Developing Teaching & Learning in Africa

Decolonising Perspectives

EDITOR
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Chapter Five

The Dislocated Rural Student: Calls for Decolonisation

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Introduction

It is true that students initiated the recent call for decolonisation of education particularly in South Africa (Prinsloo, 2016; Le Grange, 2016). However, in the academic circles, the voices of students seem to have been muted and the debates and the project of decolonisation usurped by academics with a legitimisation claim because such a project is an intellectual exercise that can be best handled by scholars, especially those in the humanities (Prinsloo, 2016). Unfortunately, this usurpation means that the initial call for decolonisation remains misunderstood, misdirected and is running a risk of being killed unaddressed. Part of this chapter is to problematise this usurpation.

Furthermore, this chapter interrogates the multiplicity of academically colonised subjects. It does so by profiling a typical student in a 'rural' university and shows how the university dubbed 'rural' dislocates such a student by way of appealing to universal discourses of academia. Although the notion of a rural university appears straightforward when viewed from geographical location, there are nuances that disturb such a label. Nonetheless, it remains that geographical location all by itself cannot absolutely measure the state of rurality of a university; students on the contrary, even though they may not absolutely take the label of rural, have among them those whose lineages and rootedness are absolutely rural. These lineages can be linguistically and rhetorically explained. The profiling is therefore achieved through the analysis of a student's transactional letter written to the researcher in an indigenous language.

The analysis underscores the space occupied by a typical rural student by (re) constructing the context surrounding the student and the community that embodies the student. The chapter argues that it is critical for the university to understand this space and the context community in order to avoid dislocation. This dislocation results from the construction of rurality, which seems to satiate marketing imperatives called for by commodification of education.

Sufficed to mention that the global drive towards urbanisation marginalises the rural. In fact, the paradox is that whilst there is acknowledgement of rurality, the underlying project is to urbanise the rural. Ruralisation is not only viewed as backward but is taken as an unworthy course in which investment is seen as wasted. In this way, students with rural lineages are doubly colonised as their discourses are bastardised in favour of urban ones. This explains why there has never been a project of ruralisation despite the fact that scores of communities particularly in the South African landscape remain rural.

In fact, dominant Western thought continues to view Africa as an expanse of rural landscape whose preservation is for the gaze of the civilised tourist. Therefore, the reconstruction of rurality is hardly for the betterment and humanisation of rural residents than a tourist attraction move meant to commoditise the people and their lived experiences. It is the argument of this chapter, therefore, that decolonisation is essential for students in institutions, especially those located in rural communities.

Students' Call for Decolonisation

The #RhodesMustFall campaign in 2015 at the University of Cape Town will go down in history as an impetus for subsequent demonstrations such as #FeesMustFall which did not only draw national and international attention but was equally revolutionary. These campaigns a success given the fact that the Rhodes statue did fall and fees did fall for a certain category of students. The students who were at the forefront of these campaigns iterated that these were just part of the bigger project of decolonising education in the context of South African higher education. What did students mean by the project of decolonisation?

To answer this question, we need to consider the *modus operandi* in the successful campaigns mentioned above. In the first instance, the envisaged outcome was the removal of Cecil Rhodes statue. To demonstrate the vulgarity imposed by the statue, protesting students defiled it by smearing it with human excrement. Human

excrement represented the highest form of repudiation. When humans defecate, the universal practice is to cover the excrement from both the owner's and the public eye. The message was well registered and the statue came down but not without muffled protests from those who had legitimised its perpetual existence on historical grounds. Mbembe (2015) is on point in asserting that the question should have never been on whether the statue should be removed or not but on why it took so long. Why indeed? Why were the academics blind to it? Did they not read the same message that was so loud and clear to the students? Perhaps the answer lies in the intellectualisation of the obvious so much as to mask the depravity entailed.

Similarly, the calls for free quality education did not go unheeded. The universities, especially those that benefited a particular class of students, argued strongly that this was marking the demise of university education hitherto known. At the heart of #FeesMustFall campaign is the question of access. Previously, it was easy to bar entrance on the grounds of colour; but when the system that legitimated such exclusion fell, fees became the new exclusionary mechanism. Very few students from black communities could afford the exorbitant fees charged by the former white universities. The historically black universities (HBUs) had, at the same time, never been able to catch up with their counterparts in terms of resources and facilities; they were instead retrogressing as numbers swelled whilst facilities shrank. Given these realities, the legitimate course of action for students was to call for the slashing of fees. As mentioned, students explained these campaigns as preliminaries for a larger decolonisation of universities project (Le Grange, 2016).

Although calls for and debates on decolonisation are not new, the pragmatism displayed by students in these campaigns is revolutionary. Their actions are reminiscent of the change of many regimes when many African states gained independence. These campaigns had casualties just as Fanon (1963) contends that decolonisation is chaotic, brutal and unsettling. In decolonisation, there is replacement of the settler, re-establishment of the marginalised and re-ordering. In practice, these are very difficult actions. Cecil John Rhodes' statue, for example, had stood as a constant source of pride to the beneficiaries of his legacy; it was taken for granted that this statue had a unitary text, which could only be read in one way – the philanthropic way. That there were casualties of his legacy was never thought to exist, yet the whole population of black South Africans was constantly reminded of shame and humiliation posed by the statue (Mbembe, 2016). The only way to reverse the aspirations of Cecil Rhodes' colonial escapade was to remove the representation of his vision. No amount of argument or debate could

have swiftly accomplished what their actions did. Their actions triggered a series of debates around the decolonisation of universities, but these so far remain only as debates and the reason for that should be obvious.

The petition that led to the removal of the Rhodes statue at the University of Cape Town read: "We demand that the statue of Cecil John Rhodes be removed from the campus of the University of Cape Town, as the first step towards the decolonisation of the university as a whole" (Mamdani, 2016:68). The removal of the statue was a physical act, but decolonisation would demand something more than a physical act. The students must have read the silent text represented by the statue (even though academics were silent on the same text). The text spoke of an underlying tradition that the university embodied which academics perpetuated. The calls for decolonisation by students were not an easy bone to chew. Andreotti, Stein, Ahenakew and Hunt (2015:25) argue about the "recognition of ontological hegemony and metaphysical entrapment" that maps the university into a state of beyond reform. What they mean is that there is no escaping the university system, which is anyway heading for a crash. This would partly explain why the removal of a statue only called for a council vote, whilst decolonisation generated debates among academics as to what it really means.

Fanon's critique of decolonisation as captured by Mbembe (2016) stemmed from the adulteration of the masses by the African middle class that had bought into the colonial system and sought to perpetuate its hegemony to the annihilation of fellow Africans. In other words, this kind of decolonisation was based on the new form of colonialism where the new masters had perfected the system of exploitation, as it seemed to have worked for the old masters. Wa Thiongo, on the other hand (Mbembe, 2016), envisaged the centering of Africans and their languages as viable instruments of intellectual pursuit which had been bastardised by the Western system of thought.

Tuck and Yang (2012) convincingly argue that, perhaps, the biggest challenge or hindrance to decolonisation lies in its metaphorisation. Decolonisation is as brutal, unsettling and revolutionary as colonisation. If countries, ideologies, cosmologies, ontologies and epistemologies were violently disrupted by the act of colonisation, it should be naturally expected that the reversal (decolonisation) would bear similar repercussions. It is this fact that prevents decolonisation because the beneficiaries of colonisation would not think of parting with their benefits of power, privilege, lands, etc. The easiest way out is metaphorisation which ensures that the status quo is maintained; and the colonised must perpetually

fight their way up in order to catch up with the privileged and canonised people who have never been at the receiving end of colonisation and therefore have settled on the normalcy of their privileged position. Therefore, the rhetoric of the decolonisation of education exemplifies this metaphorisation as the onus is placed on the colonised to participate in dismantling the shackles of colonisation through colonial instruments. These colonial instruments include continual citations of say pedagogies that do not begin with a description of colonisation so that the reverse would be made possible. The reverse, for instance would entail the adoption of the local but universalisation that grounds the university system glorifies the global, which in fact is a foreign local made universal by the hegemony of the Western epistemology.

To illustrate further, Mbembe (2016) asserts that the human being in the present era has entered the anthropocene epoch where humans are no longer the centre of existence but part of all objects in the cosmos. This is exemplified by the current reality of global warming that is regarded as the natural world's response to the interference of human beings in misbalancing the natural order. This has dire implications in the existence of the world and all its inhabitants and may have well triggered apocalyptic extinctions. The world therefore, has never needed human beings more now than human beings need the world. None of these players is important than the other. Interestingly, it is the Western intelligentsia which Mbembe represents that seems to have come to this realisation; Africans have always cosmologically held this view. In fact, the criticism that Mbembe received during his tenure as director of CODESRIA (The Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa) was that he reintroduced the sovereignty of Western scholars whilst reducing African scholars into observers (Mamdani, 2016). The human being has always been held on the same par with other objects in an African cosmology. For instance, in Zimbabwe, there is a ritual held as part of clothing the land, i.e. cleansing the land by planting trees that were lost during the bush war of liberation (Feris & Moitui, 2011). In this ritual, songs that address trees as human beings are sung where apologies for all the brutal acts human beings inflicted on trees are given (Feris & Moitui, 2011). The tree is directly addressed as a woman whose womb gives all the amenities provided by the tree (Feris & Moitui, 2011). This behaviour is in harmony with Nguni mythology where living creatures of all kinds are said to have sprung from the Tree of Life (Mutwa, 2003).

Another dilemma faced by indigenous studies lecturers at university is the pedagogical approach that promotes Indigenous Knowledge Systems and worldviews whilst at the same time maintaining rigour in the Western tradition of knowledge construction (Nakata, Nakata, Keech & Bolt, 2012). The goal is to remain true to the decolonisation of indigenous studies whilst acknowledging the intricacies of Western epistemologies. Nakata et al. (2012) in this regard admit that ultimately it remains with the student to decide the manner in which they would want to respond to the indigenous studies in terms of whether “they resist, oppose, defend, convert, patronise, tolerate, or thoughtfully engage the content of their courses to the best of their ability” (Nakata et al., 2012:136). In this instance, it is clear that decolonisation is metaphorised.

Muted Student Voices in Decolonisation Debates

Prinsloo (2016), supporting Mbembe (2015), contends that the issues of decolonisation are intellectual matters and must be dealt with by intellectuals. What they imply is that the student campaigns that were part of decolonisation were handled unintellectually. Indeed, Fanon (1963) would argue that decolonisation is not an intellectual exercise. It is just as unintellectual as colonialism. However, that does not mean that students who initiated calls for decolonisation did not act out of their intellect. In fact, they possessed pragmatic intellect that the traditional academy puts into abeyance under the pretence of agreeing to disagree. Had the students relied on that logic, the statue might still be mocking them.

Furthermore, the project of decolonisation has been unpacked, defined and redefined by scholars following the intellectual tradition. In fact, some plainly confess that they are adding to the debates on decolonisation (Le Grange, 2016; Prinsloo, 2016). Unfortunately, such contributions may only remain contributions and not amount to actions in the same momentum that saw the removal of Rhodes’ statue and slashing of fees for deserving students. This is because the intellectual tradition has its own bureaucracies in the form of administrators and academics, as Prinsloo (2016) acknowledges the role played by #RhodesMustFall Campaign in opening up issues of decolonising universities and thereafter appeals that academics and university management must take students’ concerns seriously.

In addition, the many facets of decolonisation that academics have debated include, decolonising knowledge (Mbembe, 2015), decolonising the curriculum (Le Grange, 2016), decolonising methodology (Keane & Khupe, 2017) and so forth. What these facets seem to have achieved is to metaphorise decolonisation

(Tack & Yang, 2012). Tack and Yang (2012) argue that decolonisation is easily reduced into a metaphor when it no longer addresses the plight of the colonised by reversing their situation to what it ought to have been. Using the case of indigenous Americans, they contend that decolonisation in their case entails that they get their land back, which was usurped by Europeans during the colonial expansion. When the Native Americans lost their territories, the colonialism that was responsible for it was never a metaphor but was real action and process. Decolonisation therefore would follow a similar mode of operation.

It therefore remains paradoxical that the custodians of knowledge, curriculum and methodology, would come up with means that would not favour their positions. The student who cries foul play is not given a platform because the game is played with the instruments of the academy to which a student is only an infantile novice. The student is not deemed to possess the expertise and intellect to grapple with the intricacies of decolonisation; his and her voice consequently remains muted. As Tack and Yang (2012) argue, metaphorisation of decolonisation serves to assuage the guilt of the coloniser who is not ready to give up the privileges gained through colonisation. In the same vein, the academics and university administrators consider themselves direct beneficiaries of the traditions of the academy and have it as their duty to induct students into the same traditions, which explains why calls for decolonisation did not come from their circles. Students, on the other, hand continue to be spoken about in forms that sometimes reduce them into hooligans and ungrateful spoiled brats. This metaphorisation is therefore used to allay the guilt that academics and administrators have in perpetuating the oppression of students. For example, exorbitant fees are justified because they support research and salaries of university employees – the question of exclusion becomes irrelevant.

Similarly, metaphorisation helps academics and scholars work out knowledge, curriculum, methodologies, and epistemologies in ways that totally exclude student input. Using their scholarly traditions, they would appeal to dominant discourses for epistemic balance meant to safeguard the established global lineages sometimes at the detriment of the local. It is for this reason that students normally take the pragmatic route. However, it is not always the easy route to take especially for rural students.

Profiling of Rural Students and Rural Universities

Pillay and Ngcobo (2010) in their study about stressors and support for first year students in an HBU cite, *inter alia*, socioeconomic factors and fear of failure experienced by these students. These factors seem to characterise rural students whose educational background has been stereotyped as wanting. Their research was conducted in the same institution as this study. They argued that, among other stressors, were residential issues exacerbated by the location of the institution that is far from a metropolitan area where students can easily access housing. Other stressors include death of family members especially in the context of HIV and AIDS pandemic. Hussain, Guppy, Robertson and Temple (2013), although researching the physical and mental health of students in a rural university, had similar findings to Pillay and Ngcobo (2010). Like many studies, Hussein et al. (2013) focused on the negative experiences of rural students. This could be understood in the light of a disjuncture between university life and rural life. University life seems to favour and seeks to mimic urban culture and regard rurality as backward. In fact, Byun, Meece and Irvin (2012a) assert that rurality has been approached from a rural disadvantage perspective where emphasis is placed on “lower socioeconomic status, lower parental expectations, and poorer high school preparation” (Byun et al., 2012a:2). Notwithstanding these disadvantages, Byun et al. (2012a) admit that rurality has advantages of strong social resources, high family, school, and religious connections.

Similarly, Byun et al. (2012a) concur with Pillay and Ngcobo (2010) in that rural students have socio-economic problems and poor academic preparation. Byun, Irvin & Meece (2012b) further report that generally, rural students face unique challenges compared to urban students. These problems range from alienation, attrition, to higher levels of stress. Rural students also have challenges of adjusting to urban life that they find in the university. The question arises of whether the same challenges persist for students attending a rural university. It sounds like a rhetorical question but even though a university is said to be rural, it is rural only in terms of its locale but the culture is an urban one and differs profoundly from rural communities’ culture.

Malebana (2014) in his research about the intentions of rural university students in Limpopo Province to start a business, reports that whilst the percentage of individuals with entrepreneurial intentions had generally decreased, there were few entrepreneurial activities in rural areas compared to urban settings; the majority of his respondents intended to start a business in the future. He however admitted

that, although the intentions are good indications, they might not be immediately used to infer to the probability of starting a business. Part of the variables that may make such an inference inaccurate is the rural setting with its own communal dynamics at times at odds with an urban setting. For instance, many rural settings still hold traditional notions of hospitality. According to Derrida (2000:5):

[a]bsolute hospitality requires that I open up my home and that I give not only to the foreigner but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I give place to them, that I let them come, that I let them arrive, and take place in the place that I offer them, without asking of them ... reciprocity.

Clearly, this would have a bearing in the entrepreneurial activity as traditionally defined. The urban setting on the other hand would seek to maximise profit from the foreign. In fact, tourists are the normal target for profit making where they are sold things at inflated prices.

Limanond, Butsingkorn and Chermkhunthod (2011) define a rural university as one located far away from distractions such as shopping malls, theatres, nightclubs, etc. In relation to the research they conducted about travelling patterns of students in a rural university, they contend that the transport system in a rural area is typically poor, inaccessible and has lower network coverage (Limanond et al., 2011). This however comes as an advantage in that students in such a situation tend to spend their time over weekends and weekdays doing group activities. This maximises student interaction with each other – a trait that is common in rural communities. Therefore, Limanod et al. (2011) concluded that in the rural setting where their research was conducted, transportation among university students is characterised by high social interdependency which is in stark contrast with Danaf, Abou-Zeid and Kaysi's (2014) research conducted at the American University of Beirut located in an urban setting where they found that time is a determining factor on the mode transport which makes most students use own cars. In fact, Danaf et al. (2014) propose that strategies for improving public transportation, such as decreasing the amount of time for bus travelling and increasing the efficiency of taxi sharing transportation would encourage wealthier students from American University of Beirut to use more sustainable modes of transport. The point here is to underscore the communal versus individualistic inclinations of rural and urban students respectively.

Paton-Lopez, Lopez-Carillos, Cancel-Tirado and Vazquez (2014) in their research about food insecurity among students in a rural university point out that in comparison to their urban counterparts, rural students are more prone to food insecurity. Their research confirmed that more than half of the sampled students

were food insecure, which had a direct effect on their educational attainment, which in turn affected upward social mobility, among other things. When students are faced with such situations, they are more likely to be reduced to beggars.

Alienation of the Rural Student

Klomegah (2006) defines alienation as a feeling of being lost, desire for dependence, confusion with the environment and inability to have any influence on the environment. This happens when a social being is removed from his/her social environment. Klomegah's (2006) study was conducted in the context of international students who come to study in the US. He concluded that in comparison to local students, international ones experience serious alienation in adjusting to college life and further underscores that social contact correlates with feelings of alienation.

Shoho (1996) conducted a study on the alienation of rural middle school students and its implication to gang membership. He observed that although the school population consisted of 80% Hispanic students, they felt more alienated than the Anglos mainly because they felt powerless to influence the system. Indeed, it can be inferred that generally, the educational system has a tendency of favouring a certain people group; say the urban and the wealthy that can identify with the system whilst other groups are left with the burden of adjusting. The university system is no exception. In South Africa, black students already come with a label of disadvantage because of educational, linguistic, and literacy exposure at high school. Shoho (1996) highlights three determinants of alienation, which are powerlessness, normlessness, and isolation. Whilst on the one hand, isolation, according to Shoho (1996), refers to a state of loneliness caused by dissociation with peers, on the other hand, normlessness refers to a state where students feel they do not conform to the norm associated with school such as good grades, good behaviour, feelings of being part of a crowd, etc. This sense of normlessness is likely to make students perceive themselves and believe that they are perceived by others as "different in a negative way" (Shoho, 1996:7). Furthermore, Shoho (1996) regards powerlessness as inability of the student to influence educational choices. According to Shoho (1996), powerless students are likely to take any effort in attaining educational goals as a waste of time.

In an earlier study conducted by Benjamin, Van Iran and Benjamin (1983) on the alienation of Vietnamese students in the United States of America, they assert that Vietnamese students operate in the margins of Vietnamese and American

culture – increasing the probability of marginality leading to alienation. Benjamin et al. (1983) regard alienation as the psychosocial phenomenon that prevents an individual from participating in the society. A rural student who is removed from his/her environment is most likely to feel alienated in the university especially when the university system prevents students from contributing to it. Students are most likely to feel that they are not part of the university and the university is not contributing to their feeling of acceptance.

I shall now turn to the letter that the student wrote me whose analysis would highlight many of the arguments raised thus far. The analysis would further accentuate the discourses and experiences of a typical rural student.

Understanding the Discourses of the Rural

The letter (appended at the end of this chapter) is written in isiZulu, one of the eleven South African official languages in South Africa. The choice of the language is important because the course that I was teaching the student was Practical English and therefore every correspondence would be expected to be carried out in English. The presence of English in the student's linguistic repertoire is only represented by few occurrences of code switching involving isiZulu and English: *ngayenza* first semester and second *yasala* (I did it first and second semester but it was left). Certainly, there is no way of avoiding code switching in a bilingual or multilingual situation. Choosing an African language therefore speaks of both resistance to the English language and acknowledgement of our common lineage as the student knew that we shared the same indigenous language. The student therefore felt at ease to address herself in the language that would not impose any barriers. It also implies that given the choice between the language of learning and teaching and the indigenous language, the student is most likely to choose the mother tongue. But this is not novelty because research abounds which indicates that the most successful education is carried out through the mother tongue (UNESCO, 2016; Ntombela, 2017). That education in South Africa continues to be exclusively in English or Afrikaans speaks volumes about the linguistic exclusion of the masses. Unfortunately, many academics do not see anomaly in that situation; instead, some reduce calls for education in indigenous languages to a neurosis (Akpome, 2017).

The letter that the student wrote follows the conventions of informal letters. It is not only the structure but also the diction, which is largely colloquial that characterise informal letters. Structurally, the student's address appeared on top of the right

hand corner of the letter, consisting of the subject code: ENQ (for enquiry) followed by the initial and the last name of the student; the telephone contact number in the next line, and the date in the last line. Unlike a typical letter with either postal or residential address, this one has a telephone number implying that the reply would be expected to be given orally over the telephone. This seems to indicate preference for oral over textual transaction. Interestingly, the student does not seem to consider the letter as a written text than an oral transaction when she says *Ukhuluma nomntwana omfundisayo* meaning 'You are talking to the child you are teaching'. The letter therefore assumes a telephonic conversation where the person on the other side of the line must introduce himself or herself in terms of who is speaking or talking. The letter therefore assumes some kind of oral interaction. This already creates a disjuncture with university education that elevates the text and downgrades the oral. For this student, important matters are transacted orally which is why (as explained in the letter) she had first tried to come to my office in person and only resorted into writing a letter when she could not find me. But for the university tradition, matters must be reduced into writing – the very exams that have frustrated this student are textually-oriented.

The salutation simply begins with the title of the addressee meant to indicate acknowledgment of my position. The opening line then addresses me as 'father', perhaps the father in a religious setting as the student proceeds to greet me in the name of the Lord. This means that the student considers me to be occupying the same position as that of a priest. By this opening, the student may have possibly meant to influence my mind so that whatever decision or action I take afterwards, it should be reminiscent of what a priest would do under similar circumstances. In addition, the address 'father' represented the father figure in a family setup. This is confirmed by the fact that the student refers to herself as the child (*umntwana*). She explains that she is the child in the context of learning, i.e. a grown-up child who is already a mother '*Mkhwenyana* [a pseudonym]' (...*umntwana osekhlile umama Mkhwenyana*). The church and family are two important institutions in a rural setup. These are some of the advantages that Byun et al. (2012a) referred to. In other words, education is seen as another wing that extends family and religious harmony. These institutions command similar respect. This means that in a rural worldview, the lecturer holds the same position as with the priest and the father at home. These have a moral obligation towards those who are under their tutelage. In other words, just as the priest and the father are obliged not to fail the congregants and children respectively, the lecturer is equally obliged not to fail the students.

After the opening sentence which is a greeting, the student proceeds in the tradition of an oral interaction to introduce herself. She addresses me with my praise name (Mahlobo) and then explains the reason for this exchange. Without any major punctuation to terminate each sentence, the student uses commas. For instance, after introducing herself a full stop would be expected so that the reasons for this transaction begin a new sentence. But as I have indicated, these punctuation obligations belong to a textual transaction and not the oral one, which the student's letter represents. Even the persisting typographical errors are tolerated, as speech has no spelling.

The student then explains that she had been to my office on Tuesday and Wednesday because after writing on Monday, when she calculated correct answers, she could not get anything above 30. Although she admits that she might not be accurate in her calculation, this is already a cause for concern because the course in question is being repeated the fourth time. She had even written a special exam, which is written by students who are left with one or two modules to graduate, but did not pass. This letter is therefore an appeal (*ngiyacela*) that I do something about her situation. The question is why would she make such an appeal to me? The answer perhaps lies in the possibility that the four times she had not passed the course she may have come to believe that the lecturers have something to do with it. For her, the power of passing and failing is in the hands of lecturers, the same way that the priest has the spiritual keys for the believer, and the biological father, the keys of physical nourishment for a child.

For her, a lecturer can easily manipulate a number. The 30 that she thinks she got can be grown into a pass mark by a lecturer. There is no question of her qualitative gain on the course but the whole engagement with the course seems to have been reduced to a statistic. She cannot be blamed for that because that is what gets emphasised in universities – success is quantitatively measured, and numbers assume some magical attainment. This is to the extent that those students who get good scores are likely to be considered by others as lucky instead of brilliant. Therefore, the 30 that this student feels she must have got has no direct relation to her level of performance but simply represents a bad omen.

In the following paragraph, she details her plight. She starts by mentioning that she had received sponsorship by God's grace, which is meant to register that should she not clear the course, she would probably lose sponsorship. She then punctuates her appeal with *baba ngiyazithoba* (father I humble myself). It is almost as if she is a repentant sinner in front of a priest. This humility is triggered by her

request that if when I mark, I find that she did not do well, I must give her 50 which is what is standing before her and the course. Fifty, in other words, has assumed some magical figure capable of resolving somebody's life problems. In fact, it seems the student interprets the educational endeavour as some statistical configuration where 30s and 50s represent failure and success respectively.

The details that follow highlight the predicament that the student has gone through because of this course she has been failing. She lost an employment opportunity and she now fears that she will end up being a laughingstock in her neighbourhood. She looks after herself and sometimes her relatives help her out. Her children have piece jobs and the young one just has a job of taxi driving. All this mean that they are still depending on her. As part of accentuating her plight, she appeals to a biblical account where Jesus' disciples had toiled the whole night without catching any fish. She likens her situation with that of the disciples, meaning that I am some sort of Jesus who must deliver her from this fruitless toil. In addition to the stress that this course gives her, she is a single mother who was abandoned by her husband in 1996 having been married in 1993. Although she apologises for divulging this detail, to her, the matter surrounding the course simply adds to the burdens she is carrying. This means her educational experiences subjectively affect every aspect of her being. She now sees this course standing on her way for a better life. It is colluding with her husband who abandoned her after only three years of marriage.

At 29 years of age, she seems to have gone back to school the following year after having been abandoned. She enrolled for Standard 6 and continued until she completed Standard 10 in 2001. She then registered with the University of Zululand in 2002, but in 2005 when there was a strike at the university, she was injured and had to drop out. She was only able to get back almost ten years later in 2014. In the interim, she had been teaching Grade R until the government insisted that only qualified teachers should be employed which is probably why she went back to the university *ukuqoqa imilenze* (to collect legs).

Collecting legs is a university student discourse in isiZulu, which means re-doing all the courses you have failed. The courses are metaphorically referred to as legs because that is what you use for movement. Therefore, when a person collects legs literally, it is a sign that he/she is about to move. Courses are therefore legs inasmuch as they either allow or hinder someone from progressing. Therefore, when a student collects legs, it means the student's degree would be completed and the student would soon graduate. For this student, the legs she set out to collect seem to be misbehaving. Her future seems to be hanging in a balance with

uncertainty about this module. She had come back in 2016 just for this module and now she does not feel she made it. She ends that long paragraph with her date of birth to indicate how desperate she is given the ticking time of her age. Coincidentally, she wrote the letter when she was left with seven days to celebrate her 48th birthday. This means that at 48, she was yet to complete her first degree she started 14 years prior. This is one of the many realities that rural students face.

The last paragraph begins with a similar plea: *ngiyazithoba ngiyacela Baba Ntombela* (I humble myself I plead with you Father Ntombela). Her main plea is that when I mark her paper, God must touch my heart because she does not think she wrote well. What may have added to her poor performance is that she wrote bereaved. Her sister who had been ill at a hospital passed away and at the time of writing the letter, they were preparing for her funeral, which was to be held on a Sunday. Pillay and Ngcobo (2010) have already identified bereavement as a common stressor among students in a rural university. God must therefore touch me concerning all her troubles.

Furthermore, her plea was that I should give her 50 so that she passes and would not need to seat for a re-exam because she did not pass the previous re-exam. Re-exams are given to students whose final mark ranges between 40 and 48. They must get not less than 50 to pass the re-exam. She then promises that if I am gracious in my marking, she would come back to express her gratitude. In other words, my attendance to her plea is like another transaction to which she would be indebted. She would therefore need to pay that debt in some form of gratitude. What she is implying is that she understands I will be going out of my way to help her out and therefore would have to be compensated for that.

This is followed by some kind of invocation where she charges me with re-building her homestead which she had so far built all by herself (... *ake uvuse leliyakaya engilikhale ngingedwa* ...). In other words, the 50 she is requesting is as big as her homestead. My generosity in marking would be treated as a work of re-building a rather collapsing house. I am therefore invited to team up with her in building up a collapsing homestead. She then presents me with the list of referrals that would authenticate her story. These are her uncle, her mother's cousin and another Mrs Mpaka who have stood with her through thick and thin. She provides telephone numbers for her uncle Mr Ntenga and Mrs Mpaka. These are the people who would verbally substantiate her story. The presence of these people around her life encapsulates the African concept of *Ubuntu* where her personhood is confirmed

by other persons around her. The quest therefore is not to develop an absolute individual but an absolute community. She therefore views me as part of the community around her life.

In a university tradition, testimonials and commendations can only be accepted when in writing, but in this case, as with typical rural settings; the oral testimonials are just as authentic. These people have helped her so much that she is even afraid (*Sengiyabesaba*), as if she is indebted. Her grandfather who is a neighbour to her former husband's home is a pensioner and he sometimes helps her when she does not have food. This further confirms food insecurity among rural students as reported by Paton-Lopez et al. (2014). The letter concludes with an explicit promise that the gratitude she spoke about in the preceding paragraph is a monetary one. That is, she expected that I would notify her how things went and then as soon as she gets employed she would come to thank me, but that must remain between me and her, and God would be her witness if she does not live up to her promise. This would easily be interpreted as bribery or 'marks monetary transaction'. Whilst it might as well border in that, the whole educational experience she has gone through has been a monetary transaction. She had paid tuition fees and miscellaneous fees and this would simply add to that list. Another possibility though is that this is the practice she has grown to know at a university. Stories of marks manufactured in this and other unscrupulous means are not uncommon. But in this case, it is clear that desperation seems to have driven the student right to the end of her tether. She does not believe she has any options left except appealing for the lecturer's mercy which she also feels cannot go unrewarded.

Conclusion

This chapter is based in an HBU in South Africa. Almost all HBUs in South Africa are rural because they were formed to service the black population that had been pushed out of the metropolis to make way for the white population and most importantly to cater for black students in homelands. The rurality of these institutions has been in terms of both geographical location and resources. Educational investment was placed in the institutions that serviced white students and HBUs perpetually lagged behind. When democracy broke into the lives of South Africans, access that was previously denied was given to many black South Africans. When these South Africans experienced the education that was previously closed to them, they were hit with insults and mockery staged by the legacies of the apartheid regime both ideologically and artistically. As they could take it no

longer, protests broke out in various former 'whites only' campuses demanding for the decolonisation of institutions. Among the successes of these campaigns were the dismantling of the Cecil Rhodes statue at the University of Cape Town and the announcement of free higher education for deserving students. These two examples are perfect illustrations of decolonisation. Notwithstanding such a successful start, academics and scholars who through their various intellectual traditions interpreted and reinterpreted calls for decolonisation to the extent that it seems to have lost its simplicity and urgency usurped the rest of the project of decolonisation. However, these movements and campaigns do not seem to have catered for a typical rural student or university. With rural universities aspiring to be something similar to their urban counterparts, the rural student is bound to be alienated. To understand this alienation and dislocation, we needed to revisit the discourse of a rural student accessed through the analysis of a transactional letter written in an indigenous language.

This whole transaction interestingly blurs the lines between an educational diction and that of religious and family one. The Dr Ntombela to whom the letter is addressed is both regarded as a father figure in a family setup and at the same time some priestly representation in a religious setup. The implication is that these institutions: the educational, religious, and family are interlinked in the life experiences of rural students. That is why the student takes it as a matter of fact that I would identify with and understand the religious analogies. But that I would also understand the traditional rhetoric of building a homestead. Her education is not just for personal gain, she has children whom she must support and a homestead she must build. Dr Ntombela, her lecturer, therefore, must partner with her in all these endeavours. Education from a rural worldview, therefore, does not only consist of interactions in a lecturer hall – the lecturers and those entrusted with students enter a community where their contribution goes beyond an intellectual one. Perhaps, if the university had woken up to that reality, there would not have been a need for this student to spend up to 14 years for the first degree, or four times battling the same module to the extent of resorting to purchasing the marks.

Therefore, the whole transaction could be reduced into a plea for a pass. As mentioned above, Pillay and Ngcobo (2010) found fear of failure as one of the most common stressors among students in a rural university. Therefore, the student has taken all her energies to explain what failure would mean and the changes that would be brought by passing this course. Whilst it might seem like an automatic act of recording say 30, 35 or 40; for many students these are not just statistical figures but represent all the difference in their livelihood. Mbembe

(2016) is on point when he decries the reduction of an educational goal from that of the pursuit of knowledge to the pursuit of credits. The appeal for a 50 from this student indicates clearly that the figure far supersedes the knowledge gained. There is surely a better way of working with scores whilst at the same time acknowledging the centrality of knowledge. Ideally, knowledge should far outweigh the score to an extent that it could be represented without a grade.

Universities must also take into account the linguistic realities of rural students. Whilst universities in the metropolis, especially in South, are dominated by English and Afrikaans - traditional languages of privilege – rural students strive in their indigenous languages and there is no reason for not developing their languages into languages of intellectual pursuit. Even the French academics petitioned for scholarly publications to be in their native language because they argued that it is not possible to have a dialogue with your superior without using your own language (Phillipson, 2009). The choice that the student made to use an African language in such an important matter in her life is a testimony. But as argued earlier, the sluggishness in overhauling the language policy that promotes African languages as intellectual languages is a result of the metaphorisation of decolonisation. Akpome (2017) for instance, would call for the abandonment of the pursuit of mother tongue instruction on the ground that it would not only be herculean but has already suffered philosophical despair. He is right in his conclusions and defence of the exclusive English language medium of instruction because he stands as the beneficiary and by default the defender of his privilege – decolonisation in this instant would be brutal and unmerciful to such a privilege, but so was colonisation. It is these kinds of arguments that usurped the students' noble call for decolonisation and continue to dislocate rural students.

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ANNEX 1

ENQ: N. Mkhwenyana (pseudonym)

Contact: 079.....

Date: 17/11/2016

Dr B. Ntombela

Baba Ntombela ngiyakubingelela egameni lenkosi Amen. Ukhuluma nontwana omfundisayo – kodwa kodwa umntwana osekhulile umama Mkhwenyana, Mahlobo ngifikile ngolwesibili nangolwesithathu angakuthola, ngizozilahla ngehlulekile ngezwa ngomsombuluko uma ngizibalela ngifika ku 30 kodwa name anginasiqiniseko ukuthi ngizimakela ngakho, ngiyacela kulonyaka bengiyenza okwesine, 2015 ngayenza first semester and second yasala ngashayeka naku especial exam akwalunga.

Isponsor ebenginaso nakulonyaka ngasithola ngomusa ka Jehova, baba ngiyazithoba. Ngiyacela uma ngingenzanga kahle ngicela ungiphe 50 mayedlulile, ngumiswe yiyo yodwa. Nakulonyaka ngaphuthelwa itoha ebese ngilitholile ngibizwa ngoMach ngenxa yayo – ngiyazicelela Ntombela ngimdala sengizoze ngibe yihlaya nangasemakhaya, Degree yami yonke isino 65 module kusele lena, bengizele lokho, baba ngiziphethe ngiyazondla ngiphiwe nazihlobo izingane zisebenza amatoha angatheni aphelayo, kumanje omncane liphelile elakhe omdala kade ethola ethekweni ngenyanga edlule nacho akutheni udriver amatekisi bathembele kimi makulunga, baba ngishikekile, njengabafundi abathi kuJesu sishikile ubusuku bonke, kodwa, ngibona ngiphelelwa, amathemba empilo, encono, ngiyacela baba, ngiwumama oyedwa owalahlwa wumkhwenyana 1996 kade ngigana ngo 1993, ngiyaxolisa ukukwazisa izinkinga zami, wukuthi nazo zinginikeza incindezi, ngafunda ke, Sengimdala, ngabuyela esikoleni ngo 1997 ngayoqala Std 6 to STD 10 ngo 2001 – ngafika ongoye ngo 2000 – ngalimala ngo 2005 kunesiteleka, ngabuya ngo 2014 ngazoqoqa imilenze yami yonke nale Philosophy eyinkinga. Ngimisiwe eTohweni ebesengiphila ngalo bengifundisa Grade R Gobihlahla Primary and Mashoba ngo 2013 kwathiwa uhulumeni ufuna abaneziqu eziphelele, bengibuyele, ukuzoqedela nakulonyaka bebengifuna esikoleni ebengikuso, bekungefani kulowo R4000-00 bengikwazi ukuphila manje ngiyabona ikusasa lami liyafiphala uma lemodule engimise kanje ingalungi. Neminyaka isihambile 1968-11-24

Ngiyazithoba ngiyacela BABA Ntombela uma usumaka ngabona, ngehlulekele, ephepheni kodwa nje umusa wakho unkulunkulu akuthinte ngiyobuya ngizobonga Ngibhale nakabi sekushoniwe ekhaya ngiyahamba kusasa. Sifihla ngesonto, Kushone ucc wami ubese sbhedlela Eshowe. Umqondo wami waphazamiseka, ngiyacela, ngiyanxa ungiphe nje 50 angisafuni re-exam – eyango January yangichitha Ngiyakuthembisa ake uvuse leliyakaya engilikhale ngingedwa nampa ofakazi abangakuthsela ngempilo yam. Malume wami uMr Ntenga 072-----, umzala kama, wami, uzokutshela ukuthi ngiphila ngaphansi kwasiphi isipho, nangu omunye MRS Philisiwe Mpaka 082----- Sengiyabesaba, usizo lwabo, uma ngiya ekhaya yibo, uma ngibuya esikoleni yibo – umkhulu usempeshile akasasebenzi kodwa, masiswele okudliwayo, ngiphiwa kwakhe ngoba, ungumakhelwane walapho ngashadela, khona Ngiyabonga ukungizwela, ungisendele Mahlobo, mangithola itoho ngiyobuya ngizobonga, ngiyathembisa phakathi kwami nawe nonkulunkulu uyobe eyiso kimi uma ngehlulekile ukubonga

Ngiyabonga: Student 2002---- N. Mkhwenyana

ENQ: N. Mkhwenyana (pseudonym)

Contact: 079.....

Date: 17/11/2016

Dr B. Ntombela

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amatekisi bathembele kimi makulunga, baba ngishikekile, njengabafundi abathi kuJesu sishikile ubusuku bonke, kodwa, ngibona ngiphelelwa, amathemba empilo, encono, ngiyacela baba, ngiwumama oyedwa owalahlwa wumkhwenyana 1996 kade ngigana ngo 1993, ngiyaxolisa ukukwazisa izinkinga zami, wukuthi nazo zinginikeza incindezi, ngafunda ke, Sengimdala, ngabuyela esikoleni ngo 1997 ngayoqala Std 6 to STD 10 ngo 2001 – ngafika ongoye ngo 2000 – ngalimala ngo 2005 kunesiteleka, ngabuya ngo 2014 ngazoqoqa imilenze yami yonke nale Philosophy eyinkinga. Ngimisiwe eTohweni ebesengiphila ngalo bengifundisa Grade R Gobihlahla Primary and Mashoba ngo 2013 kwathiwa uhulumeni ufuna abaneziqu eziphelele, bengibuyele, ukuzoqedela nakulonyaka bebengifuna esikoleni ebengikuso, bekungefani kulowo R4000-00 bengikwazi ukuphila manje ngiyabona ikusasa lami liyafiphala uma lemodule engimise kanje ingalungi. Neminyaka isihambile 1968-11-24

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Ngiyabonga: Student 2002---- N. Mkhwenyana