



Decolonising the curriculum: Southern interrogations of time, place and knowledge

Catherine Manathunga

School of Education,
University of Sunshine Coast
Australia

cmanathu@usc.edu.au

ABSTRACT

Introduction

Scholars such as Connell (2007), Chen (2010) and Alatas (2006) have provided evidence of the ways in which epistemologies, knowledge systems, theories, research and publication practices dominate many of the means of knowledge production globally. This has taken on a particular urgency in South Africa since the #RhodesMustFall (#RMF) and #FeesMustFall (#FMF) student campaigns beginning in 2015. As a Southern, white settler/invader scholar in the postcolonial country of Australia still dominated by Northern knowledge systems, I also have to acknowledge the ways in which I am

my family for five generations. As a woman who is proud to call herself a feminist and has struggled with ongoing marginalisation as a woman academic, my standpoint is also intrinsically feminist.

work as academics we give and receive knowledge and ideas. As an Australian with a deep respect for cultural symbol in Figure 1), which comes with permission from the Turrbal people of the Murri (Indigenous) clan groups from Brisbane which is my home town. This acknowledges my geographical heartland and its multiple and complex histories.

The cultural complexities of my own family illustrate the ways in which labels such as White and Australian break down because of postcolonial hybridities. My first marriage was to a Sri Lankan Australian man which is why my family name is Manathunga. I have since learned that Manathunga is originally an African name that must have travelled across the seas to Sri Lanka several centuries ago. I have two Sri Lankan-Australian sons. I have learnt a great deal about intercultural experiences and identities by watching them grow up. I am a proud bearer of a Sri Lankan family name and a proud intercultural mother. I have two sons, one Australian with some Chippewa First Nations American and Colombian heritage. Therefore, my standpoint is now influenced by the multiple, entangled cultural identities of my sons and daughters-in-law and their families who are now part of my family.

Postcolonial cultures and identities: the problem with language

For the project of SOTL in the South, I need to explain why I have chosen to rely on quite problematic language like Northern/Southern, Western/Eastern, Indigenous/Aboriginal and black/white. I fully appreciate the work of Soe in the no),

SOTL in the South as a site of contested histories, geographies and epistemologies

The Scholarship of Teaching and L

In this article, I have also drawn upon the work of Colombian theorist, Escobar (2007) and of African theorists, Nyamnjoh, Garuba and Busia. I researched and wrote this manuscript while I was in Bogota, Colombia working with colleagues at the University of La Sabana. I had many postcolonial moments when I was reading and writing about South Africa, while sitting in a shared office with my Colombian colleagues quietly talking around me in Spanish and getting updates from my Instagram language app urging me to learn some new Irish words. As Ruitenberg (2015) argues, I am undeniably influenced by my geographic location as well as by the traces of the geographic locations which I have found myself in the past. / • Z OE E Ç u v i 6) Z e n t i m e n t i w h e r e h e r e s p o n d s t o t h e q u e s t i o n ' A r e y o u f r o m x ? ' w i t h t h e c r y p t i c r e s p o n s e ' N o t y e t ! ' W h i l e t h e s e t h e o r i s t s h a v e n o t e x p l i c i t l y e n g a g e d i n t h e C T L, t h e i r t h e o r i e s e n a b l e t o w o r k t o w a r d s t h e u n d o i n g o f k n o w l e d g e h i e r a r c h i e s t h a t p r i v i l e g e N o r t h e r n k n o w l e d g e.

Arturo Escobar is an interdisciplinary Colombian scholar and activist who initially trained in science and engineering and later moved into social sciences and anthropology. He is a Professor at the University of North Carolina in the US and has conducted or participated 5(o)-5(f)-3688,W5()19(s)11(

Garuba (2010) also emphasises the importance of moving on from essentialist and ontological arguments about origins and identities and instead suggests the need to recognise the trajectories and transformations of history. Exploring the writings of the African diaspora, he critiques the false binary between positioning Africa as origin or denying the role of Africa with an emphasis on hybridity and creolisation. Instead he suggests that genre theory and Foucauldian discourse analysis assist us to re-theorise Africa in a non-essentialising way (Garuba 2010: 245).

Feminist African theorist, Abena Busia, is the Chair of the Department of Women's and Gender Studies at Rutgers University in New Jersey. She is also the editor of the groundbreaking Women Writing Africa Project, a multi-volume anthology published by the Feminist Press at the City University of New York. This anthology is designed to recognise African women. In a piece about funerals and exile, Busia (2006) is regarded as dynamic and ever-changing rather than as static. She emphasises how, each time a ritual

intellectual contributions and (trans)cultural disposition (Singhet al. 2016:61). Together we have been arguing for the use of life history methodologies in intercultural supervision especially in the supervision of Indigenous, migrant, refugee and international students. Using a postcolonial or decolonial historical methodology (Chakrabarty 2007; Battiste 2008), this research positions histories

place as a contact zone where difference is encoded. Ruitenberg (2002: 214-215) argues that 'where we learn becomes part of what we learn because I am undeniably influenced by my geographic location as well as by the traces of the geographic locations in which I have found myself in the past.' / o • } (] v Z } • [• ~ í ã õ ò

Western students) engage respectfully with Southern knowledges (Manathunga 2014). As a Western scholar located in the South, thinking through these theoretical resources about knowledge means that we have a particular responsibility to facilitate South-South dialogue and to decolonise knowledge, theory and education. There would also be times where we need to encourage our students to respect racism (Jones 1995: 376) reminds us that we must at times embrace positively a politics of disappointment that includes a productive acceptance of the ignorance of the other and a gracious acceptance of not having to know the other. Finally, we would need to encourage our students to engage in respectful and rigorous critique of Southern Knowledge and Theory (Mantoni 1996; Nakata 2007). Some of these practices are already evident in Indigenous and Cambodian student and in the empirical research I conducted for my book (Manathunga 2014).

Conclusions: Decolonising the curriculum

To conclude, I would like to extrapolate from the site of intercultural supervision to make some broader recommendations about

Thirdly, I believe that developing a decolonised curriculum would involve three parallel and equally important curriculum processes:

1. The systematic deconstruction of Northern knowledge;
2. Critical Whiteness Studies;
3. The systematic reconstruction of Southern knowledge.

This curriculum would not throw out Western/Northern theory and knowledge systems but rather seek to critically read the canon and the archive against the grain to highlight explicitly black, cultural minority, Eastern, Middle Eastern, Latin and South American, Indigenous peoples, and indeed women have been and continue to be systematically recognised (Lockett & Naicker 2016) and marginalised in universities. As Chakrabarty (2007) has argued, Western theory is both necessary and insufficient in postcolonial contexts. Reading the canon against the grain involves both discursive and non-discursive or material critical deconstruction of Northern/Western texts. If the Western canon was simply removed, it would not be possible to identify, analyse and critique the colonial and neoliberal operations of power that have caused and continue to cause black and Western pain and anger. This history and these texts matter precisely because they have created and perpetuated the unjust conditions of the present. Unless these histories and texts are systematically critiqued and deconstructed, their effects will continue to remain unresolved in the future.

Fourthly, an important part of this process is to incorporate Critical Whiteness Studies in the curriculum to assist white students to begin to appreciate the privileges they have been accorded simply because of the colour of their skin. Critical Whiteness Studies emerged as part of Critical Race Studies in the early 1990s. It aims to render whiteness visible to subvert the power of whiteness (Steyn 2005: 122, 120). As Steyn (2005: 20) argues, whiteness is an ideologically supported social positionality that has accrued to people of European descent as a consequence of economic and

Northern theory into dialogue in supervision and ensuring that Northern theorists (including ourselves and our Western students) engage respectfully with Southern knowledges. It would also involve seeking to go beyond simplistic dualities and cultural essentialism, as Nakata (2006:9) does in *Z d Z* cultural interface [and as Hountondji (1996), Nyamnjoh (2016), Garuba (2010) and Busia (2006) do in relation to African diversity.

Sixthly, as a Western scholar located in the South, thinking through these theoretical resources about knowledge means that we have a particular responsibility to facilitate South-South dialogue and to decolonise knowledge, theory and education. As a settler/invasor scholar, I feel I have a particular responsibility as a member of the global South but as a privileged Australian to invest my energies and resources in working with colleagues in Indigenous, migrant and refugee communities in Australia, in South Africa, in Latin America, in the Pacific and in Asia.

Finally, all of these strategies would rely on the development of what Nyamnjoh (2015) calls 'conviviality'. This idea of conviviality takes us beyond notions of collegiality. Nyamnjoh (2016) argues that 'conviviality' is less respectful than the term 'collegiality'. It probably also takes us beyond some of the elitist exclusions lurking beneath the traditional university concept of collegiality which really meant equality only for white male middle class professors. Conviviality involves emphasising our relationality and interdependence and the need for a dialogue between knowledge systems (Nyamnjoh 2015), so focuses on conversation [which] is privileged over conversion, and ritual influences [which] are more amenable to the logic of conviviality than is coercive [or indeed symbolic] violence (Nyamnjoh 2015: 146-147).

call to form global solidarities of scholar-activists within and outside of the academy to decolonise the curriculum. In summary this would involve:

- Listening and hearing the pain and anger of black and Western voices globally
- Avoiding essentialism by historically situating identity claims and counter claims
- Deconstructing the operations of power and privilege in Northern knowledge
- Introducing Critical Whiteness Studies for all university students (especially white students)
- Systematically reconstructing and revaluing Southern knowledge
- Engaging in South-South and South-North dialogue
- Operating from a space of conviviality.

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