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An Integrated Approach towards Decolonising Higher Education: A Perspective from Anthropology

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Abstract

If science (natural, social and humanities) is to be a truly global knowledge system, scientific endeavours have to move beyond dualistic binaries of Indigenous versus Western, towards a dynamic dialogic approach that centralizes intersubjectivity, relationship and contextualisation. Despite its historic engagement with the reproduction of Western norms and reinforcement of Western dominance, contemporary anthropology is a social scientific field that is specialized in dealing with a multitude of knowledge systems, and suitable to facilitate cross-cultural dialogues as well as highly critical reflections on its own knowledge constructions. Drawing on insights and practices from this discipline, we describe the interrelated strategies of 1) radical multivocality and 2) adamant reflexivity, and how they may be useful in facilitating decolonisation within higher education. We reject the replacement of one knowledge system with another and refuse subjugation of one form of knowledge to another frame of reference. Instead, we envisage science as a co-creative dialogue among a multitude of knowledges that enables a new generation of academics to use Indigenous and Western knowledges and methods in a reflexive and critical dialogic synergy, thus fostering academia as a space where new narratives arise, meta-narratives are challenged and different narratives are related to each other.

Introduction

If scienceⁱ is to be a truly global knowledge system, then why is African knowledge considered specifically African but European knowledge often automatically deemed universal?ⁱⁱ In the modernist view of the West as a ‘culture of no culture’ (Franklin, 1995, p. 179), Western contexts are often approached as more neutral, forgetting that the West is home to the minority of the world’s population, and many of its conditions are specific, temporal and diverge from other areas. This also happens in scientific knowledge production. Even though, here, the need for conscientiousness and responsibility are magnified; firstly, because science is such a powerful knowledge system, and secondly because it hopes to produce a global kind of

knowledge created by and of service to all of humankind. Academic debates are defined by a specific set of rules and conventions, and guided by preferences for and exclusion of certain languages, knowledges and media; while day-to-day academic practices take place within unequal processes of socialisation and subordination. The unequal representation and positioning of Western knowledge systems as universal and dominant, to the detriment of other knowledge systems, prevents science from being a truly global knowledge system.

In critiquing this dominance, scholars have underlined the significance of engaging in a radical process of redefining educational standards, to ensure that teaching and learning in the Global South and North occurs within appropriate contextual relevance and takes into account a broad spectrum of perspectives, ideologies and knowledges (Makgoba & Seepe, 2004; Mamdani, 1998; Mbembe, 2016; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2016). How epistemic diversity can be achieved in practice, has been less clear. In this chapter, we provide some practical pathways towards the achievement of a cross-cultural dialogue within academic debates and knowledge production contributing to insights into blind spots as well as to the creation of spaces for disruption and possibilities for transformation. We will focus less on the associated organisational aspects of decolonisation of higher education, for example through de-privatisation and rehabilitation of the public space and democratisation of access, as argued for by scholars like Mbembe (2015). Instead, we focus on the personal and internal aspects involved in decolonising higher education, exploring an openness towards multiple ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies and subjecting our everyday experiences, assumptions and motivations to critique. We believe our ideas will contribute to Mbembe's and others' visions of creating classrooms without walls, in which various publics will come together using new forms of assembly to redistribute different kinds of knowledges.

In our discussion, we approach knowledge as an intersubjective achievementⁱⁱⁱ and use the term 'knowledge system' to indicate that knowledge is developed, shared, interpreted and understood within its ontological and epistemological context (a corpus of substantive assertions about the world), which facilitates concepts, narratives and symbols (media) to acquire meaning and be communicated (within a series of social relations) (Barth, 2002). We acknowledge that knowledge systems are not closed or static, but essentially dynamic networks of relations with semi-permeable boundaries. We use the term 'Indigenous' to represent local and often marginalized knowledge systems, ways of knowing and being, and the term 'Western' to refer to historically Eurocentric knowledges, ways of knowing and being, which have been

dominant and have been employed to serve colonial and imperialistic objectives. We understand that both these terms have their difficulties. We take into account that the term Indigenous is often used in an exoticizing and romanticizing way and associated with the traditional, cultural, non-modern ‘other’ (Kuper, 2003) and approach it ‘not as a stable point of reference or remnant of the past, but a subject position that is actively claimed and enacted in the present’ (Schramm, 2016, p. 133). From our point of view, modernity is cultural, too. We take into account that multiple modernities exist (Eisenstadt, 2000; Wijngaarden, 2018), and that we are all Indigenous to the localities and spaces which form the centre of reference and belonging in our lives. We acknowledge that the apparent dichotomy between ‘the West and the rest’ (Hall, 1996) is, in fact, a faulty product of modernist ideology (Latour, 1993). Therefore, we approach the Indigenous and Western not as binary opposed, but as intertwined notions that bring each other into being, through an assemblage of inter-reliant contrasts and continuities.

We are deeply aware that in the decolonisation debate the question of ideas and tools developed by whom is critical. This chapter is the result of exchanges between two authors who acknowledge that their insights are stimulated as well as limited by their ongoing socialisations in and affiliations with multiple European and African contexts, and who draw upon their interdisciplinary backgrounds in social and cultural anthropology, political studies, social theory and communication studies.

Using an integrated approach, we start from an anthropological perspective that places the decolonisation of academia within the unresolved tension between universalism and cultural relativism, i.e., the search for common ground in terms of universal commonalities and the problem of ethnocentrism (the blindness to the specifics of our viewpoints and standards, which seem natural or universal to us). For science to be a global knowledge system, a minimum of common ground needs to be present, but the interests of those with a privileged position or voice easily come to dominate and continue their tendency to be oppressive. The approach proposed here is aimed at making scientific thoughts and processes less vulnerable to ideological hijacking which takes place when a scientific theory is understood as universal and timeless and when political interests are obscured under the guise of objectivity. The minimalistic scientific basis we outline in this chapter is dedicated to making science an open conversation (accommodating for different knowledge systems, epistemologies and ontologies to exist side-by-side) which is rooted in reflexivity (a dedicated critical process to control

quality as well as politics of knowledge production^{iv}). We aspire to contribute to a scientific knowledge system that is increasingly global by expanding the recognition that it constitutes a perpetual dynamic process of reflexive and multivocal potential.

We start by discussing the entanglements of the concepts of knowledge and colonisation, using historic colonial developments as a backdrop to introduce some of the responses present in the decolonisation debate. Subsequently, we establish why an anthropological perspective can further the process of decolonisation beyond these responses and outline radical multivocality and adamant reflexivity as two interrelated strategies. Finally, we will conclude how these strategies fulfil important prerequisites in the decolonisation process called for in the literature.

Entanglements of Colonisation and Knowledge

Throughout history, a variety of knowledge systems have been present, which have influenced each other (Diamond, 1998; Hoppers, 2001; Wolf, 1990). Many of the theories that form the basis of current curricula worldwide are drawn from a multicultural conglomeration of knowledges, which have roots in Hebrew and Old Greek myths (forming the tacit groundwork to the criteria used in the philosophy of science to measure truth and the development of logic), Chinese technologies (inventions of compass, gunpowder, paper and printing press technique), and Arab disciplines (mathematics, geography, astronomy, medicine) (Diamond, 1998; Scarborough, 1994).

Through the periods of colonisation and Enlightenment, the interplay between Western power and knowledge reached a hegemonic level, fuelling the development of the modern scientific knowledge system. Even though this system has been extensive and powerful, it is far from absolute or complete, and one of its greatest weaknesses is that it remains strongly biased by its development in Western societies. Scholars from Africa and other beyond have for example criticized the underlying Newtonian-Cartesian epistemologies for favouring specialisation above holism, structures above processes, materialism above spirituality, individualism above communalism, and answering ‘how’ questions but remaining silent on ‘why’ questions (Goduka, 1999; Millar, Kendie, Apusigah, & Haverkort 2006). Consequently, these epistemologies ‘present a view of reason that excludes and marginalizes other ways of knowing’ (Goduka, 1999, p. 26; Mbembe, 2015). These scholars argue that modern scientific knowledge is disembodied and disembedded, as there is a supposed division between mind and

world, which results in a splitting of the observer and the observed, objectifying ‘the other’ (Visvanathan, 2002; Badat 2017). The knowing subject is supposedly able to know the world without being part of that world, and produce knowledge that is presented as universal and independent of context, while somehow remaining rational and outside of it (Mbembe, 2015).

Interestingly, the philosophy of science prescribes that academics should always keep an open mind regarding their conclusions, even if these conclusions might appear absolutely correct and final for the time being (Popper, 2002; Scarborough, 1994), because theories are constructed by human beings within contexts and cannot be value-free. As a result, scientific knowledge production is not static but dynamic, including shifts of paradigm^v (Kuhn, 1962; Popper, 2002, 1963; Scarborough, 1994). Nevertheless, in daily applications, scientific knowledge is often ‘naturalized’ and treated as a timeless, universal and objective ‘truth’. When turned into an eternal essence beyond question, it is disguised that a certain explanation was chosen from a variety of options available. The objective realism modern science envisions ‘pretends to be determined by things in and of themselves [while other knowledge] is a cultural ontology, comprehending nature in terms set by human relationships and activities’ (Sahlins, 1995, p. 158). In the process, the Western cultural bias underlying most scientific theories is ignored.

Moreover, the naturalisation and essentialisation of scientific theories as objective, universal principles, fuels an ideological use of the scientific knowledge system which is referred to as ‘scientism’. In this constellation, theories are no longer viewed as tools to help order and explain the world but are treated as unfalsifiable and immutable. Instead of merely being an attempt to describe how the world works, they are used to prescribe how the world should work and/or how the world should be perceived or understood. These normative components are politically charged, because they not only contain a material or realistic element, but also an idealistic element, and thus cannot be separated from the question of interests. Specific perspectives and frames of thought, although in the interests of some, are now claimed to be in the interest of all. In this political programme, it is proposed that science de-mythologizes religious beliefs and superstition, replacing them with facts and reason. As a result of the overall Eurocentric basis and character of these scientific theories, scientism effectively intertwines with the process of colonialism, in which Europeans portrayed themselves as the holders of specific forms of thought (rational and logical), through which they could generate universally valid knowledge (Wiener, 2013). Those who follow the logic of Eurocentric science were – and often still are – deemed superior to those who follow other systems of thought, which are denigrated as not-

reasonable or not-practical, and thus approached as irrational or ignorant of the immutable laws of nature (Kisiang'ani, 2004).

Decolonisation beyond Dualisms

Against this backdrop, decolonisation debates have developed; including the prominent call to re-centre Indigenous knowledge. Scholars from this perspective argue for a recognition, centralisation, and prioritisation of Indigenous methodologies, ways of knowing, and being in the processes of knowledge production, reproduction and legitimation (Nakata et al., 2012; Ajayi, Goma, & Johnson, 1996; Mamdani, 1998; Mbembe, 2016), advocating an approach to knowledge production that is tailored to the local cultural context. In Africa, this means fitting the university, its practices, process and modes of knowledge production and legitimation within the African identity and context (Le Grange, 2014; Makgoba & Seepe, 2004; Mamdani, 1998). This implies decolonisation of dominant Eurocentric knowledges. This is a difficult task because structures and knowledge practices of many universities in the Global South are based on Eurocentric values and ideologies. Decolonisation would thus involve a rethinking of the current model according to which universities are organised; a reconstruction of existing disciplines; and a shift to transdisciplinary knowledge (Le Grange, 2014). Scholars like Le Grange (2014), Makogba and Seepe (2004) have argued that while the centralisation of the African identity takes primacy, it should not be the sole focus of the Africanisation – and we would add – the decolonisation process. This implies addressing the possibilities of decolonising against the backdrop of colonial (and in some regions, apartheid) legacies.

These responses imply a contestation and dualism between Indigenous and Western knowledges. This is especially problematic as the arguments often exist in conjunction with a hierarchical understanding that positions one way of knowing as ontologically prior, leading to arguments that one should be subsumed within or incorporated into the other (Le Grange, 2014; Nakata et al., 2012). Thus, the strategy towards re-claiming, reversing, and rewriting Indigenous identities and knowledges runs the risk of inadvertently reproducing colonial binaries and replacing one knowledge, ideology, identity, body or text with another (Horsthemke, 2017; Le Grange, 2014; Nakata et al., 2012). It fails to take into account the complexity and entanglements of cultures and identities (Horsthemke, 2017; Nakata et al., 2012), and the unequal geopolitics of knowledge (re-)production and legitimation processes.

In our move away from a simplistic, reductive and dualistic approach towards and integrated treatment, we agree that the focus on the local is imperative, but also envision African universities as contributors to global knowledge (Makgoba & Seepe, 2004). We thus understand decolonisation not as a mere reversal or turning back the clock (Le Grange, 2014), but as an incentive to create a space that enables a co-creative dialogue between knowledge produced in different geographical, cultural and social environments. We present strategies for the construction of an academic space in which a multitude of knowledge systems – including their epistemologies, theories, methodologies, as well as the history and the politics of their (re)production, centralisation and legitimation – can be critically examined (Nakata et al., 2012).

The Challenges and Prospects of Anthropological Approaches

If the (re)production and legitimation of knowledge cannot take place transcendent of social, cultural and political influences, how can science be expected to produce global knowledge, relevant to and congruent with the divergent multitude of local knowledges and experiences? We found resources in anthropology. This is the discipline that aims to analyse (groups within) societies from an insider perspective, using participant observation to expand the knowledge of human diversity, as well as to search for issues that are fundamentally human (Eriksen, 2001). An anthropologist tries to approach knowledges from within their respective knowledge systems ‘via direct and repeated exposure to the linguistic, social, bodily, motivational, and affective contexts in which concepts and categories appear’ (Cohen, 2010, p. 201).

Through engaged and immersive participation anthropologists aim to expand and practice their ability to deal with multiple, diverse kinds of knowledge (systems). In turn, these exposures fuel the critical examination of their own (sub)culture by defamiliarizing, deconstructing, and denaturalizing seemingly self-evident ‘truths’ and taken for granted institutions, for example by questioning how knowledge is defined (Eriksen, 2001), as well as by engaging in cultural critique. Thus, anthropologists constantly ask themselves reflexive questions to prevent the use of a universalizing language when they actually view the world from a particular social, ‘racial’, ethnic, gendered and sexual location (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997). From the 1970s on, the ‘anthropology of knowledge’ tradition has greatly contributed to approaches of ‘self’ and ‘other’ which take into account that all knowledge is deeply socio-cultural; that necessarily

multiple definitions of knowledge co-exist (including rational, abstract and analytic as well as embodied, experiential and intuitive forms of knowing); and that the ‘truth’ which is propagated most effectively, is deeply influenced by power constellations in society and academia (Barth, 2002; Cohen, 2010; Crick, 1982).

Anthropology’s dedication to criticise and relativize its own knowledge (tradition), has grown out of the discipline’s problematic onset as the science of analysing and comparing cultures of the supposedly primitive, irrational, non-modern ‘other’, treating the own culture as neutral, scientific and the legitimate purveyor of true knowledge, thus contributing to imperialist incentives and the production of faulty dichotomies (Hall, 1996; Latour, 1993; Lutkehaus & Cool, 1999). Anthropologists played a role in constructing myths about Indigenous populations, fetishizing Indigenous peoples and cultures, positioning them as exotic and analysing their societies through ‘the imposition of Western bourgeois categories’ (Rigby, 1996, p. 81) that were irrelevant to these populations. Like other social sciences (Connell, 2007), anthropology developed theories of social evolution and racial hierarchy, and played a dark role in the racism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Ellingson, 2001; Harrison, 1995, 1998; Mullings, 2005), with the incentive to study other people’s point of view originally being conditioned by colonial needs (Pels, 2018).

Anthropologists still question the concept of representation (Lutkehaus & Cool, 1999) and criticize themselves for being ethnocentric and dominated by Western concepts (Amory, 1997; Burns, 1999; Karp & Kendall, 1982; Thomas 2018); for not providing enough opportunity for Indigenous persons to express themselves (Rigby, 1996); and for insufficiently subverting misrepresentations of Indigenous communities (Crick, 1985; Rigby, 1996). Francis Nyamnjoh, who holds the chair of Social Anthropology at the University of Cape Town, has argued that anthropology on Africa still exhibits the structural and geographical, ‘monological, non-reflexive and non-inclusive’ characteristics of its white colonial past (Nyamnjoh, 2012, p.68; 2013; Osha, 2013). It is anthropology’s ‘sustained critique of its practices [which] has kept it “in crisis” since at least mid-century’ (Franklin, 1995, p.179), and has heightened anthropologists’ awareness of the relativity of their own knowledge. This intense process of self-reflection has been aided by a variety of neighbouring disciplines, including postmodern, postcolonial and feminist critiques, but also non-academic experts and these processes are far from complete.

Anthropology's non-hierarchical approach (rooted in the attempt to do justice to other people's ideas without delegitimising them in the process) makes it a discipline exceptionally well-suited to, on the one hand, accept and accommodate alternative knowledge systems – i.e., Indigenous perspectives and methodologies which have been considered un-scientific, for example concerning spirits, magic, and alternative ontologies (e.g. Stoller & Olkes, 1987); and on the other hand, engage in cross-cultural dialogue – i.e., being practiced in facilitating for translation between different knowledge systems and dealing with multiple epistemologies and ontologies (Pickering, 2017). Moreover, anthropology is a discipline that has the critical and reflexive tools to understand science as a form of culture, and thus question and contextualize the scientific knowledge constructed, as is done in critical science studies (Franklin, 1995). This allows it to approach its own knowledge in the same (critical) way as other systems of knowledge production, and confront the power with which knowledge is used (Campregher, 2010; Weiler, 2011). In the remainder of this chapter, we will formulate two interrelated strategies towards decolonisation that anthropology may offer.

Radical Multivocality

Many scholars have pointed out that if the scientific knowledge system is to be truly global, the points of view it incorporates have to be multiplied (Connell, 2007, 2014; Moichela, 2017). We take this idea a step further and propose a radical multivocality, which rejects approaches that advocate for the inclusion of multiple voices by incorporating them. Incorporation necessarily implies the subjugation of one knowledge system into another, meaning that one frame of reference validates or invalidates another. Instead, we propose a model where all voices are approached as equally valid, so that the variety of voices can exist as a multiplicity, with each voice remaining unrestricted and unsubdued, representing different worldviews and ways of knowing.

The Nigerian critic Chinweizu (1987) pointed out that although it is legitimate to compare Greek and African myths, Greek mythology should not be the frame of reference for the interpretation of African literacy. His argument illustrates the fact that in a lot of current scientific work, Western social constructs of truth continue to be taken for granted, in the process centralizing Western experiences and interests (Connell, 2007, 2014; Chilisa, 2012; Smith 2012).^{vi} When alternative points of view have been taken into account, this is often only in the form of data which has to be analysed, and not as ideas which are part of the dialogue of

theory construction (creatively addressed e.g. by Comaroff & Comaroff, 2012). Moreover, ‘even when discrete pieces of Indigenous knowledge are seen as valuable by Western scientists, the ways of knowing and cosmological orientation from which the knowledge originates is often not acknowledged’ (Harmin, Barrett & Hoessler, 2017). Thus, the scientific narrative has not only been a vehicle of knowledge production and sense making, but also obscures, deletes and masks insights by leaving them untold (Bruner, 2005; Selwyn, 1996). This leads to an ‘erasure of the experience of the majority of humankind from the foundations of social thought’ (Connell, 2007, p. 46). Catherine Odora Hoppers asserts that using Western scientific knowledge to inform education is a form of cultural imperialism that produces a cognitive crisis, with ‘millions of ... people ... bearing the uncomfortable burden of speaking and living in unfamiliar cultural idioms within all areas of everyday life’ (2015, pp. 98–99). This does not only result in insecurity and self-doubt but is relevant for community livelihoods, human rights, and democratic citizenship.

Because scientific knowledge – like any other knowledge system – rests on a body of tacit, taken for granted assumptions (Scarborough, 1994), ensuring that a greater variety of people are involved in the scientific dialogue, will broaden the relevance and validity of the knowledge produced. Moreover, the engagement with discourses, viewpoints, and understandings of others is the most efficient mechanism towards becoming aware of unsound, incoherent, absent, or unproductive aspects in our own ways of thinking (Keet, 2014). This is because aspects which group-members deem to be self-explanatory, are more easily visible to an outsider, who uses a different reference system (Schütz, 1964; Idahosa & Vincent, 2019; Idahosa, 2020). Hence, contrasting views are of great value for (self-critical) analysis and deconstruction of concepts, theories, and understandings.

Anthropologists have often contributed to accessing these contrasting views, breaking down ideas of what was once thought to be factual or objective (Sahlins, 1995) or universal (Surrallés, 2016; Wierzbicka, 2008). An impactful instance is how ethnographic engagements with Papua New Guinean and Amazonian peoples (Strathern, 1980; Viveiros de Castro, 2004, 2012; Descola, 2013) disrupted Western frames of thought and academic premises of a single objective nature upon which culturally divergent meanings are imposed. This had far reaching implications for how academics understand the relations between themselves, other organisms and their life worlds, causing some to speak of an ontological turn (Pickering, 2017; Paleček & Risjord, 2012; Candea & Alcayna-Stevens, 2012).

The radicality of the multivocality that we propose here, firstly lies in the fact that alternative knowledges are not simply included in the existing system. While incorporation leads to a certain diversification, in the process of framing and subduing one type of knowledge by placing it in the context of another knowledge system, it also strengthens the dominant frame of reference without questioning its basis. We propose that the variety of voices neither needs to be incorporated into a single, comprehensive or unified whole nor subjected to a certain monopoly of understanding.

The epistemological and ontological turns in anthropology and science and technology studies have shown that although a multiplicity of epistemologies and ontologies may involve problems of translation, it also inspires a focus on comparative transitions (Pickering, 2017) and relational aspects (Barad, 2006; Latour, 1993). Actor-Network-Theory (Latour, 2005; Campregher 2010) fields of new materialism (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2011), more-than-human and multi-species approaches (Kirsey & Helmreich, 2010) are successfully moving beyond Cartesian dichotomies, and in the process centralize multiplicity and relations, for example including non-human agencies in ways that resemble cosmologies anthropologists have accessed (e.g. Kohn, 2013; High, 2010). This exemplifies how knowledges of people who live and think according to these cosmologies are/can be in conversation with Western knowledge systems and of (continued) value to theoretical developments. The developing awareness that new insights can be generated by focusing on the interface between multiple knowledge systems further underlines this (Durie, 2005).

Secondly, the radicality of the multivocality we advocate requires a multiplicity of ways of coming to know, and thus a radical divergence of research methodologies. We already pointed to the usefulness of the method of participant observation, which was made famous in anthropology through the early reflexive writings of Malinowski (1922), and aims at grasping the point of view and lifeworld of the people one does research with, by sharing aspects of life with them (Davies, 1999). Its execution has increasingly shifted focus from documenting information about others, towards cooperatively studying with and learning from others, and this foundation lies at the basis of a range of fieldwork methods which all require ‘being there’, and allowing oneself to become immersed and changed, through engagement in interactions, participation in activities, and by subjecting oneself to certain socialisation, which we deem useful starting points in the attempt to access or understand alternative worldviews. At the same

time, a critically focused engagement is also required, which includes looking beyond our self-interests and its attending blind spots, disrupting our comfort, acknowledging our subjugated/dominant positions, recognising current relations of domination as strange, and imagining a different order of things^{vii} (Idahosa & Vincent, 2019; Idahosa, 2020).

Promising embodied and practice-based research strategies continue to be developed in anthropology and beyond, and include phenomenological approaches and (multi-)sensory research designs which question dominant hierarchies; multi-disciplinary applications of participatory (action) research; contemplative methods; and the use of internal boundary practices such as ‘embodied practitioner knowledge’ by psychologists and neuroscientists (Wiles, 2019; Zajonc, 2003). Central to all these approaches is that the use of the researcher’s ‘self’ as a research instrument, facilitates the creation of translations between epistemologically, and perhaps even ontologically, distinct domains.

Working with an alternative or multiple research paradigms certainly leads to challenges but it also makes it possible to hear the voices of people who would otherwise not be heard (Datta et al., 2015). Practicing novel methods can engage us in new perspectives, and thus make it possible to approach ways of knowing that would otherwise remain inaccessible; for example, because they are relational, intuitive, spiritual, embodied, bound to place, expressed in local languages, ritualistic or existent only in ‘we’ form, in a way that is foreign to the researcher.

Helpful in this regard is Chilisa’s (2012) ‘Indigenous research paradigm’, which includes participatory, liberatory, and transformative research approaches that reflect a variety of Indigenous ways of knowing; including talk circles, songs, cultural practices and techniques based on philosophic sagacity and ethnophilosophy, among others. Chilisa’s Indigenous research paradigm assumes ‘socially constructed multiple realities, shaped by the set of multiple connections that human beings have with the environment, the cosmos, the living, and the non-living’ (Chilisa, 2012, p. 40). Its openness to multiplicity and focus on relational aspects make that it not only holds great potential to contribute towards the development of a radical multivocality, but the ongoing dialogue and co-creative efforts with non-academics are imperative to developing novel tools, spaces and processes to share knowledge.

It is important to add here that a radical multivocal approach does not only affect methods of research design, data gathering and analysis, but also forms of communicating findings. This

includes reporting not only through various, innovative and creative forms of text (Campregher, 2010), but expanding new and existing audio-visual (Harper, 2009) and performative forms; the use of installations and other creative outputs; as well as the development of hybrid forms combining these. Experiments in this direction have been ongoing in the laboratories of large anthropological conferences, which in recent years have included crafts, drama, embodied experiences, dance and experimental use of media (European Association of Social Anthropologists, 2018).

The vision of a symmetrical anthropology (Latour, 1993) provides a possible model for how a multiplicity of knowledge systems can exist side-by-side and interact within the academic space. In a symmetrical anthropology, knowledges are compared without setting aside one's own culture and its understandings as if these are neutral or have more access to 'truth' (Campregher, 2010). The result is that analytic efforts are not focused on explaining and accounting for the falsehoods of other thought systems (in the process shielding the weaknesses of the own reference system), but aimed at finding and understanding the values of other perspectives on the world. This does not imply an absolute relativistic approach that deems all hierarchies equal but instead is based on a relativist relativism or 'relationism' (Latour, 1993), which is rooted in fostering a reflexive awareness of the relative yardstick one uses to achieve commensurability. This means it will always be taken into account in which context and from which perspective, certain concepts will be compared (Kirby, 2011).

Following symmetrical anthropology, the key to the radical multivocality we propose here is a relativist form of relativism in which 'the self' ceases to be an exception and is regarded from a relativist standpoint, too. For academics, this means that they turn a critical eye onto themselves (through adamant reflexivity outlined below). It challenges the prevalent assumption of 'intellectual superiority', which is the idea that 'our ways of knowing are superior to those of fellow academics or those we study' (Nyamnjoh, 2013, p. 136). Radical multivocality enhances the principle that 'science is a collective pursuit, and ... no one has a monopoly on insights and the truth' (Nyamnjoh, 2012, p. 65). The approach enables cultural relativism and universalism to come together^{viii} and would lead to the end of absolute binary oppositions while doing justice to the fluid, interactive and dynamic aspects of cultural production (Sismondo, 2004). It acknowledges that meaning is created intersubjectively, making it possible to understand people's behaviours as open and ongoing processes that can

incorporate patterns as well as novelties. Distinctions do not exist in a fixed or absolute way and can only be made contextually.

The consequences in academic teaching would be that the curriculum would no longer be focused on the binary positioning of Indigenous and Western theories while one is deemed central, but shift towards understanding a multitude of ideas and thinkers in their historical, social and geographical contexts, fostering awareness of the existence of multiple epistemologies and ontologies. This co-constitutiveness will be cognisant of the asymmetrical power relations between different theories as a result of the reflexivity involved. Furthermore, students will necessarily engage with more non-academic and non-textual sources and processes of obtaining knowledge, which are partly locally based.

Exemplary are ongoing initiatives to cooperate with Indigenous populations in Canada, such as between the Universities of Saskatchewan and Regina, and the Beady's-Okemasis First Nation. Researchers did not only take into account Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies and community-based ethics and cultural protocols, for example by asking for spiritual support and engaging in sweat lodge ceremony with the community members, but also analysed the data in collaboration with the community, and published the results with the Community Elders Research Advisory Group as a co-author, acknowledging more-than-human beings as critical to the insight obtained (McGinnis, Tesarek Kincard, Barrett & Ham, 2019). Engagement with local approaches to knowledge opens spaces for new voices to be part of the conversations and knowledge production processes, and for novel insights to be made operant; not only about the topic, but also in discussions concerning empirical contexts, ethical issues, academic practices, and interests. Similar initiatives could illuminate the entanglements of knowledge, colonialism, land, power and well-being which are reflected in localities throughout Africa (Wijngaarden, 2016).

The problem of incommensurability may be heightened when working with different knowledge systems, and due to their experiences, Indigenous people have a lot of insight to offer in this regard. Elder Albert Marshall from the Eskasoni Mi'kmaq First Nation offers us the concept of two-eyed seeing, which includes recognizing, assessing, and using each type of knowledge on its own terms, as well as weaving them together in a back and forth movement, without assimilating one with another (Barrett, 2013). Torres Strait Islander Nakata (2007) theorizes the 'cultural interface' as the place where life and the re-making of knowing take

place as ‘knowledge systems ... interact, develop, change and transform’ (p. 286). These contributions indicate that when dominant Western knowledge systems are not used as a necessary overarching model to legitimize or frame other knowledges, this results in an increased epistemological openness. Moreover, as other (e.g., transrational, embodied and storied) ways of knowing come to be acknowledged, this leads to an increased awareness of intersections and overlaps between the variety of Western and Indigenous knowledges (Barrett, 2013).

Ultimately, scientific knowledge production has been a multivocal practice all along, but its multivocality has been limited and was often made invisible. Critical reflexive approaches reveal that incommensurability has always been present, even within modern scientific knowledge systems. This is particularly evident in the social sciences, where one could never (perfectly) measure one theory or perspective relative to another^{ix}. Increasing the awareness that inconsistencies and incommensurability are present throughout, may disrupt and dismantle the still often present notion of science as a unified whole (Sismondo, 2004) and the assumption that all academics share or should share a certain epistemological or ontological approach. A commitment to radical multivocality will divide the hegemonic system, questioning and destabilizing the imaginary idea of a singular academic knowledge system, towards an understanding that focuses on the dynamic, dialectic and rhizomatic aspects, fragmenting and diverting power from the centre.

Adamant Reflexivity

How can we rely on scientific knowledge if it is neither universal, objective nor timeless? Alasuutari (1996) has proposed that science can be distinguished from day-to-day thinking as it contributes to the systematic production of ‘deconstructions of the way in which we construct realities and social conditions and ourselves as subjects in those realities’ (p. 382). This is because scientific thought starts with the awareness that ‘blindness ... which comes from preconceptions, prejudices and assumptions about what constitutes reality [is] a blindness of which all humans are guilty’ (Nyamnjoh, 2012, p. 65). This begs the question of ‘how one keeps one’s preconceptions in check to do justice to encounters with a difference?’ (Nyamnjoh, 2012, p. 65).

We propose that the answer lies in reflexivity. We do not have in mind nihilistic reflexivity associated with postmodernity, in which nothing can be known but the knower, but rather ‘a turning back on oneself, a process of self-reference’ (Davies, 1999, p. 4) centred around the ability to contextualize and criticize one’s own assumptions, findings, theories, epistemologies and ontologies, thus putting one’s own knowledge into perspective. This process includes (critical) reflections upon the culture, conventions, socio-political positionality and unspoken or even unconscious practices of the academic community. Reflexivity fosters the awareness of how ‘the self’ and the research process and encounter affect the knowledge constructed, produced and legitimized, and is important in all levels of the research process, from the initial selection of the topic up to the dissemination of results (Davies, 1999). This self-consciousness must first be utilized at the personal level, as only from there it can trickle through to the disciplinary, research, knowledge production and legitimation processes.

Inescapably, the very act of reflecting on something already involves tacit assumptions (Scarborough, 1994). However, reflexivity is the mechanism through which these assumptions might be made explicit. It forms the bedrock of the dynamic scientific knowledge system, where science turns its gaze onto itself, thus safeguarding the central consciousness that theories are eternally falsifiable. Through reflexivity, academics engage with knowledge while attempting to prevent their full immersion in it; producing knowledge without naively believing in it. Reflexivity is the fundamental character trait of science which has often not been lived up to, and this is what underlies the need to decolonise academia.

Decolonisation involves a process of questioning and subjecting our implicit assumptions to critique. This is facilitated and stimulated by engaging with previously unconsidered modes of thought, knowledges and methodologies through radically divergent voices, and sensitizing ourselves to the asymmetrical nature of power relations both in our modes of interaction on a daily basis and in the knowledge (re)production and legitimation process by engaging with a multiplicity of perspectives. The process entailed in reflexive praxis is essential to ‘decolonising the mind’ (Thiong’o 1981), which begins with the self and needs to be internalised before it can be externalised, and is deemed central to the decolonisation process (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2016). It is the process of internal deliberation that enables the questioning and challenging of the self-vis-à-vis the context. The decolonisation of our thoughts and behaviours is essentially and necessarily a reflexive process as no one else can change our mind our actions.

Reflexivity is thus an important key towards unlearning oppressive modes of interaction and healing our thinking from the forces of colonialism, because it enhances the awareness that our thoughts are not independent of our circumstances and stimulates us to find out which assumptions underlie our own perspectives. It brings the temporal and spatial relativity of knowledges into view, thus undermining absolutist usage of claims to truth for particular interests or groups because the circumstances of the speaker and the contexts of the idea communicated are always taken into account. The exposure to a broad variety of voices by engaging with the knowledge and knowledge production processes of a global variety of actors fosters and broadens reflexive prowess.

It is an adamant approach to reflexivity which brings the otherwise cacophonous reality of radical multivocality into a conversation that is centred around the goal of global knowledge production. Through this unrelenting commitment to reflexivity, academia can become a space that facilitates the dialogue between different constructions of reality, to enhance the understanding of these varying constructions, including academics' own constructions. It cultivates the awareness that studies of others and the world outside us, are also studies of ourselves and our relationship with others (Davies, 1999), stimulating the ability to stand back from existing social relations and transform them (McNay, 1999). Adamant reflexivity is personal and transformative, a strategy to challenge routinised action and normalised (thinking) processes. It resides in the awareness that not only knowledge, but also 'the self' is continually under construction. It requires a conscious openness towards the possibility that in the process of knowledge production, also 'the self' is transformed, and the questioning, disrupting and altering of our- 'selves' is what ultimately makes decolonisation possible.

In academic teaching, the practice of adamant reflexivity can be fostered and practiced in conjunction with radical multivocality, introducing students to the groundwork of academic knowledge (re)production and legitimation. For example, reflexive exposure to a variety of contextualized knowledges (where, when, by whom) and multiple ontologies may be used as a starting point to ask students fundamental questions regarding what they consider reality, knowledge and theory, and how these might be dealt with intersubjectively. These questions can be part of introductory courses which also involve the basics of philosophy of science combined with exercises that enhance reflections upon the own and the scientific thought systems, inspired by social anthropology and critical reflexive practice (Cunliffe, 2004), including the keeping of reflexive diaries.

Promising too is the technique of ‘epistemological stretching’, employed for example in environmental education to simultaneously engage with modern scientific and Indigenous worldviews, and facilitate transformative and epistemic learning, which are strategies aimed at shifting people’s operative ways of knowing and ways of being in the world (Sterling, 2010). Epistemological stretching practically combines the multivocal and the reflexive in higher education learning and has been proven effective to facilitate deconstructions of power, bridging of worldviews, re-conceptualisations of relationships and increased validation of Indigenous’ points of view (Harmin, Barrett, & Hoessler, 2017). Still missing are practices inspired by Indigenous approaches, which are to be increasingly present over time as a result of engagement with radical multivocality.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we began from the premise that knowledge is established intersubjectively and discursively. As a result, relationships and contextualisation are central, and knowledge constructed never forms an end station. Our approach is in line with Nyamnjoh’s statement that ‘knowing is a lifelong commitment to reflexivity, dialogue and accommodation’ (Nyamnjoh, 2012, p. 81). In criticising the modern scientific system, we have taken up the challenge to provide tools towards decolonising the academic space by furthering a co-creative dialogue between knowledge from a multitude of geographical, cultural and social environments.

Drawing on insights and practices from anthropology, we propose an approach to decolonising higher education that ‘connotes not a transcendent viewpoint but simply the perennial possibility that human beings can move beyond their local or particular identifications through broadened horizons of intersubjective engagement’ (Jackson, 1998, p. 205). Thus, we have taken the debate of decolonisation of higher education beyond responses that dualistically oppose Western and Indigenous knowledges, and refuse to subdue, incorporate, or integrate one type of knowledge (making) into another because such non-dialectical approaches obstruct the ideal of science as a truly global knowledge system.

Instead, we argued for a radical multivocality that enables an openness towards multiple ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies (worldviews, ways of knowing and ways of coming to know), advocating their treatment as equal partners amidst a myriad of knowledge

production strategies, which have the opportunity to contradict, complement and sharpen each other. This symmetrical approach of radical multivocality is enabled by academics exercising adamant reflexivity, which forms the unyielding and impermeable foundation of an open scientific system and holds great transformative potential. In turn, this adamant reflexivity is stimulated and deepened through academics' exposure to the co-creative dialogue between a variety of knowledges. This minimalistic meta-approach is geared to draw attention to the limits of any knowledge system, so that science can function as it has been envisioned, not as a dogmatic narrative that is used ideologically to exert power, but as consisting of multiple dynamic knowledge production processes through which dogmas are constantly challenged and disrupted.

The two interrelated strategies presented may help to decolonise and transform higher education in several ways. In the first place, they will allow a new generation of academics to enter the academic discourse and to use Indigenous knowledges, approaches and methods in synergy with existing scientific knowledge, or to explore and criticize it. Secondly, they will enhance the role of higher education institutions and their members to contribute and transform scientific knowledge, which according to the philosophy of science, has always been a space where new narratives arise, meta-narratives are challenged, and different narratives are related to each other. In the current context, we see the usefulness of a curriculum which presents knowledge as multiple and dynamic, including education on reflexivity and paradigm shifts, as well as relativistic approaches towards objectivity, timelessness and universality.

'Current demands to decolonize the university not only concern demographic, institutional or representational matters, but they also challenge modes of academic knowledge production in profound ways' (Schramm, Krause, & Valley, 2018, p. 254). The strategies presented fulfil important prerequisites called for in the literature, promoting the understanding of 'indigeneity as a fluid, embodied and rightful existence', furthering a 'paradigmatic and epistemic shift' and facilitating for an approach that enables Indigenous and Western epistemic frameworks to stand alongside each other (Almeida & Kumalo, 2018, p. 1). They decentre the normality of dominant Western discourses at the university, which many students and lecturers continue to experience as alienating, disempowering, and exclusionary (Costandius et al., 2018). The proposed strategies also reinforce Le Grange's (2014) suggestion that Africanising the university involves the flattening of perceived hierarchies between the Western and African (and we add other Indigenous) knowledge systems. Specifically, they form practical avenues to address the

principle of the ‘detached observer’, and the colonial implications of such an epistemology. As such, they align with calls for an approach to decolonisation that is sensitive to the politics of knowledge production, is contextual, cognizant and responsive to social conditions, and takes into consideration the presence and intersections of multiple knowledges in the knowledge production process (Nakata et al., 2012).

The call to decolonise knowledge has often been perceived as a call for cognitive justice, which is the right for a multitude of knowledges to exist, be valued and used to serve the needs of people in their societies, and is thus deeply related to the struggle for global social justice (Hoppers, 2001; Visvanathan, 2009; Idahosa, 2019). Its proponents aver that all knowledge is partial and complementary, and cognitive justice forms a dialogic approach that gives meaning to the relationships between different knowledges (Visvanathan, 2009). In line with these arguments, we acknowledge that there is a deep-seated need for healing in education, as many people have been systematically excluded from participation in knowledge building in society. We argue that when science is transformed to become a truly global knowledge system, where ‘truth’ is constructed not through a claim to objectivity but through a commitment to a radical multivocal, deeply methodological divergent and adamantly reflexive dialogic process of intersubjective validation, higher education will alter from a place where people are excluded, socialized and subdued to accommodate a certain knowledge system, into a space of expansive self-transformation.

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ⁱ In this chapter we use the term science to refer to the totality of the natural and social sciences/humanities. We treat science as a whole, because the division into natural and social sciences/humanities is based on the modernist Cartesian dichotomy of nature/culture, object/subject (Hauhs et al., 2018) which does not hold in many Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies (Descola 2013; High 2010; Ingold 1994; Mullin 2002; Viveiros de Castro, 2004) and therefore cannot be taken as an a-priori in a decolonised approach to science.

ⁱⁱ There is no unproblematic definition of what may be referred to as African (Kuper, 2003) or European (see for example Wittrock's (2000) observations with regard to modernity in Western and Central Europe). Both can include a variety of territories, institutional and cultural forms. For example, it is unclear if African knowledge should be used to include only Indigenous or also white writers who were part of the struggle against Apartheid. Also, it's unclear if members of the black African diaspora such as Du Bois and Fanon, or Arab Africans as Amin should be part of this group, and those born in Africa but with non-African descent (Connell, 2007).

ⁱⁱⁱ In line with Haverkort & Rist (2004, p. 4), we consider that 'every form of knowledge – including the one produced by natural and quantitative science – is socially constructed.... This means that "truth" is not so much determined by objectivity, but by "inter-subjective validation"'.

^{iv} With politics of knowledge we refer to the normalisation and legitimisation of specific knowledges, values and ideologies as the accepted norm and standard, a process which simultaneously misrecognises and marginalises other ways of knowing.

^v Interestingly, the theoretical notion of a Cartesian divide, which underlies modern scientific thought, has been challenged even in elementary natural scientific experiments. The most famous example is the double slit experiment, which 'throws into question a basic premise of science ... that the real world is essentially the same when we are not observing it as it is when we are observing it' (Hobson, 1995, p. 350). Wave-particle duality cannot be understood from the current paradigm in natural sciences, however it cannot be done away with as a marginal side-issue, as it forms a fundamental, central aspect of physics (Davies, 1999; Eibenberger, Gerlich, Arndt, Mayor, & Tüxen, 2013). These kinds of issues show the potential for a future scientific paradigm to sweep current understandings away (Kuhn, 1962; Popper, 2002 [1963]; Scarborough, 1994). Incompleteness, subjectivity and temporality of knowledge play an even greater role in the social sciences, because instead of describing mathematical 'laws', social scientists develop concepts to understand phenomena and behaviors (Klute, 2007), and as a result are more fluid and reliant on tacit assumptions and meanings.

^{vi} Instead of the terminology West and non-West several authors use the terms (Global) North and (Global) South.

^{vii} See Idahosa and Vincent (2019) and Idahosa (2020) for a broader discussion on critical engagement.

^{viii} This has been an important objective in anthropology all along (Eriksen, 2001; Jackson, 1998).

^{ix} An example can be found in the classical political theories of Hobbes (2009,1651) and Locke (1690), which start from fundamentally different assumptions concerning humans' 'state of nature', but exist side-by-side. Similarly, in our society, different historical accounts written by different historians can exist side by side and be considered true, without us being shocked that they are not exactly the same, as we focus on what is basically similar and neglect the differences (Lévi-Strauss, 1978).