

# **The decolonial bandwagon and the dangers of intellectual decolonisation**

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## **Abstract**

In recent years, ‘intellectual decolonisation’ has become so popular in the Global North that we can now speak of there being a ‘decolonial bandwagon’. This article identifies some of the common limitations that can be found in this growing field of intellectual decolonisation. First and foremost, it is suggested that intellectual decolonisation in the Global North may be characterised by Northerncentrism due to the way in which decolonial scholarship may ignore decolonial scholars from the Global South. In order to address this ‘decolonisation without decolonising’, this article offers an alternative genealogy of intellectual decolonisation by discussing some of the most important yet neglected decolonial theory from the Global South. Thereafter, five other common limitations which may appear in discussions about intellectual decolonisation are identified, which are: reducing intellectual decolonisation to a simple task; essentialising and appropriating the Global South; overlooking the multifaceted nature of marginalisation in academia; nativism; and tokenism. The objective of this article is to highlight common limitations which may be present in discussions about intellectual decolonisation so as to provide a warning that some manifestations of intellectual decolonisation may not only be inadequate but may even reinscribe coloniality.

## **Keywords**

Decolonisation; decolonial theory; coloniality; decoloniality; Northerncentrism

## **Introduction**

In the past few years there has been a surge of events, blogs and academic publications in the Global North about decolonising curricula, pedagogies, classrooms and knowledge production. These calls for ‘intellectual decolonisation’ wish to undo the legacy of colonialism within academia due to a belief that coloniality continues to impact how academia is experienced, as well as what is researched, published, cited, and taught. Intellectual decolonisation is said to be necessary to overcome the entrenched exclusion of minority groups and perspectives within academia which does not only harm minorities, but also prevents universities, academics and students from realising the potential that only the acceptance and inclusion of diversity can

facilitate. Ultimately, intellectual decolonisation is about dismantling the ‘global Apartheid in higher education’ (Mbembe, 2016, p. 38). The origins of this renewed interest in intellectual decolonisation can be traced back to two predominately student-led movements which appeared in 2014/2015 – ‘Rhodes Must Fall’ and ‘Why Is My Curriculum White?’ – both of which challenged the legacy of colonialism within universities and provided a lexicon that stimulated conversations within and beyond academia about the need for intellectual decolonisation. The proliferation of interest in intellectual decolonisation is reflected in the recent upsurge of academic books published about intellectual decolonisation. For instance, the British Library catalogue lists 73 books that were published between 2014 and 2018 with ‘decolonising’ or ‘decolonizing’ in the title which is approximately the same number that were published in the whole two decades prior to 2014 (32 books between 2009 and 2013, 24 books between 2004 and 2008, 15 books between 1999 and 2003, and 5 books between 1994 and 1998). Amongst these recently published books, one can find calls to decolonise everything from sexualities to cameras, from dieting to counselling, from disability to peacebuilding. The explosion of interest in intellectual decolonisation does not mean that there were not Northern academics who were calling for intellectual decolonisation prior to 2014, but rather, those ideas did not have the traction then that they have now. Neither should one presume that the new enthusiasm for intellectual decolonisation in some circles means that intellectual decolonisation has been universally endorsed within Northern academia given that Northern universities remain sites of racism, orientalism and white privilege, and given that there are significant numbers of Northern academics who resent, and perhaps even wish to resist, intellectual decolonisation (Andrews, 2018; Arday, 2018; Johnson & Joseph-Salisbury, 2018; Last, 2018, pp. 212–213; Matthews, 2018, p. 48; Mignolo, 2018b, p. 106; Mogstad & Tse, 2018, pp. 56–58; Shilliam, 2018).

The rapid ascent of intellectual decolonisation as a field has led one commentator to speak of ‘the current decolonization hype’ (Behari-Leak, 2019, p. 58) and another to speak about how ‘decolonization [is] currently in vogue in the academy’ (Izharuddin, 2019, p. 137). While this craze is to be celebrated due to the importance of intellectual decolonisation and the many excellent contributions that are being made, ‘the decolonial bandwagon’ also has its pitfalls. In particular, the enthusiasm to pledge allegiance to an important new cause has resulted in an underwhelming critique of intellectual decolonisation. This is unfortunate because elaborate interrogation is required if the theoretical trajectory of intellectual decolonisation is to prosper. Thus, although intellectual decolonisation is a desirable undertaking, as I have suggested

elsewhere, it requires a ‘theoretical shakedown’ (Moosavi, 2019a, p. 262). This must involve a heightened reflexivity amongst those of us who are advocates of intellectual decolonisation in much the same way that we expect other scholars to become more introspective about their intellectual outputs (Lewis, 2018, p. 31). This is particularly true for Northern scholars who need to recognise how we are privileged by coloniality and even implicated in its enduring structures of inequality (Mogstad & Tse, 2018, p. 54, 62; Sefa Dei & Lordan, 2016, p. x).

In seeking to offer a comprehensive critique of intellectual decolonisation, in this article, I identify and discuss six dangers that we must be alert to when engaging in intellectual decolonisation. The most concerning amongst these is the possibility of Northern academics overlooking decolonial theory from the Global South despite it being well established and sophisticated. This is unfortunate because it means that an advanced and insightful body of literature which can assist us in the pursuit of intellectual decolonisation is often silenced. In such instances, the very colonial hierarchies that those who pursue intellectual decolonisation lament are reproduced to the extent that there is a ‘decolonisation without decolonising’. This realisation that those of us who self-identify as anti-racist and anti-colonial may actually enact ‘intellectual colonisation’ is deeply disconcerting. In order to address this possibility, I will offer an alternative narrative of the genealogy of intellectual decolonisation by exploring pioneering but neglected decolonial theory from the Global South. Thereafter, five other limitations that can appear in discussions about intellectual decolonisation are identified, including the tendencies to: simplify intellectual decolonisation; essentialise and appropriate the Global South; overlook some forms of colonial exclusion; produce nativism; and be tokenistic. These limitations are distinct from each other but they can also overlap and reinforce each other. Ultimately, this article calls upon academics who endorse intellectual decolonisation to make more deliberate efforts at self-scrutinising the ethnocentrism and other limitations within our own scholarship to the same extent that we routinely call for from others so as to avoid reinscribing coloniality and so as to better realise our decolonial quest for justice and inclusivity.

### **Rethinking the genealogy of intellectual decolonisation**

There is a concerning possibility that Northern academics who are interested in intellectual decolonisation may enact intellectual colonisation rather than dismantle it. This irony is more likely for those who have ‘jumped on the decolonial bandwagon’ given that intellectual

decolonisation has become a fashionable way to promote social justice. Discussions about intellectual decolonisation can be Northerncentric in the sense that Southern scholarship about intellectual decolonisation may be ignored. In such instances, Northern academics may suffer from the very same parochial tendency to ignore and almost never cite scholarship from the Global South that they accuse others of, which Lewis (2018, pp. 30–31) has referred to as an ‘epistemic incuriosity’. Such scholars may imagine that the recent explosion of interest in intellectual decolonisation in the Global North constitutes a new field or what may be referred to as ‘the decolonial turn’. In fact, it is more accurate to say that those Northern academics who have recently developed an interest in intellectual decolonisation are arriving late to the decolonial turn which actually emerged in the Global South several decades ago (Behari-Leak, 2019; Maldonado-Torres, 2011; Mignolo, 2014, pp. 586–588; Thiong’o, 1986/1994, p. 89, 95). This is important to recognise because one of the principles of intellectual decolonisation is to move away from the prevailing tendency to believe that events, developments and questions only matter when they manifest in the Global North. Despite scholars from the Global South having initiated the decolonial turn which placed intellectual decolonisation firmly on the agenda several decades ago, Northern academics may at best engage with decolonial theory from the Global South in a superficial manner. Therefore, we may say that intellectual decolonisation in the Global North needs to be decolonised given that some scholars from the Global North may foster intellectual colonisation by silencing decolonial scholars from the Global South. In order to rectify this and to avoid ‘decolonisation without decolonising’, it is necessary for decolonial scholarship to meaningfully engage with the voluminous decolonial theory from the Global South. This literature is not flawless nor does it contain all of the answers, but it can serve as a foundation for discussions about intellectual decolonisation due to its originality, insights and sophistication. In what follows, I attempt to highlight the trajectory of some of the most significant decolonial theory from the Global South which has often been ignored in the Global North.<sup>1</sup> This results in a unique narrative about the genealogy of intellectual decolonisation which not only recontextualises our understanding of intellectual decolonisation but also serves as an important reminder to Northern scholars that we are joining a conversation which has been ongoing in the Global South for several decades rather than initiating a new conversation which is to be orchestrated from the Global North. I am unable to offer a complete overview of decolonial theory from the Global South but my hope is that the following discussion will contribute toward cementing the status of some of the pioneers of intellectual decolonisation who are often silenced.

Syed Hussein Alatas, a Malaysian intellectual, is one of the pioneers of intellectual decolonisation but Northern academics rarely give him the recognition that he deserves. There is a growing awareness of the fact that SH Alatas has been overlooked even though his contributions remain relevant today (Alatas, 2018; Graf, 2010; Moosavi, 2019b). SH Alatas (1972, 1974) decried ‘the captive mind’ of Asian intellectuals which he understood as the feeble tendency of people from the Global South to defer to Northern ideas, evaluations and solutions as if they are still enslaved by their former colonial masters. SH Alatas wanted to overcome this dependency on Northern paradigms and instead, establish ‘a genuine and autonomous social science tradition in Asia’ (1972, p. 21). This could be achieved, SH Alatas believed, by Southern scholars replacing ‘the captive mind’ with something more promising; ‘the creative mind’ (1974, p. 694). This would involve original analyses, properly adapted to the immediate context that would offer a more precise engagement with local issues. SH Alatas (1971, 1977b) implemented this in his own work by thoroughly dismantling Northerncentric depictions that characterised Southeast Asians as lazy and European imperialists as heroes. Earlier than this, SH Alatas (1963) had specifically sought to challenge Northerncentrism in knowledge production by countering Max Weber’s Eurocentric depiction of Southern religions as incompatible with capitalism. He would subsequently extend this to critique the manner in which Northerncentric experiences of religion and secularity were treated as universal even though they can be understood as an exception that deviated from the dominant human experience (Alatas, 1977a). SH Alatas (2006) continued his commitment to intellectual decolonisation throughout his life and that he was making the same calls toward the end of his career as he was making at the start is a reflection of how much more work needs to be done to achieve intellectual decolonisation.

Syed Farid Alatas, the son of Syed Hussein Alatas, followed his father’s footsteps in committing himself to intellectual decolonisation and making lucid contributions which deserve greater recognition. SF Alatas seeks to address the Northerncentrism of knowledge production by promoting Southern theorists who he believes could be deployed successfully in both teaching and research. Top amongst his list are Ibn Khaldun and José Rizal, the former being a 14th century North African scholar who some suggest founded sociology with his development of a new discipline called ‘the science of human society’, and the latter being a nineteenth century Filipino intellectual who, as a contemporary of Karl Marx and Émile Durkheim, was ahead of his time in engaging with theoretical issues in original ways (Alatas, 2006, 2007, 2009). SF Alatas offers these two theorists as exemplary Southern scholars whose

works are rarely utilised in academia and whom may therefore be considered as examples of those who could help decolonise research and teaching. SF Alatas also introduces a vocabulary that is useful in theorising intellectual decolonisation. For example, at various points in his work he talks about ‘an autonomous social science tradition’, ‘alternative discourses’, ‘academic dependency’, ‘decolonising the social sciences’, and ‘intellectual imperialism’. SF Alatas has actively bridged the gap between his theoretical agenda and his teaching since he has purposefully decolonised curricula at his university, an effort which he claims has produced better equipped social science students, and offers inspiration to other educators (Alatas, 2010, pp. 70–71; Alatas & Sinha, 2001). Building on this, along with his colleague Vineeta Sinha, SF Alatas has recently produced a ground-breaking social theory textbook that seeks ‘to introduce non-Western social thinkers with the aim of universalizing the canon’ (Alatas & Sinha, 2017, p. 6). This is a long overdue milestone but it remains to be seen as to whether it will be influential in shaping university teaching, particularly in Northern universities, given that it is written by two scholars from the Global South who may not be given the attention that they deserve.

Alongside SH Alatas, Claude Ake, a Nigerian intellectual, was another pioneer who advocated intellectual decolonisation as is most clearly articulated in his book *Social Science as Imperialism* (1979). His frustration with the social sciences was due to his belief that they were used to undermine Southern societies by tailoring them to unsuitable Northern models. This is what he termed ‘academic imperialism’ (1979, p. xiv) and what led him to seemingly call for an outright rejection of the social sciences when he wrote that ‘the ultimate purpose of this book is to encourage the developing countries to reject Western social science which is imperialist and useless as science’ (1979, pp. xvi-xvii). Ake did not mean to call for the dismissal of the social sciences entirely, but echoing SH Alatas, he wanted to adjust them so that they become more pertinent to Global South contexts, or in his own words, he hoped for a ‘revolt against Western social science and the quest for social science of relevance and vitality’ (1979, p. 195). In identifying the social sciences as part of a neoimperialist agenda used to subvert the progress and independence of Southern societies, Ake cynically suggested that a political conspiracy underpins the Northerncentrism of academia, ultimately implying a deliberate Northern plot. It is here that Ake and SH Alatas contrast sharply given that Ake primarily blamed Northerncentrism on Northern intellectuals’ mischievousness whereas SH Alatas primarily blamed Southern intellectuals’ self-subordination. SH Alatas’ and Ake’s different emphases remind us that if intellectual decolonisation is to be realised, it will require

efforts from both Northern and Southern scholars. For instance, while Northern scholars may need to ask ourselves if we are too confident in pronouncing the universal significance of our knowledge, Southern scholars may need to ask if they should have greater faith in the relevance of their own situated knowledge (Keim, 2008, pp. 32–36).

Another African scholar from Kenya, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, pursued similar themes to SH Alatas and Ake in *Decolonising the Mind* (1986/1994). In this seminal but often overlooked book, Thiong’o argues that the imposition of European languages has had harmful consequences for Africans as it has played a major role in eradicating their culture, history and their ability to confidently articulate their worldview, all of which he refers to as ‘colonial alienation’. Thiong’o implores Africans to overcome this alienation and its antecedent stigmatisation and exclusion of native languages by embracing African languages in order to revitalise one’s ability to express oneself in ways that are more authentic to one’s traditions and lived realities. Moreover, Thiong’o highlights that a turn to native languages will create more inclusive opportunities which will allow broader sections of African societies to participate in knowledge construction. In seeking to decolonise language, Thiong’o restricted his use of English and turned to native languages in his own scholarly outputs which serves as a pioneering example of a decolonial scholar enacting intellectual decolonisation in such practical terms. In his analysis of linguistic hierarchies, Thiong’o also introduced a class dimension by suggesting that native elites are primarily responsible for sustaining the dominance of European languages due to the benefits it affords them even though the consequences of such neocolonialism disproportionately harm the native masses who tend to be more comfortable with native languages. Thus, intellectual decolonisation for Thiong’o is not only about undoing colonialism, but it is also about undoing capitalist structures. His focus on class and capitalism is not common in contemporary decolonial scholarship which reminds us of how decolonial theory from the Global South can introduce us to original perspectives. While the idea of reverting to native languages is not always possible nor is it the only way that one may decolonise, Thiong’o ignites challenging questions about the extent to which intellectual decolonisation can be achieved in European languages. Moreover, his candidness in admitting his own naive complicity in sustaining colonial hierarchies serves as a valuable example that those of us who are interested in intellectual decolonisation may wish to emulate given that such self-introspection is uncommon.

In a similar vein to Thiong'o, Akinsola Akiwowo (1999), another Nigerian scholar, pushed for 'indigenous sociologies' by which he meant using cultural notions from Africa as analytical tools for understanding societies. Akiwowo was more unequivocal than Thiong'o about the potential for such knowledge to be exported beyond Africa by suggesting that 'mainstream world sociology can be enriched by insights brought from African oral literature, in general, and a genre of [Nigerian] oral poetry, in particular' (Akiwowo, 1999, p. 116). In his contribution, Akiwowo continued what Thiong'o started, which was an effort to operationalise intellectual decolonisation in a manner that is still rarely undertaken today. This sort of innovative experimentation to incorporate Southern perspectives in creative ways will need to be emulated more frequently if intellectual decolonisation is to be achieved and a blueprint for how to do this may be found in neglected scholarship from the Global South, such as that of Thiong'o and Akiwowo.

Another significant contribution to intellectual decolonisation both within and beyond academia was the emergence of the Subaltern School in the 1980s. This was primarily orchestrated by scholars from India and as with the other Southern scholarship thus far mentioned, it may not have been given the attention that it deserves. The Subaltern School sought to reveal the colonial construction of hierarchical categorisations which bestowed agency upon people from the Global North in ways that were not extended to people from the Global South. Ranajit Guha (1983/1988), one of the most significant contributors to the Subaltern School, argued against the tendency for Northern narratives about world history, particularly colonialism, to be taken as the most authoritative accounts. To combat this, Guha advocated that the agency of marginalised peoples, particularly the dispossessed from the Global South, should be recognised so that they can provide their own accounts of history which may differ from Northerncentric perspectives. This decolonisation of history raises crucial questions about whose account is heard and whose is silenced in the quest for a more balanced understanding of human history whilst at the same time as challenging Northern scholars who may be complicit in imposing Northerncentric perspectives and silencing Southern accounts.

Southern feminists from the Subaltern School also played an essential role in pursuing the decolonisation of feminism. They criticised Northern feminists who spoke on behalf of all women, made universal claims about womanhood and exhibited Northerncentric biases that ignored or even silenced the voices of Southern women. In this instance, the claim of silencing



was even more poignant given that it was directed toward feminist scholars who claimed to be dedicated to inclusivity, equality and a philosophical questioning of biased knowledge. Thus, Southern feminists revealed how stubborn Northerncentrism in academia can be, even amongst well-meaning scholars who have convinced themselves that they are challenging domination, rather than reaffirming it. Emblematic of this body of literature, Chandra Mohanty (1984) rebuked Northern feminists for constructing Southern women as monolithic, seizing their agency and hoisting their culturally-specific readings onto them. In showing how Northerncentrism appears, Mohanty warned of the dangers of Northern feminism's 'binary analytic' that so often assumes that Northern women are liberated whereas Southern women are miserable (Mohanty, 1984, p. 56). Not long after Mohanty produced these arguments, Gayatri Spivak (1988) famously asked if the subaltern can speak given that those from the Global South, particularly Southern women, are systematically excluded by academics to such an extent that their accounts are never heard since academics assume that they can speak on behalf of them. Spivak specifically challenged Northern intellectuals on their silencing of Southern accounts and accused these same intellectuals of committing 'epistemic violence' against the most dispossessed strata of Southern societies (Spivak, 1988, p. 78). For Guha, Mohanty, Spivak and others in the Subaltern School, intellectual decolonisation must involve redressing the failure to properly include voices from beyond the Global North, especially the voices of non-elite people. This illustrates how decolonial scholars from the Global South have long been lamenting the silencing of Southern voices which only makes any continuation of this within decolonial scholarship even more disappointing.

There has been a significant amount of literature produced about intellectual decolonisation in Latin America. This material is perhaps better recognised in the Global North than other decolonial theory from Asia and Africa – which may relate to a story of racialisation – but it is still somewhat neglected. The Peruvian intellectual, Aníbal Quijano, played a key role in developing a distinct approach to intellectual decolonisation. Quijano (2000a, 2000b, 1999/2007) popularised the notion of 'coloniality' and 'coloniality of power' in the 1990s which sought to introduce an innovative vocabulary for theorising about neocolonialism in the contemporary period. In speaking of coloniality, Quijano wished to depart from the notion of 'postcolonialism', which was favoured by the Subaltern School, for he felt that it may mislead people into thinking that colonialism expired when the reign of colonial administrations ended. Quijano argued that the continuation of global capitalism and racist hierarchies illustrates coloniality as they are both colonial impositions which still cause suffering for those who

were/are colonised. Quijano also suggested that the enduring geopolitical supremacy and economic dominance of Global North nations similarly signifies the continuation of coloniality. Quijano noted that knowledge from the Global South is still shunned in favour of knowledge from the Global North to the extent that one may even say that we are witnessing a kind of intellectual genocide, or ‘epistemic suppression’, as Quijano put it (2000a, p. 541). For this reason, Quijano advocated ‘epistemological decolonization’ in which alternatives to Northern claims to universal understanding would be given greater consideration (1999/2007, p. 177).

Quijano had a notable influence on multiple decolonial scholars from Latin America who went on to develop his themes. Most renowned amongst them is Walter D. Mignolo, an Argentinian scholar, who remains one of the most prolific contributors to discussions about intellectual decolonisation today. Mignolo (2011, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2018a, 2018b) has written extensively on overcoming coloniality through the pursuit of decoloniality and insists on detaching from Global North hegemony and embracing ‘the decolonial option’ which is a ‘pluriversal’ approach which seeks to recognise and embrace the numerous alternative modalities to Northern modernity that exist in the Global South. Mignolo (2015, pp. xxi-xxiv) also speaks about this as a form of ‘epistemic disobedience’ which involves being prepared to ‘delink’ from Northerncentrism. On multiple occasions, Mignolo invokes the notion of ‘border epistemology’ and ‘border thinking’ to convey his preference for knowledge production to take place in liminal spaces that straddle intellectual repertoires that are not often merged. Mignolo (2018a, p. 136, 2018b, p. 121) also makes an intriguing distinction between decolonisation and decoloniality, the former of which he defines as being about reclaiming control of the state apparatus and the latter of which he defines as being about reclaiming one’s whole existence. This is significant because it implies that decoloniality is a much more penetrating manifestation than decolonisation which may affect the way that such notions are conceptualised. It also captures Mignolo’s belief that there are gradations of decolonisation which mean that not all attempts to decolonise are as valuable as each other. The significance of this is not to be understated as it relates to the fact that Mignolo is willing to critique decolonisation as well as colonisation. In this respect, Mignolo’s sophisticated theorising is particularly useful in reflecting upon the theoretical challenges of intellectual decolonisation. For example, Mignolo (2014) has made arguments which echo those that are made in this article by suggesting that Northern academics who are interested in intellectual decolonisation may make the mistake of ‘rewesternizing’, by which he means that we may reinforce Northern

hegemony by co-opting intellectual decolonisation and seeking to control its trajectory. Mignolo specifically labels a report entitled *Open the Social Sciences* (Wallerstein, 1996) as an example of ‘rewesternizing’ due to the way it allegedly sought to dictate the boundaries of intellectual decolonisation from an Northerncentric perspective. This is a significant accusation because this report was one of the first attempts by Northern scholars to highlight the need to incorporate Southern perspectives into academia which may suggest that Northerncentrism has been present in Northern discussions about intellectual decolonisation since Northern scholars ‘discovered’ this terrain.

Along with Latin American scholarship on intellectual decolonisation, the Taiwanese scholar Kuan-Hsing Chen’s work has also received somewhat more attention in the Global North than other decolonial theory from the Global South, albeit typically within the closely-knit fields of cultural studies and area studies. In *Asia as Method* (2010), Chen calls on Asian scholars to prioritise comparative studies between Asian societies in order to find Asian solutions to Asian problems. In this regard, Chen considers his project as severing Northerncentrism to a greater extent than has been the case in other decolonial theory which he suggests has tended to obsess over the Global North as if it must be a reference point that is involved in all discussions. To move away from this, Chen calls for ‘inter-referencing’ which he explains as follows:

[T]here is an urgent need to do comparative studies, or inter-reference studies, of modernity as it is experienced in third-world spaces. The underlying assumption is that ignoring others who have experienced similar pressures and trajectories of modernization makes it impossible to understand oneself. By shifting our points of reference, we can generate more strategically useful knowledge (Chen, 2010, p. 225).

Although Chen focuses on inter-referencing within Asia, his mention of ‘third-world spaces’ hints at his willingness to consider how this may transcend Asia to incorporate comparative studies across the Global South and is why inter-referencing can be understood as a project that seeks to promote South-South dialogue as a key component of intellectual decolonisation. Related to this, Chen (2010, pp. vii, 4) suggests that scholars from the Global North and scholars from the Global South should play different roles in intellectual decolonisation by suggesting that the former should ‘deimperialise’ and the latter should ‘decolonise’. This binary overlooks the complexities of colonial hierarchies in the Global North and the Global South, but it may still prompt Northern academics who are interested in intellectual decolonisation to

ask whether we have a different and even limited role to play in intellectual decolonisation compared to those from the Global South. Chen also suggests that there is a need to ‘de-Cold War’ in the Global South given his understanding of the Cold War as intertwined with colonisation and just as restrictive to the development of Southern societies. While Northern societies may have largely moved on from the Cold War era, Chen argues that the Cold War continues to have major repercussions in Southern societies today which is the kind of unique intervention that is perhaps less likely to be made in the Global North and therefore reminds us of the value of consulting decolonial scholarship from the Global South.

One of the most valuable aspects of Chen’s contribution is his recognition that Southern scholars often overlook scholarship from other parts of the Global South. Thus, he claims that ‘Asia as method is not a slogan but a practice. That practice begins with multiplying the sources of our readings to include those produced in other parts of Asia’ (Chen, 2010, p. 255). Although this is an ideal pronouncement, in an article that is provocatively entitled *Silencing as Method* (2018), SF Alatas is critical of the Asia as Method proponents for overlooking other decolonial theory that has been produced in the Global South. This illustrates that, like Northern academics, Southern academics who are interested in intellectual decolonisation may also ignore decolonial theory from the Global South given that ‘[a] scholar’s geographical origins or race are no guarantee that their scholarship is (or is not) decolonised’ (Matthews, 2018, p. 54). Indeed, even the decolonial scholars from the Global South that are discussed in this section rarely, if ever, engaged with or even cited each other. SF Alatas emphasises the consequences of this as follows:

When critics of Orientalist and colonial discourses fail to cite and acknowledge the contributions of their fellow critics, their work inadvertently but effectively contributes to the perpetuation of Euroamerican, androcentric hierarchies, and regimes of knowledge production and their coloniality (Alatas, 2018, p. 11).

SF Alatas (2018) suggests that this occurs to such an extent that decolonial scholars from the Global South even ignore decolonial theory that is produced in the same institution that they are affiliated with. SF Alatas’ engagement with Chen’s project serves as an example of how decolonial scholars from the Global South can engage with other decolonial theory from the Global South but it is a relatively rare occurrence. Thus, one may say that for intellectual decolonisation to be realised, scholars from the Global South need to engage with decolonial

theory from the Global South as much as scholars from the Global North need to do the same thing. As an extension of this, it is also necessary for us to start putting decolonial scholars from the Global South into conversation with each other, rather than dealing with them in isolation from each other, or only in reference to Northern theory (Izharuddin, 2019, p. 132).

Before exploring further dangers of intellectual decolonisation, it is worth recapping that even though intellectual decolonisation was only popularised in the Global North since 2014/2015, a wide range of sophisticated decolonial theory has been produced in the Global South since the 1970s. These contributions have numerous limitations that should be critiqued but they also contain original concepts, sophisticated analyses and rich theoretical offerings. Yet, despite the precious contributions of decolonial scholars from Malaysia, Nigeria, Kenya, India, Peru, Argentina, Taiwan and elsewhere, decolonial scholarship produced in the Global North may not even mention, let alone engage with, decolonial theory from the Global South. This is why trailblazing decolonial scholars such as Syed Hussein Alatas, Syed Farid Alatas, Claude Ake, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Akinsola Akiwowo, Ranajit Guha, Chandra Mohanty, Gayatri Spivak, Aníbal Quijano, Walter D. Mignolo and Kuan-Hsing Chen may be overlooked in discussions about intellectual decolonisation in the Global North. This signifies the perpetuation of an ironic but troubling intellectual colonisation whereby Northern scholars may take ownership of intellectual decolonisation and silence decolonial scholars from the Global South who should not only be involved in the project, but should arguably be at the forefront of it. As discussions about intellectual decolonisation expand in the Global North, there is a danger that this knowledge will be exported to the Global South and displace existing knowledge, as already regularly occurs in other fields (Blaustein, 2017). Thus, there needs to be caution not to distort the genealogical origins of intellectual decolonisation which stem from the Global South and mistakenly recast it as a project that is to be choreographed from the Global North.

### **Further dangers of intellectual decolonisation**

In this section I expand my warning about the danger of intellectual decolonisation by suggesting five more limitations that can appear in publications, discussions and events about intellectual decolonisation. These limitations may be found in decolonial scholarship produced in the Global North or the Global South.

#### **(1). Intellectual decolonisation is not easy and perhaps not even possible.**

If one wishes to achieve intellectual decolonisation, one must be prepared for a daunting struggle given that coloniality is unapologetically entrenched. For instance, trying to subvert racist and colonial structures within higher education can be psychologically and emotionally taxing, particularly when one is a minority academic who is already frequently subjected to microaggressions within the university (Arday, 2018). Yet, some academics may offer a utopian impression that intellectual decolonisation is a straightforward undertaking which we are on the way to achieving, and in some cases, we have already achieved. Scholars who treat intellectual decolonisation as a simple undertaking may not demonstrate how it is to be achieved which is why there are many calls for intellectual decolonisation but much less guidance about how it can be practically realised (Keim, 2011, p. 124; Mbembe, 2016, p. 36). Indeed, locating Southern scholars, literature, concepts and ideas which may assist with intellectual decolonisation is not always straightforward, especially because Southern scholars are often forgotten, unknown or may not adhere to Northern disciplinary boundaries. The task is not made any easier by there only being a limited number of foundational textbooks which deliberately introduce Southern scholarship (Alatas & Sinha, 2017). Language barriers add further difficulty in trying to overcome the exclusion of those Southern scholars who utilise non-European languages too (Connell, 2007a, p. 219; Curry & Lillis, 2014; Mazonod, 2018; Yazawa, 2014, p. 275). One must also concede that, although there is a significant amount of valuable literature produced in the Global South as discussed earlier in this article, it is still relatively scarce due to several socio-historical factors. For instance, we should consider, at least reluctantly, the possibility of there being academic stagnation in parts of the Global South due to a range of historical, political, economic and social factors – some of which originated in the colonial era – which have created barriers for the flourishing of Southern scholarship (Keim, 2008, p. 25; Oommen, 1991, pp. 74–77; Singh, 2007, pp. 215–216). For instance, Hanafi (2017) has described the funding limitations, censorship, imprisonment and even torture that scholars from the Global South may still encounter, which invariably stifles intellectual productivity. However, although Southern contexts may not be as well resourced, stable or intellectually productive as the Global North, ‘the South is not lacking in creative and original thinkers’ (Alatas, 2010, p. 71) and so, it is our duty to locate and amplify these voices, even if this is challenging. In some cases, even if Southern scholarship is identifiable and available in familiar languages, the work may still not be easily accessible. This is because academic databases, university libraries and the publishing industry continue to prioritise Northern scholarship at the expense of Southern materials, meaning that there continues to be a structural

exclusion of scholarship from the Global South (Collyer, 2018; Edwards, 2019; Graf, 2010). This highlights that there are limitations to what individual academics can do to achieve intellectual decolonisation as key decisions about which knowledge is accessible are made at an institutional level which prompts a question about whether an institutional decolonisation of universities, libraries and publishers is what is really required.

If we simplify intellectual decolonisation it could prevent sufficient questions being asked about whether intellectual decolonisation can even be achieved. For instance, given that there will always be marginalised voices, perhaps one must conclude that intellectual decolonisation is not entirely possible (Bhambra, 2007, p. 28). Yet, such points may not often be acknowledged and instead, the impression that may be fostered is that intellectual decolonisation is desirable, possible, effortless, unproblematic and uncontested. This not only ignores the fact that there are still many within universities who are not convinced by the calls for intellectual decolonisation but it also overlooks the point of view that coloniality is so deeply entrenched in universities that we may never be able to untie the knots of coloniality in academia. That is to say that universities may be compromised institutions which remain complicit in ethnocentrism, elitism and exclusion to such an extent that perhaps they should be abandoned altogether, even if nobody is willing to take the first step in doing this (Andrews, 2018; Bhambra et al., 2018, pp. 5–6; Connell, 2007a, pp. 9–10, 2007b, p. 377; Johnson & Joseph-Salisbury, 2018, pp. 153–155; Mignolo, 2014, pp. 585–586, 595). Similarly, it may be suggested that the neoliberalisation of academia makes intellectual decolonisation almost impossible within universities. In such corporatised climates, academics are overburdened with a heavy workload which demands efficiency, impact and productivity against a backdrop which is characterised by excessive competitiveness, individualism, metrics and precarity (Bergland, 2017; Bunds & Giardina, 2017; Dawson, 2019). These unfavourable working conditions may prevent the type of radical innovation which is required for intellectual decolonisation. This is why it has been recognised that ‘there are costs in [intellectual decolonisation], including the very heavy commitment of time involved in cultural re-tooling, and risks to professional credibility (consider what an acceptable citation list is for a paper in a “mainstream” North Atlantic journal)’ (Connell, 2006, p. 263). Decolonial scholarship should therefore consider whether a true commitment to intellectual decolonisation necessitates a departure from the university or at least challenging its neoliberalisation (Mbembe, 2016, pp. 30–31, 37). Yet, perhaps the impossibility of decolonisation exists just as much outside of academia as within it as it may be the case that the colonial hangover remains entrenched in all sectors of society

(Santos, 2014). This is why, in her discussion of utilising Maori culture as a source of innovative knowledge production, Mahuika (2008, p. 12) has recognised that ‘after two hundred or more years of colonization to suggest that Maori are capable of existing without being influenced by western ways of thinking is unrealistic’. Elsewhere, scholars such as Balagangadhara have argued: ‘Colonialism alters the way we look at the world and, with sheer violence, displaces native ways of experiencing the world. To the colonized, there is no simple or naive return to the lost world possible’ (2012, p. 229). Decrying the triumph of ‘colonial consciousness’, Balagangadhara posits that it may never be possible to abandon the Northerncentrism that has triumphed which generates pessimism about the potential to achieve intellectual decolonisation. Similarly it may be impossible to distinguish between what a ‘colonial’/‘Northern’ and a ‘decolonial’/‘Southern’ perspective is, given that they have fused together to such an extent that they can no longer be distinguished (Matthews, 2018, p. 61; Ogunnaike, 2018). Furthermore, if one accepts that ‘epistemicide’ has resulted in the eradication of many forms of Southern knowledge then it implies that reintroducing that which is already extinct will not be possible (Santos, 2014). Decolonial scholarship must therefore recognise the monumental challenges involved in intellectual decolonisation which includes theorising about how Southern scholarship can be identified and accessed within a neoliberal climate in which coloniality is entrenched within universities and broader society.

## **(2). Intellectual decolonisation should not essentialise nor appropriate the Global South.**

The defining feature of intellectual decolonisation is an eagerness to incorporate marginalised perspectives or people within academia. This is an admirable objective, but as we have already seen, it can also be done in problematic ways, particularly in ways that reinscribe coloniality. Coloniality may also be reproduced through the essentialisation or appropriation of people, ideas or culture from the Global South in a manner that imitates what occurred at the height of colonialism. By essentialising, I mean constructing the Global South as if it has an innate essence that can be known and captured (Connell, 2006, p. 262). Essentialisation would occur if one were to allude to an intellectual from the Global South and claim that the Global South perspective has been acknowledged. This is problematic because of three reasons. Firstly, it presumes that there is only one Global South which reproduces a colonial generalisation. Secondly, it leads to the exclusion of alternative Southern perspectives, especially non-elite perspectives which do not have as much opportunity to be heard (Mahuika, 2008, p. 3, 6; Mbembe, 2016, pp. 33–34). Thirdly, it ignores the fact that some Southern contributions can



be Northerncentric (Bhambra & Santos, 2017, p. 5; Connell, 2007a, p. 75; Grosfoguel, 2009, p. 14; Rosa, 2014, pp. 861–862). Instead of essentialising the Global South, it should be understood that the Global South is such a vastly diverse entity that it can never be said to have a single essence that can be discreetly conveyed. Thus, there is no such thing as ‘the Southern reading’ or ‘the Southern perspective’ even though decolonial scholarship may often refer to such things. Rather, ‘the Global South’ is a drastically simplified notion which mimics the crude geographical categorisations that colonialism was built upon. Those of us who are interested in intellectual decolonisation therefore face a theoretical dilemma which has not been adequately resolved of needing to find a way of talking about the exclusion of the Global South without reinforcing the ontological premise that this exclusion is based upon.

There is also a need to be cognisant of an issue that is related to essentialisation, which is the parallel possibility of appropriating that essence. So while I argued earlier that Northern academics may overlook decolonial scholarship from the Global South, in remedying this, we need to ensure that we avoid ‘theory looting’, which is when Northern scholars deliberately plagiarise ideas from the Global South without due credit (Driscoll, 2010). To understand this, it is necessary to recall the long history of agents from the Global North who have stolen people, minerals, artefacts, relics and resources from the Global South. At the height of colonialism, such appropriation was primarily about the confiscation of natural resources, treasures, land and even humans, and while this still happens in some instances, appropriation today is more likely to manifest as intellectual or cultural appropriation that may be masked under the guise of appreciation. According to hooks (1992/2009), minority cultures are often exoticized, packaged and consumed in ways that may appear innocent and even affirming to the one doing the appropriating, but which may actually be more exploitative than is first realised. hooks suggests that this appropriation relates to a colonial fantasy to dominate and benefit from the Other, rather than any sincere validation of their inherent worth. This is why hooks talks about engagement with the Other as finding ‘an alternative playground’ to entertain oneself or as new seasoning to spice up one’s life (hooks, 1992/2009, pp. 366–367). To avoid reproducing this in intellectual terms, Northern academics who are interested in intellectual decolonisation need to carefully reflect on how we can avoid manipulatively appropriating Southern materials to satisfy our own intellectual appetite to enjoy ‘an exotic periphery’ (Connell, 2006, p. 242). For example, we must avoid selfishly confiscating data, information and ideas from the Global South for the benefit of our own academic careers in the Global North and instead we should contextualise the situatedness of Southern knowledge and seek to collaborate with scholars

from the Global South (Blaustein, 2017, pp. 373–374; Connell, 2007a, pp. 77–78, 2007b, p. 369; Izharuddin, 2019, p. 137; Keim, 2011, p. 125; Last, 2018; Smith, 1999). Furthermore, Northern academics who advocate intellectual decolonisation should consider how we can redistribute the resources or opportunities that we possess to assist those from the Global South that do not have the same advantages. In doing this, it is important that we do not patronise those from the Global South by treating them as being dependent on our assistance to realise something meaningful, as this would be tantamount to reproducing the very hierarchies that intellectual decolonisation should dismantle. Anything other than this may result in the appropriation of intellectual decolonisation in a manner that is similar to what was discussed earlier whereby intellectual decolonisation is premised on a colonial arrangement in which Northern academics assume ownership. Thus, Mignolo warned:

And the issue here is the potential temptation of European scholars to take the lead and to ‘dewesternize’ and ‘decolonialize’. If that happens (and it may happen), it would be indeed rewesternization disguised as dewesternization or decoloniality...European actors and institutions will now take the lead in decolonization because people in the rest of the world are not capable of decolonizing themselves! (Mignolo, 2014, pp. 589–590).

To avoid this, Northern academics should be prepared to step aside rather than taking up more space than we deserve in order to allow scholars from the Global South to be at the forefront of intellectual decolonisation. For instance, it should not be presumed that collaboration between scholars from the Global North and the Global South must be led from the Global North nor that the theorising must take place in the Global North while only the data collection takes place in the Global South (Keim, 2008, pp. 30–31). To avoid essentialisation and appropriation, Northern academics who are interested in intellectual decolonisation must think carefully about how we view the Global South, intellectual decolonisation and our own personal relation to both of them.

### **(3). Coloniality produces multifaceted forms of exclusion.**

While all of us who support intellectual decolonisation agree that there is an inequality in academia in the treatment of peoples and perspectives, there is less agreement about how to specify who is privileged and who is marginalised. This is a crucial issue because our approach

to intellectual decolonisation will be determined by who we consider to be excluded. For instance, in this article, I am referring to ‘Global North/Global South’ as the dividing line but for others the axis is ‘West/non-West’. While the Global South and the non-West are often conflated, they do not always correspond. For instance, while Africa may generally be considered as both Southern and non-Western, Latin America may generally be said to be part of the Global South but Western, and parts of Asia like Japan, South Korea and Singapore may be said to be non-Western but part of the Global North. Thus, neither the Global North/Global South nor the West/non-West axes are ideal for capturing the complexities or all forms of exclusion that coloniality generates in academia. Even if one were to deploy an amalgamation that recognises a combined exclusion of the Global South/non-West, this still does not account for the way in which some Southern scholars are based at prestigious universities in the Global North and are therefore partially Southern and partially Northern, nor does it account for the ethnic minorities from the Global North/West who are Northern but racialised as Southern. For instance, despite being a pioneering scholar from the Global North/ West, W.E.B. Du Bois, an African-American, was and still is ostracised within academia due to the colonial legacy of endemic racism (Morris, 2015). Moreover, characterising the exclusion as being of those who are from the Global South/non-West may result in the contributions of decolonial scholars like Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) and Gurminder Bhambra (2007), who have both played important roles in the genealogy of decolonial theory, being miscategorised on account of their Northern citizenship despite them having Southern heritage. Some commentators wish to resolve this by moving away from geographical demarcations and suggesting that a racialised axis around white/non-white is a better way to understand the colonial hierarchies that remain within academia. However, this is not ideal due to the contested nature of who qualifies as white/non-white and because of the way in which it would not accommodate an appreciation of the way in which white scholars from the Global South/non-West can also be marginalised, such as those from Latin America like Quijano and Mignolo. It is not common for scholars who are interested in intellectual decolonisation to merge calls for the incorporation of people from the Global South/non-West with calls for the incorporation of ethnic minorities from the Global North/West as there is no overarching terminology that facilitates this. To complicate matters further, some commentators understand the dividing line as being between dominant languages and less dominant languages, particularly in relation to the privileging of English as the lingua franca of academia at the expense of all other languages (Faraldo-Cabana, 2018; Mazonod, 2018). This means that a key question remains: In our efforts to achieve intellectual decolonisation, are we trying to better integrate scholars, scholarship and students into

academia from the Global South, the non- West, ethnic minorities or non-English backgrounds? The answer could be ‘all of the above’ but these questions may not even be explored in the first place.

In order to resolve this puzzle, it may be preferable to talk in terms of ‘centre/periphery’. This is a more fluid notion which is not restricted to one geographic region, language or people, and it allows one to simultaneously call for the greater inclusion of ideas and people from all of those groups that coloniality discriminates against. Defining intellectual decolonisation as being about the inclusion of people and ideas from the periphery also allows one to acknowledge that there are Souths within the Global North and Norths within the Global South (Blaustein, 2017, pp. 359–361). Furthermore, it could facilitate an extended understanding of other forms of exclusion that manifest in academia, such as that faced by women as a result of patriarchy, androcentrism and misogyny, especially since decolonial scholarship may overlook intersectional hierarchies, particularly in relation to gender, given that the focus is typically on ethnicity, nationality or language. This is why Grosfoguel (2010) has drawn a direct comparison between ‘epistemic racism’ and ‘epistemic sexism’ to the extent that he even proposes that they are so inseparable that it may be most suitable to speak of ‘epistemic racism/sexism’. In trying to better understand academic hierarchies and avoid simplistic dichotomies, one may even speak of the ‘centre/semi-periphery/periphery’ rather than ‘centre/periphery’. This would allow for a realisation that colonial hierarchies produce a spectrum of exclusion which silence various groups in similar albeit different ways rather than thinking in simplistic binary terms that there are some people with a voice and some people without a voice. Such gradations would also enable us to recognise that there are some who are closer/further from the centre than oneself which may have added importance when formulating more specific strategies of inclusion. For instance, Boaventura De Sousa Santos (2001, 2014), a Portuguese scholar, and Raewyn Connell (2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2011), an Australian scholar, are both white, Western and Northern but their decolonial theory has not been given the attention that it deserves, possibly on account of them being from the semi-periphery, even if their work is better utilised than the decolonial theory from the Global South that was discussed earlier. Thus, it becomes clear then that even white, Western and Northern academics from the outskirts of the Global North/West may face some degree of exclusion within academia (Curry & Lillis, 2014). Whatever terms are settled on to refer to the lines of exclusion, there will remain disagreements about who belongs to such groups given the contestations around who is non-white, where the Global South/non-West are, or who hails

from the periphery. Thus, while I may consider Connell to belong to the semi-periphery as an Australian, she considers herself as belonging to the Global South because ‘Connell believes that the South can be defined not by its political and economic situation but instead by its intellectual position’ (Rosa, 2014, p. 859). Connell’s classification of Australia as Southern diverts us from the connotations of poverty, dependency, and underdevelopment that are associated with the Global South, none of which characterise Australia, which is linguistically, culturally, economically, politically, religiously, institutionally, and socially on a par with the Global North. Yet, given the binary dichotomy between the way in which decolonial scholarship may speak about intellectual decolonisation, it is understandable that in the choice between Northern and Southern, Connell would categorise Australia as Southern. The move toward ‘centre/semi-periphery/periphery’ may alleviate the tendency to assume that marginalisation is the same for all ideas and people and could be developed further. For example, the next step may be to morph the axis to ‘centre/semi-centre/ semi-periphery/periphery/outer-periphery’ in order to be even more precise in trying to understand the nuances of coloniality in academia. This must be approached with caution though since it could be usurped by those who wish to indulge their status as more peripheral than others. Ultimately, speaking in terms of the periphery or peripheries when discussing intellectual decolonisation could enable us to achieve a holistic understanding of who is excluded within academia by way of producing a more holistic terminology to capture the complex reality of academic environments.

#### **(4). ‘Nativist decolonisation’ should be avoided.**

In some moments, decolonial scholarship may make the mistake of glorifying Southern scholarship or scholars just because they are from the Global South. Rather than intellectual decolonisation, this should be referred to as ‘nativist decolonisation’. This may also manifest amongst those who see intellectual decolonisation as an opportunity to promote a Third World Nationalism which is less to do with broadening horizons and being inclusive, and more to do with a self-validating identity politics which celebrates that which one is affiliated with. Nativist decolonisation may also be advocated by political elites from the Global South whose actual purpose is to further their own populist political agendas. Nativist decolonisation may also result in the promotion of Southern scholarship or ideas which may not reach the standards that one would usually expect. Decolonial scholarship should therefore guard against an exaggerate romanticisation or unwarranted flattery of that from the Global South. Instead,

Southern scholarship should be subjected to the same ‘epistemological vigilance’ as Northern scholarship, which means ensuring that it is interrogated in the same way that one would expect Northern material to be (Matthews, 2018, p. 57). Intellectual decolonisation is not achieved by merely introducing people or ideas from the Global South as a nativist may assume but rather it is about active disruption of the colonial past and the assumptions that it has generated to arrive at something that is prepared to rupture the colonial legacy in drastic ways (Behari-Leak, 2019, pp. 61–62; Maldonado-Torres et al., 2018; Mogstad & Tse, 2018, pp. 59–60; Ogunnaike, 2018). Thus, we should be prepared to recognise the limitations, inconsistencies and flaws in Southern knowledge. Anything less than this will result in decolonial detractors labelling intellectual decolonisation as a trivial undertaking in the interest of a self-serving placating of Southern insecurities.

Nativist decolonisation is also problematic because it may produce a distrust in Northern scholarship just because it is Northern. This tendency may be found amongst some of the more puritanical proponents of intellectual decolonisation who may depict it as an attempt to cleanse academia from Northern influence which amounts to ‘Southerncentrism’. For example, although Nyoni (2019, pp. 2–3) offers an impassioned call to liberate African scholars from their supposed ‘colonial caged mentality’, he seems to overstep the mark when he insists that African scholars must stop citing Western scholars and replace them with ‘African epistemology’ and ‘Afro-centred knowledge’. Expunging Northern perspectives and valorising Southern perspectives in such a nativist manner is problematic because it may mean overlooking useful scholarship and over-relying on less useful scholarship in a manner that is similar to how Northerncentric scholars behave. This is why Grosfoguel (2009, pp. 11, 24–26, 2010, pp. 31–32) has suggested that scholars who engage in nativist decolonisation should be labelled as ‘fundamentalists’ as much as those who are Northerncentric should, given that both of them make the mistake of subscribing to an insular and naïve approach which presumes that they possess all of the answers. Thus, when pursuing intellectual decolonisation, one should be open to including whichever research, ideas, theories and concepts are suitable, regardless of whether they originate in the Global North or the Global South, and beyond that, we may even find that the most promising stance is one of synthesising the two (Alatas, 1974, p. 697, 2000, p. 27; Matthews, 2018, pp. 56–58; Ogunnaike, 2018; Spivak, 1988, pp. 91–92).

**(5). ‘Tokenistic decolonisation’ should be avoided.**

The final limitation that can manifest in some discussions about intellectual decolonisation is the tendency to be tokenistic. By this I mean that intellectual decolonisation could involve merely gesturing toward the exclusion of those from the Global South without going far enough in subverting the exclusion of Southern people and knowledge. Such a ‘tokenistic decolonisation’ may make little effort to undo coloniality and in some scenarios may even reaffirm colonial structures due to not taking radical action. Dawson (2019) has similarly suggested that decolonial scholarship can be divided into ‘substantive decolonisation’ and ‘decolonisation lite’, the former of which attempts to radically disrupt existing hierarchies, and the latter of which superficially claims to do the same, often under the banner of ‘internationalisation’. Thus, we must avoid ‘a blind adoption of the language of decolonization, with no real change’ (Behari-Leak, 2019, p. 65). Tokenistic decolonisation may manifest in various forms including as a minimalist approach which superficially uses the language of intellectual decolonisation or mentions Southern scholars, scholarship or ideas only in passing. This has been described as a ‘strategy of “mention and inclusion” [which] produces the effect that merely lip service is paid to critical voices ... The issues are deemed to have been raised, highlighted, addressed and resolved’ (Sinha, 2005, p. 199). Yet, tokenistic decolonisation could also be excessively abstract and theoretical in a manner that may appear as nuanced and sophisticated, but which remains tokenistic for being characterised by an intellectual pontification that is based on a scholarly superfluity that serves to massage one’s ego and deceive others of one’s genius at the expense of actually achieving intellectual decolonisation. Therefore, to avoid tokenistic decolonisation, decolonial scholarship needs to strike the right balance between ‘under-theorising’ and ‘over-theorising’ decolonisation, both of which can be tokenistic.

Tuck and Yang (2012) have offered one of the most provocative critiques of tokenistic decolonisation by suggesting that ‘decolonisation is not a metaphor’, by which they mean that decolonisation should not only be a symbolic academic exercise. Rather, they call into question the entire project of intellectual decolonisation by suggesting that intellectual decolonisation in and of itself is almost always tokenistic. Instead, they argue that decolonisation should primarily involve the reversing of more tangible aspects of colonialism, such as economic reparations or land return to indigenous peoples. Tuck and Yang bemoan decolonial scholarship for having a hollow commitment to decolonisation which they consider is mostly a self-indulgent exercise which allows individuals to overcome the guilt which we may have in relation to benefiting from and being complicit in colonialism. Thus, Tuck and Yang

understand intellectual decolonisation as an attempt to place oneself at the forefront of a noble enterprise without any real investment or sacrifice. They refer to this as ‘settler moves to innocence’ which they define as ‘diversions, distractions, which relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility, and conceal the need to give up land or power or privilege’ (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 21). Tuck and Yang echo earlier pronouncements from hooks who also identified the guilt that can underpin the fantasy to connect with the Other:

The desire to make contact with those bodies deemed Other, with no apparent will to dominate, assuages the guilt of the past, even takes the form of a defiant gesture where one denies accountability and historical connection. Most importantly, it establishes a contemporary narrative where the suffering imposed by structures of domination on those designated Other is deflected by an emphasis on seduction and longing where the desire is not to make the Other over in one’s image but to become the Other (hooks, 1992/2009, p. 369).

This illustrates how tokenistic decolonisation relates to some of the other limitations mentioned above, such as the possibility of treating intellectual decolonisation as if it is a simple undertaking that can be achieved through appropriating elements of the Global South which invariably results in tokenism. It also highlights how intellectual decolonisation can be self-serving in much the same way as it is when universities realise the marketability and profitability of decolonisation and go on to commodify it in the interests of capitalising on a timid version of it (Andrews, 2018; Rodriguez et al., 2018; Schapper & Mayson, 2004). Although Tuck and Yang have been criticised for having a reductivist approach to colonisation due to their downplaying of forms of colonialism beyond land displacement (Bhambra et al., 2018, p. 5), they rightly implore us to ask ourselves how far we are prepared to go to achieve decolonisation, including whether we are willing to make sustained sacrifices in the pursuit of decolonisation. An academic whose career, status and profile is enhanced by our involvement in intellectual decolonisation needs to ask ourselves whether we would be as committed to the cause if our career, status or profile suffered as a result of our commitment to it. Moreover, those of us who are unwilling to engage in decolonial activism beyond the university may come to realise that we are actually producing tokenistic decolonisation, rather than something more sincere, given that intellectual decolonisation is just one part of a broader strategy which is required (Andrews, 2018; Bhambra et al., 2018; Shilliam, 2018). This is why Sefa Dei and Lordan (2016) favour the terms ‘anti-colonialism’ and ‘decolonial praxis’ so as to evoke the



importance of being action-orientated in the pursuit of a decolonial agenda. Thus, whilst it is easy for academics to declare our anti-racism, whether this translates to our academic conduct is another question. This means that each decolonial scholar must ask ourselves whether our decolonisation efforts are merely tokenistic or something more meaningful, particularly as this can be lacking in discussions about intellectual decolonisation.

## **Conclusion**

Intellectual decolonisation is a necessary undertaking which is why the popularity of intellectual decolonisation in Northern universities is to be welcomed. However, intellectual decolonisation should be pursued in a reflexive manner in order to avoid a superficial and poorly theorised project. This is a necessary reminder because while there is some excellent decolonial scholarship being produced in both the Global South and the Global North, there may also be some who have ‘jumped on the decolonial bandwagon’ due to intellectual decolonisation becoming fashionable in recent years. This is why, in this article, I have sought to warn of some of the dangers which surround intellectual decolonisation. My recommendations to those who are interested in intellectual decolonisation are that we ensure that we do the following: (1) engage with decolonial theory from the Global South so as to avoid decolonisation without decolonising, (2) recognise that intellectual decolonisation requires momentous effort and may not even be possible, (3) avoid essentialising or appropriating the Global South, (4) explore the complex ways in which coloniality produces multiple forms of marginalisation, (5) avoid ‘nativist decolonisation’, and (6) avoid ‘tokenistic decolonisation’. If we are not alert to these six dangers then we may find that our efforts to promote intellectual decolonisation are not only wasted, but that we may even reproduce intellectual colonisation.

## **Note**

1. I do not discuss the contributions of Frantz Fanon and Edward Said because, even though they are highly relevant to intellectual decolonisation, their works are already relatively well known, even if they are not as mainstream as some of us would like them to be. Instead, I focus on other decolonial scholars from the Global South who have been even more neglected than Fanon and Said whilst simultaneously and emphatically insisting that Fanon and Said must also be understood as essential contributors to our understanding of intellectual decolonisation.

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