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Epistemic (in)justice and decolonisation in higher education: experiences of a cross-site teaching project

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Higher education has been strongly contested in recent times, on the grounds of its role in reproducing epistemic injustice, leading to calls to ‘decolonise’ institutions, curricula and teaching practices. Meanwhile, the practice of epistemic critique also points to potentials for challenge, learning and change. This article offers critical reflections in two distinct moments of time: firstly, reflections on experiences of a cross-site teaching project (2016) involving three of the authors (Mucha, Pesch and Wielenga) from the Departments of Political Science at the Universities of Düsseldorf (Germany) and Pretoria (South Africa) in an academic virtual collaboration project using shared classes and video-conferencing tools to study peace-building, human mobility and mediation. Secondly, the writing process for this article has involved a further collaborative author (Khoo) to comment upon and theorise curriculum-making and teaching experiences. We look at the different contexts in each country and how far the curricula and syllabi at both universities can be supplemented by cross-site teaching elements to deal with epistemic asymmetries in higher education reflexively, while leaning towards a more just knowledge (re)production. Some key challenges and limitations of the cross-site project are also discussed.

Keywords: epistemic justice, decolonisation, higher education

Introduction

Knowledge (re)production, especially in the social sciences, is a social process of discourse and debate, of speech and response. However, 500 years of (Western) colonial expansion have made a lasting impact. Today's academic debate is both epistemically and ontologically shaped by Anglo-American and European perspectives (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018a; Spivak 2004; Ziai 2015). Concepts of epistemic injustice relate to existing power asymmetries in knowledge (re)production not solely with respect to dominant (Western) perspectives, concepts, and terminologies but also blind spots where existing knowledge is ignored, neglected, or even destroyed (Brunner 2018; Mignolo 2009). The enterprise of epistemic critique also points to potential new sites for emergence (de Sousa Santos 2012). Concerns about epistemic injustice apply to what is categorised, constructed, and perceived as knowledge (thinking) as well as to the distinct ways in which knowledge is disseminated (talking). As places of research, teaching, and debate, universities are key actors in both the (re)production and the dissemination of (academic) knowledge(s). 'Epistemic justice' and 'epistemic freedom' have become salient concepts for social and political analysis in recent times (Fricker 2007; 2015; 2017; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018a). Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018a) invokes the concept of epistemic (in)justice (Fricker 2007) as more than simply an abstract philosophical concern. Epistemic injustice has become practically and politically urgent in higher education, and epistemic crisis is part and parcel of a 'Crisis of the University' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018b). Addressing the crisis of higher education means addressing the testimonial injustice that disadvantages certain groups of knowers and the hermeneutical injustice that prevents society from understanding their experiences (Fricker 2007). Epistemic injustices form part of the structural inequalities that poor and marginalised students have to face as they struggle to access and succeed in higher education.

Using this framing, we comprehend knowledge (re)production in the social sciences as processes that, as any *craft*, are taught and learned. The way knowledge will be (re)produced in the future to some degree depends on how coming generations of knowledge (re)producers are trained. The epistemologies, ontologies, and methodologies that are taught at universities do not only determine what students learn content-wise, but shape how they will act as future knowledge (re)producers. What universities determine to represent as 'worldwide academic standards' will determine what passes for legitimate, accurate and relevant knowledge. Today, knowledge *standards* are imbricated in the state of epistemic crisis, yet we can view 'crisis' as more than a merely

negative or unpleasant phenomenon. Crisis allows us to lay bare the implicit normative assumptions and frameworks that might otherwise remain hidden, allowing us to learn to unthink and unlearn (Roitman 2013), disrupt normal hierarchies and change the way we talk about theories, issues, evidence and interpretations. Higher education is both a linchpin for the (re-)production and dissemination of the asymmetries and injustices that exist today – and, vice-versa, a key opportunity to address these asymmetries, challenge them and enable more democratic, just and sustainable alternatives to emerge.

Sharing intentions to deal with existing asymmetries reflexively, the Departments of Political Science at the Universities of Düsseldorf (Germany) and Pretoria (South Africa) established an academic virtual collaboration project in 2016. This collaboration brought students and lecturers from both locations together, merging curricula and sharing classes using videoconferencing tools (see <https://cross-site-teaching.phil.hhu.de/>). The first seminar in the cross-site teaching project was implemented in 2017, focusing on the field of peace-building. Two further seminars were conducted in 2018 (on human mobility) and 2019 (on mediation). Though subjects and content varied, the overall objectives by both students and lecturers were to '[b]reak free from one-sided perspectives', to '[c]omplement own perspectives through reflexive thinking', to re-think and re-talk the ways we know the world and to 'discover ideas and perspectives we d[id] not know' through joint and student-led contributions.¹ Following the end of the seminar series, the time has come to pause, evaluate, and critically reflect. The current debate about epistemic (in)justice in higher education provides us with a provocative reflection point for thinking about our contextually situated experiences as students and lecturers at our respective institutions, and about the cross-site teaching project overall. We want to ask ourselves whether and how the cross-site teaching project could contribute to attempts to address epistemic injustice. Considering the asymmetries criticised by many voices in academia, such as the dominance of Anglo-American literature and skewed participation in international conferences, we attempted to pluralise epistemologies in our everyday lecturing work – by decolonising our shared curricula. In this article we reflect on the experiences from one module. On the one hand, 'we' refers to the lecturers involved in the project (Mucha, Pesch, and Wielenga). On the other hand, 'we' also includes a collaborative writer who was not involved in the experience of cross-site teaching but comments on the project from a critical decolonial perspective (Khoo). This co-authorial set-up has proved fruitful, allowing the reflection process to happen in two distinct moments in time. Our initial goal was

1 The statements are quoted from online surveys with students participating in the seminars in 2017 and 2018.

to describe the teaching experience as a pilot model for decolonising curricula. In the later writing process however, we realized that the writing itself is also a useful process allowing further reflection. Theorising about curriculum-making is not part of the curriculum itself, but can actually influence how we think about it and feed into future work. Reflecting on curriculum making extends our learning beyond the cross-site teaching project we describe in this paper.

Anderson's (1999) 'failure first' approach is useful in thinking about justice problems such as epistemic in/justice. Like Sen's (2009) concern to address 'manifest injustice', Anderson calls for the pursuit of justice to be oriented towards the removal of oppression. Theoretical considerations of epistemic injustice, answering to Spivak's (1988) call to measure existing silences in higher education, are at the centre of this article. Subsequently, the question arises: what criteria and measures are necessary from a theoretical perspective to address the subject of epistemic injustice in higher education that, eventually, lead to a more just system of academic knowledge (re)production? Drawing attention to epistemic dimensions enables us to understand what conditions of possibility exist for epistemic justice. It puts the attention on how we recognise people as knowers, how people might be wronged as knowers, and how knowers with power might knowingly or unknowingly perpetrate forms of injustice (Walker 2018: 1). A 'failure first' approach leads us to question how far the previously-thought theoretical dimensions and characteristics of epistemic injustice are reflected in higher education 'standards'? Following on from this, we address the question of how far the curricula and syllabi at both universities can be supplemented by cross-site teaching elements to deal with epistemic asymmetries in higher education reflexively, and to lean towards a more just knowledge (re)production. At the same time, key challenges and limitations of the cross-site project are discussed.

This iterative self-reflection process is important to us as lecturers who have been trained/educated according to certain 'academic standards' that may possibly need to be questioned. Unlearning and learning to learn are not only imperatives for the students in the collaboration project, but for our professional academic development as lecturers as well. We should recognise that university is only one of a number of spaces for the work of decolonising. Decolonising is an ongoing process and a structure in which we are entangled. As such, decolonising cannot just be 'done'. Higher education cannot achieve decolonisation on its own. It is not more special than other actors. However, because of its epistemic production role, higher education has a specific role to play in decolonisation. It manifests specific problems and challenges as well as potentials for transformation in three main areas: research, teaching and democratically debating and devising responses to societal needs and imperatives. The project between the Universities

of Pretoria and Düsseldorf addresses the potential for transformation from a teaching perspective.

Decolonisation and epistemic (in)justice in higher education

Discussions about epistemic injustice can be situated in the decolonial turn unfolding in knowledge production and higher education globally. 'Decoloniality' is a term developed by a group of scholars in Latin America² which speaks to the ways in which colonisation produced a particular world order and knowledge structures (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013; Mignolo 2011; Grosfoguel 2007; Maldonado-Torres 2011). The political project of decolonisation had the intention to take back the state, but it did not challenge the underlying logic (knowledge systems) of the global order and state system. Decoloniality is about challenging, dismantling, and exceeding these underlying knowledge systems which sustain global inequalities and injustices.

The colonial-modern is a problematique that extends coloniality in the 'postcolonial' era through a combination of structural economic forces and the reproduction of underlying epistemological and symbolic structures of domination (Mignolo 2007). The critique of Eurocentrism disenchant 'Western' thought. The 'de-colonial turn' rejects the Eurocentrism of the status quo and renews/affirms decolonisation as a project. 'Decolonisation' is concerned not simply with historical colonialism, but also addresses the coloniality of subjectivity and labour, gender and race. For instance, Quijano (2010) re-states Latin American dependency theory as a problem of internalisation of the coloniality of power in peripheral societies. In defining wage-labour, servants, or slaves, people are defined in terms of what capital can or cannot 'develop'. The lesser 'infrahuman' ontological status accorded to 'indigenous' and 'blacks' forms the basis of their oppression and exploitation. Decolonisation thus is not merely reaching a historical compromise with an external colonising power, it must imply a radical change in the ways in which subjects are understood within the societies in question – a challenge that is symbolic as well as economic. An important task for decolonisation is to interrogate how identities within the colonised society themselves carry the seeds of dependency and unjust power relations (Maldonado-Torres 2011: 13). Decoloniality involves an ethico-political turn, a 'de-colonial attitude' that engages a new type of criticality in critical theory, and proposes a form of thought and coexistence in which gratitude, receptivity, and giving can be incorporated into daily life. The latter presupposes the creation of

2 This group of scholars calls themselves *the collective*: modernity/coloniality/decoloniality.

epistemological perspectives that help to undermine sexism, racism, and other social ills of the colonial-modern (ibid).

SH Alatas (2000) critiques 'intellectual imperialism' in knowledge production and how the attention of Asian and African societies becomes displaced from the problems that really concern them. The emancipation of the mind from the shackles of intellectual imperialism will allow for the development of creative and autonomous social science in developing societies. 'Intellectual imperialism' takes various forms: exploitation and control of the dominated people; tutelage, a more subtle form of domination which treats the dominated as a ward of imperial power; conformity, the dominated people must conform to the form of life, organisation, and rules set by the imperial power; the dominated people play a secondary role – they obey the rules, but they don't write them; the intellectual rationalisation of imperialism as a necessary stage in human progress, making the business of the imperialist power that of civilising the subjugated people; and acceptance of rule by persons of inferior talents, who might not have succeeded in the metropole.

SF Alatas (2003) follows on SH Alatas's critique of intellectual imperialism (2000) by addressing academic dependency through the lens of the global division of labour in the social sciences. He suggests measures for reversing this academic dependency: 'To the extent that the control and management of the colonised required the cultivation and application of various disciplines such as history, linguistics, geography, economics, sociology and anthropology in the colonies, we may refer to the academe as imperialistic' (599). Analogous to the dualistic and uneven structure of political economy described by dependency theory, SF Alatas describes an analogous centre-periphery continuum in the social sciences that corresponds roughly to the North-South divide. The 'centre' is 'constituted by the fact that works produced there command more attention and acknowledgement than works produced elsewhere; a centre is 'a place from which influence radiates' (Alatas 2003: 603).

The rationale of engaging in the cross-site teaching collaboration is in line with SH Alatas's observation regarding the role of higher education:

Academic imperialism in this sense began in the colonial period with the setting up and direct control of schools, universities and publishing houses by the colonial powers in the colonies. It is for this reason that it is accurate to say that the 'political and economic structure of imperialism generated a parallel structure in the way of thinking of the subjugated people' (SH Alatas 2000: 24).

Richardson (2018) sees the problem of Eurocentrism as a 'problem of undone science'. The critiques of the imperial unconscious as a structure that may be embedded in the curriculum may still pay too little attention to how that curriculum is enacted. In a similar vein to SH and SF Alatas, Richardson acknowledges the way that global structures of academic knowledge transmission serve to ensure that configurations of people, resources and space that allow for new decolonial knowledges never come to exist (231-2). Non-produced knowledge is 'undone science'. The South is associated with 'negative knowledge, unknown knowledge that is insignificant or even dangerous to know' (Knorr-Cetina 2009). Nevertheless, 'science' is a social activity that is not strictly or exclusively determined by the logic and methods that any subject itself espouses. In this regard, universities are not the only site of decoloniality. Richardson looks at three potential sites for unlearning across the actors that produce this 'undone science' – the generalised violence of settler colonialism, racism within academia and structures of global knowledge and transmission. In order to decolonise the university we must therefore target the curriculum which is itself impacted by colonialism and Eurocentrism. What is at stake is the protection or the undoing of the colonial world itself, of which the university is a component.

We find the concept of epistemic justice useful to a decoloniality that reorients the curriculum and the structure of science towards undoing undone science and doing it differently – embedding and embodying more inclusive capabilities to make epistemic contributions. Against this backdrop, the concept of epistemic justice works as the underpinning project of decoloniality. In this regard, the cross-site teaching collaboration project between the University of Pretoria and the University of Düsseldorf seems to be a useful way to approach questions of epistemic fairness and decolonisation. In particular, the South African partner university has proved crucial to understanding the political implications of the decolonisation project.

A series of student protests in South Africa in 2015 and 2016, which some described as being reminiscent of student protests in Europe in 1968 (Fomunyam 2017; Newsinger 2016), were concerned with the underlying logic within the South African university system that sustains the spirit of apartheid and colonialism, even though these systems claim to have been legally dismantled. This is reflected in statements by students of colour that they did not feel welcome in the university environment, or felt that they could only participate in the university if they were to adopt a more 'white' or 'European' way of being, including ways of thinking, speaking, writing and articulation. Although the protests were about many things (the liberalisation of the university, the commodification of education, the marginalisation of economically poor students, etc.), at the forefront was the call to 'decolonise' the curriculum as the

starting point to change the foundational logic that gives shape to institutions of higher education. This same challenge is increasingly being made by students at institutions of higher education across the globe (e.g.: University of Cambridge, University College London, Birmingham University³, Columbia University⁴, to name a few).

Walker (2018) argues that the theory of epistemic justice has ‘pedagogical lessons for contemporary higher education’, which can be aligned with the fundamental transformative ideals of dignity and equality, as set out in South Africa’s 1996 Constitution (RSA 1996). Despite the frustrations about its incompleteness, the debate about epistemic justice is also promising – there are spaces that refuse and challenge as well as collude (Walker 2018, 7). Walker’s work focuses most interestingly on questions of pedagogical responsibilities and the educational significance of expanding people’s freedoms (Sen 2009) for South Africa. This is not to say that higher education in general or even higher education in South Africa still resembles the apartheid past, yet it would be uncontroversial to see it as still struggling under the burdens of unequal history and epistemic exclusions (Heleta 2016). Walker (2018) points out that there is a big challenge to higher education – what if we get epistemic justice ‘wrong’?

While the debate in South Africa has reached academic and political circles on a national level, the German educational context has seen less agitation on campuses. Only a few analyses dealing critically with knowledge production at universities have been published (Dos Santos Pinto and Purtschert 2017). Strikingly little awareness has been raised by activists on a national level in Germany. For instance, a few public roundtables have been organised by scholars engaged with decolonial theory at the Institute for Latin American Studies at the Freie Universität Berlin. Compared to the South African context, there has not been much pressure on universities in Germany to further reflect on more diverse knowledge systems or to better incorporate voices from the global South. Against this backdrop, the cooperation between the Universities of Düsseldorf and Pretoria seems particularly fruitful as the different contexts promise critical discussions on decolonisation approaches in higher education and beyond.

The debates about ‘decolonising’ knowledge and curricula in higher education, although particularly prominent in South Africa right now, are echoed globally (e.g.: for an example from the Netherlands, see Hira 2012; etc.). The impetus for this begins with the concerns about ‘letting the subaltern speak’. As Mignolo

3 <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/jan/30/students-want-their-curriculums-decolonised-are-universities-listening>

4 <https://mg.co.za/article/2016-10-18-students-in-new-york-rise-up-in-solidarity-with-feesmustfall>

discusses in a conversation with Delgado and Romero (2000), 'political process (and social events) will, out of necessity, be interpreted in the frame of existing macro-narratives'. He argues that our disciplines are dependent on these macro-narratives (or theories), which include, for example, Christian cosmology, 'the secular and scientific macro-narrative of the natural history of the world and of the human species' and the 'opposing, and complementary, views of liberal and Marxist cosmologies after the eighteenth century'. He further states that this is how the subaltern is rendered silent, as there is no macro-narrative 'from where the needs of the subaltern could have been interpreted'.

Mignolo argues that 'Kant and Hobbes, Hegel and Marx, Freud and Heidegger became the models to think from those local histories in which the global designs of Western local histories were exported and are, successfully or not, being implemented.' But he asks,

what do you do with Kant in Africa since he is at the same time a brilliant thinker of the enlightenment totally blind to coloniality? What do you do with Marx if you come from the perspective of the history and experiences of Indigenous populations in the Americas or Afro-Caribbean French or British (ex) colonies? Certainly, you can use it to understand and criticise the 'logical structure' of capitalistic economy, but you cannot necessarily derive an ethics and an ethos from a Marxian experience with the proletariat of the European industrial revolution. You need to understand and imagine possible futures beyond the proletariat experiences of capitalism since victims of capitalistic exploitations were also the Indigenous and African slave, although it was and is not the same as the experience of the European workers in the European factories.

He admits that we cannot go back to what he calls other 'original' thinking traditions (China, Islam, India, Amerindians and Latin Americans),

because of the growing hegemony of the Western and modern/colonial world, what remains available to us is either re-producing Western abstract universals and projecting them all over the world, or exploring the possibilities of border thinking to imagine possible futures. That is to say, of engaging the colonialism of Western epistemology (from the left and from the right) from the perspective of epistemic forces that had been turned into subaltern (traditional, folkloric, religious, emotional, etc.) forms of knowledge.

'Border' thinking becomes central to the reimagined curriculums of the 21st century, which allow knowledge production, in the words of Mbembe (2016), to occur horizontally. He describes pluriversity to be a process of knowledge

production open to epistemic diversity (a way of combating epistemic injustice). He argues that it is a 'a process that does not necessarily abandon the notion of universal knowledge for humanity, but which embraces it via a horizontal strategy of openness to dialogue among different epistemic traditions'.

One way of developing this epistemic diversity is through expressing a clear locus of enunciation, which Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) suggests 'reveals that all knowledges are partial and this reality questions the practice of Euro-American epistemology of always concealing the locus of the subject that speaks only to claim universality and to hide the dangerous imperial global designs embedded within it'. We would suggest that in both the universities of Pretoria and Düsseldorf, the curriculum has historically privileged certain knowledge systems and processes of knowledge production over others. Not recognising this history threatens to reproduce epistemic injustice, and also fails to prepare students for a changing global order.

Cross-site teaching at the Universities of Pretoria and Düsseldorf

To learn from one another's backgrounds and points of view, lecturers from the Universities of Düsseldorf and Pretoria merged their respective curricular frameworks to implement a series of joint seminars on the topics of peacebuilding (2017), human mobility (2018), and conflict mediation (2019). In 2016 the collaboration had initially begun based on interpersonal connections between individuals at each university (Mucha and Wielenga) who had been interested in bringing their students into direct exchange within an international environment. Against this backdrop, the key objective of the cross-site project has not only been to expose students to knowledge produced by international scholars, practitioners, and individuals but rather to **broaden both students' and lecturers' perspectives** on theoretical, empirical, and methodological approaches via a joint learning process. The idea of broadening perspectives is embedded in the decolonial literature by scholars such as Mignolo (2007), Grosfoguel (2007), and Quijano (2007). The latter's famous quote '(...) if knowledge is colonised one of the tasks ahead is to de-colonise knowledge' is the starting point of each seminar's first session at the beginning of the semester. Students in Pretoria and Düsseldorf engaged with the decolonial turn and discussed the implications of this for the themes of subsequent classes with each other. As the end of semester approached, the students became more familiar with the concept. At the same time, though, as elaborated below, they came to realise that a radical way of decolonising knowledge might put the entire collaboration project into question. While the third-year Bachelor of Social Sciences students in Düsseldorf had at

best only superficially reflected on the issue of colonialism and decolonisation before attending the class, the experience of fourth-year Honours students of Political Science at the University of Pretoria was different. Between 2015 and 2017, student protests and university shutdowns had challenged the higher education sector in South Africa. Within this highly politicised environment protesters had at first challenged the high fee increment set for 2016. This protest call was later expanded to key issues such as student exclusion based on financial, epistemological and cultural grounds.

The cross-site seminars rest on the didactical concepts of blended learning and inverted classroom: firstly, we provide students with a ***diverse range of literature and inputs***. To this end, lecturers from both universities pick internal and external speakers for each session, through which the contextualised and geographical diversity and pluralism of the perspectives and opinions represented are decisive, rather than the academic background of the invited speakers. For instance, based at the University of Pretoria, Siphamandla Zondi would give a lecture on 'decolonial peace' (see <https://cross-site-teaching.phil.hhu.de/decolonial-peace/>) while the Bogota-based scholar Viviana García Pinzón would give a talk on the peace process in Colombia (see <https://cross-site-teaching.phil.hhu.de/colombia-the-long-way-to-peace/>). Based on preparatory materials such as journalistic articles, scientific literature, video-talks, and artistic work or in-class formats such as panel discussions, simulation games and Q&A, students are invited to engage with the respective subject from a plurality of perspectives. Secondly, as experts of their respective perspectives and disciplinary backgrounds, ***students take an active and central role*** in the process of joint knowledge production. Therefore, groupwork, student contributions, and personal interaction are at the heart of the seminar's didactical conception. For instance, if so desired, students can conduct their own research/ journalistic/ artistic projects individually or in groups and present them in class. Via video transmission, students from both universities jointly discussed various epistemological and ontological concepts underlying the terms of peacebuilding, human mobility, or mediation. Corresponding to Grosfoguel's (2007: 12) call for a '(...) broader canon of thought than simply the Western canon (...)' students are obliged to work on a cross-site basis in order to get credit points. For instance, in the past semester two students in Pretoria and two in Düsseldorf teamed up and produced a video-clip on migration governance (see <https://cross-site-teaching.phil.hhu.de/explainer-video/>). The evaluation results showed that students on both sides liked 'to engage with students from different knowledge environments to [oneself]'. In particular, the cross-site simulation games were seen an effective means of producing collaborative knowledge: '(...) I mostly liked the exchange of opinions and knowledge and the challenge of finding solutions together like we did in the role plays.'

Right from the start in 2017 the collaboration project emerged as an experiment in doing things differently. Many things worked, but some did not. The major challenges were the limited time and technological issues. Given the different semester starts in South Africa and Germany the student taskforces only shared up to eight weeks of time cooperating with each other. The sometimes poor audio and video quality during live conferences had an impact on the exchange between the two university sites. These interrelated challenges of time and technology made it difficult to delve further into different topics – in particular we thus potentially missed the opportunity to go deeper into local decolonial concerns. However, Ndlovu-Gatsheni's calls for epistemic diversity were realised in the cooperative framework, with knowledge produced in Africa being overrepresented, while that from Europe was underrepresented. A 'De- and Re-provincialising' approach was substantiated by the diverse selection of seminar literature and range of video experts. In line with Grosfoguel (2007) and Mignolo (2000) students learnt to question dominant knowledge production processes. While unmasking what is concealed, students were able to differentiate fundamentalist approaches. Lecturers asked participants to critically discuss how far substituting Eurocentrism with Africa re-centring would accord with critical decolonial theory. In this regard, challenging Africa re-centring alongside Eurocentrism helped students to reflect on their previous and future knowledge production processes. The rethinking of thinking itself became a major issue during the discussions as one way to break out of the aforementioned epistemic crisis. In sum, the cross-site teaching project was positively evaluated.

However, there are lessons learned towards the 'next practice'. Educational innovations and 'best practice' are often too aspirational to be practical. This has led to a more contextual and bottom-up idea of 'next practice' as intervention is understood and enacted as processes within the local ecology of practice (Sheard and Avis 2011). Besides this lack of time and a number of technical challenges, for instance unsatisfactory or malfunctioning internet connection and distorted video/audio transmissions, we had to adjust our own expectations, respective objectives and certain didactical features in the course of the project. This holds particularly true with respect to the objective of a joint learning process that did not develop as intuitive, smooth, and conflict-free as initially anticipated. In this context, from our point of view, two lessons learned are of particular importance.

Firstly, the *emotional sphere and mutual trust* turned out to be the most crucial factors for proper exchange and fruitful discussions. This is partly due to the blended learning and inverted classroom concept of the project: there are decisive emotional and communicational differences in discussing with fellow students, lecturers, or speakers via video/ audio transmission or in person. For instance, it took a few sessions before students got used to speaking confidently into the

camera and the mobile microphones. For many of the German students, language was also an issue. Another issue affecting trust was the fact that South African students were more familiar with the political context in Germany than the other way round. Apparently, students based in Pretoria were able to ask their German fellows in detail about recent elections, the current government and its policies. German students were struck by their sparse knowledge about South Africa in particular and Africa in general. Experiencing these asymmetries on the interpersonal level helped students to reflect on their own positionalities as both subjects and objects of the collaboration project. In light of these asymmetries, for the lecturers the objective to create a cross-site seminar (instead of a student exchange project) that is firmly implemented in the university routines and readily accessible for students from both universities remained. Accordingly, it was necessary to adapt the format of sessions. Therefore, in the first sessions of the 2019 seminar, the emphasis was placed on the personal interaction of students and lecturers as well as on the familiarisation with the complex (social) situation and the practical technical, operational, and communicational realities of the seminar. Technology is not neutral, and we learned not to repeat the expectations of the prior seminars when students were expected to discuss specific subject content on peacebuilding (2017) and mobility (2018) in the very first session (Dabbagh et al. 2015; Collin and Brotcorne 2019; Cheng 2016).

Secondly, even though students and lecturers from both universities stressed the desire to break free from previously acquired thinking processes and to *overcome limited perspectives*, actually achieving this was one of the biggest challenges of the seminars. This was reflected in the question asked by a student from the University of Pretoria in the final session in the 2019 seminar: 'But have you [in Germany] actually internalised what we have been saying about global inequalities in peacebuilding and conflict mediation?' This demand for the 'internalisation' of learning reflected, firstly, an assumption that students from the University of Pretoria would be well versed in these inequalities, but students from the University of Düsseldorf still needed to 'internalise' this (a false assumption based on what was shared by students from both universities over the course of the semester). Secondly, it reflected that there was a degree of mistrust on the part of (at least some) students at the University of Pretoria that their counterparts in Düsseldorf were 'on the same page' as them, even though we had journeyed through the same curricula together. Trust proved to be more difficult to build than initially anticipated. The question raised by that student led instructors and students to engage in critical and dialogical reflections on what had been learned beyond the specific content related to peace and conflict studies. Apparently, the meta perspective of the project on decolonisation and epistemic injustice had sensitised students in Pretoria and Düsseldorf to question their

positionalities. Paradoxically, critically discussing trust building and inequalities in the open demonstrated that some form of trust was in process of being built as challenges and concerns were surfaced and had to be dealt with among students.

This discussion was one of the major lessons learned in 2019: to question one's own knowledge time and again, to constantly re-think and re-talk is a reiterative process of sharing, reflection and learning that comes with challenges not only for students but also for lecturers. This was reflected in lengthy conversations between lecturers in preparation of classes over Skype or Zoom about what sources to include, what the justification of these sources was, and what it was that students needed to take away with them. The seminar thus not only turned into a journey of learning about one's own positionality and perspective for the students but moreover for all lecturers involved. This holds also true for the following aspect.

Open exchange, the respectful debate of differing perspectives, and reflexive thinking require skills that need to be learned and trained, especially in the intercultural context of the seminar. Although by-and-large, large-group and small-group conversations remained polite (and sometimes too polite to facilitate meaningful dialogue, however necessary for trust-building) there were times when frustrations flared. This was evident in the last session of the 2018 seminar, when one student from the University of Pretoria expressed frustrations about the literature used in the seminar, saying that it had remained too Eurocentric. Another student joined her in becoming increasingly disappointed about the ways in which the seminar had perpetuated the very injustices it had claimed to challenge. Although these views were only shared by two students on the Pretoria side, they brought to the fore the challenges of this kind of exchange. To the lecturers the harsh critique of 'Eurocentrism' was challenging and confronting because the project fundamentally intended the opposite – namely to pluralise epistemologies and not to perpetuate structural asymmetries. For this reason, the previous focus on content-related questions shifted to the active integration of both learning processes and required skills (e.g. intercultural and soft skills, reflexive and constructive conflict management) as key subjects of the seminar. This shift is particularly reflected in the selection of the seminar topics 2019 (mediation) and 2020 (peace and conflict). By this means and in contrast to the pervasive misconception of conflicts as something inherently negative and avoidable, the joint discussion and the reflexive settlement of conflicts arising from both academic discussions and personal interactions became a central source of knowledge in the joint learning process.

The topics being discussed, namely migration, peacebuilding and international mediation, are themselves on the receiving end of radical critique from a local turn

and decolonial turn perspective, both in practice and in the literature. The critique has included its hypocrisy, double standards, lack of local legitimacy, lack of broad, local participation, insensitivity to local needs, its 'technical' approach, its state-centrism, its elite-focus, and its attempts to fit one framework to many contexts (Lemay-Hébert 2013; Richmond et al. 2011; Taylor 2007). Included in this is Zondi's (2017) introduction of the term 'decolonial peace' which speaks to the failure of peacebuilding to date as it does not explicitly address the effects of colonial legacy on current conflicts. Furthermore, debates abound about who can speak about a given context, as reflected in the controversy surrounding the academic journal – *Somaliland Journal of African Studies*, which was launched with only Europeans and Americans on its editorial board and no Somali scholars represented (Aidid 2015). Increasingly, academic journals have to think more carefully about what voices are included and excluded. All these concerns need to be reflected in any curriculum on peacebuilding and conflict mediation and engaged with as key debates in the scholarship of peacebuilding and conflict mediation.

Towards next practice

Returning to Anderson's (1999) failure-first rationale, the challenges of the project motivate the lecturers to continue reflecting on ways to improve the craft of teaching as knowledge (re)production processes. From an epistemic justice perspective, our cross-site teaching project remains a great **opportunity to initiate and mould joint learning processes** not only on a content-related but moreover on an **emotional, communicative and reflexive level**. This does not only apply to students but also to lecturers and speakers. In the course of the ongoing learning process, there is a need to combine a content-related focus (e.g. peace building and migration) with a focus on the asymmetries, conflicts and challenges that exist within the seminar framework. We hope to address questions of epistemic injustice and decolonial peace in more concrete and sustainable ways both for lecturers and students.

Our experiences are continuously recounted in an attempt to establish an Open Educational Resources (OER)-platform on cross-site university teaching (see <https://cross-site-teaching.phil.hhu.de/>). By this means, we not only aim to pass our experiences on to interested lecturers and students worldwide, but to provide a platform for discussion, feedback, and criticism. The openness rationale of OER is linked to social justice – enabling access, targeting disadvantaged groups and reducing costs. 'Open access' in research and 'copyleft' leads to the creation of global commons, and cost reduction for students and governments enabling them to resource more needy students (Lambert 2018). Regardless of the potential benefits of sharing our cross-site collaboration experiences with

interested scholars and others, the decolonial questions, self-reflection and positionality do not end here: '[Does] open as permissively licensed offer anything to decolonisation?' (Lockley 2018: 157) or does it represent 'an almost solutionist colonialism' (Lockley 2018: 159)?'

Decolonising of higher education is more than just diversifying. Decolonisation means moving away from problematic ways of treating 'diversity' – as individually focused and oriented towards a more structural intervention that can end racialised hierarchy and injustice as an ontological and epistemic structure (Gilroy 2000). The decolonial framing of student demands links questions of race to coloniality, centring Empire and slavery as projects of economic, political, material and cultural domination. At the heart of the discussion is the need for structural change. Representational grievances are important, but not enough to understand what needs to be recognised, re-organised and repaired. In other words, decolonisation is about structures. No practice is (expected to be) enough but the general aim is ending academic imperialism and dependency and becoming more pro-actively anti-racist in a structural and pragmatic manner. Three years in cross-site teaching between the Universities of Pretoria and Düsseldorf have demonstrated that decolonising curricula and pedagogy can be done and produces new possibilities for learning on small scale. Despite the challenges on a technical, interpersonal, and structural basis, the ultimate purpose of future collaborations remains to move towards greater epistemic plurality and fairer development of all participants' capabilities (instructors and students in both sites) for epistemic contribution.

There is one more thought that has not been addressed here but keeps surfacing controversy among students and lecturers. In terms of unlearning (privilege) in order to learn and identify new materials for future iterations, there is a need to acknowledge ignorances in the decolonisation and epistemic justice literature. The last session of seminar is usually held without the counterpart in Pretoria, so just Düsseldorf. Major findings are wrapped up and the local evaluation results are discussed. At that stage students have a good understanding of the concept of decoloniality and are able to reflect on the implications for their individual roles within the collaboration project. By then, the questioning of participants' positionality and challenging the limits of self-reflexivity have come as byproducts of the seminar experience. Testing students' criticality and self-reflexivity to the extremes in the final moment of the seminar, the following questions are offered. Imagine you are to prepare the readings list and pool of video experts for the future cross-site seminar. Taking the decolonial imperative seriously, would you cast aside work by prominent scholars and literature produced in the so-called North in order to make room for knowledge produced by less prominent scholars based in the so-called South? In other (deliberately provocative) words, is voice

and representation more important than what is understood and accepted as critical to academic 'quality'? To what extent is there really a trade-off between the two? Is 'quality' already determined or is it an emergent and possibly even transformative concept? These questions are likely to spark heated debates among students. They may lead to the related question to what extent academics and particularly lecturers can or should be normative and political. Indeed, we could say that subject knowledges have already lost any claim to unproblematic objectivity and are now faced with more critical questioning along the lines of epistemic justice and representativeness – they no longer unproblematically represent the subject matter and student and lecturer positionality become quite thorny issues. Interpretation, normative and political values and mutual understanding will have to be considered and built into curriculum-making. But we cannot return to a position of innocence.

In the decolonisation literature, it seems that scholars have not yet fully addressed the 'quality' issue. For instance, most scholars do not problematise the potential costs of '(...) pursuing decoloniality as an imperative for the achievement of full liberation in the Global South' (Zondi 2017: 106). There is no doubt that the dominant international academic benchmarks such as the Science Citation Index (SCI) reflect the dominance of Anglo-American personnel and research products in global academia – with gatekeeping ramifications for scholars everywhere. However, full 'delinking' (Mignolo 2007) would not automatically solve the asymmetries in the knowledge production process. Only a few advocates within the decolonisation debate have presented alternative ways of knowledge production that take into account the likely pitfalls. One of the difficulties concerns how to create more equitable and adequately representative curricula that still satisfy requirements of academic 'quality', given the problematic status of 'quality' judgements dominated by commercially driven and predominantly Anglo-American and English language-based publications. Going back to the example of peace and conflict studies, the foundational concept of negative and positive peace has been shaped by the work of Johan Galtung (1969) at the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) in Norway. Casting this work aside for the sake of decolonising knowledge would leave behind a gap too large for some of us to countenance. What academic literature would students read instead? Canonical materials of European origin, such as Galtung in peace and conflict studies, are foundational to the subject matter of the academic discipline. Decolonising cannot involve a total rejection and replacement of such foundational subject matter, so opening up the canon would probably involve a new interpretive approach which sets it in a critical and dialogical context.

In line with Gibson's (2017) 'Anthropology for Liberation', Appleton (2019) offers helpful concrete ways to decolonise academic work: 'Diversify your syllabus

and curriculum; Digress from the canon; Decentre knowledge and knowledge production; Devalue hierarchies; Disinvest from citational power structures; Diminish some voices and opinions in meetings, while magnifying others.' There are implications for university employment, such as hiring more faculty from indigenous and marginalised backgrounds, but these measures are beyond the reach of the lecturers involved in the cross-site teaching project. However, the elements related to teaching seem to have been tried by lecturers and students alike. First, syllabi and curriculums were diversified. A variety of expertise produced both in the so-called 'South' and the so-called 'North' was treated equally as potential seminar content, reading, and video experts. Second, by diversifying the knowledge bases, seminar participants automatically digressed from the traditional canon of what is to be taught and thought. Third, knowledge and knowledge production were decentred by making cross-site student taskforces decide on their own on the topics and mode of assessment. Fourth, hierarchies of academic knowledge were disrupted by having more diversified readings and also more diversified experts in the videos. Fifth, the same holds true for disinvesting from citational power structures. The reading material was not selected on the basis of citation indices. Rather the thematic focus of journal articles was the primary selection criterion – not the SCI ranking. Lastly, voices of students on both sides and video experts were given equal attention. The specific talk time was particularly taken into account during classes given the varying group size such as more students attending the seminar in Düsseldorf than in Pretoria. In sum, on an experimental and limited scale, the cross-site project has tried to open up the canon in a decolonial, collaborative and critical frame, and as such is part of a much larger, collective undertaking.

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