

## **The Africanisation of universities in Africa: Reclamation of humanity and rationality**

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### **Abstract**

The process of Africanisation teaching and learning in universities in Africa is an extremely important endeavour; yet, this noble undertaking is conceptually disputed and trivialised in certain scholarly circles. Owing to the negative perceptions associated with Africa, there are reservations associated with Africanisation. Accordingly, there are perceptions that Africanisation may compromise the standard of education, the quality of lecturing staff and research, as well as the general deterioration of infrastructure. Additionally, in some scholarly cycles, Africanisation is regarded as anachronistic and confrontational to global dimensions of knowledge, as well as teaching and learning. On the other hand, proponents of Africanisation uphold the perspective that teaching and learning draw relevance by incorporating local knowledge traditions. Against the backdrop of these conceptual contestations, the concern that dominates this article is that it is imperative that the process of Africanisation be founded on guiding philosophical principles. In this article, the argument is made that notions of humanity and rationality provide a philosophical framework for the process of Africanisation.

**Keywords:** Africanisation, decolonisation, higher education, humanity, philosophical guiding principles, rationality

### **Introduction**

Despite the calls for the Africanisation of teaching and learning in universities in Africa (South of Sahara) gaining currency and significance, the concept has remained contested and is entangled in conceptual and practical complexities (Cross & Ndofirepi, 2016; Dick, 2014; Makgoba & Seepe, 2004; Minga, 2021; Ochwa-Echel, 2013). Though teaching and learning, as well as general institutional culture, in universities in Africa are predominantly Western-centric (Minga, 2021; Assie-Lumumba, 2016; Mazrui, 1975), Africanisation as a possible counteracting measure continues to be a highly political and controversial notion. To highlight the imperative for Africanisation, it is argued that



universities in Africa continue to be censured for being out of step with the continent and its developmental agendas because many of their curricula are closely modeled on those of the former colonial masters and not the indigenous African university that has championed African civilisation in Mali, Timbuktu and Sankore. (Motsaathebe, 2019:36)

Therefore, the concern that dominates this article is that the conceptual and practical complexities surrounding the Africanisation of universities can be attributed to a paucity of philosophical guiding principles. These principles could mitigate against conceptual complexity which is dominant in Africanisation scholarship. We concur with the observation that 'what is required is a conceptual approach and languages of description that move decolonising education debate towards considerations about the terms on which knowledge selection for a decolonial curricula approach ought to proceed' (Fataar, 2018: 6). It is important that we state upfront that decolonisation is not used interchangeably with Africanisation. Decolonisation is a broad concept which encompasses endeavours towards undoing the colonial legacy embedded in education and Africanisation is one such facet. As a contribution towards the philosophical guiding principles of Africanisation, we proffer the notions of humanity and rationality. In doing so, we do not suggest that they are exhaustive; rather, we seek to explore philosophical guidelines which represent a paradigm shift, from the scholarly fixation on conceptual, definitive complexities (Horsthemke, 2008; Makgoba & Seepe, 2004), to an exposition of philosophical guiding principles

It is critical in this section to make three categorical statements: first, Africanisation will not unfold as a homogenous process across universities in Africa. Universities are situated in contextual settings that differ from one country to the next and one region to the other. Subsequently, the discourse on Africanisation is highly determined by specific historical and evolving political, social, and material circumstances (Assie-Lumumba, 2016). Second, the incessant demand for Africanisation requires an implicit re-imagination of the ideal Africanised University. Thirdly, Africanisation is not a point that is reachable and settled upon. Rather, we regard Africanisation as a process that is in a constant state of becoming. The pursuit of Africanisation is, therefore, informed and guided by the re-imagined ideal. For that reason, humanity, and rationality as philosophical guiding principles for Africanisation are underscored by a realisation that the idea of an Africanised university is attainable. The guiding research question in this article is:

*What can be conceptually drawn from the notions of humanity and rationality as philosophical guiding principles for the Africanisation of universities in Africa?*

In pursuance of an adequate response to the research question, which is important in relation to teaching and learning, this article is divided into four interlinking sections. In the first section, we locate the university in Africa within the framework of the historical legacy of colonialism, and the colonial perpetuities which compel universities to unwittingly operate and

exist as disseminators of Western-centric teaching and learning. Africanisation, therefore, becomes a necessary response, aimed at discontinuing the hegemony of the West in terms of knowledge, orientation, culture, and values. The second section provides an overview of conceptual debates, disputations, and contestations around Africanisation. In the third section, on humanity, we argue that Africanisation will lead to the restoration of a colonially-wounded humanity of Africans. Such an envisaged restoration does not render the process as emblematic of reverse racism, as suggested by some scholars (Moulder, 2008; Prinsloo, 2010; Horsthemke, 2008; Matolino & Kwindigwi, 2013; Banda & Banda, 2018), since humanity is a common, unifying factor. Concerning reverse racism, Moulder states that 'the project of Africanising universities is part of a change in the way in which power and privilege are distributed in our society' (1988: 3). We, however, differ from this observation, as will be demonstrated in the sections covering both humanity and rationality. In the fourth section, which deals with rationality, we delineate the argument that Africanisation is an affirmation of the rationality of the African university, and local knowledge traditions espoused by Africans. Concerns for epistemic injustice, which manifest through the hegemony of Western epistemologies, testify to a history in which both African humanity and rationality were called into question by the colonial establishment.

### **A background to Africanisation**

The main purpose of this section is to situate the context in which demands for Africanisation are made. Accordingly, an exposition of converging social and educational perspectives is discussed here. The social perspective explores the historical and social trajectory that influences human and rational misconceptions about African people. The reason for drawing on examples from society is that separating society from any university is a false dichotomy. In this respect, since Donald Trump, the former president of the United States of America, was quoted as referring to African nations as "shithole" countries (Dawsey, 2018), it can be argued that negative perceptions are associated with Africa and "Africanness" (Fourie, 2015); the concept of Africa is not ethically neutral. For Fourie, there are four conceptions of Africa, namely, Africa as place, Africa as commodity, Africa as ideal, and Africa as condition. Africa is not only a geographical designation. In this article, we use the term Africa to refer to a worldview, values, beliefs, and aspirations informed by contextual circumstances. In this article, we deploy Africa and Africanness as concepts that refer to constructive worldviews, cultural identity, and daily practices and experiences. Besides the continent's economic underdevelopment, various views continue to dehumanise the African people. A typical case is the Covid-19 pandemic, which has equally exposed underlying misconceptions about Africa and Africans. For instance, during the vaccination trials, two French medical scientists openly suggested that Africa would be the ideal place to conduct experiments to determine the efficacy and efficiency of Covid-19 vaccines (*BBC News*, 2020; Lamptey, et al., 2022). At the time, the pandemic had caused more deaths in Europe than Africa, so, ideally, Europe should have been suggested as the ideal place for large-scale and intensive vaccine experimentation.

However, suggesting that Africa, despite its relatively low rate of Covid 19-related deaths, should be a ground for vaccination experimentation insinuates that African humanity should be seen as guineapigs. Also, in April 2020, Melinda Gates, in a television interview, stereotypically “predicted” that Africa would be the continent worst hit by the Coronavirus, graphically stating that there would be decomposing bodies in the streets of African cities (*BBC News*, 2020). Again, this prejudicial forecast was made at a time when more deaths were being reported in Western countries, than in African states (Okereke & Nielsen, 2020). It should also be recalled that during the “early days” of HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) such suggestions were made as well. These examples, drawn from the wider society, indicate that Africa is still perceived as ‘the dark continent’ (Conrad, 1899). It is also the case that “justifications” for scientific experiments in Africa embed colonial notions of Africa in which Africans are portrayed as subhuman. Thus, Africanising a university is a necessary and cathartic endeavour.

From an educational perspective, Africanisation, as a process, realigns education with African values, worldview, epistemologies, norms, and aspirations. While the call for Africanisation is not a new phenomenon, it is our considered view that it has been emboldened by the 2015/2016 South African student protests (Chikoko, 2021; Motala, et al., 2021), when Africanisation emerged as the focal point of efforts to decolonise higher education in Africa (Sebola & Mogoboya, 2020). Ultimately, the presupposition is that an un-Africanised university is foreign, dislocated from, and alien to, the African culture, vision, and aspirations. In other words, the embedded presupposition is that an un-Africanised university does not appropriately respond to the contextual challenges and needs of Africa and Africans. For Kumalo (2018), universities in Africa – especially the formerly white universities – are creating what he calls ‘Natives of Nowhere’, a depiction of students and graduates who are culturally dislocated from their environment. Therefore, teaching and learning that predominantly conveys Western values and epistemologies marginalises Africa and consequently creates an “un-Africanised” university. Ultimately, teaching and learning, as well as general operational and administrative, practices that are Western-centric alienates the African students from their immediate context.

Africanisation draws its imperative from the realisation that universities in Africa, which were ‘imposed [by] the colonial power[s] and later adopted by African governments for the sake of economic necessity, [are] still to become [...] African institution[s]’ (Kamola, 2014: 151). Though there were forms of higher education in pre-colonial Africa, the idea of a “modern” university was established during the colonial era. Of course, there are contentions about whether pre-colonial institutions of higher learning, such as those at Sankore (Timbuktu/Mali), Alexandria (Egypt), Al-Alzhar (established in the tenth century in Cairo, in Egypt), and Al-Qwarawiyin (established in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Fez, Morocco), can be considered Africanised universities as their teaching and learning, research, and other operational aspects resemble the “modern” day university (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017; Sherman, 1990; Woldergiogis & Doevenspeck, 2013).

In the colonial era, there was a misconception that the establishment of universities was critical towards the broad objective of “civilising” Africans. In this regard, Ramose (2003, 2005) correctly states that universities, during the colonial period, claimed the “sacred duty” of educating Africans to forsake magic, superstition, tyranny, and barbarism, by adopting Western scientific truths, technology, and civilisation. The university was thus considered one of the central institutions in the implementation of a “civilising” mission in Africa. Inevitably, the university became (and has remained) a cultural centre for the production, dissemination, and privileging of Western practices and values. The assumption was that Africans needed to “convert” from upholding traditional cultural values and epistemologies to adopt Western orientations. In fact, forms of education that were taking place in the pre-colonial era were dismissed. Accordingly, the guiding philosophical principles are important towards the execution of Africanisation. Before discussing these principles, it is imperative to unpack the conceptual underpinnings that characterise Africanisation. The next section endeavours to do that.

### **The conceptual consideration of Africanisation: The universal vs. local knowledge debate**

As noted in the previous sections, Africanisation contentiously denotes racial, political, and ideological tenets that are bolstered by uncompromisingly combative (and often socially divisive) notions around indigeneity, the reversal of coloniality, and the termination of Western epistemological hegemony. In accounting for conceptual contestations, we expose several underlying factors that occasion conceptual complexities. Accordingly, this section theoretically interrogates the disparate relation between universal and local knowledge traditions. In this respect, scientific knowledge ‘is often perceived as universal, which implies that knowledge is independent of the individual knower and the context in which it has been produced’ (Madsen & Adriansen, 2021: 52). By contrast, local knowledge has been negatively portrayed as part of a romantic past, and as a major obstacle to economic and social development. Local knowledge is also trivialised as a non-issue that is naively advanced as a panacea for dealing with pressing local challenges (Nygren, 1999). Be that as it may, “scholarly” reservations about Africanisation are framed from a view of deficiency, in which it is “feared” that the attainment of the primary objective of Africanisation – a local knowledge tradition – may result in compromised standards when it comes to university education (Zezeza, 2007; Mbembe, 2016). By contrast, we concur with the observation that Africanisation is an acknowledgement of the realisation that ‘knowledge which is based on theories and methods developed in specific historical and geographical contexts, maybe wrong or ill-suited for solving problems in other geographical contexts’ (Madsen & Adriansen, 2021: 54).

Africanisation is also, paradoxically, considered to be a corrective measure against a prevailing coloniality which is the colonial legacy; while some scholars perceive it as reverse racism (Nordebo, 1995; Moulder, 1988; Horsthemke, 2008). Moreover, it is viewed as a contradiction to “modern” perspectives which relate to internationalisation, globalisation,

multiculturalism, interculturalism, and transculturalism within the university sphere (Horsthemke, 2008; Moulder, 1988). It is brusquely argued that

the first thing that should be noted about the idea of “Africanising” our universities is that it is an absurd idea. Nobody has ever contemplated the Anglicisation of Oxford and Cambridge, or the Americanisation of Harvard and Yale, and nobody will, because these ideas are absurd. (Moulder, 1988:2)

There are conceptual contestations that have far-reaching implications, in the sense that when concepts are disputed, their objectives may not be adequately attained.

From the above discussion, two competing conceptual paradigms of Africanisation have emerged. The first, which we will term “antagonistic scholarship”, dismisses Africanisation as a form of reverse racism, and label it as discriminatory and exclusionary (Dick, 2004; Horsthemke, 2008; Prinsloo, 2010). For these scholars, Africanisation is naïve and oblivious to the contemporary social-demographic composition of African society. The argument suggests that Africa is such a vast and highly diversified cultural milieu that it would be impossible to refer to anything as “purely African” (Dick, 2004). Be that as it may, this scholarship contends that university education, as an outcome of knowledge production, should not be labelled “African”, since it is European in nature (Horsthemke, 2008). Such a dismissal of Africanisation appears to propose that there is nothing distinct or specific about the African university. Thus, in reference to the theoretical guidance in this article, it can be deduced that the antagonistic perspective espouses a universal approach to knowledge. By contrast, the second conceptual paradigms held by, proponents of Africanisation argue that considering epistemic injustices, universities in Africa cannot afford to overlook the significance of the need to Africanise (Alemu, 2018; Etieyebo, 2021). Africanisation is valued on the basis that it centres on African reality and experiences within the domain of university education. The implication is that an Afrocentric university is primarily focused on researching and responding to local challenges and needs in Africa. Moreover, proponents of Africanisation implicitly contrast it with Eurocentrism.

Africanisation entails ‘a renewed focuses on Africa and reclamation of what had been taken away from Africa’ (Naidoo, 2016: 1). The retrieval perspective, as insinuated by Naidoo (2016) is, however, quite problematic, conceptually speaking, on at least four grounds: first, to retrieve a past that has no historical time frame is practically impossible. Additionally, the pursuit of an African past that is not well known is one of the reasons why Africanisation is difficult to implement in practice. Notably, a historical retracing does not guarantee that Africanisation will be able to retrieve and bring to bear relevant knowledge. Second, as noted in the introductory section, Africanisation endeavours to bring on board relevant knowledge for the specific challenges and needs facing Africa. Yet, the challenges which pre-colonial and colonial Africa encountered are vastly different from those facing contemporary Africa. Third, Africanisation is not a uniform experience: as there is no uniform historical, political, and economic context in Africa, a blanket approach may impede the realisation of an African

university. Fourthly, there is a danger because “pasting” Africa may render the pursuits for Africanisation to be a redundant and futile exercise. Nevertheless, whatever format Africanisation may take, it is indisputable that this process is a clarion call demanded by some students and academics in universities across the continent. There are several idealised reference points for Africanisation. Such referral ideas include the need for linguistic balance in medium of instruction, a “satisfactory” redress of past colonial and apartheid injustices at universities, a curriculum that reflects African realities; the countering of Western hegemony, a change in the social-demographic composition of students, lecturing and administrative staff, a change in the names of university buildings, and the prioritisation of African people’s aspirations.

Conclusively, as a critical synopsis, it is our considered view that the conceptual complexities which impinge Africanisation revolve around the polarised positioning between universal and local knowledge. The standpoint that universal knowledge is socially and historically neutral appears to be at the heart of contentions surrounding Africanisation (Hortshemke, 2008). Controversially, an impression is forcibly created that there is universal knowledge. According to this view, universal knowledge is supposedly transferred from Western countries to the non-Western world (including Africa) on the assumption being that good-quality knowledge will trickle down from Western to African universities and societies (Madsen & Adriansen, 2021). Consequently, this situation leads to the implicit monopolisation of the canon of what qualifies as “genuine” knowledge. Within the guise of coloniality, Western educational institutions are touted as the custodians of genuine knowledge, and this is seen in the university rankings. The university rankings, in which Western universities occupy top positions disregard the different historical, political, and economic context (Madikizela-Madiya, 2022). In response to the conceptual contestations outlined in this section, the subsequent two sections proffer humanity and rationality as philosophical guiding principles for Africanisation. Notably, the discussion of these philosophical guiding principles is guided by the competing notions of universal and local perspectives on humanity and rationality.

### **Africanisation as the restoration of humanity**

The seemingly dichotomous relationship between universal and local values underlines Africanisation as a philosophical guiding principle for the restoration of humanity. In this section, we argue that African humanity was (and continues to be) vandalised through epistemic injustice, which advances the view that the Euro-North American population is the custodian of the universal, canonised, and legitimised “values” associated with being human. We, therefore, agree with the observation that ‘humanity is about sense of self, so the goal of education is to help people become part of their respective social fabric’ (Assie-Lumumba 2016: 12). In so many ways, colonialism contradicts a universalistic conception of humanity, used through the Aristotelian distinction between essential and accidental qualities. For that reason, Africanisation works towards the restoration of humanity, through a university that takes seriously African perspectives, values, and norms. Our theoretical framework is that

humanity can be defined in terms of an attitude, morality, or a sentiment of goodwill towards our fellow humans. Additionally, humanity refers to the collective existence of all people (Coupland, 2003), and, to that end, a central point to make here, is that humanity is supposed to be at the centre of all educational endeavours.

In articulating this philosophical guiding principle, we note that if education is to be understood as the continued quest to uncover relevant truths and the search for an intellectual response to challenges, then it is logical that it be considered a definitive and distinctive feature of humanity. Coupland suggests that 'a fundamental premise of science is that knowledge gained should, in some way, advance human existence' (2003: 161). Conversely, the inability to access education is tantamount to degrading or denying someone's humanity. The humanity of the African people was violated through slavery and colonialism. To a significant extent, these brutal historical exercises were carried out and "justified" on the presumption that black Africans were somehow less human. As Ramose notes,

the experiences of inhumanity were also by every test both irrational and inhuman. There is no hierarchy in measuring the value of one human life over another. Africa's right to life continues to be denied, derecognized and remains practically unprotected by the beneficiaries of the irrationality, violence, and inhumanity of colonialism. (2003:12)

In postcolonial Africa, the process of Africanisation is premised on the realisation of a continued violation of Africans' humanity, albeit in a different form. Practices that are now termed as "epistemicide", "epistemic injustice". or "the peripheralisation of indigenous knowledge systems", are pointers to continuities of violence against the humanity of the African people (Ndofirepi & Gwaravanda, 2019). Africanisation as the restoration of humanity entails the recognition, legitimisation, and validation of Africa's rich epistemologies and knowledge traditions. On the understanding that human beings can research and disseminate knowledge, Africanisation implies the centering of humanity beyond phenotypical accidental attributes. In this context, an Africanised university gives due credence to African epistemologies, while concurrently appreciating Western or any other epistemological tradition. Perhaps it is for this reason that "pluriversity" as an emerging conceptualisation dovetails with the process of Africanisation (De Sousa Santos, 2014).

In view of Africanisation as involving the restoration of humanity, we make three points: first, the restoration of humanity should entail broadening access to university for black Africans, a previously disadvantaged student cohort (Gore, 2021). It should be recalled that in the colonial era, race as an accidental phenotypical appearance was a determining factor for which "human body" was allowed or denied enrollment at a university. Pointedly, the colonial establishment systemically made it difficult for African people to access tertiary education (Lephakga, 2015). Across Africa, the white minority had greater access to well-resourced and highly graded universities than black prospective students did. Cooper (2015) opines that participation rates, access to elite universities, and completion rates are still skewed to white



students, as higher education systemically struggles to undo the effects of historical, race-based privilege. In the case of South Africa, Moyo and Mann (2021) point out that sociodemographic factors such as historical-economic, gender and language have a determining effect on throughput to the extent that black Africans are less successful than their white student counterparts. It is, therefore, logical that Africanisation will facilitate the restoration of African humanity, by enhancing access for black Africans. Impediments such as prohibitive tuition and accommodation fees, and the dominance of Western languages such as French and English as mediums of instruction, are some of the issues that continue to deny Africans their humanity.

Second, Africanisation should compel universities to critically analyse the notion of access to university for black African students. At this juncture, we refer to an academic paper researched and initially published in South Africa, the objective of which was to explore the reasons behind the numerical paucity of black African students in Science and Technology-related academic disciplines (Steyn, et al., 2014; Nattrass, 2020). In an era in which there is more demand for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics than any other Controversially, this study revealed that non-white students in this country found academic pursuits in sciences to be challenging (Nattrass, 2020). In terms of representativity, there are more white than black students in these domains. In the same study, it was noted that

some departments such as Conservation Biology, Engineering and Metallurgy have struggled to attract and retain black students. Black students tend to prioritise job opportunities over interest in the subject, while the opposite is true among white students, most of who come from relatively privileged backgrounds. (Nattrass, 2020)

In some cases, students for whom English is a second language are regarded as “underprepared” learners because of limited proficiency in the language of teaching and learning (Moyo & Mann, 2021). Access<sup>1</sup>, in the scheme of Africanisation, pertains to both the quality and type of academic disciplines which universities in Africa offer. There is no denying that the pressure for access to university education is precipitated by the need to secure employment, upon graduation. It is an injustice to African humanity (Mashau, 2018) when universities, in the quest for financial gain, create irrelevant academic programmes, and confer academic credentials that result in unemployable graduates. Perhaps this point demonstrates that the Africanising of a university education can only be adequately attained if and when all other lower levels of education are Africanised, as well (Du Plessis, 2021; Fataar, 2018; Murray, 2016).

Third, Africanisation should not parochially focus on correcting the educational injustices perpetrated by colonialists. It is erroneous to confine the violation of African humanity solely to the colonial and apartheid eras, as this discredits noble transformative efforts aimed at achieving the decolonisation and transformation of higher education. White supremacists,

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<sup>1</sup> Access means the removal of systematic impediments to teaching and learning.

Western hegemony, coloniality, colonial hegemony and Eurocentrism are not the only negations of humanity, which Africanisation may remedy. Africanisation should be all-encompassing in attending to and correcting, both the past and contemporary dehumanising practices and tendencies perpetrated by African university administrations, and national political establishments. When university students are tear-gassed, harassed, beaten, and sometimes kidnapped or killed, for conducting peaceful protests in countries such as Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Cameroun, South Africa, Eswatini, and many others, then the actions of the authorities should rightly be regarded as dehumanising, and contrary to the Africanisation agenda. It is hypocritical of proponents of Africanisation to concentrate on the colonial dehumanising perpetrated by historical colonialism while ignoring oppressive, black-on-black violence in the contemporary era.

We conclude this section by attending to the idea of reverse racism: it supposes that an overemphasis on Africanisation inadvertently results in a change in racial and social structural arrangements. The assumed flaw in reverse racism is that Africanisation is simply a transference of dominance from the erstwhile colonial curricula and Western epistemologies to African versions thereof (Horsthemke, 2008; Mbembe, 2016). In other words, Africanisation has an inherent risk of reverse dominance in universities. In our view, a fallacy of Slippery Slope is committed, because it is an assumption that Africanisation is tantamount to the entrenchment of black African privilege. Africanisation is not the replacement of white colonial supremacy with black African supremacy. On the contrary, the central objective of Africanisation, from a humanitarian perspective, is to repair a “wounded humanity”, so that those people may claim their rightful place within and among all the peoples of the world. Africanisation is thus concerned with ensuring social justice in education. The restoration of African humanity does not, in any way, imply the negation, degradation or marginalisation of the humanity of non-Africans. Africanisation holds that different fundamentals exist for the production of varieties of knowledge. The multiplicities of sites of knowledge can interact without the assumption that some knowledge(s) is/are superior to others (Ramose, 2005). Ultimately, Africanisation critically confronts the human condition.

### **Africanisation as recognition of the rationality of the African people**

Rationality, as a philosophical guiding principle for Africanisation, is closely connected to humanity, as discussed in the foregoing section. Again, we deploy the interlinked relationship between universal and local knowledge as our theoretical framework, to discuss this benchmark. What, then, from a theoretical point of view, is rationality? This question is important because the arguments advanced in this section are drawn from diverse theories on rationality: from a Western perspective, Aristotle, Descartes, and Kant stand out as prominent philosophers who explored rationality (More, 1996). Aristotle expounded formal logic on the basis that ‘man is a rational animal’; for Descartes, the aphorism ‘I think, therefore I am’ implied that rationality is a fundamental property of each individual; while Kant asserted that moral, categorical imperatives can be attained through the application of rationality (Mhlambi, 2020).

From this perspective, rationality is a distinctive attribute of each individual. However, the decolonial perspective problematises the Western orientation in which emphasis is placed on individual rationality. From a decolonial perspective that upholds communitarianism, an individual is an indispensable member of the rational collective.

In contemporary times, rationality tends to encompass multiple perspectives to include choices, epistemologies, teleologies, or judgments. For instance, Shrimali (2018) opines that rationality is the discipline of subjecting one's choices – of actions as well as objectives, values, and priorities – to reasoned scrutiny. Reason involves the application of arguments and logic, and the ability to entertain doubts. Hence, rationality can be considered to be central in making critical decisions that make living to be worthwhile. The distinction between rationality and reason is that the former is a cultural characteristic, whereas reasoning is the logical practice that creates that culture. For Kelly (2003), the concept of rationality can be categorised as either epistemic or instrumental. The former entails an acceptance of propositions based on the evidence provided. In that case, the proffered evidence is so strong, that believing the contrary is both improbable and unsustainable. By contrast, the latter, instrumental rationality is displayed in the pursuit of a set goal or end. For Ventris (2003), rationality enables the evaluation of thoughts that inform practices. It assumes theoretical forms (such as the normative, historical, political, and social), and its meaning is deeply embedded in the broader historical forces shaping society. Thus, rationality is culturally conditioned because it reflects the evolution of society.

In the context of

the struggle for a reason – who is and who is not a rational animal – is the foundation of racism; the phenotypical appearances such as skin and eye colour, short hair etc. became the distinctive markers of rationality and irrationality to justify colonization and Christianization. (Ramose, 2003: 1188)

As Mhlambi (2020) pointedly notes, during the colonial era, the definition of rationality was constrained in ways meant to advance European and Euro-North American colonial conquest. This point is aptly captured by a notation that

The European tradition implies a commitment to reason. It is claimed, at all levels, if one holds a position, it is presupposed that one can give a *reason* for it. Put shortly, European culture is centred on reason and rationality, and along with that, an acceptance of the attitude that no other points are relevant for recognition of a position that its supporting reasons. (Nordebo, 1995: 42)

Part of the colonisation and slavery project involved confining rationality to the Western world. Put differently, rationality was localised, rather than being universally applied to humanity.

Since the colonial era, universities have become the epicentre of the civilising mission; the only way that guaranteed the civilising of Africans was to import the civilised knowledge of civilised European cultures. That is where the “logic” of Bantu Education comes from – the racial divisions between universities (in the case of South Africa) and segregated education systems across African countries, during apartheid and the colonial era. The “rationale” of doubting or questioning the rationality of African people, is aptly captured in the following affirmative argument:

If the colonised are by definition without reason, then it may be justified to turn them into slaves. But they must be seen as slaves of a particular kind, namely sub-human beings who because of lack of reason can have no will of their own and therefore, no fundamental freedom either. To teach them anything that human beings can understand and do by virtue of their rationality would be a contradiction in terms. It would be tantamount to redeeming them from the status of sub-human beings, to elevate them to parity with human beings. (Ramose, 2003: 1187)

From the above, it can be deduced that the main purpose of Africanisation, from a perspective of rationality, is to demystify the myth that some races are rationally superior to others. Segun (2014) notes that to deny Africanisation is to deny someone the right to think, and to question his/her rationality is to question his/her humanity and very existence. Bizarre claims have been made that colonialism “uplifted” and developed the African people through the application of rationality brought by Western epistemologies.

Universities in Africa are thus not rationally independent. For Mazrui, ‘the African university, like a multinational corporation, is not autonomous in Africa today, nor was it ever in the past. It relies on cultural exports from Europe and America’ (1975: 194). The recognition that the university curriculum, teaching and learning as well as institutional culture are dominated by Western epistemologies is testimony to the fact that the university in Africa does not think for itself – it copies and pastes the epistemological end products and patterns of expressions of rationality, following the dictates of the West. The West possesses the canonicity, legitimisation, and validation of what qualifies as rationality and/or irrationality. On these grounds, some of the experiences and realities of African people are dismissed as superstition, myth, and fairytale. Consequently, an African student studying at an African university is caught between the interpretations of reality expressed at the university, and what s/he encounters in his/her ordinary, daily circumstances outside the university’s “rational” framework.

Rationality is one of the most misappropriated concepts deployed during the colonial era (and still used in postcolonial Africa, thanks to the dominance of Western epistemologies at African universities). These hegemonic stereotypes deserve to be eliminated, through a process of Africanisation. We caution that failure to address a denial of rationality, for Africans, will continue to breed and sustain epistemic violence. Succinctly,

epistemic violence erases the history of the subaltern and also convinces them that they do not have anything to offer to the “modern” world; their only option is to blindly follow the “enlightened” colonisers, learn from them, adopt their worldviews and fit into the periphery of their world as second-class citizens. (Heleta, 2016:4)

From a perspective of rationality, Africanisation advances the notion that Africans need to define the meaning of experience and truth for themselves, in their own right, to construct an authentic and truly African discourse about Africa (Ramose, 2003). This statement implies that Western epistemologies construct an imported reality, but, ultimately, Africanisation will counter Western epistemic hegemony. Moreover, Africanisation should not be perceived as a process that is tended towards the total elimination of Western epistemologies in universities. Rather, Africanisation through restoration or reclamation of humanity and reassertion of rationality seeks to create a platform whereby all epistemologies are given due credence and recognition.

## **Conclusion**

This article outlined the importance of the Africanisation of universities in Africa based on the legitimization of rationality and acknowledgement of the humanity of African people. While there is some semblance of academic convergence on Africanisation, conceptual complexities abound. Conceptual complexities are occasioned by the absence of philosophical guiding principles for Africanisation. To circumvent these complexities, we have proffered notions of humanity and rationality as philosophical guiding principles for Africanisation. The process of Africanisation entails the epistemic restoration of a “wounded” African humanity, while rationality affirms the worldviews, perspectives, values, and ideas of all African peoples. In this respect, we have outlined that disruptive occurrences, such as slavery and colonisation, disfigured African humanity and dismissed rationality as exercised by African people. Consequently, these disruptive occurrences altered the conceptualisation of higher education in general and university in particular. While the Africanisation of universities is contextually determined, its urgency and significance are premised on the realisation that the university in Africa needs to re-align itself with the goals, worldviews, epistemologies, values, and norms of African people. Ultimately, Africanisation seeks to bestow social relevance to universities in Africa.

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