
Response to the UCT curriculum change framework

While the following two articles engage with the specifics of the UCT curriculum change efforts, similar trends are being observed at universities across South Africa and indeed globally. In this light, New Agenda feels it is important to provide space for engagement with these crucial questions in higher education, teaching and research.

Niall Reddy and Michael Nassen Smith are UCT alumni. Niall Reddy is a PhD Student in Sociology at New York University (NYU). Michael Nassen Smith is the Deputy Director of the Institute for African Alternatives (IFAA).



While #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall movements have ebbed, the desperately needed debate on university transformation which they ignited has continued to rage. Its latest flashpoint has been the December 2018 report of the Curriculum Change Working Group (CCWG), which was convened by the University of Cape Town (UCT) to advance the conversation on making the curricula more socially relevant.



INTRODUCTION

Our own time spent at the University of Cape Town, while not devoid of inspiring moments, left us with a strong sense that it had not kept pace with the kind of transformation required of it. Cape liberalism's hegemony seemed undisturbed while critical ideas and curricula were confined to the interstices, and far too little had been done to include black and poor South Africans. We therefore reacted with enormous enthusiasm to the emergence of a movement arraigned against institutional racism and calling for the 'decolonisation' of the campus.

We have, however, become increasingly disturbed at the particular vision of decolonisation that has taken hold among influential representatives of that movement. In

this view, decolonisation collapses quickly into civilizational binaries: conflict is viewed as originating in the inherent oppressiveness of ideas and subjectivities associated with 'Western modernity', while solutions turn on promoting ideologies that are authentically 'black' or 'African'.

The nativist impulses that run through this way of thinking have diverse roots, some tracing to local nationalist traditions, but ironically their main inspiration is an intellectual movement that formed part of the postmodern turn in Western universities, known as postcolonialism. Postcolonialism is a notoriously diffuse body of thought, but its central thread is the contention that Western discourses, chiefly those linked to the Enlightenment, serve functions of social control and hence cannot be used to either understand or liberate populations that have suffered imperial domination.

Postcolonialism began in comparative literature departments but has spread much further afield, becoming and remaining enormously influential in history and social science. Until recently its influence within South Africa has been marginal, but that looks set to change dramatically in the wake of the student protests. To some extent the student's affinity

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for postcolonialism is easy to account for. The theory makes the claim that hierarchies of race and gender are embedded into certain ideologies and bodies of knowledge as a result of their historical origins. Those ideologies continue to function as a major fulcrum of power – legitimating certain views and subjectivities and subtly excluding others.

Postcolonialism thus provides an apparently felicitous tool for understanding the informal and implicit – but nonetheless invidious – forms that racism often assumes at institutions like UCT. Moreover, by directing much of its energy at the symbolic instantiations of racism – as a postcolonial approach would advise – the student movement has become a *cause celebre* for postcolonial researchers abroad and at home.

Yet like *some* strands of identity politics, postcolonialism tends to disconnect symbolic and discursive concerns from material realities. This may account for why its diffusion, while widespread, has also been highly uneven – concentrated much more in elite universities. To the extent it has gained traction on poorer campuses it seems to have done so by co-mingling more heavily with vernacular ideologies like Black Consciousness and Pan Africanism. But since elite universities have tended to dominate in the coverage

and outward representation of student politics – a source of much internal strife – postcolonialism has become disproportionately influential on the way decolonisation is being articulated in spaces of power.

Arguably the subordination of the politics of decolonisation to the academic agenda of postcolonialism reaches a new extreme in the CCWG report. The working group was given fairly broad terms of reference – to document and take forward existing processes of curriculum change, to provide an ‘enabling’ environment for debate and ultimately to offer a framework to guide ongoing transformation. Official commissions of this kind tend to douse themselves in legalese and to offer findings which, however substantively political, make heavy overtures to objectivity and inclusiveness for all ‘stakeholders’.

One can’t help but admire the chutzpah with which the CCWG have absolved themselves of those dreary conventions. Their report is nothing short of a full-blooded manifesto for postcolonialism and its particular brand of decolonisation.

Its first half is mainly devoted to an abstruse theorisation of the historical significance of the student movement and the nature of power at the university, drawing on a set of metaphysical categories like the ‘coloniality of being’ and the ‘coloniality of power’. This is laid out through a series of lengthy excursions into the theories of postcolonial luminaries like Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha. The finer points of this discussion are admittedly hard to appreciate since they are encased within a nearly inscrutable philosophical jargon, but the broad thrust seems familiar enough from postcolonialism’s standard repertoire: UCT is viewed as an institution moulded by the ‘epistemic structures of Empire’, which valorise ‘Western’ modes of thinking while ‘marginalising’ and

‘erasing’ both the subjects and forms of knowledge perceived to be outside its own canon.

Most of the rest of the report describes the work of the CCWG during its 18-month tenure, which mostly consisted of hosting a set of decolonial fora and seminars by prominent postcolonial academics. It concludes with various recommendations which are really a series of broad injunctions to be more mindful of the power relations embedded in knowledge production at the university.

Needless to say this approach has proved controversial. The report has been met with a fusillade of angry responses, mostly from liberals and conservatives who have intoned against its unregenerate relativism and crude ‘race-thinking’. Regrettably, critiques that begin from a position of support for progressive transformation at UCT have been much less audible, leaving postcolonialism to fill a growing vacuum on the Left of the political space on campuses. We hope here to correct this.

Since the CCWG report is so forthright about its own ideological commitments, it provides a welcome opportunity to evaluate the role of postcolonial theory in the broader movement for decolonisation, particularly its more radical wing. We will argue that its current influence is undeserved – postcolonialism offers neither a realistic means of getting to decolonisation nor an appealing vision of what it entails.

The considerable following it has already amassed owes in part to its having successfully posed as the heir of a radical tradition that runs through Biko to anti-colonial leaders like Fanon, Cabral and Du Bois before them. Our first aim is to show that this is largely a fiction: postcolonialism’s real point of origin is firmly ‘Western’. We make this point not simply to highlight the irony of postcolonialism’s own fetish for authenticity, but because ►►

we think its real biography is rather instructive. Postmodernism, of which postcolonialism is a close offshoot, took root in a period of unremitting defeat and demoralisation of the Left, but its own effect was to entrench rather than alleviate that defeat. It acted either to belittle the struggle for radical social change entirely, or to shunt it into fruitless, mostly academic, avenues.

There is every reason to believe that postcolonialism's effect in South Africa will be similar, certainly if the CCWG report is a reliable bellwether. We will try to show that the CCWG succumbs to a narrow academic tribalism neglecting the practical support it could have offered to the movement for curriculum change in the name of advancing a misguided theory, which serves only to mystify the real causes of institutional racism and material inequalities on campuses and in the wider society.

POSTMODERNISM'S FOREIGN AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT

Postcolonialism originated as part of the 'cultural turn' in social theory, which began in Western universities in the 1970s. The essence of this was not simply a flowering of interest in issues of *discourse*, *ideology* and *culture* but a full-blown swing towards these themes in a way that displaced the categories and concerns that had traditionally grounded radical scholarship: chiefly *class* and *capitalism*. This movement had various roots (see Hull discussing its Heideggerian origins on pp. 29-33), but its most significant immediate precursor was the French structuralist school of the 1950s.

Structuralism contended that individuals were mediated from reality by rigid self-referential systems of meaning. It became an early vehicle of culturalist encroachment by promoting the expanded use of linguistics and language-metaphors in the analysis of an ever-broadening array of social institutions. Structuralism gained a beachhead in Marxism through Louis

Althusser, who argued somewhat analogously that capitalism obscured its own reality by enmeshing its subjects in ideological systems produced by public and civil institutions – so-called “ideological state apparatuses”.

However, the truly untrammelled plunge into the realms of discourse occurred only after structuralism had morphed into poststructuralism. Structuralists had thought of mediating systems as comprised of relatively fixed elements and quasi-universal properties. Poststructuralists fundamentally doubted this, arguing them to be fluctuating and unstable and hence subject to the vicissitudes of history. At the same time, they also divested themselves of any lingering concerns that discursive systems may rest on or be strongly conditioned by extra-discursive institutions of any kind, whether state apparatuses or relations of production.

These new departures provided a fertile canvass for Michel Foucault's efforts to re-think the nature of power free from the shibboleths of the Old Left. Rather than emanating from the material capacities of states or classes, Foucault came to see power as operating through the medium of knowledge and as diffused throughout society.

Here we have, in the broadest of strokes, the core sociology of postmodernity – a world in which the human subject has no reach outside of the free-floating, power-laden discursive circuits in which she is embroiled. Derrida's pithy quip, “there is nothing outside the text”, is the most oft-quoted summation of this view. It's easy to see how it sustains well-known motifs of the broader postmodern movement: incredulity towards 'grand narratives', distrust of totalising systems, fetish for difference and relativism. While many today may be less willing to go all the way with Derrida, the enduring impact of the cultural turn is the idea – pervasive if not hegemonic across social science in the West – that no social

structure, no matter how apparently material, can be analysed independently of the cognitive frames and alignments of meaning and value adopted by its participating agents.

Anyone with even passing familiarity of recent campus debates should instantly recognise the extent to which postcolonial theories exist as a mere subgenre of these – eminently Western – intellectual fashions. In fact postcolonialism is really best understood simply as the application of the core apparatus of postmodernism to a specific socio-geographical setting or, in Terry Eagleton's more acerbic words, as “little more than [it's] foreign affairs department.”

Its start is generally dated to Edward Said's *Orientalism*, a professedly Foucauldian investigation of the role of essentialising tropes in the history of Western imperialism¹. The Saidian stream was subsequently enlarged by other tributaries, including the Subalterns' Studies group of figures like Partha Chatterjee and Gayatri Spivak. Subalterns were influenced by Marxist social history but gave it an avowedly postmodern twist – asserting that the cognitive frames and political strivings of the Eastern masses were unintelligible in the terms of Western sociological categories. Moreover, any attempt to apply Western conceptual tools to the former colonial world, would be to partake in cultural and intellectual imperialism. Radical scholarship thus turned on reclaiming subaltern 'epistemologies' from the South.

All of this is to say that if postcolonialism is to become a new governing ideology for South African higher education, as the CCWG seems to wish, it cannot claim that position by virtue of being any more indigenous than the supposedly colonial ideas it assails. For us its Western origins are not problematic as such, since we don't subscribe to the notion that the provenance of an idea governs its politics – but within the field itself, where that notion is axiomatic, it is

obviously a sticky subject.

Perhaps this is why postcolonialism tends to narrate its own lineage rather differently. Foucault and Derrida tend to fade out of official histories while centre stage is given to a clutch of leading scholar-activists of the anti-colonial movement, such as CLR James, Amílcar Cabral, Walter Rodney and Franz Fanon. The Latin American decolonial school – a subcategory of postcolonialism and an important touchstone for the CCWG – is particularly assertive in claiming this heritage while downplaying connections to French critical theory.² Substantively, however, there seems little to distinguish it.

HORSESHOE EFFECTS IN POSTCOLONIAL THOUGHT

The appropriation of these anti-colonial leaders is especially unsettling because postcolonialism has played such a significant role in dislodging from the academy the actual politics and intellectual traditions for which those leaders stood. Postmodernists saw Marxism – to which all of these anti-colonial leaders subscribed in varying degrees – as just another hoary “totalizing narrative,” full of Enlightenment pretension. Their postcolonial siblings accused it of worse – not only of having ineffectively resisted colonialism but of having been secretly *complicit* with it, a view parroted by the CCWG document.³

The origins of this view trace back to Edward Said who used Marx’s early writings on India as evidence of the ability of Orientalism to envelop even nominally anti-colonial thinkers.⁴ Said’s followers have doubled down, broadening the attack to include the universalist and modernising forms of nationalism that animated most anti-colonial movements. In a key text of the Subaltern school, Chatterjee indicted India’s early nationalist rulers not only for having failed to break out of the economic orbit of their former colonial power but for having

guaranteed that failure by not rupturing with its discursive orbit.⁵ Chakrabarty’s *Provincialising Europe* further emphasises that Marxist categories are applicable only to the European context, and flounder when approaching the experience of the former colonial world.⁶

This turn against the traditional ideologies of the Left is a natural outgrowth of the culturalist reinterpretation of colonialism, which was also originated, somewhat – unwittingly – by Said. Said’s *Orientalism* opened with an analysis that unveiled, with new scale and systematicity, the essentialising tropes in Western texts, but nonetheless located them within a conventional sociology – showing how ideas of the Other arose to rationalise and legitimate acts of conquest. However, at some point in the book, as an early critic put it, “the stylist and polemicist ... runs away with [the] systematic thinker” and an altogether different, and at that time novel, theory emerged.⁷ Said appears to claim that Orientalism worked not simply to *justify* the interests behind colonialism but to *incite* them in the first place.

Even as he began to inflate its causal significance, Said started to stretch the historical coordinates of Orientalism, finding its signature not simply in the modern era of imperialism, but along the whole length of the Western canon reaching all the way back to Homer. For the authors of the CCWG, incidentally, Descartes is seen as the main progenitor of civilizational chauvinism in the ‘Western mind’. They inform us that *cogito ergo sum* (“I think therefore I am”) is actually best translated as “I conquered, therefore, I am” (see Hull on p.29 for the problems with this interpretation of Descartes’s thesis).

The trouble with all of this, as Al Azm pointed out, is that Said ended up with theory that bore all the hallmarks of an Orientalist distortion in the way he himself had defined it. Colonialism had been detached from its materialist predicates, lifted out of the nexus of

classes, states and interest groups and presented as the consequence of a certain ‘bent of mind’ which had been beguiling Western civilization, unerringly, since its earliest origins.

The critique incensed and clearly unsettled Said though it never really registered on the field he spawned.⁸ His followers have taken this line of thinking to its logical conclusion, effectively re-Orientalising the Global South in negative terms – depicting it as a zone in which so-called ‘Western’ categories like Reason – have no purchase, and where ‘Western’ values like liberal rights – have no appeal. Although this Othering is given a more positive inflection, in substance, as Vivek Chibber notes, it simply mimics what colonial authorities themselves came to argue, after self-defined ‘civilising missions’ turned out to be too burdensome and a rationale was needed for abandoning all pretence of spreading democracy or modernity.⁹ Postcolonial theory in its more extreme expressions thus succumbs to a horseshoe effect, ending up not far from the ideologies it seeks to reject.¹⁰

Crude essentialism has featured recurrently in the student protests (see for example #ScienceMustFall) and clearly underlies much of thinking in the CCWG. Post-structuralist jargon has lent it an air of the avant-garde, but in reality, there is nothing subversive and certainly nothing new about it. As Fred Halliday noted in a commentary on the *Orientalism* debate, the recourse to essentialising mythology was hardly a peculiar feature of colonising powers.¹¹ It had been a “prerogative of the dominated as much as the dominant” for as long as history could recall. This fact is also the best evidence for why Said and fellow culturalist interpreters of imperialism must simply be wrong. If the tendency to ‘Other’ were really a sufficient determinant of the tendency to conquer, there would be no way to explain why colonialism turned out to be such a markedly Western enterprise.¹² ►

The reality is that no credible theory or body of evidence has ever been supplied for the claim that the history of Western conquest can be put down to an ideology or 'bent of mind'.

THE POLITICS OF POSTCOLONIALISM

The path blazed by postmodernism through the Western academy was not a mark of the strength of its ideas. Rather, it is better understood as the outgrowth of a specific political conjuncture – defined by a catastrophic defeat of the labour movement and the Left which dramatically narrowed the horizon for radical social transformation. Postmodernism proved useful in inuring intellectuals to this defeat – allowing them to believe either that the idea of social progress had been delusory to begin with, or that it could yet be achieved in the absence of movements by challenging power at its discursive roots.¹³ To its meagre credit, postcolonialism opted broadly for the second of these routes – its theorists generally aspire to inform a radical political agenda even if their ideas have never connected with a movement capable of carrying it out. In Eagleton's terms it is "a post-revolutionary discourse for a post-revolutionary world."¹⁴

South Africa and much of the rest of the continent for that matter¹⁵ never participated in the earlier stages of the cultural turn because its own political temporality was so different. Mass movements in that country were gearing up for a final battle with Apartheid at the same time that others were being ground down in neoliberalism's Northern advance. The situation today is different: two and a half decades of disappointing Tripartite Alliance rule have discredited traditional Left ideologies among younger South Africans, while the abiding absence of a mass-based opposition has stymied the emergence of a critical intellectual layer. Those of the anti-Apartheid generation

who successfully resisted lucrative posts in government and the private sector are on the way out of the academy, having left few heirs or apprentices. Meanwhile the same corporatisation of higher education which elsewhere produced a "systematic alienation of the intellect" has been well underway for decades.¹⁶

Long¹⁷ writing in this journal, has already noted how the early seeds of the cultural turn are taking radical politics at UCT in strange and unhelpful directions. Perhaps a better foretaste of what is to come is given by the CCWG report itself – which is especially useful to examine since it provides an instance both of the theory of postcolonialism and of its politics.

The overarching objective of the analytical component of the report seems to be to locate events at UCT within the broad thematic of postcolonialism – showing how Enlightenment discourses work to reproduce colonial-derived hierarchies in the knowledge system. Since the CCWG's mandate was to produce practical guidelines for curriculum reform one might have expected that this analysis would have a strongly local focus – centring on the *specific* institutions, norms, discursive practices in operation at UCT which guarantee its placement in the wider field of postcolonial knowledge production. But this isn't the approach taken. The report opens with a sweeping vista of the world-historical context of the student protests, drawn almost entirely from work of the decolonial scholar Maldonado-Torres, and it never really climbs down from this level of abstraction. In a strongly Foucauldian spirit, it sees the oppressive imprint of Cartesian ideology at work everywhere, penetrating all social relationships and defining all hierarchies at the university. But there is never any real discussion of the actual mechanisms through which these power structures operate. Power is treated as a prerogative of the

discourses themselves.

The closest the report gets to locating anything concrete underpinning the colonial episteme is through a discussion of 'disciplinarity' – undoubtedly a crucial aspect of the way knowledge production is regulated. But here again the analysis veers almost immediately into a purely philosophical register, before the real-world foundations of disciplinarity can be identified. Consequently, there is no reference made to publishing rules or career structures or any of the other institutions that enshrine disciplinary boundaries. Instead, disciplinarity is seen as arising simply from the impregnation of everything at the 'Westernized Academy' by the ideology of the Enlightenment. On the whole, the report evinces a curious inattentiveness to the particularities of UCT in the name of repeated sweeping generalisations about 'coloniality': an odd outcome for a theoretical approach supposedly founded on hostility to grand narratives.

The consequence of this is that most of the contextual details which would seem necessary for any commission to arrive at practical recommendations for curriculum change are entirely elided. There is no description anywhere in the report of the relevant institutional structures, no account of how curricula decisions are made or what systems govern who gets to make those decisions. Indeed, shockingly, there's no description of an existing curricula in the report, nor any attempt to flesh out what form a decolonised curricula may take. Considerable space is devoted to explicating the finer points of Homi Bhabha's ruminations on "liminal third spaces," but the substantial local scholarship on university reform in the post-Apartheid era¹⁸ is not graced with a single citation. In fact despite its ceaseless declamations against foreign influence on South Africa's education system, the report manages to rely overwhelmingly on

US-based postcolonial scholars while consistently overlooking far more relevant local research.

However wayward the above may appear, it is important to recognise that it is ultimately entirely consistent with what a postcolonial approach would dictate. The main thing the report seems to want to establish is that the problems at UCT need to be apprehended in terms of ‘ontologies’ and ‘epistemologies’, ‘the fundamentals of knowledge production’.¹⁹ What is meant by this is never really spelled out, but one can infer that the intention is precisely to deny that the origins of racism and systematic exclusion can be located at the level of institutions, policies or political and economic relationships. Insofar as such things feature – as in the reports on site visits to various departments – they do so merely as secondary manifestations of the transhistorical metaphysics of ‘coloniality’. More often they simply wash out entirely, much as classes, corporations and state apparatuses did in Said’s initial idealised rendering of colonialism.

This may seem in some ways dismissive, but a more robust engagement with the substance of the report is not really possible since it doesn’t proffer arguments or evidence in any conventional sense – procedures which are presumably too tainted by Cartesianism. It’s theories are thus hard to falsify, but there’s also no particular reason to believe them, certainly when they seem so disconnected from the everyday realities of the university. Reading the report, one is left to seriously question whether the authors actually *intended* to try and convince anyone. Certainly, if their use of language is any indication, they don’t seem to have cared much for being understood. The obscurantist and frankly elitist jargon of the report is another inconvenient reminder that postcolonialism still belongs more to the world of Derrida than of Rodney or Cabral.

The obvious consequence of this is that, despite the fact that the CCWG recognises its own position as political, it is unable to offer much that is useful for activists of curriculum reform. It doesn’t simply fail to broaden the appeal of the cause but doesn’t even attempt to do so, nor does it provide any of the practical information that may have helped in framing demands and setting agendas. Most seriously, it has effectively squandered the institutional opening won by the student movement by putting on the table a set of quixotic, toothless recommendations which, even should they be adopted by the Senate, have little hope of making a substantial dent in institutional racism or ideological bias. The list of these recommendations (“read with conscious intent”, “leadership with integrity”, “authentic engagement”) reads more like the chapters of a self-help book than the demands of a militant movement.

Of course, no one was expecting the CCWG to emerge with a full blueprint for curriculum reform, but at the minimum it could have framed its proposals around existing concrete demands that are widely supported – like broadening the space for African languages. Where tangible policies were less easy to specify, the report could have ensured that its recommendations were tied to some commitment of resources or institutional space on UCT’s behalf. Instead, the CCWG has effectively handed administrators a free pass, allowing them to escape with purely verbal commitments to stop spreading ‘colonial lies’ backed up by minimal actual institutional shift.

It is apparent that decolonisation means different things to different people but at a baseline it seems to denote a shift towards research and teaching that is relevant to local concerns, rooted in local knowledge producers and transgressive of the usual elitism of the university. In all of these respects the CCWG provides a poor model of decolonised intellectual

practice. Perhaps more worrying is that its approach seems feted for a politics that is thoroughly defeatist. By seeing coloniality and racism as ‘ontologically’ inscribed in the primordial matrices of South African society – rather than in concrete institutions, interests and social relationships – it ultimately fails to muster any vaguely practical vision of transformation.

DECOLONISATION FOR WHOM?

These acute limitations are directly a result of the postcolonial sociology that informs the document. The idealised, Manichean conception of power on which it rests is simply inadequate for grasping the realities of a modern capitalist society. It results not only in a mystification of the nature of social relations within the university but also in a complete inability to locate the university within a wider social field in particular to understand how it is shaped by market logics and political forces. Neoliberalism thus receives passing mention in the document but does not seriously reflect in its analysis, despite the seismic effect it has had on higher education.

Creeping marketisation of South African universities has led to a thoroughgoing commodification of education that has seen overwhelming emphasis placed on knowledge and graduate production in line with the interests of corporations. Institutional restructuring has followed in the wake of these new imperatives, leading to an inflation of administrative power and increasing application of ‘efficiency’ and performance criteria. Progressive intellectual life is strangled in this environment. Academics and graduate students are forced to compete with one another, closing off the space where collaborative and interdisciplinary scholarship may have once taken place. Returns to higher education have meanwhile grown rapidly since the democratic transition and constitute one of the structural >>

causes of rising inequality.²⁰

If decolonisation means freeing knowledge production from forces that constrain and disarm it, then any adequate conception will have to account for these dynamics. A genuinely radical conception of decolonisation would not simply factor in capitalism but actively critique it – and in the process try to imagine a higher education system that serves something more than simply elite reproduction. The most disappointing thing about postcolonialism’s monopolisation of the debate on university reform is that it seems to have so thoroughly impoverished the *positive* notion of what decolonisation ought to entail. Indeed, it is not clear that there is any positive view on offer in the CCWG report – the task of constructing one is made virtually impossible because the bounds of what is (erroneously) seen as colonial ideology are stretched so far – leaving nothing out of which to constitute an alternative. Exactly what ‘epistemology’ or mode of logic we should revert to once Reason and the Enlightenment have been routed has never been explained.

Hence the programme of decolonisation that postcolonialists fall back on typically amounts to no more than promoting ‘marginalised subjectivities’. As best this consigns decolonisation to simply fall in line with a ‘left neoliberalism,’ becoming a diversity exercise concerned with the appropriate distribution of the benefits of inequality. The celebration of ‘black’ or African ‘excellence’ at the university is an appropriate slogan for this politics. At worst, it means that decolonisation will buttress the agenda of an increasingly assertive nationalism driven by disgruntled sections of the black economic and political elite. In an interesting reflection on earlier decolonisation efforts elsewhere on the continent, Southall raises a cautionary tale about making allies out of such groups.²¹ However willing to inveigh

against Western influence on their universities, the support extended by post-colonial governments to a critical education system has typically reached a sudden limit once that education system threatens to challenge domestic structures of power.

Using affirmative action policies to actively address centuries of racial oppression in our academic system will be crucial to any serious reform of higher education. But if decolonisation is to genuinely serve the cause of just and equitable social order, this cannot be its horizon.²²

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

An alternative curriculum change framework should be drawn up – one that would retain the militancy of the CCWG document while not being beholden to the theoretical views propounded by its authors. Doing so should be a priority of progressive students, alumni and academics at UCT.

The enthusiasm for change that sparked #FeesMustFall and the student movement at UCT has not completely dissipated. Yet many progressive students and academics who supported institutional reform and free education when the protests began in 2015 have seen their voice effectively drowned out by the monopolisation of postcolonialism in fora on curriculum change. A reform agenda that remains beholden to it will only serve to condemn South Africa to repeat the same intellectual trends that have played out in the West over the last several decades, without making our universities any more relevant to challenges confronting our post-apartheid reality. The fight for decolonisation needs urgently to be seen in different terms.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Edward Said. *Orientalism*. (London: Pantheon Books, 1978)
- 2 Walter D. Mignolo, ‘Delinking’, *Cultural Studies*, (2007) 21:2, p. 452.
- 3 Curriculum Change Working Group (CCWG). *UCT Curriculum Change Framework*. (2018). Available at

<http://www.news.uct.ac.za/images/userfiles/downloads/reports/ccwg/UCT-Curriculum-Change-Framework.pdf> Accessed on 29 April 2019. See p. 20.

- 4 For a response to Said’s argument see: Pranav Javi, ‘Karl Marx, Eurocentricism and the 1857 Revolt in British India in Crystal Bartolovich and Neil Lazarus eds., *Marxism, modernity and postcolonial studies*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)
- 5 Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*. (London: Zed Books, 1986)
- 6 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000)
- 7 Sadik Jalal Al-Azm, ‘Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse.’ *Khamsin* 8, no. 1981 (1981): 5–26.
- 8 See his letter to Al-Azm (available at <https://pastandfuturepresents.blogspot.com/2016/12/edward-saidsadik-al-azm-1980.html>). The full response he promised was never forthcoming.
- 9 Vivek Chibber, ‘Eurocentricism, the academy and social emancipation.’ *Public lecture at the University of Cape Town* (2017). Available at https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=chibber+uct
- 10 Vivek Chibber, *Postcolonial theory and the specter of capital*. (London and New York: Verso Books, 2013). pp.288-290.
- 11 Fred Halliday. ‘“Orientalism” and Its Critics.’ *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 20, no. 2 (1993): 145–163.
- 12 Vivek Chibber. *The Dual Legacy of Orientalism*. In Abu-Manneh, B (ed). *After Said: Postcolonial Literary Studies in the Twentieth Century*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2019) pp.37-52 Amin, Samir, *Eurocentrism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1988), pp.101-103.
- 13 Aijaz Ahmed, ‘Postcolonial theory and the post-Condition’ in Leo Panich (ed), *The Socialist Register 1997*. (London: Merlin Press, 1997), pp 353-381.
- 14 Terry Eagleton. *Why Marx was right*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011)
- 15 See Sara Marzagora, ‘The humanism of reconstruction: African intellectuals, decolonial critical theory and the opposition to the “posts” (postmodernism, poststructuralism, postcolonialism)’, *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 28:2, (2016), pp. 161-178.
- 16 Andrew Nash, ‘Excellence in Higher Education: Is there really no alternative?’ in McKenna, S. ed., *Aims of Higher Education Kagisano no. 9* (Pretoria: Council on Higher Education, 2013) pp. 42-62.
- 17 Wahbie Long, ‘Decolonising higher education: postcolonial theory and the invisible hand of student politics,’ *New Agenda: South African Journal of Social and Economic Policy*, 2018 (69), pp.20-25.
- 18 See for example: McKenna, S (ed). *Aims of Higher Education*.
- 19 CCWG, *UCT Curriculum Change Framework*, p. 54
- 20 Neva Makgetla, ‘The systematic underpinnings of inequality in South Africa’ in Michael Nassen Smith, (ed). *Confronting Inequality: The South African Crisis*. (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2019)
- 21 Roger Southall, ‘The Decolonisation of the Political Science Curriculum in East Africa: A Reply to Mngomezulu and Sakhile Hadebe.’ *Politikon*, May 7, 2019, 1–12, available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/02589346.2019.1612638>.
- 22 Long, ‘Decolonising higher education’ 