

From Ivory Towers to Ebony Towers:
Transforming Humanities Curricula
in South Africa, Africa and African-
American Studies

From Ivory Towers to Ebony Towers: Transforming Humanities Curricula in South Africa, Africa and African- American Studies

Edited by Oluwaseun Tella and Shireen Motala

Fanele
(Zul; Kho; Tso): necessary.
This is a necessary book.



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Section I: Introduction

Chapter 1

Transforming humanities curricula in South Africa, Africa and African-American studies

Oluwaseun Tella

Background and context: South Africa's curriculum transformation efforts

South Africa celebrated 25 years of black majority rule in 2019. While there has been visible transformation in the composition of the country's governing elite, other spheres, including economic and social frameworks, remain mostly untransformed. This is particularly evident in the country's higher education system, as South African universities continue to embrace international practices to be well positioned in global university rankings (Dlamini, 2016). Despite two-and-a-half decades of black majority rule, South African higher education continues to embrace European models and paradigms. Paradoxically, concepts such as Africanisation, indigenisation and decolonisation of the curriculum have become buzzwords, especially after 2015 (Mahabeer, 2018). Nonetheless, in general, the country's universities continue to reflect Eurocentric, colonial and apartheid designs, and concerns have been expressed about over-representation of white academics and Western scholarship in the upper echelons of academia.

The #MustFall campaigns, student-led protests which began at the University of Cape Town (UCT) in 2015 and reverberated across the country's universities, ignited recent calls for curriculum transformation, the abolition of Eurocentric epistemologies, and for indigenous knowledge systems to be embraced (see Malabela, Chapter 7, Knowles, Chapter 8, and Ndelu, Chapter 9, in this volume). The protests also raised issues around access, fees and the slow pace of transformation across South African higher education institutions (see Motala, Chapter 5, in this volume). The country's universities are thus seen as sites of oppression, where Western literature and Eurocentric world-views are prioritised at the expense of African positionality. Universities are, therefore, failing in their primary responsibility to enhance social change as higher education spaces continue to perpetuate marginalisation and exclusion (Kotze, 2018).

The legacies of the apartheid regime's 'separate development' are visible in South African higher education in the democratic era. In 1949, the apartheid government set up the Eiselen Commission on Native Education, which was saddled with the primary responsibility of modifying the content and form

of the curriculum taught to black South Africans. Its recommendations led to the passing of the Bantu Education Act in 1953, which created a segregated schooling system, and the subsequent 1959 University Extension Act, which extended the Bantu Education system to higher education institutions, giving rise to historically black universities (HBUs) such as Limpopo and Zululand. Relative to the historically white universities (HWU) – such as the universities of Cape Town, Pretoria and the Witwatersrand – these institutions are underfunded and ill-equipped, with negative impacts on the quality of research and teaching (see Adebajo, Chapter 2, Motala, Chapter 5, and Mngomezulu, Chapter 6, in this volume).

Successive governments since 1994 have adopted various policies and initiatives to transform the South African higher education sector, including the 1995 National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) and the 1997 Education White Paper 3: *A Programme for Higher Education Transformation* (see Mngomezulu, Chapter 6, in this volume). Several institutions to fast-track the transformation of the higher education system have also been established. These include Higher Education South Africa (HESA), created in 2005 – now Universities South Africa – and the Centre for Higher Education Transformation (CHET), established in 1996. The CHET in particular aims to tackle the bottlenecks inhibiting transformation in this sector. However, South African universities remain significantly untransformed as Eurocentric world-views remain dominant. This has led to calls for curricula that speak to the socio-economic and political realities of the post-apartheid era. While curriculum transformation does not necessarily imply delinking from Western epistemologies, it advocates putting Africa at the centre of curriculum design and delivery. This manifests not only in the composition of academic staff, but also in the content of the curricula. As Nigerian academic Harry Garuba rightly notes, the racial composition of an institution does not always determine success in terms of curriculum transformation (Garuba, 2015). Transformation should go beyond fees reduction or free education, or the removal of the statues of colonial administrators and renaming institutions. Genuine transformation calls for serious engagement with knowledge production and delivery, and a disruptive shift that has been labelled ‘a decolonial turn in the academic space’ (Zondi, 2018). One way in which South African universities have perpetuated Eurocentrism is the reward system, which offers academics financial rewards for publishing in accredited journals. While this is commendable, it suffers from two shortcomings. First, Western journals are more valued and rewarded (Melber, 2018). Preference for international journals reinforces Western epistemic hegemony. Second, there has been an alarming increase in the number of South African academics publishing in predatory journals that appear on accredited

lists. While the bodies responsible for compiling lists of accredited publications are culpable, academics that publish in these journals are also to blame.

Earlier decolonial and transformation efforts include attempts by academics like the late South African anthropologist Archie Mafeje, who vigorously argued for curriculum reforms as early as 1968 (Mngomezulu and Hadebe, 2018), and the 1976 student protests against the use of Afrikaans as the language of instruction in schools and oppressive Bantu Education. The development of isiZulu and isiXhosa as languages of instruction at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and Rhodes University, respectively, is a recent concrete attempt towards decolonisation (Rossouw, 2018). It is believed that the use of indigenous languages would facilitate better understanding of academic concepts and theories, and also enable students to relate well to content because many of them think in their indigenous languages. However, it remains to be seen if these efforts will yield the desired results, given the slow pace of the implementation of this initiative at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

South Africa's 1997 Higher Education Act notes the need to redress past discrimination and ensure representativeness and equal access (South African Government, 1997). However, the overarching theme of curriculum transformation debates is the re-awakening of indigenous knowledge, practices and languages that have been relegated to the background. It is important that Africa-centred scholarship is embraced in order to thwart the hegemony of Western episteme. While Western scholarship is critical for the development of the West, it does not sufficiently capture the African experience (Matthews, 2018). The salience of transformation stems from the hegemonic notion that Western epistemologies are universal and that indigenous knowledge systems are of less value. Decolonisation and transformation thus connote the struggle against epistemicides with the ultimate objective of understanding other knowledge systems. South African scholar Lesley le Grange (2016) highlighted five key factors that could transform South African curricula: (1) assessing the relevance of Western disciplines for domestic African contexts; (2) creating transdisciplinary knowledge that incorporates indigenous communities; (3) developing a curriculum that reflects local and regional realities; (4) teaching students about the Cradle of Humankind; and (5) drawing lessons from the Inter-cultural University of the Indigenous Nations and Peoples, Amawtay Wasi, in Ecuador. The last approach – learning from the experiences of other countries – forms the crux of this book. Beyond the use of internally constructed strategies to foster curriculum transformation in South Africa, it would add value to draw lessons from the curriculum transformation efforts of other African countries and African-American studies in the United States.

Lessons from the experiences of other African countries: Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania

The end of colonialism in Africa from the 1950s and 1960s witnessed the rise of struggles to transform the continent's universities. This marked the most important era in curriculum transformation efforts in African higher education, evident in the rise of leading scholars such as Nigeria's Kenneth Dike, Guyana's Walter Rodney and Senegal's Cheikh Anta Diop, who championed decolonial schools: the Ibadan School of History, the Dar es Salaam School of Political Economy and the Dakar School of Culture, respectively. These centres used rigorous research techniques, such as nationalist historiography and oral sources, to challenge Eurocentric epistemologies (see Falola, Chapter 13, Rugumamu, Chapter 14, and Mboup, Chapter 15, in this volume). However, these schools were criticised on many levels. The Ibadan School was chastised for presenting a narrow historical perspective, while detractors pointed to the Dar es Salaam school's emphasis on economic determinism (see Falola, Chapter 13, and Rugumamu, Chapter 14, in this volume).

Beyond the efforts of these scholars and their schools, many first-generation African scholars vigorously fought Western epistemological dominance. These included political scientists such as Kenya's Ali A Mazrui and Nigeria's Claude Ake; anthropologists such as South Africa's Archie Mafeje and Ghana's Maxwell Owusu; geographers like Kenya's Simeon Ominde; historians like Ghana's Adu Boahen and Nigeria's Jacob FA Ajayi; and literary scholars such as Nigeria's Chinua A Achebe, Senegal's Ousmane Sembène, Kenya's Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Uganda's Okot p'Bitek (Arowosegbe, 2014a). South Africa could draw lessons from these African countries and create similar schools, as well as adopt research techniques such as nationalist historiography and oral sources to capture the socio-economic and political realities of contemporary South Africa.

However, the efforts of these schools of thought and first-generation scholars have been eroded as many African universities, such as the University of Ibadan, the University of Dar es Salaam and the University of Dakar (Cheikh Anta Diop University), continue to perpetuate the hegemony of Western thought and wallow in epistemic crises, as seen in their continuous academic dependence on Europe and the United States. This is compounded by the fact that Africa's research funding and its volume of internationally recognised publications are infinitesimal (Arowosegbe, 2014b). This challenge was especially daunting in the 1980s when the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank imposed structural adjustment programmes. The emergence of military regimes and the attendant human rights abuses, as well as Cold War politics across Africa, further dampened academic freedom (Mazrui, 2003).

The West remains the generator and exporter of concepts and theories that are tested in Africa. It continues to attract many students from Africa, and African scholars continue to pride themselves on the validation of their scholarship in the West through publication in so-called ‘high impact journals’ (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Kenyan academic Ali Mazrui (2003: 147) poignantly noted that ‘African universities have been the highest transmitters of Western culture in African societies. The high priests of Western civilization in the continent are virtually all products of those cultural seminaries called “universities”’. It is against this backdrop that a Nigerian scholar, Claude Ake (1979), argues that Western social science perpetuates imperialism, although it embraces a subtle academic rather than forceful economic imperialism.

Ugandan academic Mahmood Mamdani (2018) argues that the African university emerged as an integral part of the Western colonial agenda to build institutions and individuals that would champion ‘excellence’, irrespective of domestic context. However, after decolonisation, intellectuals emerged who prioritised relevance over excellence. These scholars were primarily concerned with the specificities of their domestic context (Mamdani, 2018). But, as noted earlier, the efforts of this generation of African academics have largely vanished. This is another important lesson for South Africa. It is not only important to call for curriculum transformation, but the process must also be internalised and institutionalised to guarantee generational mobility.

Lessons from African-American studies

The African-American scholar Molefi Kete Asante has often argued that the education offered to African Americans alienates them from their culture and traditions, and glorifies Western culture. An emancipatory education would take cognisance of the need to engage Africa’s and America’s history, using Afrocentricity as a framework. Thus, teaching and research must be framed from an African standpoint. This implies that African Americans should be the subjects rather than the objects of education to counteract inferiority and marginalisation (Asante, 1991).

Historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) were founded primarily to offer education to African Americans. In a country that confronts racial discrimination, HBCUs seek to, among other things, maintain black traditions, serve as a source of leadership for the black community and produce competent black graduates (Brown and Davis, 2001). Similar to the realities in apartheid South Africa, before the American Civil War (1861–65) higher education was racially segregated and African-American students were denied access to education through institutional and legal frameworks such as Jim

Crow laws and Black Codes (see Morris, Chapter 21, and Allen, Jones and Regassa, Chapter 23, in this volume). It is not therefore surprising that by 1865, literate African Americans accounted for only 5 per cent of a total black population of around 4.5 million (Brown and Davis, 2001). This period saw the burgeoning of HBCUs. However, in contrast to the realities in South Africa's post-apartheid era, there was significant financial support for HBCUs in the post-Civil War period, and these institutions emerged as veritable sources of socio-economic and political mobility among black Americans (see Allen, Jones and Regassa, Chapter 23, in this volume). Thus, HBCUs are critical to African Americans' influence and roles in a society that is exclusionary and discriminatory. Nevertheless, these institutions remain underfunded in comparison to 'historically white universities and colleges' (HWCUs).

The development of African studies in America was directly linked to the independence of African countries and the civil rights movement in the United States in the 1960s (Ferreira, 2010). While independence resulted in more African students attending American universities, the civil rights movement ignited the entry of African Americans into predominantly white universities and colleges. However, these students and academics were shocked by the racism they experienced in these institutions. This led to the embrace of Pan-Africanism and calls for curriculum transformation, relevance and social justice (Zezeza, 2011). Interest in African studies and area studies was also propelled by Cold War politics. The US government was actively involved in the development of African studies with the aim of promoting national security and global hegemony. For example, the 1958 National Defense Education Act VI provided for the teaching of African languages (Ferreira, 2010). Thus, African studies during this period were shaped by US foreign policy as Washington attempted to universalise Euro-American knowledge across the globe, including Africa.

African-American studies emerged in the United States as a Pan-African project and focused on decolonisation in Africa and civil rights struggles in America in the post-Second World War era (Zezeza, 2011). Two important schools emerged, namely, the Atlanta School of Sociology championed by individuals such as W.E.B. Du Bois and Richard Wright, and the Howard School of International Affairs with prominent scholars such as Ralph Bunche and Merze Tate (see Morris, Chapter 21, and Johnson, Chapter 22, in this volume). Both schools relied on rigorous research techniques – surveys, field interviews and ethnography – to debunk the notion of black inferiority. The onus lies with South African academics to take a cue from this approach to confront the ubiquitous legacies of apartheid in higher education.

Approach and content

This book of 24 chapters is structured in seven sections. The first two introductory chapters present an overview of the major themes of the book. This chapter lays the foundation of, and provides a background to, the study. In Chapter 2, Nigerian scholar Adekeye Adebajo notes that South Africa has continued to adopt Western models in the democratic era. This is evident in the challenges the country confronts in its quest to decolonise the humanities curriculum and free the country's higher education from Eurocentrism. The author argues that, while there have been reform efforts on the part of post-apartheid governments such as the 1995 National Commission on Higher Education and the 2000 National Student Financial Aid Scheme, South Africa's higher education remains largely untransformed. Adebajo offers potential lessons for South Africa's higher education sector from other African countries and African-American studies in the United States.

Section II comprises four chapters, which engage the challenges that confront transformation efforts in South Africa's higher education sector. South African scholar Crain Soudien's chapter locates the student protests between 2015 and 2017 within broader epistemological and ontological issues. He opines that, while epistemological considerations are well-engaged in South Africa, ontological issues have been largely neglected. Despite the fact that ontological considerations have identified racism to be a major challenge in contemporary South Africa, they have been unable to engage its psychological effects, particularly the 'phenomenon of black pain'. In Chapter 4, South African educationist Ahmed Bawa observes that to understand the rationale for the heavy reliance of South Africa's higher education system on Western epistemologies, there is an urgent need to investigate the conditions that led to the emergence of South African universities. He uses transformation efforts at the former University of Natal as a case study to illustrate these points.

In Chapter 5, South African scholar Shireen Motala reveals that successive South African governments in the post-1994 democratic era have supported equity in higher education, despite declining government revenues. However, high levels of inequality persist, begging the question of the efficacy of government policies on equity. To address this issue, the author engages four key themes: (1) fee-free education and free higher education; (2) education as a public and private good; (3) expansion, equity and quality of education; and (4) equitable funding models and approaches. Section II concludes with a chapter by another South African academic, Bheki Mngomezulu, who argues that the apartheid education system was characterised by a glaring dichotomy between the advantaged historically white institutions and the disadvantaged historically black institutions. Despite the efforts of successive post-apartheid governments

to improve the academic administration and capacity at the HBUs such as the universities of Limpopo, Walter Sisulu and Zululand, the author notes that these institutions remain confronted by greater challenges than the HWUs in terms of funding, infrastructure, research and teaching. These challenges have stymied transformation efforts at the HBUs.

The three chapters in Section III present the lessons that can be drawn from South Africa's student movements. Relying on primary data supplemented with media reports, former South African student activist Musawenkosi Malabela assesses student protests at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) between 2015 and 2016. Two key issues that emerge in this chapter include the call for transformation and a decolonised curriculum, and the response of university management. The student protests at Rhodes University are the subject of Chapter 8 by Zambian–South African scholar Corrine Knowles. She argues that, without carefully constructed and implemented policies around teaching, working and living spaces at Rhodes, the university will continue to embrace neoliberal ideas, thus circumscribing transformation efforts. Knowles then deploys three concepts – embodiment, collectivism and recentring – to engage the nexus between the student protests and transformation discourses.

Another South African scholar-activist, Sandile Ndelu, engages the 'Fallist' student protests at the University of Cape Town (UCT) in Chapter 9. She notes that the call for a decolonised curriculum at UCT must be seen in the light of marginalisation and epistemic violence experienced by black students who refuse to 'whiten up' at the University. She then outlines the demands of the movement, most especially the removal of Cecil Rhodes's statute in 2015 and the call for a decolonised curriculum. The events that followed led the movement and university management to engage with 'what the university teaches, who teaches it, and how it teaches' (see Ndelu, Chapter 9, in this volume).

Section IV highlights the issues around the transformation of South Africa's humanities curriculum. South African academic Joel Modiri considers the conditions that can enhance the success of the decolonisation of the education project in South Africa in Chapter 10. The author argues that efforts to decolonise the curricula in the country will only be meaningful if they take cognisance of the struggle for a decolonised world. Modiri submits that the deployment of decolonisation by academics and policy-makers must take cognisance of South Africa's peculiar settler-colonial past. In Chapter 11, Nigerian scholar Jimi Adesina argues that while the teaching and learning of sociology must be embedded within an African context, there is still an over-reliance on Western theories and models, which are often taught out of context. The author debunks the widespread idea that there is a lack of African scholarship on sociology.

He submits that this reflects ignorance and neglect of African social science scholarship. South African scholar Philip Higgs argues in Chapter 12 for the revival of indigenous African knowledges – which have been relegated to the back-burner – in the quest for curriculum transformation in the discipline of philosophy. This is critical for the socio-economic circumstances of South Africans to find expression in the country's educational spaces. In contrast to scholars who have argued for Africa to de-link from Western thought, Higgs advocates what he refers to as a 'fusion of epistemologies', that is, a synthesis of indigenous African knowledges and Western epistemologies.

Section V of this volume offers potential lessons for South Africa that can be drawn from African schools of thought, including the Ibadan, Dar es Salaam and Dakar schools. Nigerian historian Toyin Falola discusses the Ibadan School of History in Chapter 13. The author notes that the appointment of Kenneth Dike at the University College, Ibadan, resulted in an intellectual struggle against a Eurocentric view of African history that had dominated the university's School of History. Deploying oral sources and nationalist historiographies, Dike challenged the negative depiction of Africa by Western historians, and sought to ensure that the continent's history was more objectively portrayed by its own scholars. Other important academics of this school included Adiele Afigbo, Obaro Ikime, Tekena Tamuno and Bolanle Awe. They analysed topics ranging from indirect rule to African leadership and institutions. In Chapter 14, Tanzanian scholar Severine Rugumamu presents the Dar es Salaam School of Political Economy, which emerged in 1964. Some of the prominent members of this school included Guyana's Walter Rodney and Congo's Jacques Depelchin and Ernest Wamba-dia-Wamba. These scholars ascribed Tanzania's and, by extension, Africa's underdevelopment to colonialism and capitalism. Rugumamu illustrates that the internal contradictions of the capitalist system in the 1970s, the East Asian miracle by the 1980s and the disintegration of the Soviet Union by 1991, resulted in the decline of the Dar es Salaam School of Political Economy. Chapter 15 by Samba Mboup, a Senegalese researcher, examines the Dakar School of Culture. The rise of the school was directly linked to the scholarship of Cheikh Anta Diop from Senegal and Samir Amin from Egypt. The school also benefited from the works of scholars such as Congo's Théophile Obenga, Senegal's Abdoulaye Ly and Ghana's Ayi Kwei Armah. Their progressive scholarship helped to shape societal transformation. However, this chapter focuses on how Cheikh Anta Diop adopted Afrikology to transform curriculum and research methods in the humanities and social sciences.

Section VI provides lessons from other parts of Africa, including Ghana, Kenya and Uganda. It also discusses the influence of the Heinemann African Writers Series. Nigerian scholar Harry Garuba argues that despite the

criticisms levelled against the Heinemann African Writers Series in terms of its monopoly on the publication of African literature – especially between the 1960s and the 1990s – South Africa could draw lessons from this project in terms of decolonisation and higher education. Garuba notes that lessons can be drawn in areas such as accessibility, the publication of low-cost paperbacks and the republication of the classics. In Chapter 17, Ghanaian scholar David Owusu-Ansah opines that there is a need for a strong relationship between higher education institutions and society. For him, knowledge production across African universities ought to be informed by societal challenges. It is within this context that Owusu-Ansah focuses on the nexus between Ghana's post-colonial societal challenges and knowledge production. The author submits that the regime of Kwame Nkrumah, the founding Ghanaian leader (1957–66), focused on building an educational system from scratch to serve the cause of national development.

Ugandan academic Pamela Khanakwa traces the process of Africanisation at Makerere University in the 1960s and 1970s in Chapter 18. She engages transformation efforts in terms of the Africanisation of both academic and administrative staff at the institution, as well as in the context of curriculum transformation. She uses archival documents gathered from the Makerere University Library, supplemented by other relevant literature. In Chapter 19, Kenyan academic Chris Wanjala highlights the transformation efforts of scholars such as Kenya's Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Uganda's Okot p'Bitek and Uganda's Taban Lo Liyong at the University of Nairobi in Kenya, and in the East African sub-region more broadly, from the 1970s. The author explores how these literary figures used oral and popular literature that revolved around African people, society and history to challenge Eurocentric ideas across East Africa.

African-American studies are the focus of Section VII. South African-American scholar Zine Magubane examines the 'pre-history' of the disciplines in African studies in the United States. She explores the development of concepts for the study of Africans and the African diaspora, and notes the spread of the disciplines of African studies and, by extension, Western epistemologies across the globe. Magubane highlights the 'intellectual confrontations' and 'social particularities' that determined how the history of people of African descent was researched before the emergence of African and African-American studies in the United States. African-American academic Aldon Morris shows how the Atlanta School of Sociology, which emerged in a black university, prided itself on the principle of 'accurate scholarship that would disprove black inferiority and lay the foundation for black activism that produced liberation movements, thus enabling blacks to reach their full potential'. Prominent members of this

school included W.E.B. Du Bois, Richard Wright and Monroe Nathan. The school adopted rigorous research techniques to study black people and the oppression they encountered in America.

In Chapter 22, another African-American scholar, Krista Johnson, also acknowledges the need for curriculum transformation in higher education. She examines the epoch of widespread racial segregation in the United States between the 1930s and 1950s. She focuses particularly on the Howard School of International Affairs and the work of eminent black academics, including Ralph Bunche, Alain Locke, Merze Tate and Eric Williams. These academics sensitised the broader public to issues of racism while acting as public intellectuals. In Chapter 23, American scholars Walter Allen, Chantal Jones and Gadise Regassa engage the emergence of HBCUs in the United States. They argue that the emergence of institutions such as Howard and Fisk was sparked by the racism and oppression experienced by black people in America. The authors note that HBCUs became – and remain – critical to the social mobility of more than 40 million black people in the United States.

In the concluding chapter, South African academic Shireen Motala offers a synthesis and summarises the book's major findings and conclusions focusing on the five main themes of transformation, developing agency, decolonising the curriculum, making knowledge accessible in African scholarship and implementing change in African-American studies.

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