# Curriculum Decolonization and Internationalization: A Critical Perspective from South Africa

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## ABSTRACT

This conceptual paper presents a decolonial critique of Eurocentric epistemic hegemony in South Africa and its impact on the curriculum. We argue that the propagation of knowledge from the Global North as 'universal' through conceptually vague framings of curriculum internationalization is contributing to the maintenance of Eurocentric hegemony. We explore how to think otherwise about the world, knowledge and curriculum, framing this around a critical understanding of historical and contemporary politics, geopolitics and coloniality of knowledge. This includes an interrogation of historical workings of power and domination, hegemonic and ideological assumptions, and how all this continues to shape knowledge and curriculum. We offer a set of critical questions that can assist academics and curriculum developers in assessing what is amplified and what is silenced in the curriculum. This can contribute to a genuine engagement with diverse global perspectives and promotion of epistemic plurality in higher education.

**Keywords:** Internationalization, decolonization, curriculum, higher education, Global North, Global South, South Africa

## INTRODUCTION

'The historical and foundational framing of knowledge gives authority to white, male Eurocentric knowledge... As a result, we do not recognize ourselves in this knowledge and are alienated from our own rich cultures and histories of knowledge-making' (Knowles et al., 2023, p. 4).

The above quote speaks about the oppression felt by black South Africans who continue to endure the propagation of Eurocentric hegemonic worldviews, perspectives, knowledge and curriculum in South African higher education (Zembylas, 2018; Morreira et al., 2020; Knowles et al., 2023). It also highlights the alienation that black students experience at universities. In 2015 and 2016, this alienation led to widespread student protests, where

students called for free and decolonized education, including the end of Eurocentric and white domination in the curriculum. Their protests and activism shook the country's higher education sector to the core, giving impetus to the largely failed process of transformation of higher education that was promised when apartheid ended in 1994 (Mbembe, 2016; Heleta et al., 2018). Since then, decolonization has been a buzzword in South Africa and many other parts of the world, albeit we are still to see meaningful changes at South African universities (Morreira et al., 2020).

In this paper, we refer to the privileging of Global North knowledges and perspectives in South African university curricula as Eurocentric epistemic hegemony. During centuries of European colonial rule, the Eurocentric epistemic canon became hegemonic throughout much of the globe (Mamdani, 2016; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021). Eurocentricity has been maintained in most parts of the world since the formal end of colonialism through coloniality (Ndlovu, 2018). To critically unpack how Eurocentric epistemic hegemony continues to be maintained in South Africa, we follow Apple's (2019) framing of how hegemony, ideology and power impact, influence and shape the curriculum. This is particularly relevant in South Africa, where the power of a white settler minority during colonialism and apartheid was used to impose Eurocentric knowledge and worldviews as 'universal,' while silencing and erasing African and other knowledges from the Global South. This continues at universities through curriculum selectivity regarding what counts as legitimate knowledge (Zembylas, 2018) or an international perspective (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021). We will show that this has been part of colonial and neocolonial 'epistemological design' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015, p. 488), propagating Global North's knowledges and worldviews as superior, while sidelining other worldviews, knowledges and ways of knowing (Mbembe, 2016).

Given the domination of knowledge and perspectives from the Global North in the South African curriculum, the country's higher education can be considered highly internationalized, if internationalization refers to the incorporation of 'international perspectives' in the curriculum, as defined by Knight (2004), de Wit et al. (2015), and Leask (2015). However, we will argue that this vague conceptualization of internationalization (Buckner & Stein, 2020) is part of the problem that contributes to the maintenance of Eurocentric epistemic hegemony and coloniality of knowledge (Heleta & Chasi, 2023). We will also show how this conceptualization of internationalization subjects black South African students and international students from the African continent to epistemic violence in university classrooms.

According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021), for higher education internationalization to be genuinely international, we must first decolonize knowledge and curriculum. This is why in this paper we critically interrogate the South African higher education curriculum in reference to epistemic decolonization and internationalization. We will show that decolonization of knowledge and curriculum can lead to epistemic plurality, which requires institutions and academics to engage with diverse global perspectives in the curriculum instead of favoring the hegemonic perspectives and worldviews from the Global North at the expense of those from the rest of the world. Thinking critically about internationalization 'alongside or in dialogue with ongoing efforts to decolonize higher education… might lead to deepened conversations about colonial legacies, critical multiculturalism, or structures of white advantage' (Buckner & Stein, 2020, p. 163). This process and the curriculum-related outcomes that emerge from it could assist in deepening

our understanding of national, regional and global complexities and tackling the myriad of divides, hegemonies, violences and injustices through curriculum internationalization that recognizes, includes and critically engages with all worldviews, knowledges and ways of knowing.

This paper draws on decolonial approaches to knowledge, epistemology and internationalization, and relies on critical and decolonial scholarship on South African higher education and about higher education, curriculum and internationalization broadly. Epistemic decolonization refers to challenging and dismantling coloniality of knowledge, epistemic violence and Eurocentric epistemic hegemony (Zembylas, 2018; Heleta, 2018). For Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015, p. 485), decoloniality 'is a liberatory language of [and for] the future,' which aims to tackle centuries of racist oppression and subjugation, including through education and knowledge (Mbembe, 2016). Decoloniality seeks to shift the geography of knowledge from Eurocentricity 'to the ex-colonized epistemic sites as legitimate points of departure in describing the construction of the modern world order' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015, p. 489). Curriculum decolonization can be a key tool for the liberation Ndlovu-Gatsheni refers to if academics embed decoloniality as a praxis of enabling critical engagement with the plurality of knowledges, perspectives and worldviews (Stein & Andreotti, 2017). Decoloniality can contribute to the 'emergence of another-thinking, another-logic, and another-worldview' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015, p. 489) that is contextually relevant and rooted in the pluralistic thinking and critical interrogation of archives from all parts of the world on an equal footing.

Apart from offering a decolonial critique of the Eurocentric epistemic hegemony in South African higher education, we also critically explore how to think otherwise about the world, knowledge and curriculum. We will show that the thinking about curriculum decolonization and internationalization must be framed around a critical understanding of historical and contemporary politics, geopolitics and coloniality of knowledge. This includes an interrogation of historical workings of power and domination, hegemonic and ideological assumptions, and the way all this continues to shape knowledge and curriculum. We will offer a set of critical questions that can assist curriculum developers, academics and administrators to assess what is amplified in the curriculum, and what is silenced. This can contribute to the process of moving from a critique to practical dismantling of Eurocentric epistemic hegemony in South Africa and elsewhere, and promoting epistemic plurality and engagement with diverse global perspectives in the curriculum.

## CURRICULUM, HEGEMONY AND GEOPOLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE

Our thinking about curriculum is framed around Michael Apple's (2019) critical examination of how hegemony, ideology and power influence educational curriculum. While Apple writes from a United States perspective and covers all levels of education, his focus on ideology, hegemony, politics of knowledge, and curriculum are relevant for our discussion about epistemic decolonization, internationalization and curriculum in South Africa. According to Apple (2019), the purpose of curriculum is to influence students, assist their learning, and shape their minds. Mbembe (2016, p. 30) adds that curriculum and learning in higher education help students 'develop their own intellectual and moral lives as independent individuals.' Curriculum refers to materials and texts used

for teaching and learning, implying what is considered to be relevant knowledge. Hence, curriculum can contribute to validating and promoting some knowledges and perspectives, while marginalizing others (Shahjahan et al., 2022).

Apple (2019) sees curriculum design as a political process, influenced by educators' political, ideological, geopolitical, social, ethical, moral and other views, perspectives, beliefs and values. This aligns with Mingolo's (2011) arguments about geopolitics of knowledge and the fact that all knowledges are political and shaped and informed by historical and contemporary realities and lived experiences of the people and places where they were/are developed. All this influences educators' thinking about knowledge and learning and what is considered relevant to be included in the curriculum. Apple (2019, p. 49) sees knowledge, education and the contents and meanings of the curriculum as key elements in 'the preservation of existing social privilege, interests and knowledge' of powerful segments of most societies, or powerful countries or groupings on the global stage. He notes that the 'ability of a group to make its knowledge into "knowledge for all" is related to that group's power in the larger political and economic arena' (Apple, 2019, p. 65). Marginson (2022) points out that Global North's global economic and geopolitical power - both historical and contemporary - has contributed to the Eurocentric hegemony in knowledge during and after the European colonial rule. Over centuries of colonialism, European educational systems, models, institutional cultures and curricula were transplanted in the colonies in the quest to colonize minds through the imposition of Eurocentric worldviews and perspectives (Mamdani, 2016; Stein, 2017; Basaran & Olsson, 2019; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021). Apart from imposing knowledge from Europe onto much of the world, colonial authorities and their educational institutions also ingrained a belief among the colonized that only the Global North can produce universal knowledge, which the *other* must apply and follow (Mamdani, 2016).

Understanding how ideology, hegemony and selectivity contribute to deciding what counts as legitimate and universally relevant knowledge (Apple, 2019) is key for a critical engagement with Eurocentric epistemic hegemony and the dominance of Global North knowledges and worldviews in most parts of the formerly colonized world. Ideology is a set of ideas or beliefs which shape the thinking about politics, economics and/or knowledge. Eurocentric hegemonic worldviews and beliefs are rooted in white supremacy and racism (Mpofu & Steyn, 2021). Oyedemi (2021) notes that in South Africa, Eurocentric ideology, which has been shaped by colonial and apartheid racism, continues to impact higher education decades after the end of apartheid. Hegemony in education and knowledge is an 'organized assemblage of meanings and practices, the central, effective and dominant system of meanings, values and actions which are lived' (Apple, 2019, p. 4). Hegemonic knowledge, which represents a small segment of world's knowledges but is presented as 'universal,' forces one way of thinking about and seeing the world, while at the same time undermining and silencing other knowledges, perspectives, worldviews and ways of knowing. Eurocentric epistemic hegemony is 'anchored in the myths of Eurocentrism, in its ahistorical universality and totality' (Fúnez-Flores et al., 2022, p. 610) that place the Global North 'at the head of humanity' and presume it to be the past, present and future 'leader of moral and intellectual progress' in the world (Buckner & Stein, 2020, p. 162).

Apple (2019, p. 65) notes that through selectivity regarding what is included in the curriculum, educational institutions and academics 'preserve and distribute what is

perceived to be "legitimate knowledge"' while silencing other knowledges. Key here is the power to impose texts, materials and worldviews onto others. Subedi (2013) writes that in the Global North – as well as in many parts of the Global South - the curriculum privileges and propagates white and Eurocentric perspectives, often claiming their universality for all settings. This is one of the main tools used for the continued entrenchment, naturalization and reproduction of 'Eurocentric hierarchies of knowledge and humanity' (Buckner & Stein, 2020, p. 163). South Africa is a prime example of curriculum selectivity. After centuries of colonial and apartheid impositions and subjugation, Eurocentric epistemic hegemony continues to impose Global North's narrow frames for interpreting the world, while at the same time repressing and sidelining other frames and ways of knowing (Mbembe, 2016).

The power to impose and maintain hegemonic worldviews and knowledge is linked to historical and contemporary experiences and practices in the world, which have been shaped by centuries of European colonialism and its aftermath. According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015, p. 487), coloniality refers to 'colonial-like power relations existing today in those zones that experienced direct colonialism.' Ndlovu (2018, p. 99) defines coloniality as a 'power structure that affects various aspects of the lives of colonized subjects, including their ways of knowing, seeing and imagining the world.' When it comes to knowledge and curriculum, coloniality is an 'epistemological design' which propagates the singular Euro-American-centric 'epistemology that claims to be universal, disembodied, truthful, secular and scientific' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015, p. 488). In South Africa, universities have been custodians of coloniality, reproducing epistemic violence against anything outside the Eurocentric 'core' (Makhubela, 2018).

When it comes to curriculum internationalization, globally dominant concepts tend to promote abstract notions of 'international perspectives' and 'global dimensions' in the curriculum (Knight, 2004; de Wit et al., 2015; Leask, 2015). These concepts have been developed in the Global North and are often perceived as universal (Beck, 2021; Heleta & Chasi, 2023). They are based on the conceptualizations of the 'international' and 'global' which have been framed around the cultural and intellectual norms and perspectives from the Global North (Basaran & Olsson, 2019). Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021) adds that dominant internationalization concepts and approaches are based on Eurocentric notions and worldviews that see the knowledge and perspectives from the Global North as universal international perspectives and dimensions in the curriculum. Furthermore, focusing primarily on the challenges, needs and opportunities related to globalization, and in line with the neoliberal ideology, dominant concepts and practices of internationalization are largely interested in promoting instrumentalist and neoliberal discourses and commodification of higher education. This is contrary to the notion of higher education as a public good and a tool for the promotion of social justice, equity and epistemic plurality (Beck, 2021; Heleta, 2023).

The Global North-dominated conceptualization of higher education internationalization and curriculum is based on ahistorical and apolitical notions of internationalization (Pashby & Andreotti, 2016; Stein, 2017; Buckner & Stein, 2020; Heleta & Chasi, 2022). This conceptualization ignores centuries of colonialism, Eurocentric hegemony and imposition of white and Eurocentric worldviews and canon as the only relevant, legitimate, objective and scientific knowledge and way of thinking about the world (Buckner & Stein, 2020; Beck, 2021; Heleta & Chasi, 2023). Yet these concepts,

practices and approaches to internationalization have been replicated in the Global South for decades, including in South Africa (de Wit, 2012; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021; Heleta & Chasi, 2023). These concepts are part of the global Eurocentric imaginary which has been imposed during colonialism and which continues to be maintained through coloniality throughout the world. Stein (2017, p. 5) points out that this global imaginary, rooted in Eurocentric norms, ideas, values and ideologies continues to reproduce a 'racialized ordering of humanity' across the globe. Knowledge, education and curriculum play a key role in this. The Eurocentric imaginary sees only the Euro-American ways of being, thinking and knowing as a 'global way of being and knowing' (Oyedemi, 2021, p. 217) while other knowledges, ways of knowing and epistemologies are dismissed as inferior (Stein & Andreotti, 2016; Mpofu & Steyn, 2021). In the next section, we will show how the Eurocentric hegemonic canon was imposed and continues to be maintained in South African higher education.

## THE EUROCENTRIC CURRICULUM IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

The South African higher education has been profoundly influenced by colonialism and apartheid. Over centuries of institutionalized racism in all spheres of life, including education, the black majority was subjected to subjugation, repression and devaluing of African knowledges and worldviews (Luckett & Shay, 2020). Higher education has played a key part in this through the 'collusion in the violence of the colonial empire' and the apartheid regime (Makhubela, 2018, p. 16). South African universities were created as replicas of European universities, copying institutional models and curricula from the colonial centers (Sehoole, 2006; Mamdani, 2016). The Eurocentric curriculum, which has been propagated in higher education since its inception, was rooted in and based on colonial and white supremacist ideas and imaginations. The curriculum presented Eurocentric hegemonic worldviews as civilized and universal, while the knowledges and worldviews from Africa and most parts of the Global South were presented as uncivilized, underdeveloped and irrelevant (Mudimbe, 1998; Subedi, 2013). Such beliefs, imaginations and stereotypes have served as ideological underpinnings for centuries of oppression and marginalization of black people, and the creation of a racialized hierarchy in all spheres of society (Alexander, 2013).

Before 1994, higher education in South Africa was segregated by race. White people were provided with quality education and white institutions were supported by colonial and apartheid governments to develop infrastructure and capacity for research, teaching and learning. At the same time, black institutions were systematically undermined and underfunded, and black people were provided with poor quality education when compared to whites (Dube, 1985; Badat, 2015; Adonis & Silinda, 2021). During apartheid, more than 90% of all academic staff in the country were white, and whites made up the majority of academic staff even at historically black institutions (South African Institute of Race Relations, 1985, as cited in Nordkvelle, 1990). The apartheid regime controlled curriculum development at black institutions (Nordkvelle, 1990) and this way Eurocentric epistemic hegemony was entrenched at all institutions in the country.

Transformation in higher education since the end of apartheid has focused largely on increasing the enrolment figures of black students at historically white institutions and changing the demographics of academic staff. In 2017, 84.8% of students at public

universities were black (Essop, 2020). Whites accounted for 41.3% of all permanent academic staff at public universities in 2020 (DHET, 2022). However, while black South Africans constitute the majority of academic staff at historically black universities, whites still dominate academia at most historically white institutions (DHET, 2022), and white overrepresentation in academia is particularly prevalent at more senior levels, with about 75% of associate professors and professors in the country being white in 2015 (Breetzke & Hedding 2018). This has a significant influence on the curriculum, as white academics are able to 'reproduce the centrality of their own perspectives' in higher education (Modiri, 2021, p. 50) despite the fact that whites make up less than 10% of South Africa's population.

Compared to student enrolments and staff demographics, less attention has been paid to the colonial and apartheid roots and influences on universities and their institutional cultures, and on curriculum transformation and decolonization of knowledge (Mbembe, 2016; Vorster & Quinn, 2017; Heleta, 2018; Makhubela, 2018). Institutional cultures, which have remained white and Eurocentric at historically white institutions, have been key stumbling blocks in the broader transformation of universities and curricula (Department of Education, 2008; Adonis & Silinda, 2021). In addition, Ndlovu (2018) and Oyedemi (2021) highlight that historically black institutions, which were created, shaped, controlled and influenced by colonial and apartheid regimes and white administrators and academics until 1994, also need to transform their institutional cultures and decolonize their curriculum. Apart from institutional cultures, neoliberalization of higher education and the focus on corporatization, commodification and managerialism at universities has contributed to the maintenance of Eurocentric hegemony. Neoliberalization of universities has led to curriculum transformation being seen largely through the lens of universities as producers of graduates for the marketplace. In this environment, critical engagements with epistemic decolonization have been sidelined (Mabasa, 2017; Hlatshwayo, 2022; Heleta, 2023).

In post-apartheid South Africa, universities have continued to privilege Eurocentric and white perspectives from the Global North and white perspectives from South Africa as the only legitimate knowledge worth learning from (Ramose, 2016; Mbembe, 2016; Vorster & Quinn, 2017; Heleta, 2018; Zembylas, 2018; Modiri, 2021; Oyedemi, 2021). This way, universities and academia have contributed to the maintenance of coloniality, whiteness, Eurocentric hegemony and structural inequalities in higher education. For students in South Africa, Africa remains largely invisible in the curriculum, even though they are geographically based on the African continent (Ramose, 2016). Despite all the rhetoric about transformation, universities and academia have continued with the propagation of the curriculum 'designed to meet the needs of colonialism and apartheid' (Mbembe, 2016, p. 32) and imposition of 'monocultural perspectives' (Shahjahan et al., 2022, p. 83) in the curriculum - all of them being largely from the Global North and white. For students - and black students in particular - this means that they feel 'far removed from the curriculum content' (Swartz et al., 2018, p. 48) as it does not reflect the content outside the Eurocentric 'mainstream.' The curriculum in most cases bears no resemblance to the lived experiences of black South Africans (Knowles et al., 2023), who represent most university students in the country, or the majority of international students who come from other parts of Africa (Essop, 2020). The curriculum centers Europe and North America, drives 'African or Afrocentric-leaning content to the margins,' and 'produces

professionals who lack African contextual knowledge' (Swartz et al., 2018, p. 48). This deliberate exclusion of much of the world from the curriculum – what Zembylas (2018) calls a 'systematic marginalization of that which is designated "African"' or coming from elsewhere in the Global South - often leads to alienation among black students (Knowles et al., 2023).

While a Eurocentric approach to curriculum design and development could be seen as providing an 'international perspective' in South African higher education - as it relies on the knowledge, texts and materials from the Global North – it is a manifestation of coloniality of knowledge and epistemic violence (Keet, 2014; Heleta, 2018; Zembylas, 2018). Luckett and Shay (2020, p. 60) note that South Africa's complex 'historical conditions (colonialism) and social imaginaries (racism) have constituted the archive and curriculum in ways that impose epistemic and symbolic violence' on black people. Keet (2014) argues that this has been purposeful and rooted in white supremacist thinking, oppression and discrimination in South Africa and the world. Black students have been rejecting this for many years, culminating in the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall student protests of 2015 and 2016. One of the core aspects of these protests was the call for decolonization of universities, knowledge and curriculum (Heleta et al., 2018; Makhubela, 2018; Luckett & Shay, 2020; Morreira et al., 2020; Hlatshwayo, 2022). Regarding the latter, one of the students' long-term goals was to 'implement a curriculum which critically centers Africa and the subaltern.' This refers to treating 'African discourses as the point of departure - through addressing not only content, but languages and methodologies of education and learning - and only examining Western [or Eurocentric] traditions in so far as they are relevant to our own experience' (Rhodes Must Fall UCT, 2015). Even though decolonization has become a buzzword and considerable scholarship on decolonization of knowledge has been produced in South Africa since 2015, far-reaching changes when it comes to decolonizing institutions, institutional cultures, knowledge and curriculum are yet to be seen (Morreira et al., 2020; Heleta, 2023). In the next section, we unpack ideas for thinking otherwise about the world and offer a list of questions that could assist in decolonizing the curriculum and promoting epistemic plurality.

## THINKING 'OTHERWISE' ABOUT THE WORLD, KNOWLEDGE AND CURRICULUM

By thinking otherwise, we refer to the need to think, learn about and interpret 'the world otherwise,' beyond the narrow Eurocentric frames, lenses, worldviews and assumptions (Fúnez-Flores et al., 2022, p. 596). This has the potential to create 'new possibilities for relating to ourselves and the world in ways that account for our differences and interdependencies' (Buckner & Stein, 2020, p. 164), and develop a 'critical consciousness and resistance to colonial ways of understanding' (Mpofu & Steyn, 2021, p. 13) the world and all its complexities. Our thinking about curriculum decolonization and internationalization is framed around a critical understanding of historical and contemporary politics, geopolitics and coloniality of knowledge (Knowles et al., 2023; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2023). Critical engagement with the curriculum and knowledge, including the ideological frames that inform the choices of texts in the curriculum, is key in the process of epistemic decolonization. Such engagement requires an interrogation of

hegemonic assumptions, historical workings of power and domination, and the way they continue to shape institutions, curriculum and knowledge production and dissemination (Apple, 2019). This includes interrogation of historical and ongoing Eurocentric epistemic hegemony and domination of Euro-American 'international perspectives' in the curriculum in both the Global South and North.

Apple (2019, p. 13) highlights that tackling epistemic hegemony in the curriculum requires critical engagement about 'where knowledge comes from, whose knowledge it is, what social groups it supports.' It also requires looking at any field of study through a critical and historical lens and unpacking how the field and dominant scholarship have developed, whose voices and perspectives dominate it, and who has been silenced (Apple, 2019). Part of this process is unpacking the curriculum and course materials, identifying dominant worldviews, and highlighting other knowledges, ways of knowing and perspectives that must be part of the curriculum if we are to bring about genuine plurality of knowledges in higher education. In addition, the impact of neoliberalism on higher education and the ways this contributes to the maintenance of Eurocentric hegemony must be critically interrogated and new approaches to higher education must be envisioned (Hlatshwayo, 2022; Heleta, 2023). The main goal of this is to shift the 'geography and biography of knowledge, bringing identity into epistemology – who generates knowledge and from where' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015, p. 492). To this, Marginson (2022, p. 512) adds the commitment to epistemic plurality and a 'larger imagining of globality,' which refers to 'seeing' the world beyond the narrow Eurocentric provincialism.

The following questions, adopted from Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015), Stein (2017), Vorster and Quinn (2017), Apple (2019) and Hlatshwayo (2022) can assist in the process of curriculum decolonization:

- Whose knowledges, perspectives and worldviews are centered, dominant, valued, recognized and legitimized in the curriculum, and why?
- Whose knowledges, perspectives and worldviews are neglected, marginalized and/or erased in the curriculum, and why?
- How does the curriculum relate to the students, and does it speak to their lived experiences and realities?
- How can we foster plurality of knowledges and help students learn about historical and contemporary realities, inequalities and injustices in the world?
- How can we ensure that international perspectives in the curriculum are truly international, encompassing diverse knowledges, worldviews, perspectives and ideas from around the globe, based on epistemic pluralism?

The above questions can contribute to the process of curriculum decolonization, as one of its first steps is a critical examination of what is present and amplified, and what is absent and silenced in the curriculum (Subedi, 2013; Kessi et al., 2020). Hlatshwayo (2022) argues that critical questions about the curriculum can help academics be reflective about the texts they select, curriculum they create, and worldviews and perspectives they center and propagate. The above questions and critical engagements about knowledge and curriculum should be facilitated on institutional levels, through policies, frameworks and engagements with academics and students. In a complex society such as South Africa, questioning academics' choices of materials included in the curriculum is key as the curriculum is 'not neutral as academics use their agency to select the content of their courses' (Vorster & Quinn, 2017, p. 38). It is important to engage on what drives and

informs their choices intellectually, ethically, ideologically and politically. It is also necessary to unpack historical and contemporary politics and geopolitics of knowledge – and the imposition of the Eurocentric epistemic hegemony as the universal knowledge while silencing other knowledges and ways of knowing – and address both the content of the curriculum and the frames used for curriculum design and development (Stein, 2017).

Critical scholarship and interrogation of the ways the curriculum maintains Eurocentric hegemony manifest differently in different academic disciplines and higher education contexts around the world. We briefly illustrate this with three examples. Firstly, Rogers et al. (2022, p. 195) note that, in the case of geology, 'the colonial influence and exploitative actions underpinning the subject's foundations' as well as the 'discipline's colonial present' are not interrogated sufficiently. Regarding the latter, they highlight problematic practices such as 'parachute knowledge creation' which includes the removal of materials from the Global South to be held and studied in the Global North, without much, if any, input or agreement from the people who live in places from where the samples are taken. They also highlight the 'discoveries' by scholars from the Global North of phenomena that people in the Global South have already known about but might not have had the power and influence to share this knowledge globally. Through this practice, primarily white and male scientists from the Global North continue to be seen as creators of relevant and legitimate knowledge (Rogers et al., 2022). In another example, White (2019, p. 154) critically reflects on anthropology in a South African university, noting that 'lessons about the limits of ethnocentrism are superfluous in a context where our students already cross great social as well as spatial distances in their daily lives, often to much more existential effect that any staged encounter with culture shock could offer them in the classroom.' He further notes that the 'instruction in cultural relativism, drawing on the usual canon of ethnographic alterities, seems equally beside the point when most students speak more languages' than academics. Thirdly, Workman et al. (2023, p. 6), in their critical engagement with breast cancer education and practice in the United Kingdom, particularly regarding black women, highlight that medical studies must 'become more self-aware of its colonizing and racist logic and foundations' and decolonize the curriculum. They argue that decolonizing medical studies and teaching about breast cancer include 'representing the diversity of bodies that experience breast cancer' and 'ensuring that a decolonial attitude is adopted in the planning and adoption of new technologies and means of care' (Ibid., p. 7).

It is important to stress that decolonization of knowledge must be more than diversification and inclusion of *other* voices in the 'mainstream' curriculum (Stein, 2017). Adding a few voices from Africa and other parts of the Global South to the Eurocentric curriculum, without first acknowledging the coloniality of knowledge and dismantling Eurocentric epistemic hegemony, will only contribute to the rhetorical and performative 'diversification' of the curriculum while maintaining the domination of the Eurocentric canon (Makhubela, 2018; Zembylas, 2018). Stein (2017, p. 8) adds that curriculum 'diversification' would 'not entail significant transformation of structures or policies that would reorder the knowledge that is valued or rewarded, or reorient research support structures to accommodate different modes of knowledge production' which feed into the curriculum. The danger in mere inclusion of Global South perspectives in the Eurocentric curriculum is that this would not decenter or dismantle the hegemonic canon and would

only contribute to the reproduction of Global North's epistemic domination (Stein, 2017; Buckner & Stein, 2020).

Genuine and meaningful epistemic decolonization requires dismantling colonial and neocolonial structures, systems, frames of reference, worldviews, hegemonies and ideologies that shape knowledge, education and curriculum (Shahjahan et al., 2022). A key component in this is unlearning the colonial, neocolonial and Eurocentric tropes and learning anew (Ndlovu, 2018; Kessi et al., 2020; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2023), as well as developing 'critical literacy around the colonial framing of knowledge' among academics (Stein, 2017, p. 17). On the African continent, a critical aspect of decolonization of higher education is decentering the Eurocentric hegemonic canon and centering Africa. Ramose (2016, p. 547) calls this a 'critical pan-epistemic educational paradigm' that centers Africa and its interests and priorities in the curriculum, teaching, research and knowledge production at universities. This entails delinking from the Eurocentric canon 'for purposes of re-linking with it as one aspect of the thought that human beings have produced in the world, and not as the totality of world knowledge' (Mpofu & Steyn, 2021, p. 20). In the case of South Africa, this requires centering South Africa and Africa in the curriculum and critical engagement with the knowledges, perspectives and worldviews from all parts of the world (Heleta, 2018; Shahjahan et al., 2022; Heleta & Chasi, 2023).

**CONCLUSION**

While curriculum design, knowledge development and dissemination are political processes (Apple, 2019), so are the decolonization and internationalization of knowledge and curriculum (Zembylas, 2018; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021). Zembylas (2018, p. 3) argues that epistemic decolonization is a 'political, social and epistemic process and project that implies a critical examination of dominant structures of knowledge.' This process requires dismantling the Eurocentric hegemony in knowledge and curriculum and centering the places and people in question in everything universities do. Education and knowledge must be linked with who the students are and where they come from, engaging with their historical and contemporary social, economic, political and cultural backgrounds and communities, and then looking from these perspectives outwards at the world. The curriculum must be contextually relevant and based on anti-racist and anti-hegemonic principles and critical questioning of phenomena if it is to contribute to making the local and global historical and contemporary inequalities and inequities visible (Heleta & Chasi, 2022). Only in this way can higher education help students develop a critical understanding of their and others' realities and lived experiences, local and global inequalities and inequities and their causes, and enable critical reflexivity about the possibilities of envisioning a better future (Pashby & Andreotti, 2016; Heleta & Chasi, 2022; Knowles et al., 2023).

In this paper, we have offered a decolonial critique of the Eurocentric epistemic hegemony in South Africa and highlighted how this impacts the university curriculum. We have also critically explored how to think otherwise about the world, knowledge and curriculum. We argue that curriculum decolonization and internationalization must be framed around a critical understanding of the politics, geopolitics and coloniality of knowledge. This includes an interrogation of how power and domination operate and impact knowledge; critical interrogation of hegemonic and ideological assumptions in the

curriculum; and understanding of how all this continues to shape knowledge and curriculum worldwide. We have offered a set of questions that can assist curriculum developers, academics, and university administrators to critically examine what is amplified and what is silenced in the curriculum. This can contribute to the process of dismantling Eurocentric epistemic hegemony, promoting epistemic plurality, and engaging with diverse global perspectives in the curriculum. While structural and systemic challenges remain across the world, we are reminded by Mamdani (2016, p. 81) that 'if the future is constantly remade, so is the past, and thus the articulation between the two. The making of this future, and this past, belongs to the domain of epistemology, the process of knowledge production, and remains central to the decolonization of knowledge.'

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