

**The phenomenology of colonialism:
Exploring perspectives of social work graduates in the African university**

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Abstract

This article unpacks African students' understanding of colonialism in higher education through the narratives of social work graduates who attended a university located in KwaZulu-Natal. The research study is inspired by the 2015/2016 #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall movements, which suggested a need to explore students' views regarding colonialism in higher education. The data was collected through group interviews with twenty-two graduates. Framed within the Afrocentric theoretical framework and the phenomenology paradigm, the article explores the concept of colonialism in higher education and beyond. Participants' thinking on colonialism in higher education and beyond was not homogenous and some key themes emerged. Participants described colonialism in higher education as a product of the past where white supremacy and European domination served to oppress and alienate Africans from their identities and the university space. They also saw universities as spaces where Eurocentric indoctrination occurred, supported by the misrepresentation and marginalisation of Africans, which led to further isolation of African identities of self.

Keywords: African, colonialism, graduates, university

Introduction

This article calls for South African universities to become sensitive to, and acknowledge, colonialism as the historical context of the country, existing alongside injustices and inequalities mostly affecting African students. The fundamental question is: What is the meaning of colonialism in South African universities for African students? Also, how can this question be answered by listening to the voices and lived experiences of Africans themselves, rather than by using intellectuality and academic papers produced by Western writers or by African writers consumed by Eurocentric ideas? As suggested by Diop (1987) and Dussel (2012), this article calls for the need to undo the injustices of the past where the periphery was interpreted from the center. Therefore, the university experience of African students should be understood through their own historical narratives. This article acknowledges that the experiences of students in



higher education are influenced by their historical context, their social positioning, and the socio-economic aspects of their societies.

The discussions in this article highlight African students as a diverse group (Zibane, 2017). They are acknowledged as self-directed individuals who have accumulated life experience, knowledge, skills, values, and cultures, based on their historical and societal background (Burr, 1995). Hence participants' definitions and perspectives of colonialism reflect their different experiences, exposure, understanding, and context. According to Van Breda and Agherdien (2012), linking university education to personal life experiences allows students to bring into the university context their diverse perspectives based on their diverse exposure. This article is thus against the idea of one truth and one law that need to be discovered to explain all human behaviour and cultures (Mignolo, 2015). African students' perspectives on colonialism in this article are considered as not fixed or exclusive but as fluid, emanating from the interactions between multidimensional factors.

In articulating participants' narratives of colonialism, this article aims to investigate the different meanings African graduates attach to colonialism as a concept, particularly within the context of the university. The researcher believes that the exploration of the participants' definitions of colonialism and the meanings they attach to those definitions will form the basis of many interesting discussions in the decolonial struggle. McLean and Abbas (2011) also emphasised the importance of students' biographies and narratives in higher education for transformation. Similarly, Gachago (2018), in her reflection on the decolonial transformation workshop she attended at Sussex University, spoke of the importance of unapologetically providing African people with a space within which to share their historical perspectives. Cesaire (1972) also pleaded with the colonised not to forget colonialism and its impact. This article thus focuses on providing African graduates with a safe space within which to articulate their views of colonialism.

Africans were chosen to be the population of the study. This is because Africans were historically targeted for oppression and alienation (Nathan and Smith, 2018). As with Zibane (2017), 'African' in this article is not used to refer to any scientific racial categorisation but is used as a social construct to classify South Africans of African ancestry. Here I am referring to Black South Africans, amongst those who were colonially exploited and dominated because of their racial group (Biko, 1987). Nyerere (cited in Odora Hoppers, 2009: 4) also argued that it is now the time to focus the 'torch of light to shine on the poor and the unfree, and ownership and leadership of development to be reverted to them'. This suggests a need to focus the colonialism discussions to the perspectives and narratives of the previously oppressed.

Literature review

Exploring colonialism in this article does not suggest non-existence or undermining of the inciteful conceptualisation of the regime by multiple scholars. Instead, this article emphasises the importance of context-specific understanding and influences of historical events. Similarly, Butt (2018) is of the opinion that an understanding of colonialism is influenced by historical and

contemporary interaction of people. Hence, this article focuses on obtaining the colonial perspectives of social work graduates at KZN university.

The concept of colonialism has been interpreted by a number of scholars. For instance, Memmi (1955: 2) defined colonialism as a process where

'a foreigner, having come to a land by the accidents of history, the coloniser has succeeded not merely in creating a place for himself but also in taking away that of the inhabitant, granting himself astounding privileges to the detriment of those rightfully entitled to them'.

This definition suggests that colonialism is the process that ensures the peripheralisation of the oppressed through marginalisation and suppression (wa Thiog'o, 1986; Dussel, 2012). Birmingham (1995) also witnessed the process that took place in the late 19th century during the Berlin conference, where the economy, resources and education of African countries were officially divided and declared to be controlled by Britain, France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Belgium and Portugal. Birmingham (1995: 1) found that, although this power imposition and control was proclaimed as 'white people burden of developing African countries', it wiped away culture, indigenous knowledge systems, African education, and natural resources. Colonialism is thus a process of dominating over other country/s through political control and exploitation (Abdi, 2006; Horvath, 2006; Ocheni and Nwankowo, 2012). These definitions suggest colonialism as a ruthless regime that ruled by power, control, and imposition (Botwe-Asamoah, 2005). Hence Heldring and Robinson (2012: 2) acknowledged that colonialism had a 'heterogeneous effect', that is a diverse impact.

Nyerere (1968) pointed out two remarkable historical items of colonialism: the destruction of African education systems and the distortions of social development schemes in the African space. This resonates with what Mazrui (1978: 11) calls the combined arrogancies of destroying the humanity and cultures of Africa. The mission of colonialism was to disable the existing African systematic structures of education and paradigms of social advancement so that African philosophies of education will be viewed as problematic while European perspectives are considered as modernised, civilised and appropriate (Botwe-Asamoah, 2005). Colonialism thus marked the massive inequality structured along racial lines (Smith, 2014), which gave birth to the apartheid system in South Africa.

South Africa gained independence from colonialism around 1902 (Okoth, 2006). Nevertheless, the National Party, which later took over the ruling of the country, introduced the apartheid regime (another form of colonialism). Apartheid was a racial segregation system in South Africa that was enforced by the National Party from 1948 to 1994 through legislation. Different legislations affecting education were implemented during this period to ensure the exclusion and oppression of Africans. For example, the Bantu Education Act of 1952 (later called the Black Education Act) was one of the discrimination policies the apartheid government education system used to ensure that Africans receive minimal education and remain in oppressed groups (SA History Online [SAHO], 2018). The University Education Act 45 of 1959 also alienated Africans by prohibiting African students from attending 'white' universities (SAHO,

2018). Separation of public services and colonisers' excess and access while Africans were experiencing conditions of poverty and deprivation remained the brutal activities that governed the regime (Nqulunga, 2017). Such conditions distorted the African interests, cultures, and education.

The pre-colonialism education system was not conceptualised as limited to classrooms or universities. Most African education took place and continue to take place in informal community-based settings (Maringe and Ojo, 2017). However, a number of Western writers such as Voltaire (1826), Tomaselli and Wright (2011), Hegel (cited in Abdi (2012) and Montesquieu (1975) reinforced colonialism by not seeing Africa as an interesting country with its own history but rather as a state of barbarism which was preventing it from becoming civilised.

Education in Africa was thus introduced by colonisers who instilled inferiority in Africans and reinforced the superiority of Whites/Europeans (Fanon, 1952; Cesaire, 1972). Such Western education made the African youth misfits in their own villages (Mazrui, 1978), since the curriculum content and university structures were alien to them. For instance, the African universities were based on European templates, offered European degrees, and taught foreign curriculum, designed for the context of Europe, on the African continent (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2016; Maringe and Ojo, 2017). The language of tuition in these universities was (and still remain) the language of the coloniser and local languages were banished from the 'mainstream curricula' (Maringe and Ojo, 2017: 27). The indigenous knowledge system was thus not prioritised in education and training.

The colonial education systems did not go unchallenged. African societies created numerous movements against the oppressive regime and its education. For instance, in 1969, Steve Biko led the formation of the South African student organisation at the universities. In particular, the emergence of Black Consciousness Movement among university students was a powerful strategy against the thesis of white racism (Biko, 1978). It was due to such organisations that the learners of 1976 protested against apartheid educational policies, resulting in the apartheid government's brutal response that claimed the lives of many young South African learners who were calling for African emancipation and equality in education. Furthermore, during 2015 and 2016, the South African higher education institutions were gripped by the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall student protests. These protests were aimed at establishing 'free, and decolonised higher education' (Prah, 2017). The students called for contextually relevant curricula that would be free from the colonial influences (Kreitzer, 2012; Mbembe, 2016). Such movements suggest colonialism and its legacies as still influencing African students' experiences in African universities.

Despite the end of apartheid in 1994, which forced HEIs to formulate new policies aimed at inclusive higher education in South Africa, African emancipation is a farfetched dream. The twenty-five years of South African democracy and independence is still characterised by African students' identity-seeking projects (Ngoasheng and Gachago, 2017) against legacies and injustices of the past in South African higher education. This suggests a need for context-specific exploration of how historical bequests are understood and influence students' experiences in

African universities. This is of particular relevance to social work education, since social work is about reflection on experiences in order to facilitate insightful learning (Van Breda and Agherdien, 2012). Hence, this article explores social work graduates' understanding of colonialism. Nakata, et al. (2012) also argued for the need to observe colonial orders being imposed and spoke out against oppression and colonial reasoning applied to local contexts in everyday life. This article thus takes a stand against the discourses that make issues of colonial practices in South African higher education permissible and invisible. Building from Bozalek and Boughey's (2012) assertions, the point that needs to be explicitly brought to the fore is the continuation of African students' feelings of alienation, which indicates the extent of embeddedness of colonial effects on the educational structures and system.

Theoretical framework

Afrocentricity is the theoretical framework that guided this study. Afrocentricity, an Afrocentric worldview or an African-centered worldview are terms used interchangeably. Afrocentricity emerged back in 1954, and Garvey was one of the activists of the ideology (Chawane, 2000). Asante then popularised the term in the 1980s (Ibid). Afrocentricity suggests that Africans must look at knowledge and experiences and use African perspectives to understand them (Kreitzer, 2012). The focus is on African viewpoints. Asante (2002: 6) defines Afrocentricity to mean 'placing African culture at the center of any analysis that involves studying African people'. It is a mode of thought and action in which the centrality of African interests, values and perspectives predominate (Asante, 2002). It is an intellectual movement and a political view of simple re-discovery of 'African Centeredness' (Chawane, 2000: 79). Theoretically, it is placing the African people at the center of any analysis of African phenomena. Although Afrocentricity is not perceived in this article as the only way for facilitating African progress, it is regarded as a necessary mindset for undoing the injustices of the past. Prah (2017) also argued that Africanisation and African-centered practice are needed for development in Africa. This article thus uses an Afrocentric paradigm to understand the perspectives and the voices of African students in higher education.

According to the Afrocentric world view, a phenomenon needs to be explored within its location (Asante, 2002). This is because Afrocentric paradigm perceives a phenomenon as diverse, consisting of many dynamics. In this study, the experiences of African graduates are explored within the South African context. It is believed that this context and its dynamics have shaped the current experiences of participants. Hence, the voices of Africans are considered as paramount in exploring colonialism in this study.

In this study, Afrocentricity perspective allowed Africans to be subjects rather than objects on Europe's fringes and gave room for the validation of African graduates' voices and experiences. Similarly, Gray and Mazibuko (2003) viewed Afrocentric as referring to an idea and a perspective which holds that African people can and should see, study, interpret and interact with people, life and reality from the vantage point of African people rather than from the vantage point of European, or Asian or other non-African people. It is a philosophical perspective

associated with the discovery, location and actualisation of African agency within the context of history and culture (Ibid). It is thus a none-Eurocentric way of interpreting the history of humanity (Dussel, 2012). This suggests Afrocentric as concerned with discovering the Africans' central place in the struggle of survival in the world. Therefore, this study adopted Afrocentricity to reflect on the need to place African students' interests, cultures, traditions, values and structures at the center of African higher education and its institutions.

Methodology

The study was based at a university located in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The strategy of enquiry was focus group interviews. The participants of the study were twenty-two social work graduates. Ten participants were doing their postgraduate studies (PG) in social work and in other human science disciplines and twelve were social work practitioners (PT). All participants had studied at Hibiscus university (pseudonym). Two groups of interviews were conducted to get broader and diverse interpretations and opinions. The research participants were recruited by means of purposive and snowball sampling, which are none-probability sampling techniques for qualitative research studies (Guest, et al., 2013). Purposive sampling was conducted by selecting participants who met the sampling criterion and who would provide information and insight into the research problem (Rubin and Babbie, 1993; Babbie and Mount 2001)

Snowball sampling was used to locate prospective participants through referrals. This sampling technique focused on hard-to-locate participants (Rubin and Babbie, 1993; Babbie and Mount 2001), particularly social work graduates who were furthering their studies in other disciplines. Thus, the recruitment of research participants for this study was not a straightforward process. Different professional networks, as well as peers, were used to help in the process of recruiting participants.

This article adopted a hermeneutic phenomenology approach to explore African graduates' perspectives of colonialism. This is a qualitative research paradigm that explores the nature and meaning of a phenomenon through the lived experiences of individuals (Lester, 1999; Kafle, 2011). The personal experiences and perspectives of graduates in this study are perceived as a fundamental aspect of (de)coloniality in higher education. Kafle (2011: 183) also highlighted that phenomenology 'penetrate[s] deep to the human experience and trace[s] the essence of a phenomenon and explicate[s] it in its original form as experienced by the individuals'. This paradigm has thus provided an understanding of how graduates make sense of the world around them, construct reality and view themselves (Lester, 1999; Teater, 2010; Andrews, 2012). This position assumes that students' experiences in higher education are socially constructed by certain phenomena that are context-specific and are subjective to their historical interpretations (Berger and Luckmann, 1996; Zibane, 2017). The study thus perceives colonialism as a phenomenon that has shaped African students' university experiences and their view of themselves.

The period from the end of the first semester to the beginning of the second semester of 2018 was used for data collection. Focus group sessions were conducted after ethical clearance was obtained from the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Ethics Committee and consent was given by the participants. Once all participants were recruited, an information session was held where the study was discussed and the prospective participants were given a chance to ask questions pertaining to it. The data collection process began once group appointments were made with the research participants. Throughout the interviews, the research participants were respected and their anonymity was assured. Consequently, the research participants were treated as subjects during the group discussions, rather than as objects of inquiry (Acocella, 2012). Their interests, perspectives, and experiences were at the center of the study. The interview tool also created an environment that 'gave a voice' (Zibane, 2017: 6) to research participants and treated them as active agents in matters concerning their lives. To maintain confidentiality and privacy, pseudonyms are used for the names of participants and locations.

The language of communication was also an essential component of this study. The researcher was vigilant about how language is used to dominate or silence individuals. Teater (2010) also argues that interaction is determined by a shared language, which demonstrates the issues of power. As such, during the planning phase of this research, the researcher decided to conduct interviews in both isiZulu and English. The choice of these two languages was based on the researcher's own first language and, more importantly, the first language of the research participants, which was predominantly isiZulu. Practically, isiZulu became the dominant language during data collection. As Nelson Mandela had argued: 'If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart' (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2011). Thematic content and discourse analysis were used to analyse and arrange data.

Thematic content analysis interprets data through identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns or themes within the collected data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thematic content analysis was thus used in this study to describe data in relation to the research topic in rich detail by identifying patterns within collected data (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). In this study, emerging themes in the data were identified in the interview transcripts to facilitate the capturing of the communicated experiences of the research participants.

Once the researcher obtained the overall grasp of the text and its structure that was found through thematic and content analysis, another level of data was uncovered through discourse analysis. Discourse analysis explores the use of language, word choice, non-verbal and verbal speech in the collected data (Gee, 1999). This analysis focuses on the 'natural occurring of language' so as to understand human interaction and experiences (Shanthi, et al., 2015: 159). In the process of discourse analysis, the researcher completely immersed herself in transcribed data to look for linguistic meaning that was embedded in the participants' communication. The researcher looked closely at the way language was used, the participants' choice of words and how participants expressed what they said. The researcher also immersed herself in the transcribed data, searching for any symbolic discourse such as words and phrases, and marked

the indications which revealed a different aspect of the subject investigated. Discourse makers that appeared to belong to one theme were labelled. The researcher engaged with what was said in order to grasp the emotional changes of tone, avoidances, silences, contradictions and inconsistencies.

The choice of theoretical framework, ethical considerations, methodologies and all principles adopted in this article present research as personal, emotional and relational (Zibane, 2017).

Research findings and discussions

White supremacy, domination, and marginalisation of Africans

The group discussion began by asking the research participants to define colonialism. The first part on the definitions of colonialism began with the participants (who were practitioners-PT) mentioning any word/s that comes into their mind when hearing the word colonialism. They mentioned the following:

- Sida:* *White person and domination.*
- Nox:* *Oppression of people of colour.*
- Theka:* *Inversion.*
- Khomi:* *Racism.*
- Don:* *Rule by foreigners coming to your country and take over everything.*
- Researcher:* *Mhhh, I hear you. Sida, when defining colonialism, you mentioned a 'White person'. How do you relate White people with colonialism?*
- Sida:* *You are asking the obvious. Colonisers are Whites and there is no African person who is a coloniser. Colonisation came with White people.*

The above responses indicate that participants in this study understood colonialism as an oppressive system that came with white people for domination. The responses also suggest that, participants perceived whiteness and colonialism as interlinked. Similarly, postgraduate (PG) participants shared the same sentiment as follows:

- Zama:* *Thembelihle (researcher), we all know that there are no white people who are Africans. They all came from the West to oppress African people. They came as colonisers and they gave us things that they think fits to us ... Thinking what they gave us is what we deserve. You remember that people were forcefully given English names. This was to make things easy for white people and we [Africans] were powerless, we were not permitted to do or say anything, we just accepted everything.*
- Toto:* *I agree with Zama, colonisation means being brainwashed. You do not look at the situation as it is, but you look at it based on the way you were told it is. For an African person, there was that belief that African people*

are incapable and most of us believe that. We were given names and you could not refuse the name given to you. There was no chance to be called by the name you prefer... that also showed racism.

Researcher: Am I right to say that you are suggesting that colonialism involves power and the domination of one race by the other?

Phumi: (Laughing) Thembe [researcher] is romanticising this with fancy words. I think colonialism was a brutal system that was just there to marginalise us. Not just power but violent domination and dehumanising of the African race in multiple ways.

Mami: True madam [referring to Phumi], and they [colonisers] succeeded with their colonial domination because, during the time of colonisation, African people were not allowed to have their own mind. To have our own mind-sets and ideas was not possible. Things were imposed on us, and we had to act the way colonisers wanted us to act [...] ey kudlaliwe ngathi (we were played).

Researcher: [Siri raised his hand] I can see that Siri would also like to say something about this ... what do you think?

Siri: Ey guys, what you are saying is very true, and it is still happening and it is evident even at present. This colonialism thing is programmed in our minds. Like for us Africans, a person who believes in ancestors is viewed as not yet civilised. And that is the impact of colonialism. It also reveals how brainwashed we are, as Mami indicated. Because we are no longer entertaining the customs of Africans. We have abandoned our rituals that demonstrate who we are as Africans. It seems as if there is something wrong with you or you are left backward if you still celebrate African rituals. I think it is even worse here at the university. Africans behave like white people.

Whiteness, supremacy, racism, and power are the terms that featured strongly in the participants' definition of colonialism. To the participants, these terms are the basis of colonialism. Participants perceived colonialism as the use of an organised process and a brutal system to brainwash and dominate Africans. Toto makes it clear that because of this process, Africans' views of themselves are based on the interests of their colonisers. Similar to participants' views, Teater (2012) argued that there are certain worldviews that are not naturally inherited by African students, but are colonially constructed through interaction with one another and the world of their colonisers. In this way, the worldview, the interests, the values, the culture and the beliefs of the Africans get marginalised. This is the colonisation of power (Seroto, 2018) through racial hierarchies (Quijano, 2000). For instance, Siri above spoke about the marginalisation of African rituals. He recognises this marginalisation as enforced through the process of colonialism. In addition, Siri highlighted the university as the perpetuator of coloniality, where Africans are

adopting white people's ways of being. Such argument reveals the university as still privileging white people's and Europeans' customs. Similar to this study, Borocz and Saker (2012: 1) also argued against coloniality as a 'continuous and systematic framing of the colonised population as the backward, inferior, dehumanised 'other' of the enlightened European/Whites 'self' and the use of the discourses of scientific racism to this end'. This reveals that African students at the university are made to feel inferior by idealising white hegemony (Kreitzer, 2012). As a result, the university privileges the interests of White people at the expense of African cultures (Daniel, 2018).

This article argues that white's privileges emanate from colonialism. This means that privileges are rooted in the systems and history of South Africa (Ngoasheng and Gachago, 2017). Thus, the university privileges white people's interests at the expense of those of African people's (Daniel, 2018; Smith and Nathane, 2018) as a form of responding to the colonial powers. In the process, the interests of the colonised (Africans in the case of this article) are decentred and marginalised. Similarly, Bazana and Mogotsi (2017) highlighted how social identities in higher education are still constructed on racial lines, particularly in historically white universities where whiteness determines the cultures and norms of the university.

The participants thus perceived the university as an institution that has become a white reserve space that enforces one culture (Adichi-Ngozi, 2009; Bazana and Mogotsi, 2017) at the expense of diverse populations in post-colonial and democratic society. Participants' definitions and understanding of colonialism in this study showed how individual students' experiences remain influenced by the historical legacies of alienation and injustices. Such finding suggest that broader historical contexts of the country still remain influential to the experiences of university students in the new democratic dispensation.

Lost identity and misrepresentation of Africans

According to Kreitzer (2012: 47) 'identity is the means by which a person, group, nation, or continent defines themselves in terms of their individuality and difference to others'. Similarly, the Cambridge dictionary (2019) defines identity as the unique qualities of a certain group of people. This study perceives these unique qualities as modeled by the historical, political and socio-economic status of a society. Participants in this study also observed the role played by the historical context in the molding of African identities. PG participants identified a relationship between colonialism and lost identity as follows:

Researcher: How does identity relate to the concept of colonialism?

Melo: Maybe, Thembelihle, we need to firstly talk about the meaning of identity. For me, identity means your true self such as your biological and geographical origin. For example, I was born in South Africa by African parents who speak isiZulu; therefore, I am an African. Colonisers targeted to oppress Africans. So, I think of the process whereby I take your identity

and I give you what I think is suitable. White people oppressed Africans and detected their daily living.

Mami: Yes girl, (laughing) honestly speaking, you cannot separate colonialism, oppression and apartheid with lost identity. I also want to say this was a process of annulment of African people in the sense that Whites or Western people changed us and who we are. So, what comes into my mind is fake life. If I think of colonisation, I think that they made us to live a fake life. A life they visioned (sic) for us.

Researcher: Mami, why are you saying you are living a fake life? What is fake about African people's lives?

Mami: Because we had our own ways of living, but when colonisers came, they said we are uncivilised. Colonisers tried to make a society that is civilised. They came with industrialisation and machines trying to develop us. But they forged a life they had already envisioned for us.

Ngco: You know what guys; this thing of colonialism shows how Western people are controlling us. The time they were colonising us, it like they said: leave what you know and the life you are living, and from now on, this is how you are going to live ... When I came to the university, it was like I was living in another planet because my lifestyle back home is not relevant to this context. That is the impact of colonialism. Hence if I come to university, I have to adopt new, different lifestyle.

In the extracts above, participants spoke about how African identities were impacted by the pain and the confusion caused by colonialism. The imposition of English names, industrialisation or the so called 'civilisation' of Africans by colonisation were identified by research participants as acts of wiping out African identities. Indeed, Leibowitz, et al. (2005) argue that identity is not natural constructed, but it is made up of elements that might be given by others such as class and race. It is thus made up of 'chance, context and choice' (Leibowitz, et al., 2005: 3). Therefore, participants in this article understood colonialism as a process whereby colonisers allocate identity labels to the colonised people of Africa to make their ruling, domination and fulfilment of the imperial agenda easier. PT participants also shared the same sentiment. For instance, Don mentioned the following:

Although Africans are the descendants of this country, they are the ones who were oppressed and dominated in their own land. White people dominated African people. You have your name, Thembelihle, and because white people cannot pronounce Thembelihle, they call you Resurrection. That is very offending, that is like taking over your dignity, your pride, everything. Because your identity is your pride and your name demonstrate who you are and where you come from, thus changing somebody's name means taking away his/her identity.

From the above discussion, it is clear that Africans had limited or no choice in resisting the wipe-out processes of their identities. This resulted in poor self-esteem, identity distortion and lost pride and dignity for many Africans. This also reveals that a certain identity can be imposed on individuals by those who are in a position of power (Leibowitz, et al., 2005). Similarly, Prah (2009) asserted that colonialism successfully whipped away the values, cultures and interests of African people through Western hegemony. This suppression of African identity by colonisers facilitated and nurtured imperialism. African identity was marginalised (Jørgensen, 2010), transformed and dehumanised by the colonisers to suit the colonial agenda. This was the colonisation of being (Seroto, 2018) through dehumanising the humanity and the self-pride of the colonised.

It is, however, essential to note that the discussions in this section do not suggest that modernisation and/or civilisation led to the absolute destruction of African identities. Participants' expressions indicate a need for inclusion of African perspectives in human progress (Cesaire, 1972). So, the focus is on African perspectives as alternatives (Mignola, 2011) in civilisation. Similarly, Connell (2007) argued that the indigenous people from the South (Africans) have social intellectuality that can be instrumental in modernity/civilisation. The discussion of this section suggests a need for deliberate African centeredness and recognition and redistribution of power (Leibowitz, et al., 2005). As also stipulated by Odora Hoppers (2009: 4), there is a need to develop 'sterile critiques of colonialism and the subsystems it left to eternally paralyse the African continent'. Thus, Africans' unique contributions must be valued in human progress. This will allow African interest to be placed at the center (Asante, 2009). This could also be the true foundation of the anti-colonial struggle in African societies.

Eurocentric indoctrination in African universities

There was a steamy discussion among PG participants about Eurocentric indoctrination as meaning the same thing with colonialism:

Ngco: University lifestyle is presented as modern and Western; thus it is relevant. So, we abandoned African norms for adaptation at the university. This shows how colonisers governed African people and treated them to be like robots.

Researcher: What do you mean, Ngco, by the term 'robots'?

Ngco: Western or European norms dominate the university. Africans thus tend to accept anything that comes from White people and the West without challenging and questioning it.

Toto: That means we consume Western cultures at the university and are fixed to it without even considering its relevance to the African customs.

Phumi: What you are saying guys makes me think of colonialism as a Western imposition to African people. I can say it is a process where people are

programmed to behave, speak and act in a certain way and speak certain words. For example, during the colonial period, an African person was taught to say 'yes' to the white man, nothing else besides that ... Programmed to react in a certain way. Serious for the rest of our lives, because even if we go to the field, we are still following that programmed life.

Melo: What Phumi is saying makes me to think of the process of primary, high school and university as sort of being programmed as well. Programmed to undergo these processes such as after university, you need to get a job. If you went through these processes you are regarded as successful. I think somehow this is something that was programmed by colonial powers in our minds.

The choice of terms used by participants above, such as 'robots', 'programmed' and 'fixed', suggest that the systems used to colonise people were aimed to indoctrinate, dominate and control. When Ngco spoke about the robots, she demonstrated the lack of choices that Africans have under the systems created by colonialism. Such systems enforce dependency on Western hegemony. This suggests that Africans have to uncritically accept Western interests. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2014) used the term 'global coloniality' as forces that have disempowered initiatives from Africa through Western indoctrination. Melo also mentioned this Western indoctrination through the education process, where people are programmed to follow a fixed pattern as a means of success and development (primary, high school, university, and work). This is the true colonisation of knowledge (Seroto, 2018), which Mbembe (2015) explains as enforced by institutions of education when imposing Western norms and Western education on the colonised.

Scholars such as Nyerere (1968), Moumouni (1968), Rodney (1982), and Abdi (2006) acknowledged that, before colonialism, African people defined development and progress differently. Participants' responses above suggest that colonial powers created systems that everyone became dependent on and could not live without, hence imposed and adopted by Africans. Brock-Utne (cited in Prah, 2017) argued that this phenomenon is the 'the stupidification of African children', by degrading the value of African knowledge. As recommended by Odora Hoppers (2009: 5), this article calls for a need to 'corrode and exhaust the narrative of colonialism in its numerous guises and technologies and ruses ... including its alibis that are couched in the recesses of the academy'. This article is a call to restructure the narrative of colonialism that is dominating African educations by exploring and including African students' perspectives. The article thus suggests that, unless something is done, the lives of Africans will remain under the powers of colonial practice and Eurocentric dominance for the rest of African existence on earth. There is thus a need for 'resurgence of the institutions that gives expression to the intrinsic values of Africa' (Botwe-Asamoah, 2005: 13).

Conclusion

The emancipation of the African students' voices regarding colonialism has been the driving force of this article. Participants described their definition of colonialism in relation to their university experiences. This concurs with the assertion made by Mbembe (2016) in which he portrays HEIs as the vital places in which to explore historical legacies of colonialism. This article has also acknowledged such interconnectedness and interdependence of socio-political and structural dynamics of colonialism and the university. What is significant is that all participants perceived colonialism as white hegemony that operates through Western domination for the oppression of the African continent and African people. What is striking is that participants perceived such hegemony as nurtured in the African university through Eurocentric indoctrination. This is the Eurocentric vision (Dussel, 2012) that betrays the African interest and cultures in African academia. This makes African universities the breeding ground for colonialism and its legacies. This is the case not only because the university landscape is the product of colonialism (Prah, 2017), but because the democratic dispensations' failure to uproot the colonial cultures and structures in HEIs has affirmed the colonality in African universities.

The democratic liberation and independence in South Africa have failed to destroy the traces of stubborn histories engraved in the HEIs. Colonialism has thus only ended in the ideal sense, rather than in material sense (Smith, 2010). Building on Bozalek and Boughey's (2012) assertions, the point that needs to be explicitly brought to the fore is the continued alienation of African students, which indicates the extent of the embeddedness of colonial effects on the educational structures and system.

African centeredness remains relevant in undoing the injustices of colonialism in Africa. As stated by Prah (2017: 20), this study argues that 'the centre of gravity of knowledge production about Africa and Africans must be situated in Africa, so that the 'otherness' of the subject of scholarship which Western hegemony has imposed on Africa and Africans is eliminated'. The purpose of this article was thus not to document the

histories of resistance of the colonised to colonialism, rather, the article aims to turn those accounts into theoretical events that not only make those struggles relevant for their moment in time, but also relevant for other moments in times to come. (Odora Hoppers, 2009: 6)

This is the dislocating of the colonialism phenomenon to excavate its legacies in current experiences.

Study limitations and future research

The small number of participants could possibly be a limitation of this research. Only graduates of a particular KZN university participated in the study and not all South African universities and African students were involved. The study therefore recommends future research to include all South/African universities. Both quantitative and qualitative methods of inquiry must be adopted. This will ensure a broader application of the findings and allow for generalisation and in-depth interpretations. Future research must also not be based on the views of African students only. It

must include other nationalities, academics and university management to get a broader perspective and a holistic picture of the matter. While this article focused on understanding colonialism, it is recommended for future research to explore legacies of colonialism in African academia and options for decolonisation.

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