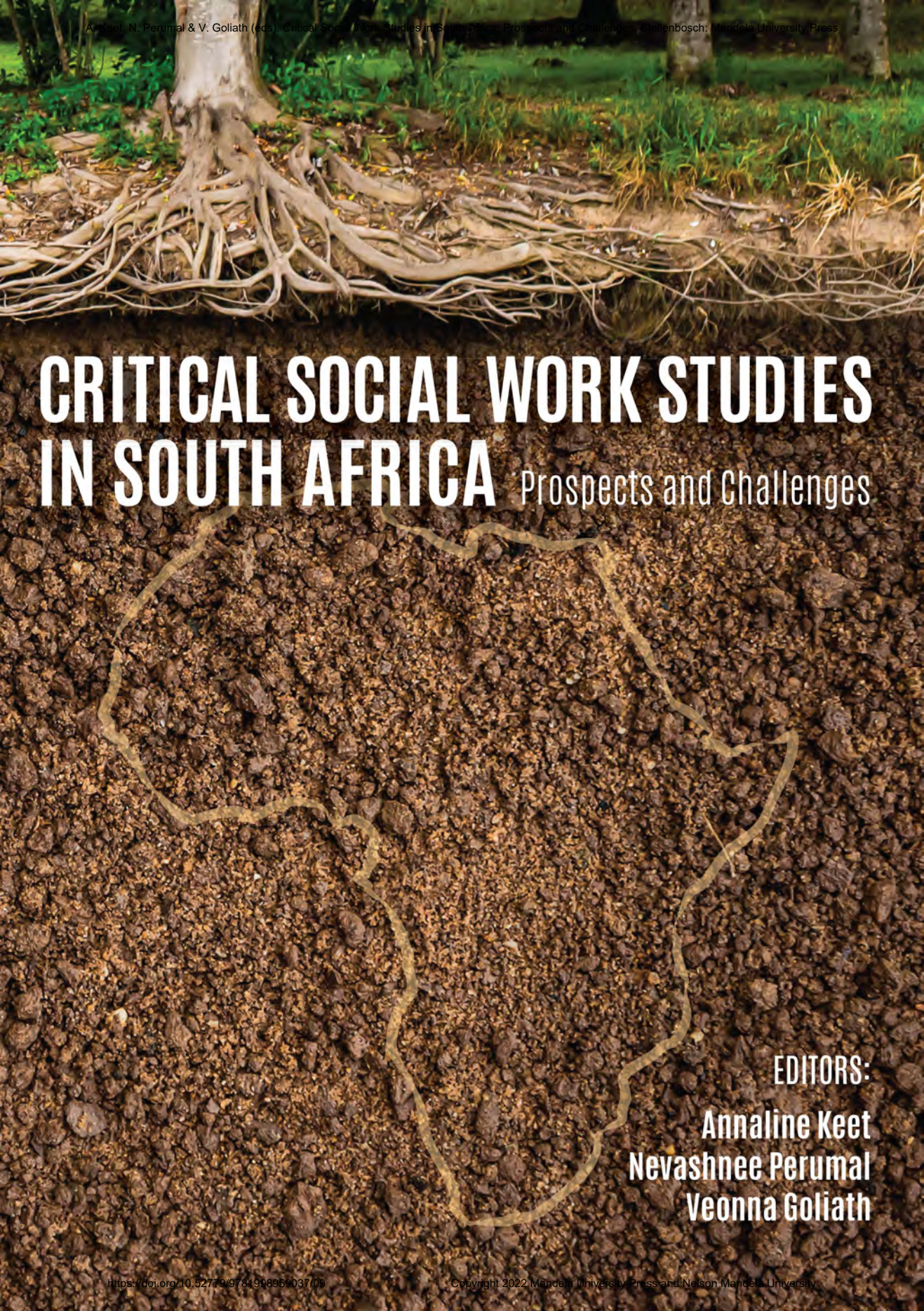


The background of the cover is a photograph of a forest floor. In the upper half, the thick, gnarled roots of a large tree spread out across the ground. Below the roots, the soil is dark and textured, with a yellowish-brown outline of the map of South Africa superimposed on it. The title text is overlaid on the upper part of the image.

CRITICAL SOCIAL WORK STUDIES IN SOUTH AFRICA

Prospects and Challenges

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LAYING THE WEST TO REST

A critical self reflection from a South African academic on centring African knowledge production

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ABSTRACT

Curricula in different South African universities reflects little of what social work in African contexts should look like. Framed by the social work principles of respect for diversity, upholding human rights and social justice, in this chapter I reflect critically using Hart (1990) and Mezirow's (1990) principles of critical reflection and question my responsibility as a socially conscious academic. I interrogate my epistemology and the power I have over shaping students' epistemologies so as to engage more thoughtfully in the process of decolonising the social work curriculum. Finally, I propose ways to relinquish power pertaining to knowledge creation, by co-creating thinking hotspots for students to begin theorising their own realities, ultimately informing an African-centred curriculum.

KEYWORDS

curriculum, decolonising, power, social work

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

I write this chapter knowing that students, graduates and fellow academics will read it with a critical lens in the quest to advance decolonial social work. My intention is not to fit into a tradition that is familiar to academic writing because doing this will go against the objective of beginning to lay the West to rest. Instead, I beg your indulgence as I write *how* I like about *what* I think should inform social work curricula, emanating from literature and from my critical self-reflection, in academia. Epistemic transformation is a benefit of critical self-reflection. I therefore use this skill to question the reasons for, and the consequences of, what I do in academia. In challenging myself (Mezirow, 1999), I hope to challenge you, by raising consciousness (Biko, 1978) regarding our eagerness and mastery over our performance in academia which is based on predetermined rules of engagement, rules which have had little expectation of our participation in developing them (Larrison & Korr, 2013).

The pedagogy of discomfort foregrounds a critical self-examination among students and academics of how our passive acceptance or non-acceptance of social injustices has been shaped by the status quo. Employing the pedagogy of discomfort, Boler and Zembylas (2003) suggest that we acknowledge the binary of being passive spectators and move towards being engaging witnesses, who would consciously be able to shift social work education in our country, in political terms towards the 'African Left' of the decolonial agenda. By moving it to the centre that would mean simply placing Africans in positions that enable them to gain control over society. However, Left would mean that African cultures form the centre of social development (Fanon, 1967; Le Grange, 2018; Prah, 2004). Educating and training social work students to practice in South Africa would therefore require a curriculum that is decolonised and informed by African culture and living. I acknowledge that social workers and social work educators in South Africa are from vast cultural and racial backgrounds. However, this chapter focuses on how we may begin to centre African culture and living in the curricula and for social work practice to be transformed accordingly.

TRANSFORMATION, DECOLONIALISM AND DECOLONIALITY

Transformation in higher education was mandated in 1997, three years after South Africa attained political freedom. The overarching frameworks guiding transformation in higher education are the White Paper 3 (Department of Education, 1997) and the White Paper for Post School Education and Training (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013). The proposed transformation in the White Papers did not consider prioritising decolonised curricula but rather kept its gaze on racial transformation and inclusion of marginalised students. Twenty-six years hence, transformation in higher education is unsteady and far too slow (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2019). It therefore becomes imperative in South African higher education to purposefully overhaul curricula in favour of the majority student population by magnifying African knowledge systems. Therefore, an understanding of decolonialism and decoloniality is important to provide a context for beginning to lay the West to rest.

Colonialism was the project of imperialist expansion driven by mercantile capitalism through the geopolitical control of another sovereign state. This involved imposing a language, religion, culture and an economic system – cloaked as a modernity so as to create an entirely new reality for the captured land and its people. Coupled with colonialism, South Africa faced the Afrikaner nationalist project of apartheid, built on racist capitalism. The intention was to further dominate and oppress Black people in the country through oppressive statutes, inferiorisation and land expropriation (Piotrowski, 2019). For a nation that was ravaged in layers of plunder, the residue remains thick. Therefore, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) argues that decolonialism is only

the administrative dismantling of colonisation, where colonial powers withdrew from countries which they historically conquered and governed, handing back sovereignty to native populations.

This is significantly different from decoloniality. According to Bar-On (2003), Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013), Maldonado-Torres (2007), and Odora Hoppers (2004), decoloniality is an interminable, dense process of colonised people freeing themselves from the biological, psychological and sociocultural shackles of domination and worthlessness. The unjustifiable damages caused by coloniality are currently evident in the “modern African distancing himself from the Africa that produced him and aligning himself with the Europe and America that rejects him”, where the “minds, lives, dreams, imaginations and epistemologies of modern subjects in Africa” have been captured by European and American culture (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013:11). Hence, placing this modern African demographically in social and political structures may be more harmful to decoloniality (Le Grange, 2018) since the mind and existence are captured in colonial frames and a foreign culture.

Grosfoguel’s (2007) three-pronged model of coloniality identifies: coloniality of power, of knowledge and of being as key constructs that maintain colonialism. In respect of coloniality of knowledge, authors contend that an interrogation of critical epistemological questions such as who generates the knowledge that is consumed and for what reasons, is essential (Mamdani, 2017; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013; Perumal, 2017). Questions along these lines demand additional layers of academic scrutiny into the politics of knowledge creation, the relevance of the knowledge produced, as well as how such knowledge enhances or diminishes the value of communities (Seroto, 2018). It is also significant to note that social work is associated with rendering services to historically disadvantaged and marginalised communities. Although agency, resilience and solidarity are strong among most low socio-economic communities, a constant fight for human rights and persistent exclusion from the economy reduces people’s confidence and spirit. According to several authors, when clients are poor, their contribution to knowledge is minimised, they are treated as incapable and tend to hide their capacities, even from themselves (Bar-On, 2003; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013; Thabede, 2008). This is what Grosfoguel (2007) refers to as the coloniality of being. In addition, the social worker, with his or her Euro American-centric social work degree, holds substantial power over marginalised communities by the mere fact that he or she possesses an education. That education unknowingly perpetuates colonial and apartheid hangovers (Mashau, 2018). This is what Grosfoguel (2007) describes as coloniality of power.

SOCIAL WORK PEDAGOGICAL PRINCIPLES AND THE FEATURES OF AN AFRICAN SOCIAL WORK CURRICULUM

Social work is a practice-based profession which is at the forefront of enhancing social well-being. To understand the training of social workers, Shulman (2005) referred to the concept “signature pedagogy”. With this concept, Shulman (2005) attempted to set social work pedagogy apart from other professions by justifying in his explanation that the uniqueness of social work is in its field practice education. However, Larrison and Corr (2013) refuted this by indicating that all health professionals, as well as law and education professionals also undertake field practice. Instead, Lynch, Bengtsson and Hollertz (2019:290) summarise Larrison and Korr’s (2013) contribution to social work’s signature pedagogy, naming three unique interrelated aspects to a signature social work approach as follows:

1. modelling relational connectedness, core practice skills, and values,
2. fostering transformative awareness and
3. nurturing personal and professional growth.

Although this is considered globally as universal, in South Africa, these aspects must be linked to our history of colonialism and apartheid, as well as to the current living conditions of the majority of people. The native people of any country with whom social workers work have history, and this must be documented in ways that are meaningful and significant to their cultural contexts.

Harms Smith (2014) calls for the history of social work to be extended further than just a chronological account and that the history of social work taught and shared in the discipline has to encompass “socio-political, economic contexts and circumstances around peoples’ livelihoods and how social conflicts shape these, which ultimately result in changes in wider societal relationships” (Harms Smith, 2014:305). Relational connectedness, skills and values must incorporate culture, traditions and rituals of all South Africans. For Africans, connectedness transcends human relations, it incorporates departed elders and kin, and includes nature’s elements, as well as animal and plant lives (Thabede, 2008). These are some features of the philosophy of *ubuntu*. Additionally, skills and values ought to represent, preserve and advance the ways that African communities map their living as opposed to what Europeans have documented and which we have cemented into social work curricula. One such example is that of upholding confidentiality, privacy and anonymity, where the Western social work tradition dictates a focus on the intrapersonal well-being of clients and individualism. Persisting with a focus on individualism in communities where people’s homes are open to the community and where neighbours draw strength from each other in times of despair, is detrimental to African communities. Therefore,

upholding confidentiality, privacy and anonymity is a foreign concept in lower socio-economic South African communities because of the relational connectedness among people.

When we consider a transformative awareness as suggested by Lynch et al. (2019), this awareness ought to be rooted in South African history which will shape social workers' responsibilities towards being agents of social change: facilitating social development, building social cohesion and advancing the empowerment and liberation of all people by upholding social justice and expelling oppression (Sewpaul, 2013). To nurture personal and professional growth in social workers in South Africa, we must include the social worker's cultural heritage, acknowledging that a social worker is also a person in the environment and that South Africa is resplendent with several racial groupings and cultures. The culturally aware social worker needs to sensitise him/herself to the context of oppression, structural injustices and inequity against his/her own lived experiences as opposed to being a passive deliverer of services in a homo-cultural, neutral environment. Such awareness and acknowledgment will make a signature pedagogy contextual and relevant to South Africa.

The social development approach in South African social work

The social development approach currently occupies a central position in the revised social work curricula, with many services, as well as academic departments changing their names to reflect 'social development' in their titles. However, the adoption of the social development approach in South Africa maintained the Eurocentric approaches to social work since the approach lacks decolonial and indigenous features. According to Pawar (2014), although this approach gained momentum after World War II, the colonisers used the approach to serve their agenda of subjugation and oppression. Pawar (2014) maintains that the drive was to exploit the colonies' resources and export them to Europe and not to promote the people's welfare and well-being. The social development approach is hailed as a democratic victory for social work because of its overarching focus on planned social change which is geared towards bringing about social and economic development. However, the social aspects of development require radical structural redress, a responsibility that is masked as collaborative partnerships between government and the people (Mohamed, Mohammed & Bin Barom, 2019). The marginalised majority in South Africa, while they possess strengths, remain in areas and circumstances that are underdeveloped. Inclusion in social planning is a distant reality. Furthermore, the agenda for economic development for youth from lower socio-economic circumstances may be likened to a pendulum that swings between accessing 'free' higher education and entrepreneurship – both being means to derive decent income ultimately. Accessing either of these options is an excruciating task for the youth presently even though we are well into our democracy in South Africa.

Using the social development approach as it stands makes social development more theoretical than practical, creating a disjuncture for new graduates who are armed with social development theory, which has no decolonial roots against an indigenous practice environment.

Similar arguments would hold true for the social work methods of practice. Anecdotal evidence strongly suggests that the methods of social casework, group work and community development are challenging in the face of the widescale poverty and unemployment that is experienced by communities in South Africa. Mwansa (2010) further suggests that social workers should be familiar with knowledge and practice in the cultural diversity of African people so as to contribute meaningfully to social development. When it comes to practicum placements, academics are challenged by the limited social work organisations who are willing to accept students due to their own resource constraints. Universities therefore resort to the use of non-traditional social work settings such as schools, where students are quite free to practice their case, group and community work methods. However, the benefits of onsite supervision, peer support, as well as organisational learning opportunities are missed in such a practice setting.

Contrary to the above argument, anecdotal evidence also suggests that students who are placed in government departments, view themselves in practicum as foster care officials or glorified administrative officers. This is due to the nature of services rendered by government departments based on South Africa's structural inequalities. These structural inequalities result in family disintegration and the responsibility of care for children resting on others. Such care requires financial support because of the high levels of poverty. Herein lies the double bind of the difficulty social workers face in planning for social change when the pressing needs are for families to be placed on social security, which requires social workers to spend many hours on completing reports for grants to be formalised. Hence, the feeling of being glorified administrative workers. Therefore, students become frustrated in practicum since the theories taught appear irrelevant in practice. In addition to foreign theories, the social development approach itself is a box into which students are forced to fit clients.

If, as a country, we adopted the social development approach to social well-being, then surely the methods of service rendering ought to be informed by the majority of South Africans who are to be served by this approach. Instead, as social work educators we are complicit in enslaving the minds of people by teaching the approach to students who go out and practice. People are left with the belief that they have the power and strength to change their circumstances and to be a part of the country's economy. When all along the domination, oppression and subjugation of

the apartheid system legislated underdevelopment which persists currently, thereby disallowing participation in the country's economy and social planning. If a nation is left on the fringes of the economy, any form of development is questionable.

According to Le Grange (2018), complicated conversations are necessary if we are to decolonise curricula. Complicated conversations according to Pinar (2004:2) in Le Grange (2018:6) "occur when we do not devise 'airtight' arguments but provide spaces for students to find their own voices so that they construct their own understanding of what it means to teach, to study, to become educated". Since African theories must be owned by the people who are tasked with learning them, as well as those whom services are directed at and are meant to be receiving them, to lay the West to rest would mean moving theories with Western origins to the fringes in the social work curriculum. The intention is to magnify African theories of social functioning (Harms Smith & Nathane, 2018). These theories, which ought to include Africa's socio-economic condition, socio-cultural and linguistic diversities and socio-political and environmental structures, still need to be developed by African students and scholars in African communities (Mwansa, 2010). Mamdani (2017) concurs that students ought to become active partners in developing theories and knowledge based on their histories and lived experiences.

We must be consciously aware that training students in the social development approach to bring about planned social change by placing people at the centre of social and economic development (Patel, 2015), must not equate to an RDP (reconstruction and development programme) house, which is equivalent in space to a suburban single parking garage. We must further educate beyond the boundaries of entrepreneurship so that sewing projects, backyard gardening and selling *magwinya* (vetkoek) and *umbona* (mealies) at construction sites are not entrepreneurial destinations but rather very short-term interim measures to aid income. Additionally, the stokvel savings strategies may be further developed by communities. This as opposed to communities being lured into the capitalistic banking systems, which charge high interest rates and ultimately leave people with less money. Students must be able to co-construct novel theories of entrepreneurship for Africa's economic activities that would enable participation of poor communities in the mainstream economy. Presently, such knowledge is absent in the social work curriculum. It is only when such goals are formulated, that social and economic development may occur.

THE ACADEMIC'S RESPONSIBILITY IN PROMOTING EPISTEMIC JUSTICE

Since the student protests in 2015/2016 calling for free, decolonised tertiary education, the momentum has increased in social work education to decolonise the curriculum. Various South African social work authors and academics, with Euro American-centric qualifications, however, view decolonisation as a process of infusing African problems, knowledge and experiences into the Euro American-centric knowledge that already exists (ASASWEI, 2016).

According to Heleta (2016), many academics become aggressive and territorial during discussions on decolonisation. Many fear to steer too far from what is already in use, arguing why this knowledge is still valid and necessary. The injustice inherent in this thinking is that it has resulted in a mushrooming of texts in South Africa with titles referring to decolonising or Africanising various aspects of social work. Contextual literature is necessary, however, these texts draw mainly on European and American primary sources, with little or no empirical evidence originating from South African data. African academics are lured into those book projects, with tokenistic chances at participating in the race to build their academic careers, ending up falling prey to such editorial teams. This practice severely humiliates and contaminates the decolonial project. It creates an additional layer of applied colonisation of African academics' minds, that will take years to be untangled. Therefore, we must unslave our minds as academics in the spirit of Pan African writers and activists such as Frantz Fanon and Steve Biko. We have to ask how will writing a chapter or co-authoring a paper with a 'well published' academic centre the African voice, as well as solutions to entrenched colonial problems?

As Black academics, it is imperative to interrogate who sets the agenda for social work (Osei-Hwedie, 1993; Thabede, 2008), how does the social work taught at universities align with practice and who determines what the curriculum should feature. It is my view that this responsibility rests on our shoulders. We have to stop the conveyor belt of knowledge reproduction, regurgitation and the banking concept of teaching and learning (Freire, 1970). We must be courageous enough to critically reflect on our views of where knowledge comes from as opposed to conforming to being technically competent and producing technically competent graduates who do not have a say in their acquisition of knowledge. If we do not interrogate our epistemologies then we violate social justice and human rights by nourishing colonial, obsolete knowledge systems – thereby explicitly aborting the development of African knowledge systems and the larger decolonial project.

What is epistemology?

Epistemology is the study of our method of acquiring knowledge encompassing the nature of concepts, the constructing of concepts, the validity of the senses, logical reasoning, as well as thoughts and ideas. Basically, all things cognitive. It may be summed up as one's theoretical knowledge base and underlying assumptions about the process of knowing (Gringeri, Barusch & Cambron, 2013), begging the question: "What are the principles and rules by which I (the academic) believe reality should be known?" (Fouché & Schurink, 2011:309). To promote epistemic justice, the academy ought to subscribe to the idea that social reality is best understood by the students' voices because students are the actors in their daily worlds and best placed to deliver their truths with sufficient depth and detail.

I therefore argue that epistemology is a prerequisite for academic employment because academics get paid to think (Blignaut, 2016) and thereby generate knowledge. Could it be that we fall into technocratic traps because compliance and conformity are safe strategies since education is commodified and excellence is prophesised as a destination (Sewpaul, Osthus & Mhone, 2011)? If academics celebrate high pass rates as indicators of success, the question we should be asking is: have we successfully managed to ply students into colonised moulds and make them technicians of learning (Mamdani, 2017) by teaching them how and what to learn, from our own epistemologies which were shaped by colonial knowledge systems?

This heavily laden question leads us to intensify our thinking about the skills that may be utilised in the academic environment to uphold epistemic justice. Such skills for academic use may be critical self-reflection (Mezirow, 1990) coupled with consciousness-raising (Biko, 1978), which, according to Fisher (2003), is closely linked to the development of higher order thinking skills by challenging conventional thoughts and practices.

Critical self-reflection and consciousness raising skills in promoting epistemic justice

Critical self-reflection means to become critically aware of our own presuppositions and involves challenging our established and habitual patterns of expectation and how we have made sense of the world around us (Mezirow, 1990:12). Critical self-reflection further entails challenging the institutionally accepted methods of problem-solving by reorienting problem-solving efforts in a more thoughtful and just manner as opposed to a technically acceptable manner. Such a process requires time and emotional investment, two commodities an academic can ill afford. Time in academia is generally constrained by heavy workloads and administrative pressures. Emotional investment exposes academics on a personal level and is intrusive to mental health and well-being.

Critical self-reflection is criticised for the word ‘critical’ as evoking a focus on the negative (Cheng, Barnes, Edwards, Valyrakis & Corduneanu, 2015). In addition, self-reflection is seen as a Western concept, where people focus on the self thereby subscribing to individualism (Gardner, Fook & White, 2006). I acknowledge that as Africans, our gaze is outward where we look out for and look after each other, hardly focusing on ourselves. Therefore, this may seem to be a contradiction. However, for the purposes of this chapter, I will explain the benefits of critical self-reflection as a skill for use by academics and explore how ‘critical’ is indeed necessary for epistemic transformation and cognitive justice.

According to Mezirow (1990), critical reflection does not involve asking the ‘how’ or ‘how to’ questions (which are the technical solutions to problems), but rather it questions the ‘reasons for’ and the ‘consequences of’ what we do. Therefore, normalising poverty and structural injustices (Sewpaul et al., 2011) by using only strengths and asset-based approaches to teaching, learning, research and community engagement is tantamount to evangelising the psyche of the student and communities which amounts to a colonisation of knowledge. Paulo Freire (1970) reminds us that the adult educator can be both precipitator and facilitator of learning. By reflecting critically, we may deduce that as academics we have been facilitators of colonial knowledge systems for too long.

Consciousness raising with and among students, as well as with and among academics is geared towards emancipation. Once our minds are free, creative, conscious and just, thinking will flourish. Steve Biko (1978) lived and died upholding the ideals of Black Consciousness trying to transform Black people’s thinking to reflect ownership of their lives and their land. History has revealed that consciousness raising comes at a high personal cost being premised on intrapersonal and then social transformation (Hart, 1990). Consciousness raising was derived from experiences of oppression as opposed to coming from a coherent body of theory. Our current environment demands similar methods of theory and knowledge generation which is possible in our fertile academic research grounds. If we were to engage in “positive discrimination” as espoused by the social development approach (Patel, 2015), then we should actively and purposely bring to the fore anti-oppressive, critical, feminist and structural theories, to name a few, so that students are unmuted when it comes to their life experiences (Harms Smith & Rasool, 2020).

Oppression is the cornerstone of coloniality and apartheid where Western knowledge systems were coated as civilisation, with no regard for cultural and traditional practices of Black people (Mbembe, 2015). Scholarship is sanitised to reflect the positivity of colonial influence. Inequalities such as vast differences in service delivery in townships vs suburbs and the use of the English and Afrikaans languages continue to

perpetuate exclusion, class and cognitive injustices (Mbembe, 2015; Odora Hoppers, 2004; Sesanti, 2016). Therefore, when the principles of consciousness raising, namely, acknowledgement of oppression, importance of personal experience and the homogeneity of the learning group (Hart, 1990:59-61), are engaged with, oppression is highlighted in order for emancipation to be achieved.

BEGINNING TO LAY THE WEST TO REST: A PROPOSITION

As an academic, I acknowledge that I am an engaging witness (Boler & Zembylas, 2003) in the learning and teaching experience and that an introspection using a critical self-reflective lens creates the potential to generate a discomfort and tension that would enable me to pause, make sense of my experience and suspend my voice based on an understanding of the self. This would allow me to listen defencelessly and respectfully to voices of students who will criticise my practices, as well as the curriculum I present. It is anticipated that by doing this I would begin to raise consciousness and create grounds for moving the social work education to the political, decolonial, African Left.

In the following section I suggest how I would lean on Hart's (1990) principles, when beginning to work with a group of students who are representative of an oppressed or marginalised population.

The first principle rests with the academic's interpretation of what constitutes oppression, hence critical self-reflection serves as a precursor for this exercise. In the South African context, it would be socially just to critically reflect on anti-oppressive and decolonial theories (Harms Smith, 2019) and personal beliefs. Once an analytical understanding is reached then oppressive issues may be brought to the table. Raising consciousness is equivalent to "speaking bitterness" (Hart, 1990:59) because one's own role in perpetuating oppression must be identified. As academics, we are complicit in advancing oppressive practices by upholding departmental and university technocratic operating systems by not asking the 'why' question.

In my experience, academics refrain from asking this question for fear of ridicule and exclusion from future progression prospects within the academy. Knowing that we hold power in the form of knowledge may either excite or intimidate students. As a Black Indian academic early in my academic career, walking into a lecture hall where disadvantaged mature age students filled the venue, made me excited. I held power in the form of knowledge and they were eager recipients. They were rarely going to question me. Conversely, later on in my career, when students from privileged backgrounds lined the front rows of the lecture venue, I was filled with angst. Although intimidation is not the intention of my knowledge base and neither is privilege of

the student, critical self-reflection reveals the epistemic injustice emanating from the inequality of the past. The disadvantaged student is reduced in the face of privilege, and so am I. Therefore, the responsibility rests with us to expose the colonial roots of our knowledge and to commit to deconstructing such knowledge and power attached to it and then to begin laying it to rest. This will pave the way for co-constructing indigenous knowledge, with students as active partners.

The second principle is the importance of personal experience in the consciousness raising process. Here, the academic should allow students to identify with the academic's personal experiences relative to the groups' personal experiences. At this point, the academic either identifies as oppressed in some regard or as being in a position of privilege. These are easily incorporated into lecture discussions when using examples to explore concepts. For example, the relativity of poverty, where I would share my background of being from a family of six and occupying one sleeping room in a house, where we as children took turns to sleep on the portable sponge mattresses on the floor. This expression of poverty is relative though because I was under a roof that did not leak, within the confines of a brick housing structure. It is acknowledged that raising personal experiences calls for a non-rushed process and critical reflection of the group is encouraged with no pressure to share or to come to a decision on anything. This principle begs the academic to undo 'ways of knowing' before consciousness raising can be meaningful. Generally, academic spaces are associated with detached, impersonal objectivity and when I reflect critically I have to ask: is remaining aloof or impersonal a self-preservation strategy? If we expose our emotions, will we be vulnerable to students? Or reframed, will we be more human to students? These are the personal truths that we must shock ourselves with so that we can begin to lay the West to rest.

The third principle talks to the homogeneity of the learning group. Consciousness raising needs an emotionally safe space where conditions of mutuality and reciprocity exist. Hart (1990) notes that because of power relations inherent in the academic-student relationship or the academic-'anybody' relationship due mainly to the crown of knowledge that adorns the academic, the major differences and inequalities must be acknowledged in order to move forward. Yet again, this process takes time. Similarities in experience and life worlds, as described in the previous two principles, have to be consciously and explicitly raised so that homogeneity is magnified. When rotation of leadership roles in the group, tasks and equal say in group processes are contracted early on, cohesion is enabled, creating fertile grounds for consciousness raising. As the process evolves, consideration is given to equality where we acknowledge the institutionalised differences of the unequal power relations between the academic and the student.

Freire (1970) acknowledged this as a potential barrier but open communication between the academic and the students does contribute to the student valuing the shared context of intentions and interests of the academic. The academic must be able to link his/her motivations to those of the other participants as an oppressed group and share with them his/her interest in emancipation. Although personal experience forms the basis of consciousness raising, according to Hart (1990), it must co-exist with anti-oppressive theoretical constructs so as to make deeper sense of experience, uphold epistemic justice and generate indigenous knowledge.

Applying the principles of critical self-reflection and consciousness raising lays the foundations for academics to consciously co-create thinking hotspots with students so as to fertilise and propagate an African-centred curriculum.

CONCLUSION

The foundations of the social work curriculum in South Africa must be rebirthed from a deep appreciation of African living, African culture and African values as its embryo. In so doing, as academics we must fearlessly engage in critical self-reflection for the purpose of including students' lived realities as the basis for transforming social work education. We must acknowledge the unique role that we play in leading education in a profession that is rooted in upholding human rights and social justice. Hence, in the near future, when critically conscious social work students gather to lay rocks on the graves of the West, they will say that there were academics who upheld epistemic and social justice, glorified human rights and magnified human dignity. They will acknowledge the strides we took alongside them, promoting their agency to theorise their own existence, continually informing curriculum development and practice. And, they will persistently invoke the spirits of Steve Biko, Frantz Fanon and Paulo Freire when they enter colonised spaces of learning because they will hold the most powerful weapon of oppression in their own hands – their free minds! Then we will know that our academic responsibilities were fulfilled.

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