings of alienation that underpin this call for decolonisation.

The end product of the task team's work was delivered in a report titled: "Recommendations of the Task Team for the Decolonisation of the Stellenbosch University Curriculum", dated 31 July 2017.

After the report was accepted by Stellenbosch University's Committee for Learning and Teaching, it was discussed institution wide along several parallel routes, namely at Senate, at the Rector's

Management Team, via the formal management structures of the university to all faculties and professional support divisions, as well as via the formal student communities structures. Apart from the task team report, two other references were recommended for inclusion in the discussions at Stellenbosch University: A book chapter on decolonisation by Jansen (Jansen, 2017) and a journal article by Le Grange (Le Grange, 2016).

Contestation of concepts and exploration processes related to decolonisation

Even though the original request from Council to SU management was to present "the interpretation they assign to it [decolonisation]", the topic rather lends itself to the broader exploration within the SU transformation imperative. There is actually no definitive view on decolonisation, as highlighted from the quotes from the Task Team report below:

"Just as the concepts of 'decolonisation', 'decoloniality' and 'decolonisation of the curriculum' are highly contested and evoke emotive responses, the initiation and continuation of processes of meaningful engagement regarding *Decolonisation of the Curriculum* raise complex issues. A balance needs to be struck between the risk of top-down, unilateral action by Stellenbosch University (which can amount to the appropriation of decolonial discourse), and the need for institutional support of and participation in engagement processes. Engagement processes regarding *Decolonisation of the Curriculum* should take place at all levels of the university community: amongst the student body, between the student body and staff, amongst academic and support staff, amongst management and council, and between management and the student body, and management and staff."

About the process the Task Team responds with:

"*Decolonisation of the Curriculum* is not a concept that can be definitively interpreted by this Task Team, the university management, the university council, or academic staff alone. Instead, decoloniality in curricula and pedagogy must result from shared processes of dialogue, meaningful engagement and shared meaning-making with those who continue to suffer colonial exclusion. This may be a challenging process as it necessitates a personal engagement with historical processes and how we, ourselves, are implicated in processes of domination and oppression today. Such processes of dialogue would need to investigate issues such as *who should teach* in African universities, *what should be taught* at an African university, *who is taught* and what is meant by *the curriculum.* While this report outlines some of the engagement already taking place at Stellenbosch University regarding the *Decolonisation of the Curriculum*, much of this engagement is fragmented and driven by pockets of stakeholders rather than a concerted effort by the university to enter into dialogue with those who still suffer from colonial oppression, and those who remain complicit in making it so."

Their report emphasises that such dialogue and shared meaning-making should steer any attempts at *Decolonisation of the Curriculum* and Stellenbosch University (SU) as a whole.

Exploring some related key concepts - Decolonisation, Coloniality, etc.

The following sections elucidate some of the key concepts encountered in the decolonisation debates, also for the sake of this report's application of terminology. It is emphasized again that this attempt at offering some hopefully accessible frameworks for understanding these concepts in multi-disciplinary contexts, fully acknowledge the plurality of opinions and perspectives on, and definitions of these concepts.

Decolonisation

To understand decolonisation we need to understand colonisation and coloniality.

Colonisation refers to the historic period of the building of empires, the grab of lands, and the subjugation and abuse of peoples, as well as their property and competencies.

Underlying the imperial practice of colonisation is the conscious and subconscious rationality, logic, attitude, presupposition and prejudice, which entails the presumed superiority of some people (ethnicities and nations) with regard to features like physical attributes (skin colour, face shape, nose size, hair textures etc.), intellect, creativity, civility, cultured-ness, morality and even spirituality. Based on this logic and presuppositions societal structures that determine all facets of life were erected. The notion of coloniality is used to refer to this underlying logic of superiority and the related societal structures that were erected on basis of this rationality of superiority.

During the period of apartheid, as distinctive manifestation of colonisation and coloniality, a "perfect" logic and rationality of superiority was developed. Based upon this logic of superiority, structures of macro-apartheid and micro-apartheid that touched upon all walks of life, were developed. These structures determined life from the most intimate spheres, like what colour person you may marry, to the most public domains, like what type and quality of public education you may receive, where you may work, what type of work you may do, and how you may participate in political and industrial life.

Curriculum

When we speak about the curriculum we have both a narrower and wider focus in mind.

In narrower sense the curriculum refers, amongst others, to the undergraduate and postgraduate academic programmes, their contents, goals, outcomes, graduate attributes, assessment, learning, teaching etc. This narrower understanding of curriculum is called the explicit curriculum (Le Grange, 2016, p7).

Curriculum in broader sense refers to the so-called co-curricular activities of the university, which

are indispensable for the operationalisation of the curriculum, like research and innovation, transformative social impact, internationalisation, sustainability and various professional academic support services, e.g. student affairs and human resources. The vision, values and institutional culture of the university is also included in this understanding of curriculum. Some call this the hidden curriculum (Le Grange, 2016, p.7).

Le Grange also refers to the null curriculum, i.e. what is not taught and learned at university (Le Grange, 2016, p.7).

Both the narrower and broader understandings of curriculum are adopted in this submission. Both the explicit curriculum (narrow) and hidden (broader) curriculum are crucial for achieving the envisaged outcomes of university education, whilst continuous and critical attention should be given to the null curriculum.

Postcolonialism and Decolonisation

To address the legacy of the imperial period of colonisation, as well as the continuous presence of coloniality, the notion of post-colonialism was introduced. Post-colonialism refers to attempts to advance beyond the period of colonisation by acknowledging the negative impact thereof, and to address that impact. Various postcolonial theories in different disciplines focus upon questions relating to the legacy of colonialism and coloniality.

Post-colonialism is, however, viewed by some as a continuation of colonisation and coloniality, as offering an insufficient analysis and understanding of the destructive and persistent dehumanising impact of colonisation and coloniality, and consequently as an insufficient attempt to free societies from the impact of colonisation and coloniality.

The notion of decolonisation is introduced to address colonisation as historic, imperial period, and coloniality as both the logic and presupposition of superiority, and the societal structures of superiority that are aligned with this logic. *Decolonisation, therefore, implies that both colonial structures in all walks of life, and the colonial mind-set, thinking, rationality, logic and prejudices underlying them are to be unmasked and addressed.*

Decolonisation of the curriculum

The discussion of decolonisation in academic contexts mainly takes place under the theme of the decolonisation of the curriculum.

Jansen (2017, p.156-163), a South African educationalist, identifies various discourses in an illuminationg way, i.e. ways of speaking, about the decolonisation of the curriculum.

The decolonisation of the curriculum can refer to *the decentering of European knowledge*. In a move away from Euro-centric approaches to knowledge, European knowledge, values, world-views, achievements, are no longer viewed as superior forms of knowledge. In this context, the decolonisation of the curriculum refers to the re-centering of knowledge away from Eurocentrism to other centres, like Africa. Indigenous and distinctive African knowledge are prioritised as authentic, and not as add-ons to other forms of knowledge, especially European knowledge.

Decolonisation as *the Africanisation of knowledge*, according to Jansen, differs from the re-centering approach above, which aims to replace Europe as centre with other centres of knowledge. In that approach, there is still room for European knowledge on a secondary level. The Africanisation approach views it as imperative that African nationalism, identity, culture, values, aspirations, literature, languages and media of instruction are asserted.

The additive-inclusive approach entails that African knowledge is merely added on and supplemented to curricula, with themes like African studies. It also entails that in the broader curriculum African public symbols, like names of buildings and statues are merely added to existing, mainly western ones.

Decolonisation of the curriculum also entails that the knowledge of the coloniser, also known as *settler or settled knowledge*, are to be engaged with critically. Students are to acquire capacities to critically engage with this knowledge, and not just to accept it as authoritative and supreme. This approach asks for a subversion of the dominant settler knowledge.

In a world of inter-relatedness, interdependence, interwovenness and *entangled* living in local and global contexts, the knowledge of colonisers and colonised impact upon each other and complement each other.

A last discourse that Jansen identifies is the one described as *the repatriation of occupied knowledge*. This discourse is prominent amongst indigenous people who struggle for reconciliation with the land that had been taken away from them. A radical break with the settler knowledge of the colonisers, which makes no room for the symbiotic existence of the knowledge of the colonised and the colonizer is advanced. Such a symbiotic existence would merely imply the perpetuation of the dominance of settler knowledge in subtle and hidden form. The aim here is the liberation from colonial knowledge that should simultaneously serve the repatriation of land to indigenous peoples.

Practical dimensions of curriculum and programme renewal at Stellenbosch University

The Vice-Rector: Learning and Teaching (L&T) identified holistic programme renewal as one of his Responsibility Centre's (RC's) key strategic priorities for 2017. This stems from an emerging SU strategy for Programme Renewal and integrated L&T Environmental Plans presented at the SU Institutional Planning Fora, Senate and Council. A community of practice was established in 2016 to include all the vice-deans for teaching as well as senior staff members responsible for programme management.

Academic programme renewal, includes investigations on the Decolonisation of the curriculum, taking note of the Decolonisation Task Team's report issued under the auspices of the Committee for Learning and Teaching of Senate.

It should be noted, however, that programme renewal usually consider many other dimensions as well. Faculties may choose to focus on any subset of the following dimensions as they embark on the renewal of specific degree programmes:

a) Developing desired graduate attributes
b) The systematic rollout of information communications technology (ICT), including designing a programme with a blend of on-campus and online activities
c) Incorporating Social Impact and Transformation dimensions
d) Quality Enhancement of the modules and offering process of programmes
e) Redesigning for accessibility and inclusivity, considering the changing nature and diversity of the student body
f) Eliminating unnecessary duplication of content, simplifying programme structures and consistency of assigned learning credits
g) Increased flexibly in using contact time with students, and enhancing online learning
h) Rethinking assessment practices
i) Integration of curricular and co-curricular elements of students' education
j) Improving the financial viability of programmes and modules
k) Imagining creative curriculum niche areas / market differentiation

All of the above are areas of transformation (change) of the curricula and academic programmes that deserve regular attention.

Proposals for organisational transformation by the Decolonisation Task Team

Since the task team also widened its brief to consider transformation of the Stellenbosch University "ecosystem" that is conducive to curriculum transformation among others, it offers the following tentative recommendations to SU management:

- *Restitution and accountability of the university*

It is recommended that the university acknowledge its past and creates spaces for reconciliation and restitution. It is further recommended that this should be done in a spirit of restoration with a view to avoiding alienation.

- *Revisiting Transformation*

It is recommended that the university includes decolonisation as a core aspect of its transformation strategy and that all transformational work needs to embrace principles of decolonisation. It is further recommended that systemic institutional transformation, and its related themes of *Place; Programmes;* and *People;* cannot assume that decolonisation will automatically be present. Decolonisation and the process thereof need to be deliberately written into all future processes and practices relating to Institutional Transformation.

- *The role of management*

It is recommended that forms of engagement are not dictated by management when it comes to an issue such as *Decolonising the Curriculum*, but that such engagement happens within spaces that are sympathetic to the needs of marginalised groups. Furthermore, it is recommended that management needs to be aware that the *decolonisation of the curriculum* is an on-going conversation and thus there is a need to work continuously to enable staff, students and all the relevant stakeholders to engage in this conversation. It is also recommended that this task team report should not be seen as means to an end, but a start of a journey towards decoloniality.

- *Understanding Decolonisation terminology*

It is recommended that the leadership of SU should explore how they could start and continue conversations within their own spaces on the topic of decolonisation, so that they can better understand the definitions and terminology relating to debates on decolonisation through the conversations currently taking place at the university. It is further recommended that the leadership of SU joins the spaces where these conversations are currently happening.

- *Resources and support for staff members*

It is recommended that resources and support be provided for staff members who engage in decolonising initiatives in teaching, learning and curriculum renewal. It is further recommended that opportunities be created to bridge the gap between the formal teaching space and the co-curricular space where students spend much of their time.

- *Spaces for engagement*

It is recommended that both physical and discursive spaces, as well as the mind space of those teaching the curriculum, should be decolonised. It is further recommended that the classroom

space and curriculum be expanded by the open discussion of what social justice may mean in relation to decolonisation.

- *Kinds of engagement*

It is recommended that management encourages individual faculties, support staff and students to continue discussions and other initiatives regarding *Decolonisation of the Curriculum*, and provides the necessary resources and support to the student body and staff, in the form of third-party mediators, to facilitate such engagement processes among themselves and with management.

Some tentative conclusions for the decolonisation of the curriculum discourse

From this brief analysis of, amongst others, notions like colonisation, coloniality, postcolonialism, decolonisation and decolonisation of the curriculum some parameters for the discourses on the decolonisation of the curriculum at SU might be constructed.

The ambivalent, ambiguous and tragic consequences of the historical, imperial period of colonisation is acknowledged.

This period of colonisation calls for a commitment to appropriate restitution.

SU is committed to a process of systemic transformation, which entails that the conscious and sub-conscious colonial rationality, logic and presuppositions of superiority and subjugation are identified, acknowledged, owned and transformed.

SU is committed to a process of accelerated transformation, which entails that the presence of subtle and visible, conscious and subconscious colonial rationalities, logics, presuppositions and prejudices in the structures of the University are identified, acknowledged, owned and transformed.

Through its transformative societal impact SU is committed to a process of transformation, which entails that the rationalities and structures of coloniality that continue to exist in broader society are resolutely transformed.

In terms of the broader understanding of curriculum, the decolonisation of the curriculum would entail that the transformation of the three inclusive domains that are identified in the Transformation Plan (TP) of SU, i.e. people, places and programmes, are undertaken through the lens of decolonisation. The TP spells out that the people, places and programmes of SU are to be transformed in order to reflect higher levels of dignity, healing, justice, freedom as well as equality and equity.

The transformation of people in the perspective of decolonisation would entail that staff, students and various stakeholders and partners of SU reflect on diversity. Moreover, the building of transformation competencies amongst the people of SU would include the overcoming of conscious and subconscious colonial rationalities and logics, presuppositions and prejudices.

The transformation of places from the perspective of decolonisation would entail that the public symbols of the University, e.g. buildings, statues, plaques, portraits and names of buildings and venues resist colonial rationalities and prejudices, and advance dignity and justice for all.

A decolonisation perspective on the transformation of programmes of learning and teaching, research and innovation and transformative social impact, would facilitate the overcoming of colonial rationalities and structures.

The decolonisation of the curriculum in broader sense implies that this broader transformation process, as portrayed above, be advanced. In narrower sense the decolonisation of the curriculum implies that the programmes of learning and teaching, the learners, the facilitators of learning (pedagogues), learning material, prescribed and recommended literature and teaching methods are transformative. This means that all of these elements of the broader and narrower curriculum advance the transformation aim of a life of dignity for all; that learning and teaching take place in a context of glocality, i.e. a context where both global and local insights, knowledge, experiences, wisdom and canons of literature receive priority attention.

References

Jansen, J. *As by fire. The end of the South African University,* Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2017.

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