

Decolonization of the economics curriculum at South African universities: using the UCT School of Economics as a case study

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Abstract

Within the context of the call for more pluralism in economic methodology that arose in Europe from early 2000 and the different student movements advocating for curricular reform in South African universities, this paper will be looking at a critique of the current economics curriculum at UCT. Bearing the decolonial project in mind, suggestions will be made to the department so that it can commit to decolonizing the economics curriculum. The case for decolonization is made through the recent student protests, along with the examination of the literature surrounding decolonization. The decolonial project, concerned with the academy, is moreover justified by the economic and social role that universities are meant to play in our societies within developing country contexts. The close linkages between universities, their curricula, and the students they produce, as well as the economy, makes the decolonization of the economics curriculum more necessary to escape the vicious cycle created by the legacy of the colonial project. The critiques of the curriculum provided in this paper are therefore shaped by the decolonial project and the solutions aimed towards decolonizing the curriculum include Afrocentricity, inclusivity, and a pluralistic approach to the teaching of economics. Full-scale engagement from academics, students, workers and civil society will moreover be needed to develop the project and maintain a decolonized economics curriculum which speaks to the South African reality.

Introduction:

“Decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world is unsurprisingly a program of complete disorder. Decolonization is a historical process: that is to say it cannot be understood, it cannot become intelligible nor clear to itself except in the exact measure that we can discern the movements which give it historical form and content.”

-Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1963, p. 36

Against the backdrop of the recent student protests and broader pan-African movements, universities, as sites of knowledge production, are key stakeholders in addressing the major societal issues that we face. This is especially due to the close linkages that exist between university curricula, the graduates shaped, and the economic landscape that is created and reinforced. This paper will therefore provide a critique of the economics curriculum taught in South African universities, using UCT’s School of Economics as a case study. Bearing the objective of decolonization in mind, the paper will provide an overview of what a decolonized economics curriculum would look like first and consequently, the recommended steps that the department can take to radically transform the curriculum.

Based on the nature of this topic and the low availability of resources and concrete data, this paper will follow an interpretivist approach (interspersed with critical realist tempering).

An online survey of 107 students in the 2018 economics honours class at UCT regarding their views on the economics curriculum and their attitudes towards decolonization was conducted.

To justify the decolonization of the curriculum, this paper will first look at how the recent student movements have informed the discourse around decolonization. It will then examine the role that universities play in our society, and how dangerous the current curriculum is. After establishing the importance of decolonization and of the decolonial project associated with the academy, further motivation will be provided for the decolonization of the economics curricula in South African universities, using UCT as a case study. This will then lead to a critical evaluation of the current economics curriculum in the School of Economics at UCT. It will then be established what a decolonized economics curriculum would look like, based on the goals of the decolonial project. Recommendations will then be provided for the department to overcome the issues outlined and establish an economics curriculum which is decolonized,

while acknowledging the steps the department has recently made in adopting the CORE textbook.

Contextualising the Problem:

To understand the urgent call for decolonization and how universities can facilitate curriculum reformation, some context needs to be given into the student movements that fomented the call for a more meaningful and inclusive academic economics. This provides background to particularly the Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall campaigns that took place across various universities and tertiary institutions in South Africa between 2015 and 2017, which had similar, but unaligned approaches to resistance. We interpret the broader decolonization project within the narrowed context of curriculum reform in the so-called ‘dismal science’, and how this facet of the dominant orthodoxy associated with mainstream or “narrowband economics” (Fullbrook, 2004: 1).

Initiation of dissent in the global North:

Student Movements and Higher Education in South Africa:

The Rhodes Must Fall, Fees Must Fall and End Outsourcing protests that took place across most universities across the country facilitated discussion about the purpose of the university, the quality of education in South Africa and addressing the inequality that the colonial project has left us with (Nyamnjoh, 2016).

The call for free tertiary education, was primarily based on the idea that tertiary education ought to be accessible to all, since education is a basic human right, it allows people to increase their job prospects, raise their earnings potential, improve their standards of living, it aids in the development and upliftment of the society and its values. This list is not exhaustive though, since there are countless benefits of education; benefits which should not be excluded to those who can afford it – especially since this is linked to class, socio-economic status and a history of privilege. Extremely high fees, hence is an immoral barrier to entry, because this form of class discrimination contributes to, and perpetuates, the high levels of racially defined inequality in post-apartheid South Africa (Özler, 2007).

Education in South Africa, particularly tertiary education, has become increasingly vocation-based and the notion that one needs a degree to get a job, is very prominent among our growing youth population (CCWG, 2018). The stress around getting into tertiary institutions and getting a job is only amplified by the rising youth unemployment rate (currently at 53.7%), and this in turn causes students to feel more pressured than ever to get qualifications. While there are other options to obtain qualifications, aside from universities, there remains the perception that degrees are the only valid forms of qualifications, and this has several undesirable economic consequences.

Figure 1: Percentage distribution of student enrolment in public and private Post-School Education and Training (PSET) institutions in 2013

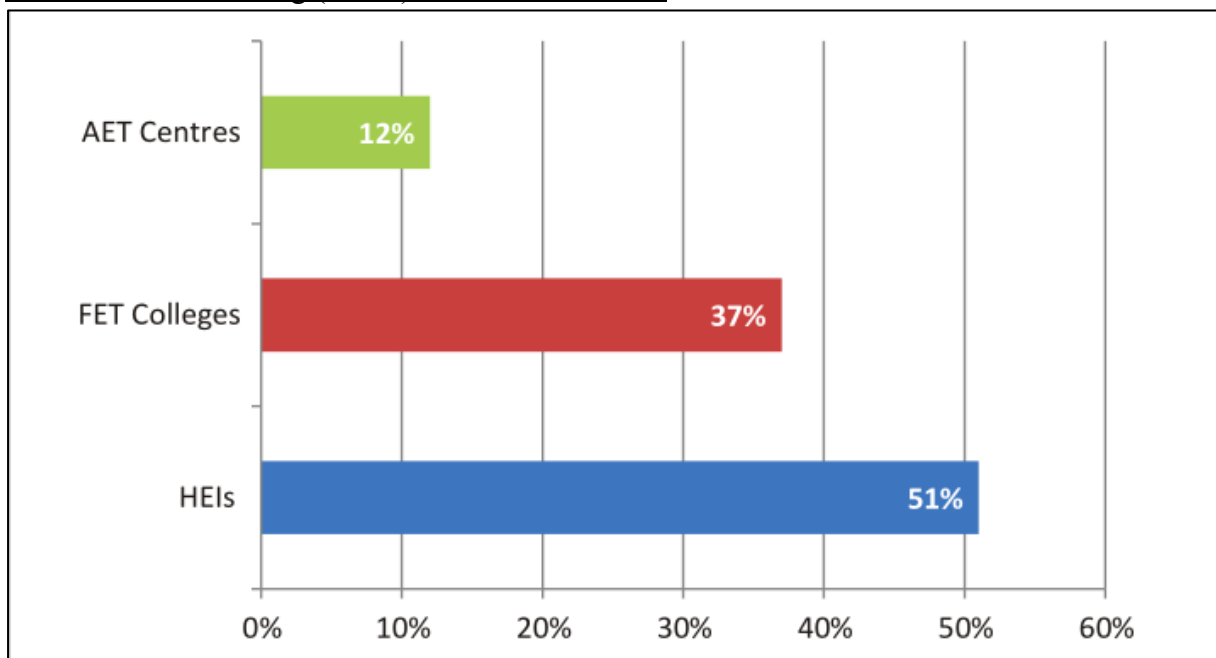


Figure 1 (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013: 4)

As indicated in the figure above, 51% of all students enrolled in private and public PSET institutions were enrolled in the Higher Education sector, while 37% were enrolled in the FET/TVET College sector and 12% in the Adult Education and Training sector. Compared with 2012 data, this distribution had increased by two percentage points for HEIs, decreased by one percentage point for FET/TVET Colleges and decreased by three percentage points for AET Centres (Department of Higher Education & Training, 2015: 4). This therefore shows the degree-bias that exists in South African society. The bias is founded on the notion that the opportunity cost of a degree can offset employment decisions and consequently raise earnings

potential, which can decrease the number of future artisans and technical skills available in the economy (Artisan Training Institute, 2016).

While the government and universities have recently made serious commitments to fee-free education, the same cannot be said regarding the quest towards decolonizing the curriculum. To therefore justify and understand the decolonial project concerned with the academy, we need to look at how our education system has been informed by the colonial project.

The role of the university – justification for decolonization:

Universities play an important role in society as they are expected to educate, certify and uplift the population. Qualifications obtained from universities and other tertiary institutions act as signals to employers, making it attractive for young people to obtain. While universities have these intellectual and economic capacities, they are also crucial sites to facilitate social justice and transformation (Nyamnjoh, 2016).

Universities should therefore recognize their revolutionary role and they should commit themselves to being institutions that are concerned with producing intellectuals who are “imbued with a profound and dynamic sense of social responsibilities, to hold out for education, not as a credentialing process, but as encouragement for the revolutionary force of individual curiosity – pursued without limit.” (Nyamnjoh, 2016: 12). Therefore, by committing to decolonization, a university would be fulfilling its societal role above its economic role, and by doing so, can satisfy its capacity to economic development and social justice.

Universities ought to be accountable to the youth and more broadly to its country. Universities in South Africa do not appear to be as accountable to South African people as they ought to be, in the sense that the statistics and rankings are in line with western standards. This is displayed by the “whitening up” of the universities and the narrow individual and collective interests embedded in educational systems which are being “defended in the name of modernity and civilisation” (Nyamnjoh, 2016). Universities ought to allow for students, workers, academics and the broader society to have equal say and equal standing, such that the interests of one group do not overpower those of others (Nyamnjoh, 2016). To remain a colonized institution, one that other’s the experience of its black students, is unacceptable.

The argument in support for the decolonization of university curricula is hence formalized below:

1. Universities and university curricula are essential in shaping the current and future generations of society.
2. The current curriculum at South African universities has remained a colonized curriculum.
3. We know it is colonized because the transition to democracy has not resulted in improvements regarding the education system and educational outcomes.
4. A colonized curriculum results in a society which remains shaped by colonial ideas.
5. Therefore, our university curricula ought to be decolonized if our society wishes to be decolonized.

The recent protests by university students and workers seeking institutional transformation and decolonisation therefore points to the effects of the continued operation of the inherited racialized power and privilege in South Africa (Nyamnjoh, 2016). Rhodes must fall was not simply about the removal of a statue; it was about taking an active step to recognize the legacy of colonialism and its impact on current black lives in South Africa. #EndOutsourcing spoke to the recognition of the workers at universities and how wage labour is a continued reality for black workers (Pather, 2015). The argument for putting an end to outsourcing is based on a moral imperative to ensure that human dignity is maintained, and the recognition that exploitation and knowledge-production cannot coexist.

Before suggesting ways in which a decolonized curriculum may look like, it will be useful to outline the issues pertaining to the current economics curriculum as taught in South African universities.

Critique of the economics curriculum at UCT

To understand why students are unhappy with the current curriculum and what they expected when they chose to study economics can therefore provide insight into what a decolonized curriculum might look like. Hence, to gather insights from the 2018 economics honours students at UCT, an online survey was created, and 30 responses were collected and some of the results are critically interpreted below.

Figure 2: Student satisfaction with the current economics curriculum at UCT

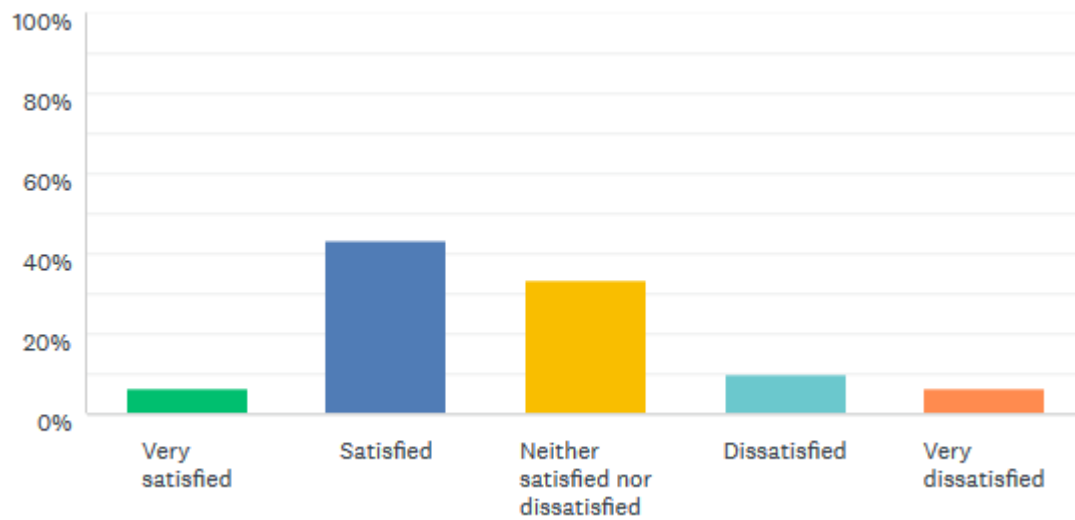


Figure 3: Student confidence regarding their understanding of the South African economy

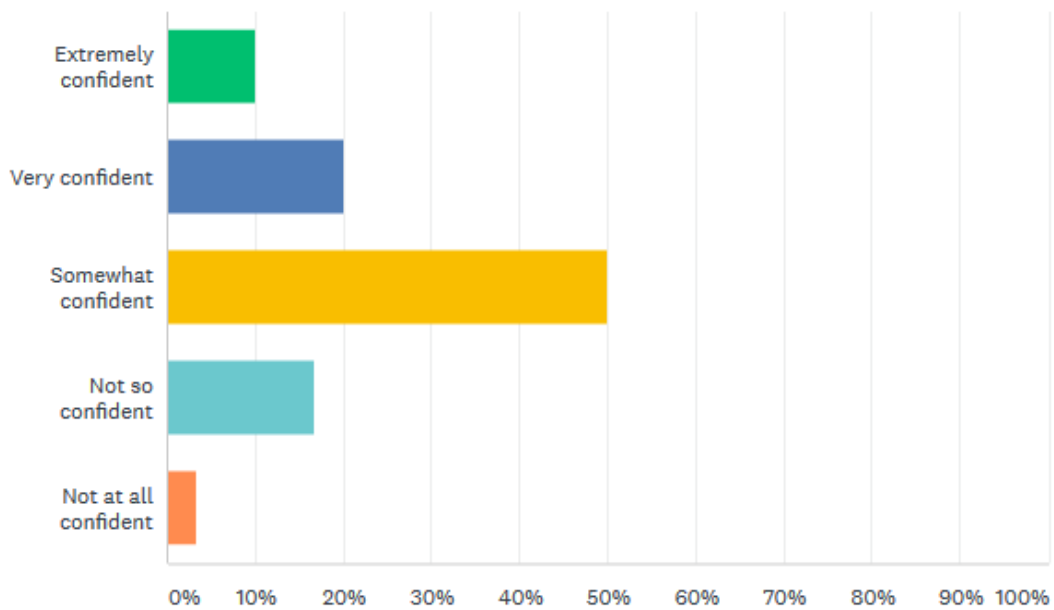
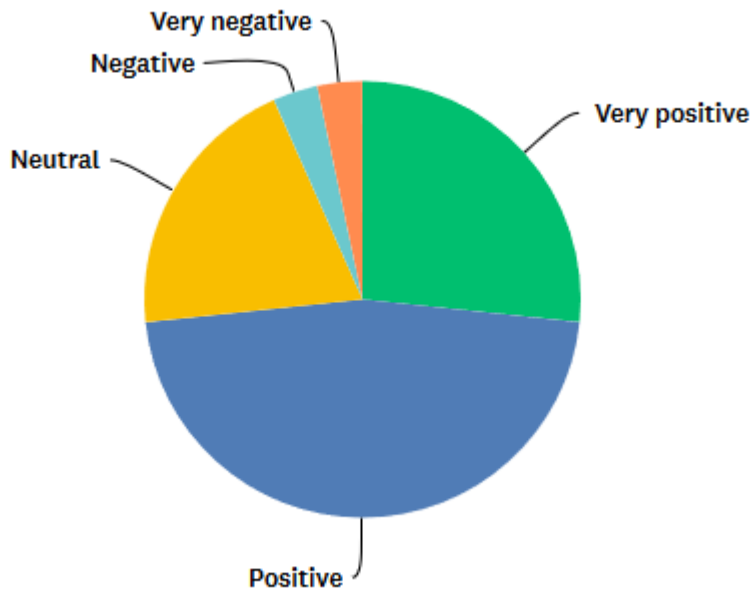


Figure 4: Student response to a decolonized economics curriculum



From the 3 graphs above, while 43% of respondents feel satisfied with the content of the economics curriculum, only 20% and 10% feel confident and extremely confident about their understanding of the South African economy. Half of those surveyed felt neither confident, nor unconfident, and 20% of the students felt neutral about a decolonized curriculum. Despite most students feeling satisfied about the current curriculum and somewhat confident about their understanding of the South African economy, there was an overwhelmingly positive response towards UCT decolonizing the curriculum.

Some of the reasons cited by students regarding their decision to study economics pertain to their willingness to study something relevant, to tackle inequality and economic development, to increase their career prospects and earnings potentials, and because they found it interesting (or at least, less boring than other commerce courses). While not everyone who pursues economics does so with the intention of obtaining a useful degree with social and political influence, the students who do choose to do so, find themselves disillusioned.

Because economics can be defined as the study of “how people interact with each other and with their natural surroundings in producing their livelihoods, and how this changes over time,” (The CORE team, 2017: 38), economists ought to have a responsibility towards their societies

and environments, and the current economics curriculum, as taught in our universities, pays very little attention to the ‘type of economist’ that they produce, particularly with regards to their views on social justice and social responsibility (Nyamnjoh, 2016).

(Dis)incentives to change:

One possible explanation for the little/no change in the university curricula can be attributed to pragmatic inertia (Mearman, 2007). It requires a lot of effort on the part of academics, students and the institution. Because decolonizing the curriculum is unlikely to see immediate effects, nor is it likely for those most placed to drive the process to be directly affected by the positive rents from this project, it has led to the slow progress regarding curriculum reform. For a student who plans to leave the university, there is very little incentive to change a system when it will no longer affect them. Likewise, for lecturers and academics, whom face a larger amount of effort to change. Decolonization of the university curricula therefore requires individuals who are forward-looking and who are passionate about social (and economic) justice, as well as the decolonial project, regardless of how it affects (or does not affect) them.

There has been little to no change so far in the economics curriculum, mainly because undergraduate textbooks have, through the hegemonic power, fostered a false sense of an agreed body of knowledge. Whilst lecturers’ sunk capital in teaching materials and the opportunity cost (in terms of time for research) of changing teaching, in turn generates a conservative attitude towards the curriculum (Mearman, 2007).

The critiques outlined in this section, regarding the economics curriculum, will hence be substantiated with evidence from the UCT experience of the author(s) and informal, anecdotal evidence collected from fellow graduate students in the SOE.

Critique 1: Course structure

One of the problems with the economics department at UCT, and the structure of the economics curriculum, pertains to what material is taught in the required courses compared to the content deemed ‘optional’. At UCT, beginner and intermediate micro and macro are core courses and hence required for the major. Courses like development economics, labour economics and history of economic thought, on the other hand, are electives and so they are not taken by most students – especially those who end up dropping economics as a major, for various reasons. These elective courses are also more likely to contain more interesting content, so by keeping them as optional, the department is doing a disservice to itself.

While the essential courses can be taught from a radical perspective, they have remained largely faithful to orthodox theory. This prioritisation of the orthodox doctrine results in less attention and focus devoted to being critical in economics and understanding how economics, politics and history are related (Lewis, 2004). It is important to recognize that economics is a social science, which therefore has intersections with other fields in the social sciences. The interdisciplinary values of economics and other social sciences are only made aware to students in the latter part of the economics curriculum, particularly in third and fourth year, and this is perpetuated by the lack of diverse methodology (Morgan et al., 2014).

The economics curriculum moreover faces the issue of creating students who accept the mainstream and orthodox doctrine, out of lack of exposure to much else. It is argued that the lack of critical and ontological reflection of orthodox methods in economics is what is responsible for the persistent indoctrination of these poorly suited methods, particularly in our universities (Lewis, 2004; Lawson, 2015). This is an unfortunate case at UCT, since critical thinking is not encouraged in the economics curriculum, especially where the curriculum, and methodology, are concerned.

Critique 2: Methodology and Mathematics

Economics may be a social science, but the discipline has increasingly associated itself with other sciences, claiming to be a ‘quasi-natural science’ (Heise, 2018: 3). Formal deductivism was also established as the only acceptable method of theorising and mathematics thus came to be regarded as the only acceptable language of economic theory, to such an extent that formal deductivism has been described as “the most comprehensive characteristic of mainstream neoclassical economics to the detriment of all approaches that reject such mathematical formalism” (Heise, 2018: 3). Mainstream economic methodology is – as Ben Fine (1999: 405) puts it – “bedevilled by lack of holistic alternatives.”

While mathematics is an important tool in economics, it is not the only way by which we can perform analytic rigour in economics (Wittenberg, 2017). An economics curriculum which presupposes advanced mathematical proficiency is exclusionary and narrow. From the mid-19th century, economists started employing scientific methodology, much like those used in physics and mathematics, although, unlike physics, economics is a social science and hence does not choose its methods based on the nature of its studied phenomena (Fullbrook, 2009).

Milton Friedman (1999: 137) has echoed the problem with this scientism in economics, arguing that it has increasingly become “an arcane branch of mathematics rather than dealing with real economic problems.”

Critical realism, as an ontology, aims to problematize the ‘scientism’ in economics, and provides scope to employ more suitable methodology to economic analysis. Based on the principle called triangulation, practical methodology can be used in research design to investigate and draw inferences from via multiple methods, which can be developed through pluralism and cooperation with other social sciences (Fullbrook, 2009). Proponents of critical realism hence argue that the methods employed by mainstream economists are poorly suited to the investigation of the socio-economic world and that a more nuanced ontology needs to be employed, given that people are at the centre of economics and are therefore less predictable than other physical objects typically studied in the natural sciences (Lewis, 2004; Lawson 2015,).

Critique 3: rationality, womxn and non-gendered individuals

The concept of the rational agent in economics is also problematic paints the image of a very particular human, namely a white cis-het man who knows their risk and time preferences and utility-maximising conditions – perfectly by the way. This behavioural assumption of utility maximization under mainstream theory ignores other aspects concerning individual behaviour and is thus paints a simplistic and narrow understanding of the economic agent (Fine, 1999). Another assumption pertaining to the economic agent under mainstream theory is that they are rational and self-interested. While womxn now fall under the domain of rationality, the concept of rationality was initially defined to make sense of what is unique about man; to exclude womxn, animals and the disabled from the sphere of justice. A false dichotomy therefore exists whereby individuals are either male or female, rational or emotional, and superior or inferior. So, to use the term rational agent when describing consumers, is to not acknowledge the origins of the word and its intended exclusionary nature.

The dualisms prevalent in the way that data is collected, analysed, and displayed mean that individuals who are non-gender-conforming therefore find themselves continuously excluded from representations of economic agents, since gender categories, amongst others, are presented as mutually exclusive (Dow, 1990). The exclusion of these individuals from the discourse, invalidates their position and experiences in the economy and society. Moreover,

the relationship between patriarchy, capitalism and racism (Abberley, 1987) is not made explicitly clear to students, and this results in the false replication of the belief that inequality is necessary for economic development and that poverty is a choice or the result of laziness.

Critique 4: Pedagogy

Lecture formats across most of the core economics courses at UCT follow a standard structure. While the economics department should be commended for employing the use of technology for supplementary material, and while it is assumed that most students at the university have access to some form of technology whereby to view online resources, there seems to be a substitution effect between attending lectures and watching the lecture recordings. This is exemplified by the typically low lecture attendance, particularly towards the busier times during the semester. It then raises the question as to whether the use of technology discourages students from attending physical lectures.

Technology, as a pedagogical tool, is extremely useful and the supposed negative causation between technology and lecture attendance should be taken with a pinch of salt (Konsky, Ivins & Gribble, 2009:). This is because the incentive compatibility decisions facing students are more complex than the substitution effect suggests, since factors which affect attendance decisions include preferences to self-teach, time-management issues, other commitments and lack of enjoyment derived from attending lectures (Billings-Gagliardi & Mazor, 2007; Bowles, 2008). Mental health is another important factor, and it is often overlooked. University is very taxing, mentally and emotionally, and often students don't get the time to address the negative impact of stress and anxiety that comes with the difficult workload. This can be overwhelming and result in an inability to go to classes, concentrate and get adequate sleep (Wang, Chen, Chen, Li, Harari, Tignor, Zhou, Ben-Zeev & Campbell, 2014).

While most of these factors cannot be controlled for by the institution, appropriate pedagogy might mitigate against the issues of low lecture attendance. Lecture quality, through engaging pedagogy, is arguably the most important factor when considering the motives of students (Massingham & Herrington, 2006).

Additionally, the UCT economics tutorial format/structure does not encourage the right type of learning. Work is presented in the tutorial as a mini-lecture, and students are expected to accept what is taught. Tutorial assignments are either completed by students half-heartedly to

attain DP status, or they are copied from friends. Even if students attempt the assignments by themselves, they often rely on their textbooks, slides and lecture notes for answers. This system of rote learning is not conducive to the outcomes we want to achieve, nor does this facilitate critical thinking in economics.

The economics curriculum at UCT does little to explain and understand the underlying social structures of the South African economy. The assumptions underlying consumer theory and about economic agents are problematic in that they are narrow, simplistic and homogenizing (Hayek, 1942; Fine, 1999).

There therefore appears to be a mismatch between the mainstream economic theory taught in our universities and the experiences of the majority, black poor population in South Africa. This is largely the result of the Eurocentrism of our economics curriculum and our universities in general (Amin, 1989). Most of the economic theory that is taught is rooted in orthodox doctrines and the capitalist framework. If we want a generation of people equipped with the necessary tools to make society a better place, then we cannot continue to use a colonized curriculum, and furthermore, we cannot be teaching students about the merits of capitalism – not when it is the capitalist economic system which perpetuates racism, sexism and ableism (Rodrik, 2015). It is unreasonable to expect to produce an alumnus of politically and socially engaged youth, when they are not being exposed, within their curricula, to ideas which challenge the mainstream doctrines and encourage them to think critically about their economy.

The way forward – achieving a decolonized curriculum

The fact that all we have as a reference is the model inherited from the colonialists, means that we know what a decolonized curriculum is not. Decolonization demands an indigenous framework and a centring of indigenous land, indigenous sovereignty, and indigenous ways of thinking (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Too often decolonization is misunderstood and so in creating a space for decolonial discourses, there will be tension and conflict surrounding the decolonial project and it is therefore important that the proponents for decolonization actively work to oppose colonialism (CCWG, 2018).

Critics and conservatives may argue that a decolonized curriculum will ‘downgrade’ the university. This line of reasoning, however, is based on preconceived notions of decolonization

equating to a downgrade, due to the hegemonic idea that knowledge as is today, is good and, because our education system closely resembles a western education system, it implies that our system is as good as it can be (Lushaba, 2017). However, the current education system is not good, because it was created through an immoral and racist past. Those who believe that decolonization is bad, believe this for reasons not to do with decolonization, but because they have been indoctrinated to believe that anything that challenges Eurocentrism – i.e Afrocentrism – is inferior and ‘backward’ (Amin, 1989).

It is moreover argued that South Africa does not just have a racist past; it has a racist present. And if things do not change, South African society and institutions will remain racist. Institutions which are founded on racist values, and which actively exclude African knowledge and African people are not good institutions. In the case of our universities and their colonized curricula, the justification for decolonization is based on the maxim that racism and ‘good education’ cannot coexist (Lushaba, 2017).

So, what would a decolonized curriculum look like?

To have a decolonized curriculum means that Africans can finally decide what ought to be the structure of the education system and this will finally provide African people with the autonomy they have so long deserved (CCWG, 2018). A decolonized curriculum will validate the African experience, recognize the heterogeneity of African people and authenticate and centralize African thought. A decolonized education system therefore seeks to rehumanize black people, to restore their integrity of being, as being valid and capable of agency and thought (Lushaba, 2017).

Based on the objective of the decolonial project and the critiques highlighted above, the School of Economics can consider the following recommendations to decolonize the curriculum. These recommendations have been informed largely by the discussions, plenaries and workshops which took place at the *Rethinking Economics for Africa inaugural festival* during 7-8 September at the university of Witwatersrand and by some of the literature on the topic.

Recommendations:

The course structure can be improved on by incorporating some of the important topics/themes from the elective courses into the core so that all students can get a decent balance of exposure to ideas and concepts. Alternatively, for students who are not enrolled in any of the other social

sciences, it could be a requirement that students take at least one humanities course, like philosophy, politics or sociology, so that their educational background is more holistic, given the interdisciplinary nature of the social sciences (Heise, 2018).

To provide students with better context into the dynamics, history and politics of the South African economy, a compulsory whole year course in the first year of the programme could be developed aimed at outlining the historical and political landscape that shaped the South African economy. This course could be focused on developing a robust understanding of the local context, and on different analytical tools so that students moving onto 2nd year of study have a better set of critical thinking skills.

The department can therefore address all of this by moreover adopting a pluralist approach – in this mandatory whole year course, and in the economics curriculum as a whole - focusing on presenting the different schools of economic thought, as this will provide students with a broader perspective and understanding of different policy tools and complexities of the economy around them.

One of the organizations spearheading the push for pluralism in economics, *Rethinking Economics*, substantiate their claim on their website by providing the benefits that pluralism has on students, given that they are “better served when they are presented with a spectrum of economic ideas rather than just the dominant paradigm” (Rethinking Economics, 2018). The advantage of a pluralist economics curriculum is that it allows students to develop a more holistic view of the economy and the different lenses with which to view and understand it.

Methodological problems can be addressed through exposing students, from first year, to alternative analytical tools so that the maths-obsession can be broken. A separate stream of economics can perhaps be introduced, so that students who wish to study economics but struggle with the advanced mathematics can still do so. Maybe the two streams can be encouraged to work together on a term project, perhaps as part of the whole year course suggested above. This type of integration could strengthen each respective stream’s analytical rigour. These ideas are supported by Tony Lawson (2015), who advocates for the adoption of a more historical and philosophical outlook to the study of economics; that the current focus on mathematical modelling can be deemphasized, while still allowing a high level of analytical rigour to be maintained. Moreover, limitations of the economic models used and the

assumptions underlying the theories, along with their historical context, ought to be made clear to students from the beginning so that critical thinking can be fostered (Rodrik, 2015; Wittenberg, 2017).

Perhaps more emphasis ought to be placed on feminist economics through exposure to prominent feminist economist scholars, like Julie A. Nelson and Myra H. Strober, who write about patriarchy and capitalism along with the way that feminist economics can improve society and the economy. Employing more females in the department, particularly womxn of colour so that womxn can begin to be included in economics, may not achieve desired results since being a womxn is not a guarantee on holding feminist economic views. Ideally, the critical thinking skills developed through the pluralist approach will allow for continuous inclusion of the struggles of womxn, of people of colour, of differently-abled bodies and of working class/poor in the classroom and outside of it, and more policies from the government to incentivise more womxn from remaining in academics.

To democratize economics and make it accessible to all members of our society, would require drawing knowledge from the ground up, engagement with civil society organisations, communities, and activists as well as the recognition of the inter-disciplinary nature of economics (Heise, 2018). Through extending the sphere of economics and its corresponding discourse to include the most vulnerable and marginalized people in our society, democratization can occur, and the content will moreover be informed by real South African experiences.

Like with gender diversity, having more black academics does not equate to decolonization, especially since not all black academics are progressive. In fact, there are some white male academics at UCT that have been instrumental during the anti-apartheid struggle. For representative purposes however, and for providing black people with a sense of belonging in the academy, having more black lecturers can further the goals of the decolonial project. There should therefore be better incentives in place to create and maintain a black academic elite, given that black academics have so many financial obligations to their families that remaining in academics is not always feasible. This narrative has its limitations though, since it is important to recognize how violent the academic space is, particularly at historically white institutions such as UCT (Mnguni, 2018). So, on top of all of these, the academic environment needs to be more conducive towards different perspectives, and this is likely to be achieved through decolonization of the institution (and the curriculum).

More practical applications of the theory, through simulations and group projects for example, could be implemented. Students might better understand how decisions are made and how political lags affect economic policy effectiveness if they are made to role-play and engage in simulations. Having an economics curriculum that is sufficiently practical in its approach to learning economics will result in bridging the gap between the transition from student to (potential) employee.

Conclusion:

The relationship between the economics curriculum at universities, the economists they therefore produce and the consequent economy they perpetuate is a toxic and cyclical one. While either stage can be disrupted to create more desirable outcomes, this paper has argued that the most effective way to decolonize our economy, is through decolonizing the economics curriculum. The student movements have facilitated important discussions around the purpose of our universities, addressing the violent colonial legacy of Cecil John Rhodes, and how western hegemony has shaped an education system that is far removed from South African reality for most of its inhabitants. The Curriculum Change Working Group (2018) rightfully point out the important role that students have in informing meaningful curriculum change and students should therefore continue to protest and pressurise the institution to commit to decolonization.

This paper has therefore presented the UCT School of Economics with a solid case in favour of decolonization, based on the dissatisfaction expressed by students regarding the current (colonized) curriculum. The decolonial project has moreover been explained and used to frame and address the problems identified with the current economics curriculum at UCT. The critiques raised have moreover been addressed through the concept of what a decolonized curriculum might look like and hence, the steps by which such a curriculum can be achieved, has been outlined. It remains to be seen how effective the CORE project will be in overcoming all the issues with the current curriculum, but hopefully through full-scale engagement, decolonization can become a tangible reality.

Words: 6573

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