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English studies: Decolonisation, deparochialising knowledge and the null curriculum

Abstract

This paper reports on a desktop review study of undergraduate and postgraduate English studies (both English literature and English language) module offerings (n = 48) of 24 English departments at 17 South African higher education institutions (HEIs) conducted in 2017. The review focused on the presence and purpose of the term, decolonisation, in these module offerings. Framed within deparochialism and a null curriculum, and employing purposeful sampling and explicit inclusion criteria common in systematic reviews and meta-analyses, the study has the following findings: (a) decolonisation has a presence in only three undergraduate module offerings and it is mentioned in only one honours module offering among the 48 module offerings reviewed. (b) All four modules are English literature modules; (c) decolonisation is a module thematic or topical component and is used for critical analytical purposes in the identified modules in varying degrees. (d) In the three undergraduate modules, decolonisation is restricted to African literature or Africa writings and (e) in the postgraduate module, decolonisation is offered as one of the four optional stand-alone modules. Finally, the paper argues for a decolonisation that deparochialises the disciplines of English studies.

Keywords: *English studies; modules; decolonisation; deparochialising knowledge; null curriculum*

1. Introduction

Calls for the transformation and decolonisation of South African higher education, or the transformation and decolonisation of the higher education curriculum or knowledge are not peculiar to South Africa (see, for example, Mbembe, 2016). They become sporadic in different parts of Africa at different times, but gain special traction in most post-colonies as a natural upshot of obtaining independence from erstwhile colonial masters. Sometimes such calls become synonymous with calls for the *Africanisation* of curriculum or knowledge in South African higher education (Jansen, 2017; Mbembe, 2016). One view (Jansen, 2017:1) has it that calls for the Africanisation of curriculum, in particular, are “at least as old as the Republic of Ghana, the first African country to gain independence [in March 1957]”. Moreover, the first wave of calls for the decolonisation of Africa took place in the latter part of the twentieth century

(see Maringe, 2017; Mbembe, 2016) with Frantz Fanon's (1961) magnum opus, *The Wretched of the Earth*, serving in most cases as one of the points of reference providing *loci classici* cited by most decolonisation scholars.

The renewed and the current calls for the transformation and decolonisation of South African higher education must be viewed against this backdrop. Even in South Africa, these calls do not exist in a vacuum. They have precursors. These are in the form of the protests which were engendered by the introduction of Bantu education in 1955; the 1976 Soweto school uprisings against the use of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in schools in 1975; and the people's education movement in the mid-1980s. Not to be forgotten in this instance, is the role played by the South African Students Organisation and later, by the Black Consciousness Movement, especially under the stewardship of Steve Biko and Barney Pityana, in fuelling and sustaining the momentum for decolonising the *Black man's* mind, and by extension, education (see Biko, 1987; Brown, 2010; Nolutshungu, 1982).

Paralleling these precursors is the 2015–2016 university *#FeesMustFall* student movement, which, in certain quarters, is also known as the Fallist movement. Initiated by university students, this hashtag movement was initially meant to protest against rising and unaffordable fees at South African universities (see figure 1).



Figure 1: Placards displaying calls for fees to *fall* in the higher education sector in South Africa (Source: *#FeesMustFall* – Placards and images).

It was mainly – even though not exclusively – run and powered through Twitter as one of the social media platforms, from which it inherited its hashtag name, and from which it had its other related memetic permutations and its related Arab Spring-like spreading. Later on, the *#FeesMustFall* student movement directed its efforts to calls for the transformation

or decolonisation of knowledge, of curriculum, and of academics in South African higher education (see figure 2).



Figure 2: Images for transforming and decolonising higher education knowledge, curriculum and academics in South Africa.

2. Definitional contours

Defining terms tends to be a contested terrain, in effect, terminological, definitional or conceptual clarity is one of the cardinal hallmarks of many disciplines in academia. Three terms that are in currency in the South African higher education sector whose definition is highly contested or is, at least, illusive are transformation, decolonisation and Africanisation. What adds to the contestation and illusiveness of these triple terms is when they, at times, are conflated with each other, as is evident in the conflation of decolonisation and Africanisation in the following quotation:

Calls to “decolonize” are not new. Nor have they gone uncontested whenever they have been made. We all have in mind African postcolonial experiments in the 1960s and 1970s. Then, “to decolonize” was the same thing as “to Africanize”. To decolonize was part of a nation-building project (Mbembe, 2016: n.p., own italics).

In this regard, an implicit conflation of transformation and decolonisation can be detected in figure 2. Concomitantly, this implied conflation gives rise to the implied interchangeability of the two terms (cf. Mgqwashu, 2016), least of which, in the context in which they have been used. Allied to this conceptual conflation are instances when each of these terms has divergent perspectives attached to it by different scholars. The case in point is Africanisation whose perspectival divergence is aptly captured by Letsekha (2013: n.p.): “[d]ifferent authors writing on Africanisation offer varied viewpoints on what they understand Africanisation to mean or entail”. An instance of the conflation of the three terms is lucidly embodied in Ndofirepi and Cross’ (2017: 3) reference to Horsthemke (2017): “Kai Horsthemke argues that the *Africanisation* of higher education is, by and large, assumed to involve institutional *transformation*, and more overtly the ‘*decolonisation*’ of higher education” (own italics) (also cf. Metz, 2015: 243).

In this case, it therefore appears that there are not only multiple definitions of transformation, decolonisation and Africanisation, but also that each of these terms is viewed differently (cf. Metz, 2015; Sayed *et al.*, 2017) (depending on a given context) by different scholars situated in diverse scholarly backgrounds. For example, appendix 1 depicts the definitions, descriptions or explanations of these three terms as documented by certain scholars, some of whom are South African. One salient feature from this appendix with reference to

transformation is a demographic and institutional dimension it assumes, on the one hand, and a complete and radical overhaul of the existing thinking (ideas) or status quo (processes) (see Kamsteeg, 2016: 6; Webstock & Fisher, 2016: 25) and the concomitant supplanting of the current status quo with the new one (see Maringe, 2017: 2). Another salient feature is the apparent fluidity, open-ended and complexity underlying the term, *transformation*, as a construct when used in higher education (Du Preez *et al.*, 2016: 7).

With regard to decolonisation, four observations are worth mentioning. First, is the fact that decolonisation as a term dates back to the 1960s – a point made earlier – (see Fanon, 1965: 33–36; cf. Sayed *et al.*, 2017: 61) in Africa, even though lately it is gaining traction in the South African higher education sector as evidenced through a student initiative such as the #FeesMustFall campaign. However, again as highlighted earlier, student-led initiatives aimed at a change in education in South Africa are not necessarily new. They have been there before (see Biko, 1987; Brown, 2010; Nolutshungu, 1982). Second, decolonisation is depicted and framed in an oppositional, conflictual and dialectical relationship with colonisation (see Fanon, 1965: 33–36; Rabaka, 2009: 187; Tiffin, 1995: 95). This Manichean framing of this concept has hegemonic centrist systems pitted against peripheral systems, and European/British discourses pitted against African discourses (Tiffin, 1995: 95). Additionally, it entails decentering European knowledge and recentring African knowledge, Africanising knowledge, engaging entangled knowledges and repatriating occupied knowledge (Jansen, 2017: 159-163). On the other hand, it involves dismantling hegemonic centrist systems/European or British discourses (Tiffin, 1995: 95) and rejecting colonial worldviews (Césaire, 2000: 89). Third, is the fact that decolonisation is conceived of as a project that has to arrest, reverse or overturn the corporatised institutional culture of South Africa's higher education institutions with its attendant mechanical, statistical and numerical orientation (Mbembe, 2016: 36). Fourth, is the search for (re)-imagining an alternative academic model – a decolonisation area in which much is still to be done (Jansen, 2017: 159).

In respect of Africanisation, two strands are manifest. The first strand is the envisaged co-existence between Africanisation (or Afrocentric thinking) and Eurocentric thinking in which both draw from each other's strength (see Lebakeng *et al.*, 2006: 77; Letsekha, 2013: 15; Ramose, 1998: vi). In this co-existence, the hegemonic tendencies of the latter have to be culled. This synergistic view of the two modes of thinking – in which both worldviews have a symbiotic relationship with each other – seems to be at odds with radical Africanisation. As such, it tends to reflect a moderate version of Africanisation (cf. Letsekha, 2013; Metz, 2015). Needless to say that a scholar such as Fanon – who is classically referenced and invoked in relation to Africanisation and decolonisation – was strategically sceptical and cynical of the idea of Africanisation (see Fanon, 1965; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2016; Rabaka, 2009; cf. Heleta, 2016). The second strand has two related streaks. One streak seeks “a re-narration of the African existence” (Okeke, 2010: 42) which tends to entail a refashioning of the African ways of doing things away from European worldviews. The other streak is specific to African literature, and argues that such literature ought to embody an Afrocentric worldview for it to have relevance to an African context (cf. Thiong'o, 1986: 91). This latter streak was later to become a launching pad for the *Nairobi Literature Debate* that contested the *Great Tradition of English literature* – with its Euro-American orientation – as both the focal point and the locus classicus of African literature (see Thiong'o, 1986).

3. Instances of decolonisation in respect of English language and English literature

Elsewhere decolonisation, especially in connection with indigenous languages or indigenous studies (e.g., Hall & Tandon, 2017; Nakata *et al.*, 2012; Pyndiah, 2016), and with regard to the English language (e.g., Chakravarti, 2008; Mishra & Bardhan, 2009-2010; Sharma, Jha & Kumar, 2015; Vaish, 2005) has been documented in both scholarly journals and books. Most of the latter – the decolonisation of the English language – seems to have occurred in India. For example, Chakravarti (2008) investigates the evolving status of English studies in English textbooks used in West-Bengal, India. She argues that these textbooks reflect crosscurrents of a post-colonial urge to reject the English literary canon and to respond to the emerging demand for English language proficiency in a globalising India. Her work depicts decolonisation efforts mounted in post-independence India, and outlines how canonical British literary texts used in the school curriculum were replaced with Indian English texts, which had relevance to Indian lives and experiences. It also highlights that there was a move from English literature to functional English language teaching.

Even though this latter point seems to be the case, it appears that in post-independence India, the decolonisation process – in both English literature and English language – entailed appropriating English, and repurposing it to meet and suit local and national demands (see Sharma *et al.*, 2015; Vaish, 2005). All these endeavours reflected the *Indianisation* (cf. Kachru, 1965) or the nativisation of English (Sharma *et al.*, 2015) and a peripherist view of English (Vaish, 2005) as opposed to *Englishisation* (Kachru, 1994). Thus, decolonisation in this sense almost embodied a statewide Indianisation and nativisation of English.

Closer to home, the single most momentous and game-changing decolonisation of English literary studies in an HEI – and by extension of the English literary studies in the higher education sector in general – is that which was spearheaded by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o and his two other colleagues at the University of Nairobi. It started as a response to proposals presented by the English Department. The following prefaced the proposals:

The English department has had a long history at this college and has built up a strong syllabus which by its study of the historic continuity of a single culture throughout the period of emergence of the modern west makes it an important companion to History and to Philosophy and Religious studies. However, it is bound to become less British, more open to other writing in English (American, Caribbean, African, Commonwealth) and also to continental writing, for comparative purposes (Thiong’o, 1969, cited in Thiong’o, 1986: 89).

Part of the response from Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o and his two other colleagues to this preface was as follows:

Here then, is our main question: if there is a need for a ‘study of the historic continuity of a single culture’, why can’t this be African? Why can’t African literature be at the centre so that we can view other cultures in relationship to it? (Thiong’o, 1969, cited in Thiong’o, 1986: 89).

This decolonisation poser was purposefully directed at the English Department at the University of Nairobi, and it is part of what later became known as the “great Nairobi Literature Debate” (Thiong’o, 1986: 89). Crucially, this rejoinder questioned the dominance of the Euro-American literary works at the University of Nairobi, and their relevance to the Kenyan literary landscape. Overall, in his classic decolonisation work, *Decolonising the mind: The politics of*

language in African literature, Thiong'o (1986) advances a cogent argument for the use of indigenous languages in African literature. In so doing, he criticises and questions the colonial legacy of writing Africa literature in colonial languages such as English. Part of the thrust of his argument is that a colonised people cannot reclaim its selfhood and cannot recover its cultures, economies and politics from a colonial chokehold, if it appropriates a colonial language in writing its literatures (cf. Murphy, 2011). All of this forms the essence of the decolonisation he envisages not only for post-colonial Kenya, but also for all post-colonial states in Africa.

In fact, there were other seismic developments in the wake of this, which led to more decolonisation efforts in the area of literary studies, mainly in African literature, in certain African universities. For instance, Harlow (2009) aptly points out that the golden era in much of the then recently decolonised Africa, especially at its universities, gained traction in the early 1970s. Among these universities, was Makerere University in Uganda, which had drastically overhauled its literary studies curriculum and was poised to provide further impetus for new directions and imperatives in the sphere of African critical practice and African cultural production. Later, the University of Dar es Salaam (Tanzania) and the University of Ibadan (Nigeria) were to follow suit in respect of historiography. All these literary developments, cumulatively, culminated in what is often regarded as three major generations of African literary writers in contemporary Africa. These are the first generation writers (e.g., Sembene Ousmane, Chinua Achebe, Christopher Okigbo, Wole Soyinka, Kofi Awoonor, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, and Ama Ata Aidoo); the second generation writers (e.g., Nurudin Farar, Isidore Okpewho, Festus Iyayi, Femi Osofisan, Jack Mapanje, Frank Chipasula, Tanure Ojaide, and Mandla Langa); and the third generation writers (e.g., Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Sefi Atta, Vonani Bila and contemporary younger writers) (Ojaide, 2015; Adebani, 2014). However, this generational categorisation has its own shortcomings. It pigeonholes writers into rigid typologies – some writers (e.g., Ngugi wa Thiong'o) have outlived the specified generations and there is a possibility of overlapping between these generation, and periodising writers through generations is a superficial representation of such writers (cf. Adebani, 2014). Pertaining to the current paper, particularly, this type of categorisation of African literary writers is framed outside of the curriculum. As such, it does not resonate with the decolonising of English literary studies curriculum nor does it with that of English language studies curriculum.

The relevance of Thiong'o's views on decolonisation for the current paper is that they were articulated within and with reference to a specific discipline such as African literature as offered at a given HEI (the University of Nairobi). In this case, it was in response to the absence of African literary canons in or their omission from the curriculum content of the English Department at the University of Nairobi. His, therefore, was a curriculum decolonisation that went to and challenged the disciplinary roots of African and English literary studies. For this reason, it had far-reaching ramifications beyond the University of Nairobi and beyond Kenya. One kindred decolonisation similar to Thiong'o's – even though it is still in its nascent stage – is the one unfolding at Cambridge University in the United Kingdom. It, too, is directed at the English literature curriculum. Spearheaded by Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) students enrolled in English literature, some of the views espoused by this disciplinary curriculum decolonisation are encapsulated in the following BME student sentiments:

There needs to be a complete shift in the way the department treats western literature. Non-white authors must be centred in the same way Shakespeare, Eliot, Swift and Pope are. Their stories, thoughts and accounts should be given serious intellectual and moral weight (Evening Standard, 2017: n.p.).

Since this decolonisation project is still in its incipient stage – it only started on 25 October 2017 according to *Evening Standard* (2017) – its success and the traction it is likely to gain remains to be seen. Needless to say that the Education Committee at Cambridge University is reported to envisage having some robust academic debate about this matter (see *Evening Standard*, 2017).

4. Theoretical frame: Deparochialising knowledge and a null curriculum

Decolonisation is sometimes treated as a conceptual framework (Oelofsen, 2015) and a theoretical framework (Abawi & Brady, 2017) in and of itself. At times, it is conceived of as an analytical term (Mbembe, 2016; Zeleza, 2017; cf. Tuck & Yang, 2012) or as worldviews (Césaire, 2000). In this paper, decolonisation is framed within a deparochialisation of knowledge and a null curriculum. Koh (2007: 13) provides a version of deparochialisation of research that is relevant to this paper. He argues that deparochialisation is about opening up research parameters confined to western epistemologies and research paradigms to non-western epistemologies and research paradigms, and that it entails a dialogue, a cross-fertilisation and a contestation of ideas that traverses East and West and South and North. In addition, he points out that deparochialisation is not merely about generating new ideas and new knowledges. Rather, it is also about broadening the horizons of one's current knowledge. In this sense, deparochialisation stands in contrast to a scopic regime that is locally focused (also see Appadurai, 2000; Lingard, 2006).

Similarly, the current paper is of the view that decolonisation needs to embody all of the hallmarks mentioned above, and that it needs to be framed within this deparochial canvas. Viewed within this framing, decolonisation needs to strive for an ecology of knowledges that recognises and is premised on epistemological pluralism: it needs to recognise the interdependence (and not the dependency) of knowledges, or inter-knowledges (see Andreotti, Ahenakew & Cooper, 2011; Santos, 2007). Moreover, it has to endeavour for what Perez (1999) refers to as a decolonial imaginary – which is a zone in which various types of relationships and dilemmas can be negotiated and re-negotiated (see also Ritenburg *et al.*, 2014). In keeping with this framing, decolonisation requires to entail *epistemological diffidence* (Appadurai, 2000: 4; Koh, 2007: 189). Epistemological diffidence has to do with treating any form of knowledge with scepticism and with applying a questioning mind to it. It also needs a “pedagogy of discomfort” (Koh, 2007: 191) which involves having students and academics deal with knowledge that does not comfort them or having them not view knowledge from their everyday confront zones.

Lastly, this paper situates decolonisation within a null curriculum standpoint. It does so with the full knowledge that standpoints can change, can be revised or can be rejected over time. According to Eisner (1985: 107), a null curriculum refers to “the options students are not afforded, the perspectives they may never know about, much less be able to use, the concepts and skills that are not part of their intellectual repertoire”. To this end, Le Grange (2016: 7) refers to the null curriculum as “what universities leave out – what is not taught and learnt in a university”. Following the leitmotif of the current theoretical framework, a null curriculum tends to deparochialise students' options and perspectives. There are two dimensions related to the null curriculum: intellectual processes that are non-verbal and *alogical* modes of thoughts; and null content, which relates to excluded or omitted module contents or bits of curriculum information (Eisner, 1985; Flinders, Noddings & Thornton, 1986).

In line with the null curriculum, decolonisation entails what knowledge to foreground and background, and what knowledge to recognise and misrecognise. Therefore, it is the contention of this paper that decolonisation in English studies needs to expose students to local, regional, continental and global epistemic frames and analytic categories if such students are to be truly functional global citizens, and not local misfits. In this context, supplanting one form of episteme with another, and one set of theoretic-linguistic/analytic frames with another set is tantamount to epistemic parochialism.

5. Decolonisation: Departments of English literature and departments of English language in South African HEIs

5.1 Methodology

This paper conducted a desktop review of the presence of the term, *decolonisation/decoloniality*, in the module offerings of the departments of English literature and the departments of English language at 17 South African higher education institutions (HEIs). The desktop review was also about to establish the purpose this term served in the module offerings of these departments. However, these departments are called by different names as determined by a preference chosen by each department in each university. In addition, certain universities have language and linguistics departments as stand-alone departments, while others have literature and language studies as composite departments. The 17 HEIs that were considered for the review were traditional universities as opposed to universities of technology. The review was conducted between July 2017 and October 2017.

5.1.1 Research design

A qualitative case study research design informed this review study. However, elements of a systematic review design conventionally employed in systematic reviews and meta-analyses (see Beller *et al.*, 2013; Dwan *et al.*, 2013; Garg, Hackam & Tonelli, 2008; Impellizzeri & Bizzini, 2012; Moja *et al.*, 2005; Page *et al.*, 2014; Shamseer *et al.*, 2015; Uman, 2011) were incorporated in the current review study in order to achieve comprehensive sets of data. Such elements include the following: (a) formulating the review question; (b) defining inclusion and exclusion criteria; (c) developing search strategy and locating studies; (d) selecting studies; (e) extracting data; (f) assessing the quality of studies and (g) analysing and interpreting findings (synthesising data) (Beller *et al.*, 2013; Dwan *et al.*, 2013; Impellizzeri & Bizzini, 2012; Shamseer *et al.*, 2015; Uman, 2011). Since the present study was a review study, the above-mentioned elements were modified as follows:

- purpose of the review
- formulating review questions
- establishing eligibility criteria
- population and sampling
- developing search strategy and locating documents
- screening and selecting documents
- extracting data from documents
- analysing data

5.1.2 Purpose of the review and review questions

The review had a dual purpose. Firstly, it set out to identify the presence of the term, *decolonisation* (or *decoloniality*) in the module offerings of the departments of English literature and the departments of English language at 17 South African HEIs. Secondly, it sought to establish the purpose of decolonisation in the module offerings of these departments. On this basis, it had the following two questions:

- Does the term *decolonisation/decoloniality* have any presence in the module offerings of the departments of English literature and English language at 17 South African HEIs or not?
- What is the purpose of decolonisation in the module offerings of these departments?

5.1.3 Eligibility criteria, population and sampling

Eligibility criteria refer to criteria used to include and exclude items for review purposes (Impellizzeri & Bizzini, 2012; Kalliisa & Picard, 2017; Uman, 2011). The categories and the inclusion criteria employed in this review study were as represented in table 1. The population consisted of the departments of English literature and the departments of English language at 17 HEIs in South Africa as mentioned earlier. A purposeful sampling method (Suri, 2011) was used, as there was a conscious intention to consider all and to focus on all the undergraduate and postgraduate modules (including their related module outlines) offered by the departments in question.

Table 1: Categories and inclusion criteria

Categories	Inclusion criteria
2017 undergraduate module offerings	Departments of English literature and departments of English language at 17 SA's HEIs
2017 postgraduate module offerings	Departments of English literature and departments of English language at 17 SA's HEIs
Decolonisation/Decoloniality	2017 undergraduate and postgraduate module offerings of departments of English literature at 17 SA's HEIs and 2017 undergraduate and postgraduate module offerings of departments of English language at 17 SA's HEIs

5.1.4 Search strategy, screening and selecting documents

The search was conducted online. So, to search for and locate the module offerings of the departments identified above, the following key phrases were used: (full name of a given university); department of English literature or department of English language; modules; decolonisation/decoloniality and 2017. In one instance keywords were separated by an “en dash” (hyphen), while in another instance Boolean operators such as “AND” or “OR” were inserted between the key phrases (cf. Impellizzeri & Bizzini, 2012; Shamseer *et al.*, 2015). In the case of decolonisation/decoloniality, the search strings, decolonisation*OR* decoloniality and decolonisation*AND* decoloniality were put together with the related aforementioned key phrases. This was done to allow for the co-occurrence possibilities of these concepts

where necessary. The search engines utilised for mounting searches were Google and Bing. In addition to the key phrase search, the portals of the departments concerned were visited by accessing the websites of their respective schools and faculties as hosted on their universities' websites. The purpose for this was to access the undergraduate and postgraduate module offerings of these departments. In both search strategies, after the information related to module offerings had been located, the module files were screened to locate the presence of the term, *decolonisation (or decoloniality)*. If located, a further search was mounted to identify in which module or in which part of the module the term appeared and to determine the purpose it served in such a module.

5.1.5 Data extraction and data analysis

The data sets for the current review were extracted from the information obtained from the undergraduate and postgraduate module offerings of the 17 South African HEIs as identified in the methodology section. The data sets were coded according to the categories illustrated in table 1. These coding categories were name of university; department; 2017 undergraduate module offerings (content); 2017 postgraduate module offerings (content); decolonisation/ decoloniality and purpose. These categories were constructed based on the content analysis and the coding procedures suggested by Creswell (2012) and Saldaña (2013). In this case, open, focused and axial coding procedures were used in which the data – extracted from module offerings – were broken into distinct parts, and categories were developed and streamlined. Axial coding helps one understand “if, when, how, and why” a particular phenomenon happened (see Saldaña, 2013: 220).

Table 2: An analysis of 2017 undergraduate and postgraduate module offerings of the 17 South African HEIs in terms of the presence of decolonisation/decoloniality, and in terms of the purpose this term serves (n = 48).

Name of university*	Department	2017 postgraduate module offerings	2017 postgraduate module offerings	Decolonisation or Decoloniality	Purpose
(1)	Applied Languages Studies	N/P	N/P	N/P	N/P
	Language & Literature	N/P	N/P	N/P	N/P
(2)	English	N/P	N/P	N/P	N/P
	Language Practice	N/P	N/P	N/P	N/P
(3)	English	N/P	N/P	N/P	N/P
	Eng Lang & Ling	N/P	N/P	N/P	N/P
(4)	School of Humanities	P (One 3rd year module)	N/O	Decolonisation	To critique post-colonial texts
(5)	English	N/P	N/P	N/P	N/P
	General Linguistics	N/P	N/P	N/P	N/P

Name of university*	Department	2017 postgraduate module offerings	2017 postgraduate module offerings	Decolonisation or Decoloniality	Purpose
(6)	English Language and Literature	P (One 2nd year module)	N/P	Decolonisation	One of module themes
	School of Languages & Literature	N/P	N/P	N/P	N/P
(7)	English Language and Comparative Literature	N/P	N/P	N/P	N/P
(8)	English (composite)	P (One 3rd year module)		Decolonisation	Part of seminar topic
(9)	English	N/P	N/P	N/P	N/P
	Linguistics	N/P	N/P	N/P	N/P
(10)	English Studies	N/P	N/P	N/P	N/P
	Languages, Linguistics and Academic Literacy	N/P	N/P	N/P	N/P
(11)	School of Languages & Communication	N/P	N/P	N/P	N/P
	Studies				
(12)	N/O	N/O	N/O	N/O	N/O
(13)	English Studies	N/P	P (One of 4 optional Hon. modules)	Decoloniality	To enable students to develop an understanding of and to critique concepts, themes, theories, regimes, case studies and African canonical figures from a decolonial perspective; and to help students acquire skills to frame critical thought outside Euro-North American critical theory and to think from African existential conditions.
	Linguistics and Modern Languages	N/P	N/P	N/P	N/P
(14)	English (composite)	N/P	N/P	N/P	N/P
(15)	English (language only)	N/P	N/P	N/P	N/P
(16)	English (composite)	N/P	N/P	N/P	N/P
(17)	English Studies	N/P	N/P	N/P	N/P
	Linguistics	N/P	N/P	N/P	N/P

* = Numbers have been provided instead of actual names; Postgraduate = Honours and (structured) Master’s course modules; P = Present; NP = Not Present; N/O = Not Offered; N/A = Not Available

The inter-coder reliability of the data was obtained by following Cohen's kappa (κ) values for reliability (see table 3). For example, Landis and Koch (1977) propose the following κ values for inter-coder reliability: 0.81 to 1.00 = almost perfect; 0.61 to 0.80 = substantial; 0.41 to 0.60 = moderate; 0.21 to 0.40 = fair; 0.00 to 0.20 = slight; and < 0.00 = poor. Later on Cicchetti (1994) modified these κ values as follows: 0.75 to 1.00 = excellent; 0.60 to 0.74 = good; 0.40 to 0.59 = fair; and < 0.40 = poor.

Table 3: Cohen's kappa values for inter-coder reliability

Name of university	Department	2017 undergraduate module offerings	2017 postgraduate module offerings	Decolonisation or Decoloniality	Purpose
$\kappa=1.00$	$\kappa=1.00$	$\kappa=1.00$	$\kappa=1.00$	$\kappa=1.00$	$\kappa=0.9$

6. Findings

As pointed out earlier, this paper conducted a desktop review of 48 module offerings of 24 departments of English literature and English language at 17 South African HEIs. It analysed the content of all the previously mentioned modules with a view to identifying the presence of the term decolonisation (or decoloniality). The paper also set out to discover the purpose this term served in the given module offerings of these departments. The focus of the review was on undergraduate and postgraduate module offerings. Pertaining to the presence of the term decolonisation (or decoloniality), table 2 indicates that there are only four such cases that were identified across the 2017 undergraduate and postgraduate module offerings of the 24 departments reviewed. Of these module offerings, three are undergraduate modules (two 3rd-year modules and one 2nd-year module) at three different HEIs. The three undergraduate modules are literature modules, all of which are African literature modules. The postgraduate module is a decoloniality module offered at honours level in the English studies department at this particular HEI. It forms part of the group of four elective modules from which students need to choose three (see table 2). During the course of the desktop review process, no presence or no mention of the term, decolonisation (or decoloniality), was detected in any of the 2017 undergraduate and postgraduate module offerings of the departments of either English language, applied languages studies, linguistics, or general linguistics.

With respect to the purpose served by decolonisation (or decoloniality), the following observations were made. For the 2nd-year module identified above, decolonisation serves as one of the themes in the critical debates on African writings. Concerning the two 3rd-year modules, one appropriates decolonisation for purposes of critiquing South African and other post-colonial literature (e.g., fiction, drama, poetry, film and television) in order to unpack the problems and consequences of political and cultural decolonisation, while the other uses decolonising as part of its seminar topic. In this regard, the focus of decolonising is on literatures resisting hegemony (e.g., colonialism, neoliberalism and dictatorship) and on imposed western modernity. Lastly, in connection with the honours module mentioned above, decoloniality is part of a module title. Its purpose is to enable students to develop an understanding of and to critique concepts, themes, theories, regimes, case studies and African canonical figures from a decolonial perspective, and to help students acquire skills

to frame critical thought outside Euro-North American critical theory and to think from African existential conditions.

7. Discussion

If the term decolonisation has a presence or a mention in only three undergraduate module offerings and in only one honours module offering among the 48 module offerings of the 24 English departments (both English literature and English language departments) reviewed in this paper, this means these are the only module offerings in which it has an explicit reference and usage. The converse seems to be true in this case, the remaining module offerings, at both binary levels, tend not to have any reference and usage, both implicit and explicit – of the term, decolonisation. Above all, this term has a zero mention in all English language module offerings of the previously mentioned departments at the said HEIs at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Module offerings, similar to disciplinary curricula, may intentionally or unintentionally in certain instances serve as epistemic spaces in which certain terms, concepts or ideas are excluded by omission or by commission. As mentioned earlier, this curricular practice is referred to as a null curriculum (see Eisner, 1985; Flinders *et al.*, 1986). Again as argued earlier, this view of the curriculum determines what knowledge to foreground and background, and what knowledge to recognise and misrecognise. When a particular aspect is not included or mentioned in a given module content, what happens is that this aspect tends to be part of what is not taught and learnt (cf. Eisner, 1985; Flinders *et al.*, 1986; Le Grange, 2016). As such, this omission or exclusion has the potential to parochialise students' options and perspectives. This is what is likely to happen when terms such as decolonisation – a polemical but a necessary buzzword that it is – are excluded or are not mentioned in the curricular spaces of the aforementioned module offerings.

At face value, locating whether a given term appears in any given text is a mechanical exercise that does not tell much about the term itself nor about the text in which it does or it does not appear. This is particularly the case with a university-level degree course module. Its value and its content matter is more than a given term. In other words, the presence or the absence of a term in a given module is not a touchstone on which the credibility and the relevance of that module can be judged. Nonetheless, when the term in question is decolonisation, engendered a great disciplinary debate in the English department at the University of Nairobi in 1968, and a term which the #FeesMustFall student movement appropriated (rightly or wrongly) in 2015-2016 in the South African HE sector to demand a radical transformation of HE curriculum, then this becomes a different epistemological game altogether. This is more so as English departments (in all their different configurations and nomenclatures) should be seen to be spearheading a decolonisation of their own curriculum content as has been the case at Makerere University and at the University of Dar es Salaam. By so doing, by extension they would be pioneering a transformation of their disciplines.

As highlighted in the preceding section, the purposes served by the term decolonisation in the four module offerings are almost the same, even though there are elemental differences in its packaging for the three undergraduate modules and for the postgraduate module, respectively. In three modules, it constitutes a thematic or topical component in each one of them, while in the other module it is a module on its own. Overall, the primary purpose of decolonisation in all these modules is to serve as part of a critical analysis toolkit. In the three undergraduate modules in which decolonisation feature, it is a form of critical enterprise mounted in African literature or in African writings. By contrast, in the postgraduate module,

decoloniality is not only part of the module title, but it is also an optional module whose primary purpose is to offer students a decolonial analysis toolkit devoid of Euro-North American frames.

8. Implications

On the one hand, it is worth mentioning upfront that entities or modules within English departments that prize in and incorporate decolonisation, in whatever form or permutation, needs to be commended. On the other hand, vexed questions in relation to the decolonisation as applied in the three undergraduate modules need to be asked: why is it that decolonisation is only applied to one African literature module or to its components thereof and why not a discipline-wide or an across-modules-decolonisation? This is similar to relegating decolonisation to the undesirable module, while the desirable ones remain unsullied. Similarly, vexed questions need to be asked with reference to the type of decolonisation used in the postgraduate module mentioned above: why an optional stand-alone decoloniality module that leaves the mainstream curriculum of the discipline-based module offerings intact or unalloyed by decoloniality? Thus, this kind of decolonisation is at best *ex gratia* and at worst instrumental. To this end, Ramathan (2016: 2) argues that university disciplines should move beyond instrumental discipline-based curriculum endeavours characterised by removing or adding modules as and when the need arises to embrace mode 2 transdisciplinary knowledge systems. To do so, discipline-based curriculum decolonisation efforts in English studies in general, would need to embrace pluri- and post-disciplinarity to deparochialise the knowledge students can acquire and to enable students to deal with complex problems within their disciplines and beyond (cf. Ryan & Tilbury, 2013).

Finally, borrowing Hitchcock's (2001: 758) views but repurposing them for this paper, there are instances when decolonisation is dressed up as parochialism. This can be said to be the case with the two versions of decolonisation identified above. Relegating decolonisation to African literature modules alone, inserting it into disciplines as a stand-alone optional module and completely excluding it in any one module, is no different from the decolonisation that Hitchcock berates. So, the form of decolonisation that will resonate with the one articulated by Ramathan's (2016) above, is the one that should deparochialise the disciplines of English studies in general – both the literature and language disciplines together with their various cognate sub-disciplines – and their related embedded bodies of knowledge. It is, therefore, the contention of this paper that decolonisation in English studies needs to expose students to local, regional, continental and global epistemic frames and analytic categories if such students are to be truly functional global citizens and not local misfits. In this context, supplanting one form of episteme with another, and one set of theoretic-linguistic/analytic frames with another set is a practice that is tantamount to epistemic parochialism.

9. Limitations and future research

This study was a desktop review of the module offerings of the identified English departments at 17 South African HEIs. Desktop-based review studies are prone to inaccuracies and misrepresentations. This stems mainly, even though not exclusively, from outdated documents or resources available on the websites and on the portals of certain university academic departments. As such, any information or any data sourced from such documents is likely not to be a true reflection of what the state-of-art is in a given department's online documents and its real-world documents. The same may be true of online copies of module offerings of the English departments reviewed in this study. However, since the inception of the study,

all the websites and the portals of the different departments were regularly visited to look for any new or updated module offering copies. This was done until just before this paper was finally submitted.

Another point that needs highlighting is that module content does not express the unstated views academic staff members may have regarding that content. It also does not articulate the kind of meta-language and meta-commentaries staff members are likely to appropriate in the course of their delivering and mediating that content. This remains one instance of a null curriculum in module offerings. Finally, module content is not the only vehicle for effecting the decolonisation of or changes to module offerings. The other crucial agents of curriculum decolonisation are academic staff members.

The current study was an attempt to survey module or curriculum decolonisation of the English departments identified above. It was just a preliminary study in this regard. Future research needs to be carried out as a collaborative effort involving more academic staff members from the English departments of other HEIs as decolonisation is an all-inclusive endeavour.

10. Conclusion

The study reported in this paper set out to conduct a desktop review of 48 module offerings of 24 departments of English literature and English language at 17 South African HEIs. To this effect, it had two aims: to identify the presence of the term decolonisation (or decoloniality) in these module offerings and to discover the purpose this term served in the given module offerings. With regard to the first goal, the study has discovered that decolonisation has a presence in only three undergraduate module offerings and that it is mentioned in only one honours module offering among the 48 module offerings reviewed. All these modules are English literature modules. Concerning the second goal, it has established that decolonisation is a module theme or topical component and that it is used for critical analytical purposes in those modules in varying degrees. Pertaining to the three undergraduate modules, the study has discovered that decolonisation is confined to African literature or to Africa writings while in the postgraduate module it is offered as one of the four optional stand-alone modules.

Against the backdrop of these findings, the paper has characterised instances in which decolonisation as a term is not mentioned in or is excluded from module offerings as akin to a null curriculum. Finally, the paper has argued for a decolonisation that deparochialises the disciplines of English studies in general.

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Appendix A: Terms, Definitions/Descriptions/Explanations & Scholars

Terms	Definitions/Descriptions/Explanations	Scholars
Transformation	"[T]ransformation could be approached as a fluid open-ended construct that is inherently complex. This complexity should be embraced when rethinking and researching transformation in higher education.	Du Preez et al. 2016:7
	"Transformation is often regarded as bringing black people and white people together, yet since the days of the Anglo-Boer war differences between English-speaking people and Afrikaners are noticeable".	Kamsteeg 2016:6
	"While transformation in South African higher education discourse has more often than not been associated with demographic changes in student and staff complements, a further dimension to the 'transformation debate' that takes it beyond numbers is institutional culture."	Webbstock and Fisher, 2016: 23
	"I use the term 'transformation' to imply a complete and radical change, in which the original idea or process becomes unrecognisable, and the new creation serves new purpose".	Maringe, 2017: 2
Decolonisation	"[W]hatever may be the headings used or the new formulas introduced, decolonization is always a violent phenomenon ... [D]ecolonization is quite simply the replacing of a certain "species" of men by another "species" of men. Decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is, obviously, a program of complete disorder. But it cannot come as a result of magical practices, nor of a natural shock, nor of a friendly understanding ..."	Fanon, 1965: 33, 34, 35 & 36
	"Decolonisation is process, not arrival; it invokes an ongoing dialectic between hegemonic centrist systems and peripheral subversion of them; between European or British discoursed and their post-colonial dis/manling".	Tiffin, 1995: 95
	"[D]ecolonisation is about the consciousness and rejection of values, norms, customs and world views imposed by the colonisers".	Césaire, 2000: 89
	"Decolonization, fundamentally, is a form of revolution waged by, and in the best interests of, racially colonized peoples..."	Rabaka, 2009: 187
	Decolonisation is "an ongoing process of intellectual and epistemological contestation in African and (more broadly) Africana contexts".	Cleary, 2012: 7
	"But in considering critically the decolonisation of education in Africa, cognisance also needs to be taken of the other commonly revealed in African indigenous knowledge systems that speaks to the transformation of education in Africa, namely, the African ethic of Ubuntu".	Mbembe, 2016: 30
	"We need to decolonize the systems of access and management insofar as they have turned higher education into a marketable product, rated, bought, and sold by standard units, measured, counted and reduced to staple equivalence by impersonal, mechanical tests and therefore readily subject to statistical consistency, with numerical standards and units".	Mbembe, 2016: 36
	"Today, the decolonizing project is back on the agenda worldwide. It has two sides. The first is a critique of the dominant Eurocentric academic model - the fight against what Latin Americans in particular call 'epistemic coloniality' ... The second is an attempt at imagining what the alternative to this model could look like. This is where a lot remains to be done."	Jansen, 2017: 158-159
	Decolonisation is a decentering of European knowledge and a recentring of African knowledge. Decolonisation is the Africanisation of knowledge; decolonisation is additive-inclusive knowledge; decolonisation is critical engagement with settled knowledge; decolonisation is encounters with entangled knowledges; and decolonisation is the repatriation of occupied knowledge (and society).	Jansen, 2017: 159-163

Terms	Definitions/Descriptions/Explanations	Scholars
Africanisation	"First was the great humanist and democratic tradition of European literature: Aeschylus, Sophocles, Shakespeare, Balzac, Dickens, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Gorky and Brecht to mention but just a few names. But their literature, even as its humane and universal, necessarily reflected the European experience of history. The world of its setting and the world it evoked would be more familiar to a child brought up in the same landscape than to one brought up outside, no matter how the latter might try to see Jane Austen's characters in the gossiping women of his rural African setting".	Wa Thiong'o, 1986:91
	"Africanisation ... holds that different foundations exist for the construction of pyramids of knowledge. It holds further that communication is possible between the various pyramids. It disclaims the view that any pyramid of knowledge is by its very nature eminently superior to all the others".	Ramose, 1998:vi
	"Nonetheless it is noteworthy that Africanisation, which inevitably contains the deconstruction of Eurocentrism should not be construed as an absolute rejection of the influence of European thinking on African scholarship but rather as a rejection of assumed European intellectual hegemony".	Lebakeng et al., 2006:77
	"The concept of Africanisation directs our attention to the fact that things are not going the way they should within the African educational, economic, political, and social lives. Africanisation demands a re-narration of the African existence".	Okeke, 2010: 42
	"The call for Africanisation is neither an advocacy to be anti-West, nor is it discouragement to learn from the West. It is rather an encouragement to learn from the West, but in a selective and constructive manner".	Letsekha, 2013: 15
	"I want [to] explain in some detail what I mean by 'Africanisation', as it, much like its companion term 'transformation', has been used in a variety of ways in South Africa".	Metz, 2015: 243
	"As is well known, Africanisation and transformation more broadly, have in practice over the past twenty years largely been reduced to the admissions, hirings and promotions of black people."	Metz, 2015: 245-246
	"In the light of the above analysis, it is useful to think of the Africanisation of institutional culture along a spectrum of people manifestations."	Metz, 2015: 252