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**SUPERVISOR: KASTURI BEHARI-LEAK**



<b>STUDENT NAME</b>	<b>STUDENT NUMBER</b>	<b>EMAIL ADDRESS</b>
<b>Prince Leburu</b>	<b>LBRMOS001</b>	<b>lbrmos001@myuct.ac.za</b>

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## **TITLE**

**Investigating the structural and cultural conditions that reproduce coloniality and inhibit Decolonisation at a Private Higher Education Institution in South Africa.**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This qualitative research study seeking to establish the structural and systemic inhibitors of decolonisation at a South African Private Higher Education Institution (PHEI), adopted a Critical and Social Realism theoretical framework while employing a critical discourse analytical approach. Working within an interpretive paradigm, the study gathered data through semi-structured interviews involving the PHEI lecturers whose agential association purposively placed them at vantage points to assess the structural and cultural elements that stunt the progression of transformation. The study established that the absence of institutional commitment to decolonisation informed the lecturers' peripheral influence in executing a decolonisation agenda. It was also established that the lecturers' perceptions of decolonisation did not progress beyond intellectual and academic pronouncements and as such, institutional structure and culture continue to inhibit decolonisation. That lack of depth on the part of lecturers compromised their competence to pronounce on apparent structural and racial configurations manifest in the institution. The study recommended further investigations that would triangulate the experiences of multiple stakeholders in a bid to propose a framework that would foreground decolonisation and curriculum change as a central concern.

**Keywords:** Decolonisation; Critical Realism; Social Realism; Critical Discourse Analysis; Private Higher Education Institutions; Ontology; Epistemology; Axiology.

## PLAGIARISM DECLARATION

I, Prince Leburu, declare that this thesis, titled “Investigating the Structural and Cultural Conditions that Reproduce Coloniality and Inhibit Decolonisation at a Private Higher Education Institution in South Africa”, submitted for the Med: Specialising in Higher Education Studies at the University of Cape Town, represents my work in concept and execution, except where indicated in the text and acknowledged in the references.

I confirm that:

1. I have adhered to the academic standards and ethics required for the completion of this thesis.
2. All sources, data, and scholarly contributions of others have been properly cited and acknowledged.
3. This thesis has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for any other degree or qualification at this or any other institution.
4. All ideas, theories, results, and interpretations presented herein are my original work unless explicitly stated otherwise.
5. I am aware of the consequences of plagiarism and academic dishonesty as per the policies of the University of Cape Town.

By submitting this declaration, I affirm the authenticity and integrity of my academic work and accept responsibility for any breach of these principles.

Signature: Signed by Candidate

Date: 13 August 2024

## **CHAPTER-1 – INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

### **Chapter Introduction**

This study investigates the structural and cultural conditions that perpetuate coloniality in the context of IIE Rosebank College, a Private Higher Educational Institution (PHEI) in South Africa. It is evident that PHEIs have as most Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in South Africa maintained, a structural and cultural disposition that is steeped in coloniality despite the conversations in academia that call for decolonisation. This chapter provides a contextualisation of the decolonial discourse, providing the rationale for the investigation of a PHEI. It will further conceptualise the discourse by providing objectives associated with the problem statement. The study is within the Education discipline but also acknowledges that the decolonial discourse is interdisciplinary in nature.

### **1.1 Background**

Decolonisation and transformation are topical in academia the world over and the South African context is no exception. South Africa's historical context underlines the need to critically assess the culture, structure, and power dynamics obtained in institutions of higher learning and the resultant discourse seeking to explicate these dynamics (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015). Exploring this line of inquiry thus demands a broad understanding of the historical ethos and milieu. In addition, it is also essential to appreciate the higher education (HE) landscape that has birthed existing conditions of learning. These conditions are evidenced by the tumultuous culture of protest among the students. In this context, this study aims to unravel the underlying nuances that characterise this discontent (Sathorar and Geduld 2018). This backdrop provides fertile opportunities to explore the levels of agential influence among academics and herein lies the core aim of this research, to seek to establish the level of agency that structural and cultural conditions permit. In doing so it becomes necessary to understand the perceptions of lecturers as agents as well as investigate the scope of their involvement in the decolonial process if that process indeed exists. The success of the investigation is predicated on a lucid explication of the inhibitors of the decolonial project.

The notion that the South African Higher Education landscape is bedevilled by upheavals is supported by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) who stresses that both legacy inequalities and a restive push by stakeholders to rid higher education of its legacy imperfections are current features in HEIs. There is no real mandatory directive from the government or elsewhere that is normative or prescriptive to determine that the HEIs private or otherwise are enjoined to comply (Lockett

2016). These imperfections include inter alia structural and systemic problems related to social, economic, and political stasis. This inertia has given rise to intellectual discourse seeking to explicate the concomitant nuances that are inherent in the system as enacted by various stakeholders (Slemming 2019). It should be noted that power differentials within that context also influence the turn of arguments that inform academic discourse. Of particular interest to this research is the context of private higher education as a subset of the Education Discipline delimited in the case of a Distance mode of offering.

There is no evidence to assert that the mode of offering influences the degree to which decolonisation is feasible or influences the way it is perceived. Lopez and Rugano (2018) argue that the educational system in South Africa is governed by standardisation and centralisation hence as far as Higher Education is concerned, the mode of offering does not act as a distinct differentiator. The case under review, it should be noted, does not distinguish the curriculum on offer between distance and contact modes. This equity in provision does therefore imply that the curriculum experience for all students studying within the institution despite the mode of delivery is the same in content, structure, and general culture. To this end, the perception of the process of decolonisation is institutional rather than assigned to the mode of delivery.

It is also important that the perceptions of lecturers are explored in the context of a private higher education institution. Private education has been associated with commodification and exclusion (Mbembe 2016). The irony of the twin conditions of being private and Distance is that distance education is meant to promote participation and negate the exclusionary legacy tendencies that were associated with the Apartheid project. Wittingly or unwittingly, the cost of education has excluded certain groups of students from participating, and herein lies the complexity of the elements associated with issues of access and other class elements determining the trajectory of private education.

## **1.2. Rationale**

At the outset it is necessary to underscore that decolonisation although implied in the education discourse in South Africa, is neither normative nor mandatory (Mendy and Madiope 2018). According to CHE (2022), educational institutions should consider their role as a social justice role. Implicit in this posture is the fact that decolonial projects in universities are voluntary and not mandated. The major purpose of this research is to establish present structural and cultural conditions that reproduce coloniality and inhibit the decolonisation processes at the institution. Lecturers are immersed in the culture and structure of the institution and their responses to this

inquiry offered useful data to analyse. In doing so it became necessary to delve into the cultural discourse elements that inform their level of agency as well as their understanding of institutional roles in the decolonisation process. In seeking clarity from academic staff in terms of their positionality and what is understood to be the status of decolonisation, insights were gained directly from participants. This also shed light on the nuanced nature of private as differentiated from public HEIs. Inevitably this entailed structural and systemic issues and most importantly the unique position PHEIs occupy in the South African HE context. Sithole (2016) asserts that African intellectual patterns are being castrated from an epistemic standpoint. This further emphasises the need to establish the status of PHEIs as they contribute significantly to the HE context in South Africa.

This research project was inspired by the coloniality and decolonial discourse that has dominated the hallowed corridors of HEIs and has been the subject of much debate (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2017 and Mbembe 2016). The central tenets of this debate demonstrate that HEIs are stuck in coloniality even though in 1994, political liberation was attained in South Africa. The focus on particularly PHEIs is deliberate because of their nature which is inherently commercial, and market-driven (Methula 2017). It is in this vein that the research seeks to establish lecturer contributions towards decolonisation within the sphere of agency that is institutionally possible, by assessing their perceptions of how the PHEI is positioned.

While there are exosystemic issues that impact the institution in its general disposition, it is essential to glean from the lecturers who are active agents for their appreciation of these as well as the internal elements that influence the social and indeed political conditions under which coloniality is allowed to thrive. It is for this reason that this qualitative research has been conceived as a case study to allow for an in-depth review of the structural and cultural internal influences as they are understood by the lecturers. The research project thus explored the conceptual probity of the lecturers as well as unravelled the nature of the curriculum and how the lecturers seek to use their agency within their context.

The benefits of this inquiry cover the scholarly prerogative to theorise in the dialectic of decolonisation as well as add to the discourse, the aspect of a nuanced consideration of PHEIs. Besides this academic benefit, it is hoped that this study will also assist the PHEIs to productively espouse the decolonisation project as well as empower academics by amplifying their agency. The study may also assist in the transformation processes of the institution,

especially in instances where culture reviews may be needed. It is in this context that the next section deals with a descriptive approach to the PHEI under review.

### **1.3. Description of the Institution**

The PHEI being used as a case in this research has a significant presence in the South African private higher education landscape. Structurally it is operating under the umbrella of a registered South African company (ADvTECH) which is also part of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE). The holding company has interests in other tertiary operations but prides itself in presiding over one of the larger educational tertiary institutions with various brands that are aligned to the target markets that inform their respective business models. The Independent Institute of Education (IIE) is the governance arm of the academic tertiary institutions operating in South Africa. The Central Academic Team (CAT) presides over the institutions' educational brands which include Rosebank College which is the case for this study.

All the brands of this PHEI operate under an umbrella governance structure CAT, responsible for legislative accountability. It is this body that determines which programmes of study are featured in each of the brands as well as determines the curriculum and its delivery. It is important to note that these programmes are approved by the Council on Higher Education (CHE) as the national and government authority assigned to regulate HE and provide accreditation for offerings. Although the IIE brands serve different markets, their curriculum is harmonised. The differentiating factor is the fees charged between the different brands depending on the clientele they target. This research is therefore being carried out in one of the business units of the College namely the Distance/Online unit.

The Online unit comprises a core staff but reports to a highly centralised structure. The National or Central Support Office (CSO) has some degree of oversight of the operations of the unit although ultimately the governance body determines how the unit runs. Determinants of operational probity lie with a strict policy regime that covers all aspects of the operations of the unit. These policies include inter alia policies relating to distance education, assessments, student welfare, teaching and learning strategy and information services. Their teaching and learning strategy is premised on Constructivist tenets and quality assurance processes in place serve to ensure that lecturers conduct themselves within the prescripts of the institution's approach and strategy.

It is also important to briefly state the demographics of the Central Academic Team (CAT) which represents the central and governance team running the institution. The racial configuration of the team reflects a racial imbalance with most top positions being occupied by white academics. This may yet be an indication that transformation if any is taking place at a slow pace. This is also significant in the nature of the discourse that is promoted as well as the general trajectory of the institution. The brand under which the PHEI department is operating has a white academic at its helm and the teaching and learning manager presiding over the brand's curriculum delivery is also white. The institution has thus strategically ensured that the influential posts are run and managed by white academics and black South Africans feature on the lower tiers of the institution's hierarchy.

This brief description of the institution serves to support the contextual need to understand the structure of the institution as well as gain insight into some of the influences on its culture. It is in this cultural and structural context that I seek to examine the institution's transformation prerogatives as well as determine possibilities of decolonisation in privately funded contexts.

#### **1.4. Decolonisation Synoptic Observations**

The decolonisation discourse generates theoretical content as well as inspires practice for some. Ironically it also attracts discordant reactions. As such it is important to further conceptualise the major elements in the discourse, which is still gaining momentum, a task which will be revisited in greater detail in chapter-2.

One of the major tasks of this study was to demonstrate the pertinence of the decolonial discourse and for that reason, relied on the works of Mignolo (2007), Quijano (2000), Wynter (2003), and many others that have invested in understanding the dominance of coloniality well beyond the political subjugation of colonies. It is this discourse that will unravel the nature of Higher Education Institutions and how teaching and learning are steeped in coloniality.

This research, therefore, leans on the decolonisation theories to understand the alignment of the ideas raised in all aspects of decoloniality with the perceptions of active stakeholders at Rosebank College, especially the lecturers. Structure and culture are key to this alignment as well as the level of agency afforded these lecturers during their duties. In this sense, the decolonisation theory supports the Social Realism (SR) and Critical Realism (CR) theories as they are all axiologically emancipatory.

The highly centralised structure is key to understanding the PHEI this research is concerned with. Inevitably this influences the degree to which power structures evolve and therefore the nature of agency the lecturers wield. The need to ameliorate these imbalances is articulated and demonstrable through SR and CR. These social theories underline the convergence of cultural agency and structure which are key features in this research. The decolonial frame also supports the same notion, focusing on the axiological premise that an emancipatory process is needed to draw private HEIs towards the same energy that public HEIs are demonstrating in decolonisation issues. It is necessary that the transformation of the educational landscape is holistic if it must have a meaningful impact.

### **1.5. Research Questions and Objectives**

Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs) in South Africa posit a dichotomous and ironic characterisation by expanding access opportunities for education while at the same time promoting an exclusionist agenda through prohibitive tuition fees (Madhav and Baron 2022). Evidential to this in public institutions are the predominant and numerous protests associated with entrenched institutional culture and a perception among students that their voices and needs are ignored. As such the commodification of education presents a challenge inherent in the structure and culture of private higher education systems. Additionally, the problem of faculty perceptions regarding the nature of the curriculum and its perceived inadequacies persists. Madhav and Baron (2022) found that in PHEIs in South Africa, staff tend to shy away from decolonisation discourses as was manifest in their lack of participation in the drive to decolonise the curriculum. All these predilections are steeped in the historical ethos that engendered the educational landscape contextualised in the Apartheid era. The latent and blatant remnants of that historical experience have brought to the fore the need for transformation and a conscious execution of the process of decolonisation. What this research problematised was the perception, practice, and agency of academics regarding institutional and curriculum decolonisation given their agential significance in the institutional processes. This research, therefore, posited the following research question:

**What are the structural and cultural conditions that reproduce coloniality and inhibit Decolonisation at a Private Higher Education Institution in South Africa?**

#### **The sub-questions:**

- What are the perceptions of IIE RC Online Lecturers about the nature of the curriculum at the institution?

- How do lecturers exercise their agency (this can be action or non-action) to mediate the structural and cultural challenges as well as in the efforts towards decolonisation?

These research questions prompt the formulation of the following objectives that will drive the research project:

- To identify institutional cultural and structural conditions that sustain coloniality and inhibit decolonisation at IIE RC Online.
- To establish the perceptions of IIE RC Online lecturers regarding decolonisation and its nuanced implicit meaning in a South African Higher Education Institution.
- To establish the perceptions of IIE RC Online lecturers regarding the nature of the curriculum they preside over in the light of decolonisation.
- To establish the extent of lecturer agency in influencing the trajectory of the decolonisation project at the institution.
- To establish lecturer perceptions regarding elements that indicate the presence of the process of decolonisation within the context of the institution.

The extent to which lecturers appreciate the scope of their agency within the constraints imposed by power differentials in PHEIs will also reveal the level to which there is a commitment to institutional decolonisation in terms of agency, structure, and culture. The objectives of this research are informed by this prerogative. It was also important for the findings of this research to offer a basis for a focused theorisation that considers the nuanced positioning of PHEIs in the necessary process of transforming higher education.

## **1.6. Methodology**

This study adopted a qualitative research approach that is interpretive and guided by CR and SR approaches. The design is a case study. The reason for the adoption of qualitative research, in this case, is justified by the notion that this is an exploration of experiences, agential influence, as well as perceptions in search of meaning. Qualitative research enables rich deep perspectives to be excavated and accommodates the need to allow meaning to unravel through an interpretive window and this is ideal for explicating a phenomenon as well as exploring its progression (Creswell 2003). A concept like decolonisation lends itself to multi-dimensional perspectives of interpretation. The ability to conduct interviews and establish contextual elements allows themes to unfold thus allowing inductive postulations. The study purposefully adopted a case study approach because of its ability to achieve an in-depth exploration of a phenomenon (Cresswell 2003). By allowing lecturers at the PHEI to unravel their practice

within context, the researcher intends to unlock structural, cultural and agency aspects of coloniality in a broad as well as detailed manner.

### **1.7. Researcher Positionality and Position – Preliminary Statement**

I grew up in the Free State Province of South Africa and experienced the disempowerment of black people first hand surrounded by rampant indigence. My parents struggled to raise enough money for me to go to school and I was exceptionally fortunate to reach University and priced that opportunity to aspire to obtain a degree in Marketing. My educational experience was within the context of the existing colonial and Apartheid structures which prompted in me a deep desire to advocate against any forms of injustice. I followed through this desire through my participation in the Student Representative Council and it is in these experiences that I saw how entrenched coloniality is in HEIs.

It is important and apposite to mention at this early stage in the study that I am an employee of IIE Rosebank College at the campus I opted to use as a case for this research study. The advantage I saw in this positioning is that I have institutional memory and experience with direct access to various instruments such as policies and procedures. It also gave me access to personnel at all levels and this made the data collection process much smoother. I was however mindful to always guard against any form of bias or interpretations based on my own experiences preferring rather to allow the subjects to freely explore their own experiences and I would then repeatedly verify the consistency of my interpretations with the content acquired from interviewees. My assessment of this positionality is therefore that it worked well for me as a researcher while allowing for the professional distance I had to keep achieving authentic results.

### **1.8. Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter contextualised the decolonisation discourse as it is experienced in the South African context with a particular focus on PHEIs. Furthermore, discussions about key concepts established the major debates that are carried out in the decolonisation discourse. The research problem, questions and objectives were also stated together with a declaration of the researcher's position/positionality associated with the ethics and trustworthiness of the study. This has thus paved the way for the next chapter which is the review of literature.

## CHAPTER-2a – LITERATURE REVIEW

### Chapter Introduction

This chapter is a review of literature pertaining to the salient issues in the decolonisation and coloniality discourse. Firstly, there is a contextualisation of colonial learning and an exploration of education as a socialising project followed by the challenges facing South African HEIs in decolonising. It is also critical to evaluate the nature of Private Higher Education in South Africa vis-a-vis conditions that sustain coloniality.

Reviewed literature indicates that there have been several forays in investigating decolonisation in South Africa with a particular focus on higher education. Pillay and Swanepoel (2019) leveraged Foucault's (1980) theoretical ideas predicated on truth, power, and knowledge to underpin a study investigating the disposition of lecturers to decolonisation. Tuck and Yang (2012) underline the fact that decolonisation discourse has carved for itself a parlance that is often repeated but offers no depth nor does it create practical inroads into the actual process of decolonisation. This is so because most of the protestations about coloniality as expounded by Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1981), Mbembe (2001), Paulo Freire (1970), and many others fall short of offering practical outlets to dislodge it. Most of what is available is descriptive. Senekal and Lenz (2020) decried the scarcity of theory that can fully accommodate the demands of a decolonisation discourse rooted in indigenous canon. In their study to explore the transformation of Private Higher Education, Madhav and Baron (2022) turned to the conversation theory to undergird their explorative study of decolonisation in South Africa. Le Grange (2016) and Du Plessis (2021) decry the fact that there still is a dearth of theoretical knowledge associated with the decolonisation of South African classrooms.

### 2.1. Colonial Learning & Education as a Socialising Project

In further understanding the importance of decolonisation, it is essential also to explore the role of education as a socialising agent. Grundmann (2021:53) asserts that both socialisation and education are an "inter and intra-generational" process that is aimed at transmitting knowledge and influencing practice. Education should also be understood as secondary institutional socialisation (Brooks, McCormack, and Bhopal 2013). As such, both education and socialisation have a bearing on all levels of human development from the primary stages through to assumptions of active practices in respective professions and organisational socialisation (Terziev and Vasileva 2022). It is in this respect that education needs to be understood as a social value that is capable of infusing how people perform various roles as

they would have been influenced by the transmitted knowledge. It is in this vein that Freire (1970) protests the banking system of education that determines how individuals perceive the world. Furthermore, the dehumanisation processes achieved by colonialism are then sustained through an education that deposits in students' epistemic components that have no root in social justice (Freire 1970). It is, therefore, necessary to further understand how decolonisation theorists arrive at the concept of the coloniality of power through the power matrix.

There is a consensus that the advent of democracy in 1994 in South Africa was not complemented by a requisite change in advancing the cause of indigenous non-white people as white privilege and general inequality persist (Healy-Clancy 2017, Heleta 2016, Maringira and Gukurume 2016). The persistence and entrenchment of coloniality is felt by black students and lecturers alike, usually exacerbated by the structural and cultural contexts that the institutions of higher learning have espoused. This inevitably affects what is taught and how it is taught and ultimately the resultant product, the student who graduates from the institutions (Albertus 2019). Healy-Clancy (2017) argues that existing cultural practices in institutions of higher education still perpetuate the marginalisation of previously disadvantaged populations and hence the need to properly consider the prospects that decolonisation brings. Albertus (2019) argues therefore that there is a need for cultural transformation in South African institutions which should focus on dislodging racism and other structures that promote coloniality. These interventions in the case of the South African context would need to address access that is inhibited by financial constraints, the transformation of the curriculum and decolonisation of institutional structures to accommodate a progress milieu that restores the "being" and acknowledges the probity of indigenous knowledge systems (Albertus 2019).

Hlatshwayo (2022) argues that there is a nexus between neo-liberalism coloniality and market fundamentalism. He offers a lucid explanation of how this relationship dehumanises and distorts the educational project by the commodification of knowledge placing academics at the centre of selling knowledge and students as customers assimilating the same to attain the entrenched colonial expectations associated with a Western education. This is significant in this current study since PHE is driven based on the attainment of revenue targets and market-related pricing principles.

Building on Mignolo (2007), Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013), and Quijano (2000), Hlatshwayo (2022) explores in more detail the significance of the coloniality of power and power matrix informing the inhibitions of the decolonisation project's traction. Mignolo (2007) explicates

the fact that the power matrix is skewed in favour of Western and modern structures that water down the significance of the indigenous people. The dimensions of this power matrix are stipulated as the coloniality of power, of being and of knowledge (Mignolo 2007). Evident in the coloniality of power is unequal power relations where the institutional structures maintain structural formulations that favour the colonisers at the expense of indigenous players. In the educational landscape, this would resonate with Albertus's (2019) observation that although the white population in South Africa is 7.8% of the total population, 74% of university faculties are occupied by predominantly white male academics. It is the coloniality of power that promotes neo-liberal market-based "logics" that predominantly feature in Hlatshwayo's (2022:118) arguments. It is therefore beneficial for this study to examine the structures within which the lecturers are operating and evaluate the power matrix to evaluate how amenable the structure is to transformational interventions.

The coloniality of "being" is also a key factor in the aspect of agential significance for the stakeholders of PHEIs. René Descartes's dictum *cogito ergo sum* "I think therefore I am" is used by Hlatshwayo (2022) to explain the ontological and epistemic significance of "being" in this sense. Maldonado-Torres (2016) states that the coloniality of "being" is predicated on the three elements of space, time, and subjectivity. Deprivation of latitude in those elements underscores the need for decolonisation. There is a correlation between knowledge and identity, confidence and value or significance attached to the human. Wynter (2003) captures this notion by demonstrating how modernity has emerged on the basic premise that there is an overrepresentation of colonial entities as they assume themselves to be more human than 80% of the rest of the world. This is illustrated in their control of resources and the way the majority of erstwhile colonies live at the edge of poverty and squalor. In contrast, Western nations live in comfort and opulence. As such, because they overrepresent their humanity, they then dictate that and lord it over others based on racist and ethnic notions (Wynter 2003). According to Wynter, it is not possible to dislodge the coloniality of power without successfully dealing with the coloniality of being. The concept is also based on the idea of a "supra-cultural human" meant to be superior to the colonised population (Wynter 2003:287). This is also linked to Albertus (2019:14) claiming that because 84% of faculty professors in South Africa are white and non-whites are made to feel inferior and assume that they are "not good enough" meaning that there is still an overrepresentation based on race and other colonial considerations. The question therefore is whether non-white academics are given equal status of existence and operation within the HE institutions. It is on this premise that Albertus (2019) insists that

institutional HE structures should be decolonised before there can be a real claim that there is a willingness to decolonise Higher Education.

It is evident in the study by Sadiq, Barnes, Price, Gumedze, and Morrell (2019) that there are advantages that white academics have especially in PHEI when they established that the rate of promotion favours white academics by almost a two-year advantage. This is all linked both to legacy issues and the persistence of perceptions that are based on the coloniality of being. Sadiq et al (2019) stress the fact that non-white academics would need 24 years to catch up with their white counterparts because of the marginalisation that was institutionalised during apartheid. That notwithstanding, there are non-white academics well capable of performing at high levels yet because of the institutional structure that is steeped in coloniality, that recognition is slow in coming. It is in this sense that Mignolo (2010) submits that if the subaltern population of formerly colonised peoples must correct the imbalances that are inherent in the coloniality of being, they need to resort to decoloniality.

The epistemic battle can be considered a low-hanging fruit for academics in HEIs. The coloniality of knowledge is at the centre of the need for decolonisation in PHEIs. According to Pardo (2020), there is a greater need now than ever to undo the hegemony of imposed knowledge. Pardo also opines that the modernist way of teaching favours a neo-liberal approach that imposes a homogenous one-size-fits-all approach to curricula disregarding context and any other factors that may favour indigenisation.

This research, therefore, seeks to lean on the decolonisation theories to understand the alignment of the ideas raised in all aspects of decoloniality with the perceptions of active stakeholders in those institutions, namely the lecturers. Structure and culture are key to this alignment as well as the level of agency afforded these lecturers during their duties. In this sense, the decolonisation theory supports the SR and CR theories as they are all axiologically emancipatory.

The highly centralised structure is key to understanding the PHEI this research is concerned with. Inevitably this influences the degree to which power structures evolve and therefore the nature of agency the lecturers wield. The need to ameliorate these imbalances is articulated and demonstrable in SR and CR. These social theories underline the convergence of cultural agency and structure which are key features in this research. The decolonial frame also supports the same notion, focusing on the axiological premise that an emancipatory process is needed to

draw private HEIs towards the same energy that public HEIs are demonstrating in decolonisation issues.

## **2.2. Challenges to Decolonisation in South African HEIs**

There is no doubt that the advent of democracy in 1994 required rhetoric at all levels that would promote transformation. Legislation and policy formulations by the government were geared towards that prerogative. The need for institutional transformation as manifest in all sectors of society and business was apparent. Education was no exception as the government embarked on promoting the cause for transformation. Extant literature however indicates that although there was such a stark need for transformation as well as rhetoric to support it, there was no practical manifestation of this transformation due to dominant structures and architectures as well as culture in HEIs. Herein lies therefore the need to explore what academics have examined as impediments to both transformation and subsequently decolonisation.

Fomunyan (2017) in a paper on decolonisation of the future in South Africa places the blame on the approaches that are rooted in neo-liberal positionality and decries that the democratic government as well as educational institutions lack commitment to implement the necessary changes. Furthermore, the only visible elements regarding decolonisation in institutions take the form of symbolic gestures. Fomunyan (2017) further argues that transformation is the precursor to decolonisation and the failure of institutions to bring about that change is responsible for the stasis that is characteristic in many institutions. Secondly, Fomunyan (2017) also blames the lack of decolonisation on the variegated nature of institutional definitions of decolonisation which emphasises numbers rather than activities towards transformation. The notion of multiple definitions as inhibitors of decolonisation is supported by Hassan (2022) who asserts that there is contestation and nebulosity as to what decolonisation means for institutions. Some institutions look at the demographics as indicators of progress in decolonisation and none of the HEIs has a holistic approach that brings all aspects of the project together for implementation. Thirdly, there seems to be little political and social capital in institutions to facilitate the needed change as stakeholders see no immediate benefit in driving the decolonisation agenda. There has been a sentiment that driving such an agenda in present cultures within South African HE may be career-limiting given the structural and systemic ethos obtained (Albertus 2019).

Hassan (2022) argues that because decolonisation is not a linear process, the institutions of higher learning have resorted to a “tokenistic” approach without the requisite commitment to

address the epistemic issues as well as the ontological factors that keep HEIs in coloniality. Aligned with this line of thinking, Seats (2020) views the existing notions of decolonisation of knowledge as being hindered by a desire to negate existing ways of knowing by discarding Western knowledge systems whereas the focus should be on ensuring that institutions possess the capacity to transform. Prah (2017) argues that instead of displacing the existing knowledge system, the focus in decolonisation should be to ensure that knowledge is culturally aligned to benefit the indigenous consumers. What is evident in this line of thinking is the complexity of the practical “doing” elements that institutions should consider when implementing the change or applying themselves to actively implement decolonisation. This complexity is also an inhibitor since there is no definitive trajectory that is adopted in concert with approaching the decolonisation project.

Hassan (2022) also identifies structural barriers that are inimical to the implementation of decolonisation of HE spaces in South Africa. This is also resonant with Heleta (2016) who describes the hegemonic and power structures in Educational Institutions as being counter-productive and against progressive strides in decolonising academia. Vorster and Quinn (2017) argue that the academics who are currently in these HE institutions were trained to deliver Western pedagogy and are therefore not competent to fully appreciate the need for alternative approaches that would promote decolonisation. There is no evidence that the training of teachers and lecturers places a high premium on the issues of decolonising the educational landscape and as such it means that most of the academics have received a colonial education which they proceed to replicate. This means therefore that the focus should be on training lecturers to not only appreciate the value of African epistemologies but the need to be structurally and culturally positioned to influence the transformation of curriculum.

Some scholars put language at the centre of the decolonisation discourse citing its cultural significance as well as the fact that coloniality marginalised the credence of indigenous languages as fit for pedagogical purposes (Hassan 2022, Prah 2017). It is also argued that the Apartheid system imposed colonial languages as mediums of instruction and even in the post-apartheid era, language difficulties confront students in HEIs (Hassan 2022). Prah (2017) advocates the introduction of a process that places the African languages at the centre of the learning environment as a point of departure to usher in decolonisation. This would then represent commitment in the HEIs to undo the colonial hegemonic practices that trivialised African culture and particularly language and relegated it out of the learning environment.

## CHAPTER-2b – THEORETICAL & CONCEPTUAL FRAMING

### Chapter Introduction

The theoretical framework includes an exploration of decolonial discourse and the multivariant conceptualisations advanced in the different perspectives as well as an examination of Social and Critical Realism as supportive theoretical structures to unravel a social justice issue i.e., coloniality.

### 2.3. Critical Realism

This research turns to Decolonisation Discourse, Social Realism (SR) and Critical Realism (CR) as the general theoretical anchor to explore the disposition and agency of lecturers regarding decolonisation in the context of the HEI under review. To obtain a better understanding of any phenomenon, one needs a strong theoretical perspective that explains the reality being explored. Roy Bhaskar (1998, 2008, 2009) and Margaret Archer (1995) offer this outlet through their respective explication of CR and SR. The selection of CR as a lens to access the conceptual elements unfolding in the decolonisation discourse albeit through the perceptions of the lecturers, is informed by the conceptualisation of depth ontology. Bhaskar (1998) offers the position that discovery should go beyond just the empirical, experiences or events into the possibility that things may be amenable to transformation and change. The ability to perceive potential in transforming perspectives helps us to unravel lecturers' reactions as possible agents for the needed transformative instruments.

Archer (1995) underlines the critical nature in which society is dependent for its development on human agency. This agential influence is key in determining how things are done and indeed how they are perceived. It is also indicative of the power that individuals wield in processes in the context of systems and structures such as the ones we are reviewing in the PHEI. Archer (1995) therefore sees the wholesome understanding of phenomena as predicated in the context of agency, structure, and culture, all of which constitute the case of HEIs. This agency coupled with structure and culture is instrumental in stimulating morphogenesis which is the process of change (Case 2015). When it is curtailed, it perpetuates stasis which Archer (1995) describes as morpho-stasis.

The key features of SR and CR offer the best option for a study which aims to further understand an injustice that needs to be rectified based on the theory's axiological standpoint which is emancipatory (Haigh, Kemp, Bezeley 2019). There is an unambiguous focus in both CR and SR, that of the impreciseness of phenomenon as well as the need to improve society.

Haigh et al (2019) also make the point that axiologically, the theories go beyond just the expression of the value in the improvement of society, but also present options of what needs to be done to ensure that improvement. Decolonisation is not necessarily apparent or a visible or universal element of existence, it requires a lens that has as its value position, the need to act on inequalities. The agential influence of lecturers within the context of a private higher education institution also calls upon them to subscribe to a value system that is uncompromising regarding the entrenchment of coloniality (Cronje and Bitzer 2019). According to Sathorar and Geduld (2019), lecturers have an immense influence on institutional functions by virtue of driving curriculum, therefore their disposition is key to appreciating decolonisation in that context.

In terms of its ontological position, CR considers reality as existing independent of thoughts or epistemological orientation and unlike positivists' position, not all reality is observable (Haigh et al 2019). According to Bhaskar (1998), reality is stratified and can be understood based on three domains namely, empirical, actual, and real. The empirical constitutes those events that are observed and experienced. Consistent with this research, certain behaviours and actions of participants are observable and can well be linked to their perceptions of decolonisation, but it is not these observable elements that will unravel a holistic understanding of those perceptions. Another element is the real which is the causal mechanisms that are responsible for producing the empirical, examples of which could be gender, power, race, and so on (Haigh et al 2019). In this research, these elements are embedded in the structure and culture of the Private Higher Education Institution under review and may well influence the perceptual positions of agents. Lecturers have an agential influence as they go about their duties, and their perceptions should not be understood in isolation but in the context of the social reality that prevails. This then takes us to the third domain which is the actual as an element of the stratified reality propagated by social realists. The actual entails actual occurrences and their effects. CR and SR allow us then to seek depth in the different levels of how reality is understood, and this will auger well in a research project aimed to both explore and explain perceptions and lived experiences of decolonisation from the perspective of participants who are immersed in the process of learning.

At the epistemological level, SR views knowledge as transitive, meaning that there is no fixed understanding of any phenomenon (Archer 2016). The social world comprises many layers and its complexity requires us to understand issues from the perspective of an open system (Zhang 2023). Our interpretation of the perspectives, and indeed actions, of the lecturers should

therefore be mindful of the complexity and layers that are represented in the ecosystem in which they exist, namely the private Higher Education context as well as the cultural realities informing the social context under review. The knowledge that is obtained is therefore considered to be transitive and this will help to theorise in a nuanced manner the ramifications of those perceptions in the larger context of decolonising higher education in South Africa.

This study leveraged the distinctions made by Archer (1995, 1996) when she enunciated the need to understand the domains of structure and culture. Structure delineates the world as we know it but specifically with its material inequalities and of particular interest are social positions and roles people play within various contexts (Case 2015). This, in the context of this study, delves into the influences of the structural composition of the HEI and how it influences both agency and perception of lecturers who are stakeholders of the system. It also underlines the systemic nature of coloniality as a structurally embedded element that requires a depth of discernment if there must be an active mission to dislodge it. In the same manner, Archer (1996) views culture as another part of the composition of societal contexts. Culture in this sense incorporates the process of ideation or simply the domain of ideas and beliefs that characterise institutions (Case 2015). The relevance of culture in this study is immense in that it contextualises the perceptions of lecturers as well as explicates their influence in the context of Archer's third concept which is agency. Archer (1995) states that agency relates to human actions as well as interactions that have causal value in the scheme of events and indeed culture and structure. In this current study, the agency is doubtless a key factor in influencing perceptions and actions. Lecturers can only be confident of their significance in a decolonisation project if they are empowered and feel that their agency is accounted for in the trajectory of the institution. This brings us to the concept of change or transformation which is an integral part of the decolonisation discourse.

As already stated, one of the central tenets of the SR theory, Archer (1995) conceptualises change as morphogenesis and inversely the lack of it as morpho-stasis. Inevitably she views this change as necessary and as a factor in both culture and structure, in other words, the agency influences the transformation of these. While Case (2015) observes that higher education should focus on the morphogenesis of student agency, it is important to also subscribe to Sathorar and Geduld's (2019) assertion that the nature of lecturer roles requires them to be active participants in the process of change. If lecturers are instrumental in inspiring change, their perceptions of both their role and the nature of change they seek to propel are important in evaluating efficacy.

In associating the relationship between structure and agency, Archer (1995) points out that the material world in which human actors reside influences their will as well as their power to act. As such when the nature of both structure and culture interface with the material reality of the lecturers within their context, their ability to act and influence change is salient to this inquiry. Understanding that the structure will entail rules, regulations, and structure of the institution, it is possible then to be able to identify where these regulatory and instructional structures begin to be a constraint to human agency and in the same way also to discern how players use their agential power to overcome the structural impediments.

Also germane to CR and SR is the element of human agency as fundamental to an axiological position that is emancipatory (Shaik 2020). Decolonisation by its nature requires the human agency to unravel. Extant literature has demonstrated that the protests at South African universities in 2015 and after that were consistent with the realisation of the importance of agency as well as the fact that decolonisation requires decisive and identifiable human action (Pillay and Swanepoel 2019, Du Plessis 2021, La Grange 2016). CR clarifies the conceptualisation of agency as the prompting for humans to act, know, think, and evaluate the reasons for their actions through reflexivity (Shaik 2020). What this study seeks to do is establish the nature of actions, thoughts, and knowledge that drives lecturers as agents within the social context of the RC department and the extent to which this context inspires the nature of those elements. Archer (1995) underscores the fact that human agency has autonomous quality although the social structures obtaining are impactful in terms of how that agency is exercised. Human agency is encapsulated in physical well-being, performative competence, and self-worth as integral elements if not determinants of human action affected by structure (Archer 2000). In examining the ramifications of perpetuated dehumanisation through colonialism and coloniality, there is a need to assess how academics were impacted. It is also necessary to assess how their actions are influenced by the negative ramifications of coloniality.

#### **2.4. Decolonisation: A Conceptual Framing**

In the introduction, I touched on some tenets of the decolonisation theories and dispensed them with definitions. It is important here to revisit the salient issues that make the decolonisation theory relevant to the pursuits of this study.

In explicating the Decolonisation Theory, I defer to the works of Mignolo (2007), Walsh (2011, 2000, and 2018), Quinjano (2000), Wynter (2003), Wa Thiong'o (1989), Freire (1970), Fanon

(1961, 1967) just to mention a few propagators of the philosophies of liberation on multiple levels. I deem the decolonisation theory to be saliently a liberation concept since it purports to extricate Africans and indeed all previously colonised peoples from the entrenched throes of coloniality. This process is understood to be essential at a physical and metaphysical level and herein lies the reason why political liberation has not been able to attain total emancipation.

The major tenets of the theory of decolonisation emerge from a historical perspective. They are somewhat a development from postcolonial theory and an appreciation of the epistemic inadequacies of structuralism, post-structuralism, and postmodernism (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015). This notion is however not absolute or universal since the conditions in Latin America and the Caribbean have attracted the thinking that the notion of coloniality has remained uninterrupted and that colonialism never left at all (Zavala 2016). It is in this vein that the cultural logic of colonialism needs to be dislodged and historical dependence on Western positions expunged through a process of deconstruction and delinking (Zavala 2016). Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015) also asserts that the fall of the physical Empire was not followed by the fall of the metaphysical one which survived beyond the fall of the Empire in its political form. Ideologically as the physical Empire dissipated, its entrenchment in the educational environment proceeded unabated in Africa and South Africa representing the last outpost of the colonial legacy albeit in a nuanced manner still needs to be sensitive to the intransigence of ideology in the epistemic and indeed other contexts. According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015), decoloniality is a search by the dominated to raise themselves into significance while assuming their identity as well as being included in the generation of knowledge.

Wa Thiong'o (2009) underlines the issue of dismemberment as a key element in sustaining coloniality. Like Archer's (1995) explication of the convergence of culture, structure, and agency, Wa Thiong'o emphasises the incidence of cultural and epistemic dominance which has outlived the Empire with erstwhile colonies assuming an epistemological canon that is inherited wholesale from their former colonisers. The fact that slavery and then colonialism propagated alterity as well as a notion that black Africans were lesser beings, was supported by Fanon (1968) and it gives credence to the idea that the colonial project was systemic in its dismemberment process. This, therefore, means that Africans can only dislodge this dismemberment by uprooting the ideological snares that have been planted over the process of both colonialism and coloniality. Reinforcing this notion, Mignolo (2007) refers to the coloniality of power advocating a need to delink African cosmologies and epistemology from European linkages. Zavala (2016) sees that the process should not only apply to pedagogy but

to education in all its contexts and formulations. The reversal of this dismembership should be an espoused project and this research questions if the academics in PHEIs perceive it that way.

Adding to Wa Thiong'o's ideas of re-membering, there is also a school of thought within the decolonial discourse that underlines the need for both deconstruction and reconstruction. In the process of deconstruction, Zavala (2016) envisions a process that seeks to admit multiple options of epistemologies into the global fray as well as constructing an African and Caribbean persona that is regarded as first in the process to dispel the dehumanisation engendered by colonialism. According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2016), this process will assist in disrupting the racist dehumanising and exploitative nature of both colonialism and coloniality. Coloniality in this sense is regarded as the sustenance of the "...patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism which defines intersubjectivity relations and knowledge production..." (Maldonado-Torres 2007 p243). Understood this way, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2016) submits that coloniality wields an invisible power structure which results in a skewed ontological premise in education. Suppose academics in PHEIs can discern such structures in their perceptions. In that case, it speaks to a positive level of consciousness and thus provides a basis for hope in the transformation of educational institutions.

Conceptually therefore the decolonial theories touch on the coloniality of power, coloniality of knowledge, and that of being (Quinjano 2007). Coloniality of power speaks to the level of agential influence experienced or indeed wielded by those who seek to institute transformation in the face of entrenched structures. Coloniality of knowledge, on the other hand, derives from the coloniality of power in that those who have wielded power for a long time have established their knowledge systems as the only viable systems and therefore African universities are beholden to them (MacKittrick 2015). This unequal existence is inspired by the understanding advanced as coloniality of being where Wynter (2003) has admitted Western subjectivities as the ideal definition in determining identity and status in the scheme of things. Bereft of dignity and personality, the Africans were emasculated and, in that process, confidence to defend cultural and epistemological structures in their indigenous form waned and gave way to a subdued mentality. It is in the face of these inimical conditions that decolonisation should actively take root in the institutions of higher learning.

## **2.5. Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter provided a literature review of the conceptual issues contained in the decolonial discourse to establish a basis for investigating actions and structures that inform the state of decolonial actions at the PHEI. In pursuing the various strands of discourse that dominate the academic conversation, the chapter also covered the theoretical framework establishing Critical Realism as the framework to both theorise as well as analyse the responses of the subjects being interviewed.

## CHAPTER-3 – METHODOLOGY

### Chapter Introduction

This study adopted a qualitative research approach that is interpretive and guided by CR and SR approaches. The design is a case study. The reason for the adoption of qualitative research, in this case, is justified by the notion that this is an exploration of experiences, agential influence, as well as perceptions in search of meaning. Qualitative research enables rich, deep perspectives to be excavated and accommodates the need to allow meaning to unravel through an interpretive window and this is ideal for explicating a phenomenon as well as exploring its progression (Creswell 2003). A concept like decolonisation lends itself to multi-dimensional perspectives of interpretation. The ability to conduct interviews and establish contextual elements, allows themes to unfold thus allowing inductive postulations.

### 3.1. Research Paradigm – Critical Theory

This study is situated in the Critical Paradigm and draws from the tenets of social justice and transformation to achieve alignment in the method used. Broadly, Critical Theory is normally understood from the perspective of the Frankfurt School theorists and was operationalised by Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse who conducted research deriving from the Marxist tradition (Jabreel 2013). According to Horkheimer (1982:244), Critical Theory “seeks human emancipation to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them.” The pertinence of Critical Theory in pursuing issues of decolonisation lies in that, as a tenet it explicates the flaws within the social reality being dealt with, posits solutions to change inimical conditions as well as offers grounds for transformative actions to be taken (Bohman 2005). It is in this context that decolonisation was dealt with in this research, and it forms the contextual application of the critical paradigm in the study.

This study acknowledges the salience of the decolonisation discourse as a preoccupation of academia which has been approached in extant literature from several emancipatory and critical paradigms. This study examines the discourse from the perspective of social realism and critical realism as the premise for analytical approaches to understand the case study of the PHEI under review. Key to the findings of this study are the cultural and social practices that are factors of causation concerning the inhibitors of decolonisation and the impact of reflexivity as a critical notion in propelling emancipatory activities. Shaik and Kahn (2021) advocate the negation of solipsism in reflexivity as influenced by cultural and social elements in favour of collective approaches that will allow corporate agents to formulate transformational agendas.

This, they established, is better pursued by an analytical approach rooted in social and critical realism because of the nature of the decolonisation discourse that requires institutional agencies to work towards a collective transformational purpose.

Leaning on CR as an analytical tool and paradigm lens to understand the agency of lecturers in a PHEI is informed by the five tenets of this paradigm so succinctly explicated by Tinsley (2021). According to Tinsley (2021), CR provides the requisite ontological framework that best explores the concepts as well as processes that are inherent in decolonisation as a philosophical exercise as well as practice at any given level. Tinsley further acknowledges the convergence of material structures with the colonial discourse, describing coloniality as a global reality manifested in different experiences with subaltern lived experiences offering insight into the nature of reality. This subaltern status should provide sources for reflexivity that cast light on the nature of structure and culture informing attitudes behaviours and ultimately the state of affairs as perceived by the stakeholders. Tinsley (2021) also underlines that coloniality is power-laden and often not so and as such decolonisation should target all the dimensions of the social world and their interactions.

It is important to also note here that Bhaskar (1975) emphasises the fact that CR protests the rigid tenets of positivism which perceives reality as scientifically observable and therefore quantifiable. The present task appreciated the depth and abstractions that are inherent in the decolonisation discourse which requires qualitative approaches for their exposure, a process which the positivist approach is least equipped to achieve. Also important in Bhaskar's postulation is the fact that reality is not universal nor is it unidimensional. An analysis of reality rooted in CR accomplishes a more nuanced and open-ended possibility that unravels the depths to which coloniality as a phenomenon is entrenched as well as the multi-dimensional perspectives that may be present for successful decolonisation. It is therefore in the converge of social and natural reality as distinct in existence that Bhaskar (1975) allows Critical Realists to have a holistic analytic and interpretive approach that is deep and exhaustive.

CR is also useful because it validates the apparent tension between reality and transience within the context of the social world (Tinsley 2021). It is this fluidity of reality in CR that inspired Archer's (1995) conceptualisation of analytical dualism where structure and agency have a mutual potency to counter affect each other. Bhaskar (1992) is cognisant of this dualism and claims that there is an epistemic element where knowledge affects and is affected by the structure. This conceptualisation allows analysis to take a dualistic approach where the

experiences of the subjects are immersed in the transient and therefore influence both knowledge and structure while conversely structure and culture as they exist in the PHEI influence the degree of agential impact by the lecturers.

### **3.1.1. Ontological Assumptions**

While positivist positions emphasise the existence of a single reality predicated on observable probabilities, CR allows the possibility of multiple realities shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, race, ethnic, gender and disability values (Chilisa 2011). Considering the position of CR in terms of the transient nature of knowledge as well as the dual positioning of reality in both the subject and structure, the ontological considerations are rooted in the ability to assume a subjective posture in analysis. CR acknowledges the multiple layers of reality and their generative constitution as key factors in unravelling the complexity of a phenomenon (Archer 1995 and Bhaskar 2008). In this research I acknowledged the historical, social, and structural elements that are subsumed and as such endeavour to unmask the realities inherent in the case from multiple perspectives that the lecturers unravelled as well as fully considering the contextual significance of their experiences. From an ontological point of view, the application of CR allowed a subjective approach that considered context as key to the reality being examined and explicated. The CR posture of a multiplicity of perspectives allows for a foray into the social political and structural elements that inform the nature of reality as an experience for the subjects being investigated. The lecturers are part of the culture and structure of the PHEI, and they should influence as much as they are influenced by the system and context in which they operate.

### **3.1.2. Epistemological Assumptions**

Consistent with the transience of reality, the epistemological posture of CR is anchored on relativism and the negation of the absolute in the acquisition of knowledge and how it should be created (Albert et al 2020). CR underlines that all knowledge is fallible also acknowledging the contextual social and cultural structures that influence the production of knowledge dependent on the power differentials that inform these structures. In that sense the creation and construction of knowledge is dependent on variables that include stakeholders and within their imposed context and herein lies the importance of power and agency to help us assess the nature of influence these stakeholders have. Albert et al (2020) argue that all knowledge is positioned with a particular standpoint. To the CR observer, it is what influences this standpoint which is salient when analysing content from stakeholders. As such the evaluation of lecturer responses needs to be strictly aligned to the contextual nuances that inform their positioning.

Analysis of social practices and actions are therefore key factors in research that are anchored in CR as expressed in both Archer (1995) and Bhasker (2009). Since meaning-making in CR is achieved through the three layers of the real, the actual and the empirical, Fletcher (2016) indicates that the logical theoretical tool that needs to be employed in analysis is retroduction which focuses on the causal mechanisms that are in each stage of the layers of knowledge being dealt with. By accepting the multiple possibilities in interpreting collected data it is therefore possible to fully incorporate all perspectives without solely depending on the subjectivities of the respondents. When the lecturers offer descriptions of culture, structure, and agency together with the attendant actions it is then possible to employ the transformative and emancipatory lens to establish possibilities for decolonisation. To fully employ this retroduction in analysis in this research, it will be necessary to be reflexive and establish what mechanisms within the lecturers' circumstances prompt them to adopt the view they adopted regarding the state of decolonisation at IIE Rosebank College. It is only by unravelling these hidden and not so apparent aspects that it will be possible to further arrive at the theoretical conclusions impacting the progress of decolonisation in the institution.

### **3.1.3. Axiological Assumptions**

The value position of this research is firmly predicated on the CR moral premise that seeks social justice and remedies for injustices perpetrated in society. Coloniality is thus an injustice that seeks redress. Having adopted a transformative paradigm it stands to reason that the inequalities that bedevil institutions influenced by the legacy of colonial dominance call for mechanisms that seek to deconstruct structural constrictions as well as proffer grounded perspectives that are based on a political and social willingness to support change.

## **3.2. Research Design**

The research sought to answer the main question that was framed as follows:

**What are the structural and cultural conditions that reproduce coloniality and inhibit Decolonisation at a Private Higher Education Institution in South Africa?**

- What are the perceptions of IIE RC Online Lecturers about the nature of the curriculum at the institution?
- How do lecturers exercise their agency (this can be action or non-action) to mediate the structural and cultural challenges as well as in the efforts towards decolonisation?

This research purposefully adopted a case study approach by selecting a PHEI site as the case to be qualitatively evaluated as the case needs to be fit for purpose (Creswell 2007). According

to Zainal (2007, p1), “a case study method enables a researcher to closely examine the data within a specific context. In most cases, a case study method selects a small geographical area or a very limited number of individuals as the subjects of study.” Yin (1984) emphasises that a case study examines a phenomenon in its natural and real context allowing an in-depth investigation into complex issues relating to the case. A case study also allows observation or review at a micro level and does not necessarily result in generalisation but provides an in-depth understanding to open the scope for further theorisation.

According to Baxter and Jack (2008), the advantage of using a case study design is that it allows access to the complexity of the subject under review, and it also allows the researcher an intimate interaction with the data collected in a confined context. In this research, the confined context is that of the Distance/Online unit of the PHEI. The other advantage according to Yin (2003) is that a case study approach favours a social construction of reality and in this case, the adoption of SR and CR as a paradigm bodes well for the research as a fit for understanding the complexity of perceptions around decolonisation. It also offers an explanatory as well as exploratory opportunity to unpack the nuanced factors that are salient in the decolonisation discourse in general and as it relates to PHEIs.

The case study approach also yields other advantages for this research. Crabtree and Miller (1999) indicate that a case study design allows closer collaboration between the researcher and the participants. This collaboration is useful in assisting the researcher to gain deeper insights into the phenomenon. When participants cooperate and voluntarily share their views Robbottem and Hart (1993) claim that this allows them to expose their reality as well as provide justification for their actions. The lecturers who constitute the target population for this research are an integral part of the PHEI Academic Department and their role allowed them to offer experiential insights that assisted in answering the main research question posed in this research.

According to Shaik (2022) when employing CR using a case study allows easy access to the analysis of the interaction of structure, events, actions, and context to identify and explicate causal mechanisms. Citing Edwards et al (2014), Shaik (2022) states that the CR tenets favour the use of case study approaches because of the salience of context among other CR tenets.

### **3.3 Sampling**

A sample represents the selection of people who are participants in a research process (Wilson and MacLean 2011). The sampling applied should be consistent with the nature of the study

and this research required participants who were immersed in the site that was being explored therefore this study employed purposive sampling. Wilson and MacLean (2011) state that the purposive sampling method requires that the participants chosen meet specified criteria that are consistent with the questions the research seeks to answer. In this instance, the sample comprised lecturers in various disciplines at RC, a South African PHEI. This sample only included experienced lecturers who had been with the institution for over three years. Institutional knowledge gained over some time gave them insights into the intricacies of the structure and culture of the institution. The sample selected was fairly small consistent with Yilmaz (2013) who opines that in qualitative research, the sample size is usually small informed by the depth of the data that is normally generated in qualitative research, and that the results and findings of such studies need not be generalisable.

The qualifying criteria for the lecturers chosen, besides the element of tenure already referred to is their active engagement with all levels of the curriculum and students in the institution. This engagement entailed lecturing, interpreting the syllabus as provided, marking of prescribed assessment and in exceptional cases the development of modules following prescribed parameters. The Lecturers are also participants in the review meetings referred to as Programme Coordination Committee (PCC) meetings, a platform which gives lecturers opportunities to provide feedback that feeds into the governance structures (IIE Policy 022). They provide student support as well as assess and evaluate student performance. The sample was not selective of race or gender although there was a conscious effort to ensure that there is an adequate representation that accounts for any frames of references that could influence predilections. The reason for not factoring in the racial element was mostly informed by the existing structure where lecturers at campuses are predominantly non-white while the CAT hierarchy as the controlling organ is predominantly white in composition. In terms of gender, there was no conscious selection although available respondents were mixed.

### **3.4. Decolonial Methodologies**

This research is anchored on CR and SR and the alignment of these with the strategies used in this research is key. According to Zavala (2016), there are three major methodologies/strategies in decolonial education namely counter storytelling, healing, and reclaiming. Counter-storytelling (CST) requires reflexive dialogue that allows participants to rename spaces and identities. In other words, by allowing participants to describe the social world they find themselves in, the researcher fosters a collaborative process that allows the participants to challenge the colonial story. In this research, I have opted to use interviews rather than surveys

to allow a dialogue that creates opportunities for participants to reflect on coloniality as it applies to them. Whereas storytelling would offer a broader context of discourse, the interviews on the other hand were framed to directly focus on issues of structure, agency, culture, and power differentials.

Decolonial methodologies are predicated on allowing all the healing of the colonial deculturation and this is not only premised on the naming process that happens in CTR (Zavala 2016). Western approaches have placed very little interest in the lived collective experiences of people as well as the spiritual and psychological aspects. A decolonised approach seeks to reach the affective elements of that experience.

This research is going to focus on the dialogue and exchanges with the participants to ensure that the process is participatory and liberating. It is in this context that the data collection process has been carefully structured to allow for that reflexive aspect that allows participants to re-examine their pedagogic praxis considering decolonisation and their experiences in coloniality.

### **3.5. Data Collection**

Neuman (1997) distinguishes between two major categories of data collection either quantitative or qualitative. Simplistically put qualitative data collection involves texts and oral communication while quantitative data collection refers to numbers and statistics. It is critical to offer consistency and align data collection with the design as already articulated.

In this research data collection took the form of semi-structured interviews targeting 6 lecturers currently working for the Private Institution of Higher Learning. The purposive sampling approach was preferred since the intention was to ensure that the subjects or respondents were involved in the contextual elements that define the culture and processes of the institution. Creswell (2012) underlines that for research to succeed the participants must be suitable to the purpose for which the research is being carried out. In this instance, the research intended to unravel the extent to which the lecturers were immersed and knowledgeable as well as to establish their perceptions concerning the state of the curriculum and knowledge practices in the project of decolonisation.

For this research, I prepared predetermined open-ended questions for the interviewees and the respondents. The interviews were recorded, and transcriptions of the interviews were made to allow for analysis of the content as well as to evaluate the underlying meanings communicated during the interviews.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

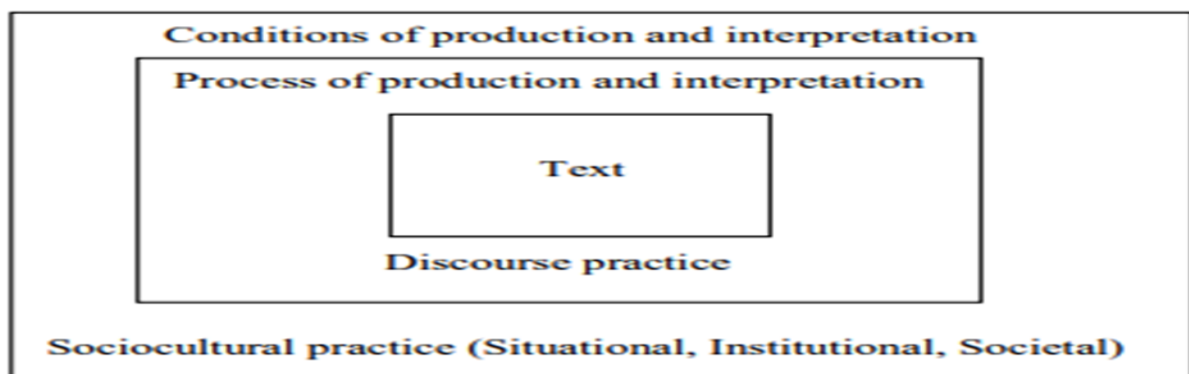
The analysis of data will be based on the theoretical grounding and leaning on the social justice positions offered by CR and SR as well as the contextual framing that decolonial theorists have presented. In line with the axiological leanings of CR and SR the chosen analytical approach will be Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). According to Jorgensen and Phillips (2007:64), CDA is most appropriate in instances where matters of injustice or unequal power relations are in focus. The decolonisation discourse deals as much with the attenuation of colonial wrongs that need to be remedied by an active emancipatory and transformational process as it does with attitudes and ideology. The extent to which lecturers can exercise their agential prerogatives is also to some extent influenced by power differentials in the institution. It is also important to underline the tenets of CDA as well as demonstrate its appropriateness in this context.

Fairclough and Wodak (1997) provide the components of CDA as well as demonstrate how textual information should be analysed by its application. Among these elements is the fact that CDA addresses social problems and that power relations are discursive (Muralikrishnan 2011:23). In addition, discourse analysis is both interpretive and explanatory. This current study is both exploratory and explanatory and therefore lends itself to analysis that focuses on the explication of the agential functions of lecturers. Fairclough and Wodak (1997) further consider discourse as a form of social action which constitutes society and culture again elements that are consistent with the exploration of institutional culture, structure, and agency.

According to Sheyhislami (2015:15), some principles need to be considered when employing CDA as an analytical tool. These include inter alia the consideration of language used as social practice. This has a bearing on the nature of language that will be employed in responses to the decolonisation discourse in the context of the interviews that will be conducted. Secondly, power relations are produced, exercised, and reproduced through discourse. In investigating the nature of agency exercised by lecturers there is bound to be an indication of how power structures contribute to either morphogenesis or morphostasis. Thirdly, participants operate from specific discursive practices originating in special interests and aims which involve inclusions and exclusions. The nature of the unfolding discourse and the way lecturers will articulate the issues, inform both elements of structure power and exclusions as far as the institutional context stands. It is also important to note that the latitude CDA gives in the analysis is predicated on the fact that it is not restricted just to interpretation but to explaining texts and discourse.

In the context of this research, the text will naturally emanate from the transcription of the interviews that will be carried out. The information gathered is, however, not produced in isolation but within the context and influence of a production environment. In this case, the institution provides the environmental conditions that produce the discourse. The process of production and interpretation indicated below represents part of what is regarded as discourse or discursive practice. Both the process and text exist within certain conditions involved in the production and interpretation of the text. In analysing the gathered data, interpretation will thus take cognizance of the conditions, process and socio-cultural practice that may have influenced the conditions the lecturers deemed influential to drive or retard decolonisation in PHEIs.

**Figure 1:** A framework of CDA adapted from (Fairclough, 1995:59)



Source: Fairclough (1995)

The above graphically illustrates the critical elements that will be focused on in the process of analysis. Cognizance will be taken in terms of the conditions obtained within the institution as provided by the participants. All the cultural and structural elements of the institution will be accounted for. The language and emerging themes will then be considered in light of the central principles of decolonial practice as it was framed above.

In this research CDA approach will be used because it allows the researcher to delve deeply into the data provided during the semi-structured interviews. It also allows for concurrent activities as themes emerge out of the interviews to be triangulated to the predetermined questions as well as nuanced qualitative information that emerges from the content accumulated during the process. This approach is appropriate for research that is dependent on qualitative responses and that seeks to establish perceptual information from responses. It is also appropriate in the context of a critical paradigm that seeks to further theorise the concept of decoloniality and offer possible inroads to explain why perceptions feature in the context of

the case under investigation. Although perceptual in nature, this approach remains deeply connected to the critical paradigm, as it interrogates issues such as positionality, language, discourse, systemic challenges, and power dynamics.

### **3.7. Validity – Trustworthiness**

Researchers have provided numerous ways of authenticating a research process. In the case of a research design that is based on a case study, the focus is rather on the trustworthiness of the process and its results. Krefting (1991) and Sandelowski (1986, 1993) have designed several ways in which one can establish credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of findings. Baxter and Jack (2008) provide several measures that should be attended to, to ensure the trustworthiness of the research which are inherently embedded in the process itself. This includes the provision of a lucid research question, appropriateness of the design, purposeful sampling and systematic collection and analysis of data. All these factors were carefully attended to in the current research, and this will validate the quality and trustworthiness of both the process and resultant findings.

Yilmaz (2013) explains trustworthiness by alluding to the veracity and accuracy of the research findings from the perspective of the researcher, participants, and readers. As such it is necessary to ensure that information relating to the research is accurately rendered at every stage of the research. Since this is qualitative research what determines trustworthiness is how the findings closely reflect in meaning all the nuanced intended positions of the participants (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Trustworthiness can be threatened by issues such as reactivity and biases and being an employee of the same institution in which I am conducting the research, this is carefully safeguarded by thorough preparation of participants for them to offer honest responses. Furthermore, in a bid to avoid biases, there is a need according to Wilson and MacLean (2011) to describe and validate assumptions and findings visibly and audibly. Also, by adhering to procedural and well-planned patterns of collecting data and eliminating any disturbances, the accuracy of the data was protected.

### **3.8 Ethics**

There is a need to adhere to ethical practices in carrying out research. Ethical considerations are normally predicated on the need to protect participants from any fallout or harm that may result from the research process.

According to Vetenskapsrådet (2017), it is critical that in research truthfulness is maintained, openness in accounting for methods used and avoidance to make unauthorised use of research

findings. More importantly, research should be conducted without harming people. I am conscious of the sensitivity of the topic given, perceived cultural biases and general practices in PHEIs and as such I had to secure the confidence of the participants and protect their interests as well. I did not in any form or shape jeopardise their jobs or their ability to dispatch their duties during the process of the research and thereafter. Since they were contributing voluntarily and anonymously, there was no danger of any harmful repercussions regarding the data they provided.

### **3.9. Researcher Positionality**

My biographical status as alluded to in chapter-1 underscores the importance of my indigent background and the resultant pursuit of university education as an inspiration for advocacy in pursuit of social justice. My choice of study was informed by a desire to lift myself and my indigent family from poverty when I was confronted with rampant coloniality with little power to do anything to catalyse transformation.

Currently, I am an employee of IIE Rosebank College holding an academic position and coordinating and managing lecturers responsible for delivering classes to Rosebank College students. On one hand, this placed me in a vantage position in that I had direct access to the participants and that assisted in the efficient dispatch of the research instruments such as questionnaires. The integrity of the data collected was critical and it required emphasis in the preparatory sessions to ensure that my position as a manager did not lead to rehearsed responses. The choice of seasoned lecturers who are academics mitigated the risk sufficiently. The other advantage is also that I have first-hand experiences in the context that assisted me in navigating the institutional terrain to conduct my research. While that positioning was advantageous in these aspects, it also meant that I would need to be extra vigilant to eliminate any biases that are a result of my direct influence within the institution. Furthermore, because of my supervisory position, some participants would be reluctant to freely share their thoughts. This is an aspect I needed to mitigate by providing firm written assurances regarding the purpose of the research. I was also mindful of researcher bias that I had to guard against and ensure that I eliminated any predilections that might influence the credibility of the process.

Since this research was being carried out in the context of an institution where I am employed, an ethical clearance for the process was obtained from the institution as well as UCT. Institutional permission gave me access to vital material and personnel involved in the Academic Department as well as opportunities to interview them. The conditionalities relating

to this clearance were that all participants should participate in this exercise voluntarily and that all information obtained should be solely for this research process. To this end, the institution was availed with the instrument used to collect data and the express instruction to participants who were given the option to participate voluntarily and were accommodated to opt out from the process at any point during the data collection process if they found the process to be not consistent with their expectations. The researcher committed to maintaining confidentiality and allowing participants to provide data anonymously.

In addition to the permissions provided by the PHEI, the researcher adhered to all the UCT ethics protocols.

### **3.10. Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter dealt with the methodological considerations of this study starting by contextualising the paradigm informing the approaches used in this research. By explicating CR as a research paradigm there was further clarification of how the transience of knowledge and experience assists the design by allowing multiple access into the layers of reality contained in the experiences of the subjects. The chapter also dealt with the research design and the consistency of using a case study approach with the qualitative and subjective approach that allows interpretation to assume duality in analysis. A synoptic assessment of methodologies used in decolonial research laid a foundation for descriptors relating to CDA, data collection methods and analysis. The validity/trustworthiness and ethical considerations were also covered as well as the researcher's positionality as an active agent in the case under review. The next chapter covers the findings of the research accordingly.

## CHAPTER-4 – FINDINGS

### Chapter Introduction

This chapter contains the findings of the study as extrapolated from the semi-structured interviews conducted. The responses generated demarcated discourse to cover the extent of lecturer knowledge, agency, perceptions of the curriculum, structural and cultural elements that inhibit decolonisation as well as perceived conditions that may promote decolonisation. The six lecturers interviewed offered views on each of these aspects and the results are delineated in this chapter.

The study sought to answer the main question that was framed as follows:

### **What are the structural and cultural conditions that reproduce coloniality and inhibit Decolonisation at a Private Higher Education Institution in South Africa?**

The sub-questions which were intended to establish the level of agency, cultural and structural conditions were stated as follows:

- What are the perceptions of IIE RC Lecturers about the nature of the curriculum at the institution?
- How do lecturers exercise their agency (this can be action or non-action) to mediate the structural and cultural challenges as well as in the efforts towards decolonisation?

Thematically, the responses that were received from the six respondents provided an understanding of the level of appreciation of the discourse, the lived experiences of the lecturers, issues inhibiting decolonisation as well as stakeholder issues that affected culture, structure and ultimately agency.

### **4.1. Contextual Framing**

The quest of this research was premised on the issues to do with the dislodging of coloniality. The specific context of the institution selected as a case to examine was in the general sphere of Higher Education (HE) but specifically located in the private learning provisioning. The private education context was selected for its role within a growing tertiary environment as well as the distinct characterisation it has as a profit-driven endeavour. It was established at the outset that the structural context of this institution was represented in a matrix that reposed power in the Central Academic Team (CAT) which is in essence the governing board and decision-making entity that controls the brands of the institution. It was also noted that there

was a classification of the brands depending on the class of students served hence differentiated fees but a uniform curriculum.

In terms of structure the hierarchy placed CAT at the apex of the institution and its Campuses across the brands operationalised the structures that were essentially directed by a battery of policies. These policies determined conduct, culture and the level of agency reposed in the different actors of the institution. The policies included inter alia the language, teaching and learning research and marketing. Within the structure, the lecturers have the most direct propinquity with the students and their role places them in the most interactive opportunity with the curriculum. It is premised on this positioning that they became the most critical informants about both the nature of the curriculum and institutional commitment to transformative interventions.

The information gathered pertained to lecturers' perceptions on the subject of decolonisation concerning the institution, their understanding of decolonisation in discourse and as a project being implemented in their institution, their level of agency in advancing the decolonisation agenda as well as identification of structural cultural and agential inhibitors of decolonisation.

#### **4.2. Establishing Lecturers' Level of Comfort with the Decolonial Discourse**

In respect of the lecturers' comfort with the salient issues that are dealt with in the decolonisation discourse, the question asked was "What is your understanding of decolonisation?"

Lecturer-A indicated that he had familiarised himself with the decolonisation discourse and that his understanding of it was limited to the theoretical engagement he had with literature and not with experience.

*"... My focus will therefore be on the episteme and not on practice. I understand decolonisation as a push for the African knowledge systems to find expression in the broader or global knowledge systems. This means that the Eurocentric knowledge systems cannot continue being the only knowledge system that is taught or promoted in the spaces of academia" (Lecturer-A 2023)*

He further expressed that there was no basis at this stage to go beyond the response provided.

Similarly to Lecturer-A, Lecturer-B's response was percussed by the caveat that the understanding she had of decolonisation was not a factor of practice but associated with casual discussions and a "...bit of reading, ... this is a concept or practice that is borne out of the

*need to not be too Western when designing and implementing curriculum and in education in general. The focus is on learning and teaching that is Afrocentric, with a view to telling our own stories and coming up with ways to solve lived problems...*” (Lecturer-B 2023)

Lecturer-C’s response had a multi-disciplinary flavour when she said,

*“...decolonization is a movement aimed at reevaluating and transforming colonial structures to challenge colonial and Eurocentric perspectives and biases. It seeks to address the historical, cultural, and epistemological underpinnings of political, economic, and educational systems that have often marginalized or erased the contributions and perspectives of Indigenous peoples, people of colour, and other marginalized groups.”* (Lecturer C 2023)

Lecturer-D’s response was focused on social justice and the negation of Western thought. *“It involves challenging dominant Western perspectives. It also aims to create more inclusive and socially just learning environments that empower students to critically...”* (Lecturer-D 2023)

In explicating decolonisation, Lecturer-E touched on the need to dislodge the vestiges of colonialism and issues of identity. *“...Thus, the ideology aims to foster a non-colonial identity and mindset in people, as it posits that colonialism was more than about the exploitation of national resources, it attempted to obliterate the colonial subjects’ cultural heritage, self and national awareness through education and mass media.”* The major focus in this sense was the confluence of culture and medium as tools that have been employed to entrench coloniality.

Lecturer-F said, *“...My understanding of decolonisation is one whereby we are trying to discard all links with our colonial past.”* In essence, the lecturer almost limited the decolonisation agenda to attempts rather than clearly defined issues of praxis related to those attempts.

The evaluation of the responses received indicated that most lecturers were conversant with the concept of decolonisation. It was evident from all the responses provided that their connection to the decolonisation discourse was a theoretical one rather than one borne out of experience.

### **4.3. Lecturer Agency**

There was a probe of the extent of the lecturer’s agency in the institutional decolonisation activities and the following responses were made:

Lecturer-A submitted that there is no institutional drive towards curriculum decolonisation and that lecturer agency exists in the development of modules, but they must follow prescribed parameters. The lecturer further claimed that the approach was to find ways of including African knowledge when developing the curriculum. He however could not explain how that could be done given the prescription relating to module development.

*“Over the period I have spent at this institution, I believe the institution is not showing enough commitment towards decolonisation even though this topic has occupied the centre stage across various institutions of higher learning. I have never been in a committee meeting where this matter has been discussed, so I don’t think the institution is even interested in paying attention to this topic. I don’t believe lecturers have any authority to contribute to the decolonisation initiatives at this institution because they are not part of the team that is entrusted to develop the study material. All lecturers can do is take to class what has been given to them to interpret.”* (Lecturer-A 2023)

Lecturer-B said, *“I am not involved in curriculum design but what I try to do is use examples from South Africa and Africa before using Western examples.”*

There was evidence in the response given by Lecturer-A that he was very keen to participate in the decolonial project had the marginalisation that was imposed institutionally stifled and inhibited his ability to do so. In the same vein, there was a tacit admission that whatever he did as a gesture of exercising agency was inadequate or did not qualify to be considered in any way as effective in dislodging coloniality.

At the outset, Lecturers-C, D and E did not make any reference to their agency or influence in the development of the curriculum, nor did they offer any insights regarding their approaches to issues of decolonisation. Although she did not offer personal experience Lecturer-D generalised agency of lecturers,

*“Lecturers do not have a lot of freedom in changing the curriculum especially if you are not involved in curriculum design.”* (Lecturer-D 2023)

By implication, this could also be a reference to her own experience but the inclination in that response leans towards lack of meaningful agency. Lecturer-F indicated that their involvement with decolonisation is limited to their use of African and South African examples when delivering lectures, -

*“...My current experience with decolonisation is when I am conducting my classes. It does not extend much beyond that.” (Lecturer-F 2023)*

Lecturer-F signalled that their understanding of real involvement should go beyond just employing lecturing approaches. He went further to explain the systemic and structural cause of the limited influence he enjoyed:

*However, RC is a business and I suppose their first concern is to take on board courses that appeal to their target markets. I want to think that that degree is to a very small extent. The institution, taking from the observation above, has as its concern, the business side of the college. If decolonisation were to succeed, it should have been a direct policy from top management to make sure that any curriculum changes take decolonisation as an anchoring point. That does not seem like it is happening now. (Lecturer-F 2023)*

Lecturer-F blames limited agency on top management. Top management in the case of this PHEI would be CAT. This response thus blames the structural as well as racial composition of the staff involved in determining the nature of the curriculum and pedagogic delivery.

Overall, the responses offered by the lecturers indicated that although there was not a clear pronouncement by the institution that they should not advance the tenets of decolonisation, the lecturers felt too powerless to meaningfully influence change because of institutional policies, structure, culture, and its disposition to chase profit. In a way, the lecturers became a party to advancing an episteme that suited the institutional purpose although that purpose sustained coloniality.

#### **4.4. Institutional Commitment to Decolonisation**

This investigation needed to establish lecturer perceptions regarding the extent to which they were convinced that the institution was committed to the decolonisation project. The lecturers had to answer questions regarding the extent of their role determining if they were convinced that their authority to execute decolonial imperatives was derived from institutional posture in terms of structure, culture, focus and mandate.

The institution's lack of commitment to decolonisation emerged as a key theme in the responses given by the respondents as follows:

Lecturer	Response
A	<i>"...I believe the institution is not showing enough commitment towards decolonisation even though this topic has occupied the centre stage across various institutions of higher learning..."</i>
B	<i>"...Whatever efforts that are being made are cosmetic since the module content is too theoretical and there is a very limited application, I have very limited knowledge since the institution uses a top-down approach..."</i>
C	<i>"...Lecturers do not have a lot of freedom in changing the curriculum especially if you are not involved in curriculum design."</i>
D	<i>"...Many lecturers are actively involved in decolonization efforts, but they may encounter challenges and resistance along the way..."</i>
E	<i>"... Institution is far behind in terms of decolonisation and their focus is profit and instilling 21<sup>st</sup> century habits in the students. It is therefore quite presumptive to expect meaningful interventions in respect of decolonisation."</i>
F	<i>"...However, RC is a business and I suppose their first concern is to take on board courses that appeal to their target markets..."</i>

These tabulated responses indicated clearly that there was no meaningful institutional commitment to the cause of decolonisation ascribing the reason for this situation to intuitional fixation with the ideal of fully commodifying knowledge as driven by profit generation prerogatives.

When aggregating the responses, it was evident that the perceptions of lecturers were that decolonisation is not foregrounded in the ethos of the institution and that institutional focus was more inclined towards making a profit. The responses also alluded to the nature of the structure and culture of the institution which limited the role of lecturers in terms of influencing curriculum transformation.

#### **4.5. Inhibitors of Decolonisation**

The lecturers were asked to respond to a set of questions that would establish their understanding of what the impediments to decolonisation were concerning the institution.

Together with the factors inhibiting decolonisation, the lecturers were also asked to posit any solutions that could indicate the salient elements in structure and culture that could be regarded as causal.

All the respondents except for Lecturer-D alluded to the fact that the institution was profit-driven in its approach and therefore ignored the need for serious engagement in resolving the entrenchment of coloniality. Lecturer-A answering the question on the inhibitors of decolonisation at the institution stated, *“I think profit maximisation tops the charts and topics of decolonisation take the backseat...”* This was echoed by Lecturer-F who said, *“The very nature that we are a private business institution, the owners have their eye on the return on investment and are not much concerned about being viewed right by the public.”* Lecturer-B also raised the issue of textbooks which were dominated by Western thinking as well as the fact that the institution’s decision-makers comprised people who had received a Western education and were content to maintain epistemic coloniality due to a natural aversion to transformation. Lecturer-B also pointed to some exogenous considerations such as the media saying. *“...The textbooks are still by and large Western, although it’s heartening that the number of books that are being published by African writers is increasing. The main decision-makers are products of the colonial curriculum, and it might be difficult for them to change. The media also contributes since the dominant voices are from the West.”* The implication of such a response lies in the cultural and socialisation of the people in control of the curriculum. Given that education in all its forms is a socialisation agent the respondent cited the nature of the episteme as problematic.

Both Lecturers-C and E pointed to a lack of political commitment by the hierarchy of the institution as an inhibitor of decolonisation.

*Decolonization efforts can be met with resistance, as they challenge established norms and can be perceived as threatening to some. Debates often arise about the extent and methods of decolonization. Change is often difficult, and resistance comes from people not wanting to change. Factor changes in stages, decolonisation debates are often totalitarian and do not leave room for questioning, addition, or opinion. As much as decolonisation is necessary, all parties need to come into play, and everyone should be given an opportunity to do so at their own pace. (Lecturer-C 2023)*

The moralisation in Lecturer-C’s response seemed to almost blame the nature of the decolonisation imperative. By calling the debates totalitarian the lecturer not only revealed the

extent of his commitment to the project but also the underlying fear that is associated with the process of decolonisation given the resistance and norms that are represented by the institution.

According to Lecturer-E “...*decolonisation can only be truly achieved if there is political will to do so. Currently, there is only individual activism...*” In addition to the issue of the lack of political will, there was also an indication from Lecturer-E that there was a cultural inhibitor namely in the use of English as the only medium or language of learning at the institution. Lecturer-D focussed on the general resistance to change by the institutional hierarchy as well as the general lack of resources that can be directed towards the decolonisation project.

All in all, the respondents identified the private nature of the college and its focus on profit as the main issue that inhibits traction towards decolonisation. The cultural issues were broached when issues of language and legacy attachments were raised by Lecturer-D. Respondents indicated that the lack of willingness to change was also a factor of a top-heavy structure that is occupied by beneficiaries of colonial education who would then consider any activism for decolonisation as a matter of public and not private educational institutions as stated by Lecturer-A. The thematic patterns of the responses were predicated on institutional rigidity due to structural and cultural issues, political inclinations to entrench coloniality and issues of money.

#### **4.6. Establishing Structural and Cultural Influence through Stakeholder Profile**

The respondents were asked to assess the stakeholders of the institution to determine how they affected both the structure and culture of the institution. The focus of the questions in that part of the interview was on the degree of inclusivity and on determining the underlying institutional dynamics that were inimical to fostering change towards decolonised spaces in the institution.

To the question, “Who do you think are the key stakeholders or actors involved in curriculum decolonisation at the institution being investigated/studied?” Lecturer-A said, “*My list of actors would include students, academics, and material developers. I don't think these stakeholders have any relationship where this matter is concerned. I say this because students themselves never express their opinions on this matter. I don't even think that they are aware of what decolonisation is and entails. I don't think even academics are aware of their agential responsibilities on this matter because this matter appears not to be something that occupies their minds.*” Lecturer-B identified the Government as a stakeholder rhetorically pushing the decolonising agenda well as stated that there are competing narratives without really specifying what the narratives and who the localised stakeholders were. Lecturer-C stated that

“...curriculum decolonization is a complex and ongoing process that requires collaboration among educators, policymakers, communities, and scholars.” Lecturer-D cited scholars and international actors as influential and stated that students were stakeholders were important but disempowered role-players.

Both Lecturers-E and F focused on internal and external stakeholders underlining the influence of the Central Academic Team (CAT) which is the Governance and controlling entity that determines the strategic trajectory of the institution as a key stakeholder that determines not only the structure and culture but also the degree of agency wielded by different actors within the context of the entire institution. According to Lecturer-E, “...at the institutional level, the key role players are the CAT, course developers, campus management and lecturers. The relationships are mostly hierarchical, whereby national agendas and institutional policies are communicated downward rather than laterally. This means, there is zero to minimal consultation at the grassroots level...” These sentiments were also echoed by Lecturer-F who said, “At RC, the brief for curriculum development and changes, comes from the Central Academic Team (CAT). These are the people who give the terms of reference. The kind of relationship pervading is one where CAT is issuing the directives to developers who work to instruction and have no capacity or platform to suggest anything else.” There was a clear indication in these responses that there are structural inhibitors to change and that the lecturers perceived these to be key elements working against the traction of decolonisation.

#### **4.7. General Perceptions of the Lecturers about Institutional Needs**

The lecturers were asked to offer recommendations on what they thought needed to be done to change institutional attitudes towards the promotion of a decolonised education. The lecturers were given the freedom to suggest any solution that would promote institutional actions towards dislodging the evident coloniality that was entrenched at the Private College. The question was framed thus, “Based on your experiences and insights, what recommendations or suggestions would you provide for addressing the challenges that inhibit the agenda of curriculum change at the institution under study?” This question was designed to further deepen the researcher’s knowledge of other elements that are influential in promoting stasis.

Lecturer-A saw institutional apathy as an inherent situation and thus said, “The institution should show an interest and desire to involve itself in this topic first and foremost. This can be done by making this topic part of the discussions that take place in various institutional committees. I also think that this topic is often understood or viewed as political rather than

*academic and so most people tend to avoid it. Unfortunately, in this country, politics are still seen to be divisive and unwelcome, especially in the private education sector. So that is why I think if the institution can invite participation in this area, academics might feel free to participate without feeling like they are entering the politicised space.*" The new dimension that Lecturer-A introduced was the aspect of avoidance of issues based on political sensitivities. This was also resonating with earlier observations regarding the lack of political willingness to address the needful changes.

Lecturer-B recommended that there should be more interactions between stakeholders regarding decolonisation and said, "*...Decolonized curricula often emphasize critical thinking, encouraging students to question dominant narratives and develop a more nuanced understanding of history, society, and culture. I would recommend open and ongoing engagement between all stakeholders...*" The lecturer also emphasised the importance of students as stakeholders and how they needed to be part of the narrative as well as an active part of the transformation itself.

Lecturer-C pointed out that the lack of traction in decolonising education at the institution was because the educators were not fully apprised of the salient issues in the discourse and therefore needed to be developed. The absence of collaborative dialogue was also regarded as one element that should change to allow discursive space that would then create a conducive environment to start the process. The lecturer also said that there was no existing policy to support decolonisation and there was no visible advocacy that would encourage the institution to be amenable to change. Lecturer-C also decried the lack of research that is geared to stimulate the needful, debate for transformation.

Lecturer-D advocated for the decentralisation of the role of CAT to be devolved to the campuses to empower lecturers. The restrictions of language in learning were also an active inhibitor and should thus be revised. The restrictions of language in learning were also an active inhibitor and should thus be revised he said. Lecturer-D also insisted that the problems of entrenched coloniality were informed by a lack of active research and advocacy on the relevant issues. The curriculum of the institution merely follows the demands of the market place the lecturer said. He also advocated for policies that are consistent with the prerogatives of decolonisation. The lecturer expressed concern by saying, "*...Imagine, the institution has around 30 policies, including a language policy and none of them not once and not even mentions decolonisation even in passing...*" According to the lecturer, there was no resource

deployment to support decolonisation or raise it to a strategic status as far as the institution was concerned.

Lecturer-E has several issues that were pertinent to structure culture and agency when offering the response to the question of whether there were other elements worth noting. The first issue raised was a structural one when he said, the institution should, “*decentralise the role of CAT and ensure that decisions are devolved to the Campus level where informed academics can appreciate the merit of decolonisation...*” Besides the devolution of responsibilities, Lecturer-E hinted at the fact that the epistemic environment was skewed in favour of Western philosophies, and this needed to change with the incorporation of, “... *indigenous knowledge systems reinforced by a relaxation of the language policy to admit other languages besides English as mediums of learning...*” The lecturer also attacked the learning culture as epitomised by the nature of assessments when he said, “*The current assessment system must be revamped, it promotes rote learning at the expense of deep and innovative learning – thus, perpetuating the goals of colonial education...*” He also decried the lack of inclusivity as both an issue of agency and culture when he said, “...*The stipulation of contact hours and content per module defies the notion of inclusivity, as differently gifted students are subjected to a uniform timeframe – there is a need for a differentiated and more inclusive approach....*” Lecturer-E also encouraged the banishment of all Eurocentric approaches across disciplines to achieve an educational ethos predicated on indigenous knowledge systems.

Lecturer-F claimed that transformation can only be realised in the institution if there is a commitment from the top thus admitting that there is a very limited agency by the lower ranks of the organisation, and this includes the lecturers as well. Making direct reference to the brand of the institution the lecturer works for the lecturer said, “...*it is a private institution. Its primary purpose is to create value for its owners. That change could come from the top down. The government could also drive that policy and make it a requirement in all curricula for higher education. If this is done, institutions would be duty-bound to infuse decolonisation at every stage of the curriculum...*” Lecturer-F identified the problem as being caused by institutional structures and the nature of policies that govern the institution.

#### **4.8. Lecturer Recommendations for Decolonisation**

Pursuant to the need to answer the main question the lecturers were asked to provide recommendations as to what they see as the best way to proceed and execute decolonisation. The specific question asked was, “Based on your experiences and insights, what

recommendations or suggestions would you provide for addressing the challenges that inhibit the agenda of curriculum change at the institution under study?”

Lecturer-A concentrated on the depoliticisation of the decolonisation discourse as well as the institutional need for transformation.

*“The institution should show an interest and desire to involve itself in this topic first and foremost. This can be done by making this topic part of the discussions that take place in various institutional committees. I also think that this topic is often understood or viewed as political rather than academic and so most people tend to avoid it. Unfortunately, in this country, politics are still seen to be divisive and unwelcome, especially in the private education sector. So that is why I think if the institution can invite participation in this area, academics might feel free to participate without feeling like they are entering the politicised space.” (Lecturer-A 2023)*

In making these recommendations the structural and cultural aspects of the institution remain the main impediment to change.

Lecturer-B saw stakeholder involvement as the key to dislodging the existent inertia that is working against change. *“Decolonized curricula often emphasize critical thinking, encouraging students to question dominant narratives and develop a more nuanced understanding of history, society, and culture. I would recommend open and ongoing engagement between all stakeholders”* (Lecturer-B 2023). This recommendation alludes to the absence of structured institutionally driven discourse towards decolonisation.

Lecturer-C listed several recommendations beginning with the development and reorientation of lecturers. She submitted that the current cohort of lecturers was not schooled in the imperatives of decolonisation and lacked ideological orientation. Secondly, she advocated for a collaborative dialogue that would mainstream the social justice issues in institutional discourse. Thirdly, she recommended the provisions of policies that will be favourable to the process of decolonisation. These policies according to Lecturer-C would be accompanied by active advocacy sanctioned by the upper echelons of the institutions for them to show commitment to the demands of decolonisation. Fourthly, there should be a deployment of financial and other resources that would capitalise on the decolonisation process. Fifthly, Lecturer-C advocated for a robust curriculum revision that is consciously geared towards decolonisation. Lastly, the research policy should favour decolonisation issues and foreground institutional knowledge development on the level of research output.

Lecturer-D indicated that he had nothing to recommend since there was not much in terms of involvement on his part.

Lecturer-E listed the recommendations as follows:

- *Decentralise the roles of the CAT to the campus level.*
- *Incorporate IKSs into all learning areas, Elevate African languages to LoLT status.*
- *Minimise dependence on Eurocentric theories or models.*
- *promote indigenous thought systems and sage wisdom.*
- *The current assessment system must be revamped - it promotes rote learning at the expense of deep and innovative learning thus, perpetuating the goals of colonial education.*
- *The stipulation of contact hours and content per module defies the notion of inclusivity, as differently gifted students are subjected to a uniform timeframe – there is a need for a differentiated and more inclusive approach. (Lecturer-E 2023)*

Lecturer-F observed that there needs to be a regulatory framework that makes it mandatory for institutions to decolonise their institutions. *“RC is a private institution. Its primary purpose is to create value for its owners. That change could come from the top down. The government could also drive that policy and make it a requirement in all curricula for higher education. If this is done, institutions would be duty-bound to infuse decolonisation at every stage of the curriculum.” (Lecturer-F 2023)*

#### **4.9. Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter set out to report on the results of the research using data that was collected through interviews involving six lecturers of the Private Higher Education Institution. The qualitative responses gathered from the lecturers established that the lecturers were fairly knowledgeable on what the salient discourses and narratives were in terms of the debates on the decolonisation of education. This established therefore that they were appropriate actors to be able to interpret their experiences in terms of the level of agency, nature of culture and structure of the institution and its role in determining the fate of the decolonisation projects.

Unanimously, the lecturers who were interviewed revealed that the institution was not committed to the decolonisation of curriculum beyond just rhetoric. The reasons given for this lack of interest ranged from lack of political commitment, structures that do not support inclusive participation, the preponderance of actors that were educated through Westernised structures, the use of English as a medium of learning, profit-driven mandate that is

characteristic of private education and lack of proper research and advocacy among other reasons. These mostly represented the structural and cultural conditions that stood as inhibitors of decolonisation in the institution.

In answering the question “How do lecturers exercise their agency (this can be action or non-action) to mediate the structural and cultural challenges?” The dominant response was that the lecturers’ mandate is lecturing and in one exception the development of course material. In the course of their work, all the lecturers claimed that they as much as possible used books and examples from South Africa as a way of promoting decolonisation. None of the lecturers submitted a comprehensive programme of influencing institutional structures or challenging practices stating that the decolonial discourse is emotive and considered to be political. As such, lecturers do not use their agency to meaningfully contribute to dislodging institutional coloniality.

In answering the question: “What are the perceptions of IIE RC Lecturers about the nature of the curriculum at the institution?” the lecturers indicated that the curriculum was still steeped in coloniality in terms of content and epistemic principles as well as ontological and axiological considerations. With regards to the question probing the extent to which IIE RC lecturers actively exercise their agency in the institutional processes to achieve decolonisation as stated above, they maintained that the structure and culture of the institution limited their ability to influence the trajectory of the institution in ideological terms.

The results provided in this chapter adequately established the main quest of this research project. The next chapter focuses on analysing and discussing the salient discursive and material issues that these results reveal. The chapter is structured to demonstrate the nature of coloniality as well as the inhibitors that exist to militate against positive transformation towards decolonisation.

## CHAPTER-5 – DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

### Chapter Introduction

While the previous chapter was seized with the task of providing a factual report of the data collected from lecturers and their responses, the current chapter will synthesise the collected responses, analyse them and offer a discursive context that will fully explicate the exigencies of the decolonisation project at the Private Higher Educational Institution in South Africa. After establishing from the results of the study the nature and constraints attendant in reversing coloniality and answering the quest to establish structural, cultural, and agential inhibitors of decolonisation the discussion will approach various pertinent discourse issues that pertain to the power differentials that inform the lack of traction that was indicated by the lecturers to be the bane of private higher educational institutions in South Africa.

The chapter is structured to initially offer a brief recap of the salient issues that were represented by the problem of decolonisation in the specific setting by descriptors of structure, then attend to the aspect of lecturers as agencies of the process, the influence of structure and culture as inhibitors as well as other inhibitors that were unravelled.

### 5.1. Lecturer Perceptions of Decolonisation – Surface Knowledge

The characterisation of decolonisation by most of the lecturers who were interviewed indicated that there was significant theoretical knowledge of decolonisation as represented in literature. Unlike Costandius et al (2018) where lecturers and students alike failed to define decolonisation the experience of this research echoed the sentiments of Tuck and Yang (2019) regarding the contestation of a definition. More importantly, the definitions provided did not always link the concept with the idea of curriculum. One would perceive that a definition of curriculum would also capture the experiences of such stakeholders as the students and place them at the coalface of the decolonisation process. Besides the variety of positions though in defining there was evidence that there exists a modicum of intellectual engagement with the concept.

In explication, there was no immediate evidence that this knowledge was experiential or borne out of praxis but an indication that decolonisation is viewed as a necessity by RC's lecturers. A necessity, yes but not one that is institutionally recognised. If we are to understand in terms of Jan van den Akker's (2009), definition of curriculum as encompassing all the experiences the students have throughout their interactions with an educational institution, definitions seeking to explicate decolonisation should perforce rein in that experiential aspect, to offer

demonstrable linkages that result in a serious interrogation of what experiences need to be decolonised or transformed. By admitting that “...*My focus will therefore be on the episteme and not on practice...*” Lecturer-A aptly illustrated the extent to which the institution has not empowered lecturers to practice or perform decolonial functions. Lecturer-B on the other hand categorically stated a lack of involvement in the curriculum at all. While there are no inhibitions that affect the personal acquisition of useful knowledge regarding decolonisation, what is evident is that the knowledge lecturers have does not represent an institutional position. This may indicate either a tendency towards enclaving the decolonisation conversation or posturing as tactful inhibitors in the same manner observed by Jansen and Walters (2022). The problem with institutional tactics in forestalling transformation is that it is not always overt and the relegation of lecturers who may want to push the decolonial agenda to spaces that are ineffectual kills the conversation as it were without the institution betraying any culpability in the process.

What was evident in the responses relating to lecturers’ level of comfort with the subject of decolonisation was the collective conviction that this was a necessity. The emphasis on defining the concept as an Afrocentric project geared to delink African education from Western knowledge systems was dominant. Adding to that conceptualisation of decolonisation was an absence of descriptors that were directly associated with the nature of coloniality and the power structures that sustain it. What seemed to be patently evident was a generalised overview of an education system that depended on a Western ethos. Lecturer-C however dwelt on the elements of marginalisation of the African Knowledge System but still, that process in his parlance, seemed to be divorced from other pertinent issues such as race, gender and the natural gradation that is normally imposed by structures that sustain decolonisation.

*“I think curriculum decolonisation involves revising educational materials, textbooks, and teaching methods to reflect a more diverse and representative range of voices and perspectives. This may include incorporating Indigenous knowledge, non-Western philosophies, and critical perspectives on colonial history. All institutions in the African continent should aim to decolonise education to bring in indigenous knowledge, hearing from African voices that are representative of the people they serve. Lecturers do not have a lot of freedom in changing the curriculum especially if you are not involved in curriculum design.” (Lecturer-C 2023)*

As such the appreciation of the discourse has fatal limits if it does not seek to fully evaluate the practical implications of an entrenched coloniality. The generalisation and prescriptive description of what Africans should do tended to be a ploy to paper over the institutional inadequacies. By universalising the discourse, the lecturer thus avoided the critical task of fully diagnosing the intellectual shortcomings that are inherent in the system.

The definitions of decolonisation that were garnered in the interviews lacked the breadth that was achieved in the probe by Pillay and Swanepoel (2019) where lecturer disposition revealed a consciousness that at stake in the discourses were elements of truth and power. There was no conceptualisation by RC's lecturers that demonstrated a thorough awareness of the entrenched role of power as a key aspect and determinant in the unequal relationships through which coloniality expresses itself in the context of institutions that are yet to experience transformation. This could be ascribed to the fact that the subject does not feature as a priority in discourse or that there are only surface considerations of its significance, as subsequent responses would then reveal.

It should be noted that the ability to delineate the various aspects of decolonisation is not the sole indicator of the level of involvement or agency of the lecturers. The fact that some of the respondents alluded within the context of describing the pertinent issues relating to the decolonisation discourses, to the fact that they stuck to their assigned mandate seemed to indicate a level of discomfort with the very idea that there might be an expectation that they should be involved in influencing the course of transformation at the institution. Sathorar and Geduld (2019) aptly summed up lecturers within the South African Higher Education context's unsure disposition towards decolonisation. The lecturers and other institutional functionaries are themselves products of a colonial or Apartheid education and their association with the intricacies and practical elements of decolonisation is almost non-existent. This is problematic in a context where advocacy and ideation should be instruments of transformation. It is in this context that the issue of agency from the perspective of the lecturers needs to be examined.

What was also absent in the perceptions of lecturers was an incisive conceptualisation of decolonisation as an emancipatory process. None of the lecturers articulated the nature of metaphysical empire as it is alluded to in Zavala (2016). The relationship between the erstwhile physical empire and the perpetuation of the metaphysical one is not well explained by the renditions provided by the lecturers. There was no aggressive ownership in the case of the interviewed lecturers to demonstrate that they were consumed with the need to wrest from an

inimical system, the reins to unshackle their disempowerment nor did they acknowledge as Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015) would advocate for them to be included in the process of knowledge generation to assume cultural and epistemic significance. As a matter of course, each of the lecturers demonstrably confirmed their relegation into being purveyors of Western curricula without any stated ambition to deconstruct and wrest control. Theirs was to offer a purely academic response devoid of advocacy.

## **5.2. Lecturer Agency & Influence in the Decolonisation Process**

After establishing that the lecturers were knowledgeable about decolonisation, albeit in a theoretical and surface way, the key discovery that was in focus was to establish if or not the environment at the institutional level allowed them to exercise agency to further the objectives of transformation. In asking the question regarding the extent to which there was institutional empowerment of lecturers, the common responses revealed that there was no such effort on the part of the institution. The lecturers themselves pointed to the rigid structure that diminished their ability to influence the course of institutional transformation. Lecturer-E captured this aspect eloquently, saying:

*While lecturers are nominally given the freedom to innovate and encouraged to apply constructivist teaching, which is the official institutional approach to teaching and learning, they are constrained by prescriptive syllabi and pacers. Thus, there is not much room for deviation from the institutional curriculum, as it can cause a misalignment with assessment tasks.*

This observation is a tacit admission that the pedagogic environment although it advocates for a deconstruction of knowledge, is only done in a constricted manner since the examinable material is already prescribed. The prescriptive nature of institutional culture works to deprive meaningful power that would be normally invested in lecturers and replace it with platitudinal pronouncements that serve coloniality. It is therefore critical to appreciate the nature of agency that the lecturers have exhibited.

Archer (1995) provides an explication of the confluences of power, structure and agency insisting on the inextricable nature of their operational existence yet being segmented enough to merit separate analysis. What is patent in the social realist's appreciation of the workings of structure and agency is the scalability from the individual to the collective and implicitly this is an admission that social and cultural structures have a bearing on the level of agency and power that individuals can contextually have. Respondents in this study demonstrated the latent

and explicit power of structure in affecting individual agency. By admitting that they defer to imposed prescripts that are in contradistinction from their owned positions on decolonisation, the lecturers seem to cede their agency to the exigencies of structure and institutional culture. It is in this respect that Archer's morphogenetic position takes a purposeful position in our observations.

It is apparent that the lecturers that were interviewed should be considered in terms of Archer's (1995) considerations of power and relational differentials that derive from social positioning. Obviously, within the hierarchy of the institutions, the lecturers fall quite low in the intellectual food chain with CAT and its staffers enjoying a vantage positioning that prescribes the social relationships that ultimately determine the level to which the lecturers would enjoy access to all forms of contextual resources that determine their level of influence. According to Archer (1995:177), these social properties represent 'those internal and necessary relationships, which entail material resources, whether physical or human and which generate causal powers proper to the relation itself.' What was clear in the discourse generated by this study was the limitedness of the power of functionaries to infuse any meaningful change notwithstanding the fact that the institution encourages individual innovation. What is therefore of essence is that while making the right noises the institution continues to choke purposeful action on the part of the staffers manning the lecture rooms thus inhibiting progressive change.

The institutional structure is therefore one of the inhibitors of change at the institution. By reposing control and power in a few elitists at CAT, the whole system is held ransom and there is no deliberate effort to empower the lecturers. Lecturer-A indicated that his association with decolonisation of curriculum ends in class when conducting lectures and that his proclivity towards decolonisation is a personal choice. These efforts are not delegated from a deliberate policy or institutional directive. Likewise, Lecturer-E says,

*"I got educated through a colonised curriculum with all materials and literature not written or drawing from our local conditions. My current experience with decolonisation is when I am conducting my classes. It does not extend much beyond that. I use books that are written by South Africans for the South African curriculum and using South African examples. The examples that I use in class are also drawn from local conditions."*

Lecturer-E likewise describes that involvement as "negligible." In all responses received it became evident that agency towards pursuits in decolonising curriculum are not derived from

a structured institutional constitution but may occur despite that composition. The agency of lecturers is therefore a factor of their innate convictions. Perhaps the most telling indication was the one given by Lecturer-B who stated that “*the institution is not showing commitment towards decolonisation. I have never been in a committee meeting where this matter has been discussed.*” Such a pronouncement just falls short of a full admission that the institution is actively inhibiting decolonisation.

The fact that the lecturer agency is not supported by institutional structures has therefore dictated that there is no meaningful traction towards institutional decolonisation programmes. According to Jansen and Walters (2022:21), institutions are known to “quarantine radical ideas” enclaving them in individuals therefore stunting the possibility of concerted efforts to decolonise. The situation at Rosebank College as expressed by the lecturers echoes this scenario in that without saying so there is rampant stasis regarding progress towards decolonisation. The fact that lecturers take responsibility for decolonisation and their understanding of it does not go beyond opportunities offered during either the delivery of lectures or the prescriptive development of modules, means that there is no serious project towards decolonisation. To assume that the level of agency they enjoy and employ has any meaningful impact towards decolonisation means that there is a great need for reorientation and understanding that systemic and structural impediments need to be eliminated before there can be any claims towards decolonisation.

Dominant perceptions on the part of lecturers tended to betray a lack of confidence in their agency almost acceding to the imposed structural and cultural inhibitors evident in the institutions. This alludes to Albertus's (2019) assertion of the effects of the matrix of power and uneven institutional landscape that then entrenches an acceptance of the status quo. Coloniality of being indicates and expresses the insistent insignificance imposed on the lecturers by the system. In this disempowered state there seems to be an erosion of confidence about what is possible to achieve hence in almost all the responses given by the lecturers there is a statement of limitations. This lack of confidence is expressed in the limitedness of their reach as stakeholders in the institutional architecture. The known hierarchy at the institution governs the flow of communication and dictates that initiatives flow downwards and not upwards. This is probably one of the reasons why the institution has not joined the bandwagon of the Public Institutions where student protests were supporting a decolonised curriculum. Lecturer-B observes that the decolonisation debate is rampant in all other public institutions

but there is “deafening silence” on the part of the IIE. The IIE seems to have successfully postured and enclaved the decolonisation discourse inadvertently sustaining coloniality.

There is a clear indication that the contextual inhibitors of decolonisation at the institution are much stronger than the influence and agency of lecturers. This confirms Madhav and Baron's (2022) assertion that unlike in the public institutions, in the private ones, there is no known strategy to execute the decolonisation imperative. If there should be a decolonisation strategy it should start with stakeholders that are positioned to work with the curriculum, especially in its development and delivery. Unfortunately, the lecturers interviewed do not occupy positions, nor do they have the clout to influence governance and policy to a meaningful degree to then operationalise a decolonisation process. The lecturer enjoys a limited influence within the context of the lectures they conduct or prescribed modules they are instructed to normatively develop without introducing approaches that deviate from standard prescribed practice. Lecturer-B quipped, “*Curriculum is developed at a level I do not have access to. Material used in the institution is developed at a level I do not have access or influence to sway decisions.*” This admission of disempowerment is likely to be one of the reasons why the transformation project may be delayed if there are no active steps taken by the stakeholders to redistribute power to empower the proponents of decolonisation within the institution.

### **5.3. The Subtle and Blatant Structural Inhibitors – Commodification**

There was evidence that there was a level of understanding among the lecturers that the slow nature of assimilating decolonisation was traceable in the inherent structure of the institution. By making the collective observation that the financial decisions that motivated the PHEI in making curriculum decisions was reposed in the institutional upper echelons there was a tacit admission that the composition of that group of stakeholders held the key to the trajectory the institution would take. What dominated responses received from lecturers about the nature of the structure was the subtle preponderance of the profit motive. Lecturer-A aptly captured this aspect when he said in response to the question on the inhibitors of decolonisation.

*I think profit maximisation tops the charts and topics of decolonisation take the backseat. I think the private institution being investigated here treats decolonisation as something for public institutions to bother about and so they remain indifferent. Opportunities come in the form of access to certain institutional meeting platforms like the PCC where discussions attendant to decolonisation could be smuggled in. However, this might not be that simple because this committee has a fixed agenda and sometimes*

*trying to foist such a discussion might be difficult because most people in this committee don't seem to fully have an appreciation of decolonisation. (Lecturer-A 2023)*

There is always a danger of commodifying education which is the point the lecturer identified. Profit maximisation is often responsive to market forces. By arrogating decolonisation responsibilities to the public there is an admission that perceptually the class of students in Public Higher Educational Institutions (PHEIs) are impelled by class to subscribe to social justice pursuits. In the same instance, the students at PHEIs are expected to be good customers and price takers uninterested in the nature of the episteme. The Lecturer further proposes the idea of smuggling decolonisation as if it is a felony in the cultural and structural consideration of the institution to consider decolonisation.

Lecturer-F reinforced this notion when he indicated,

*The very nature that we are a private business institution, the owners have their eye on the return on investment and are not much concerned about being viewed right by the public. Opportunities are there for those who are given the chance to review a particular curriculum to infuse the decolonisation aspect into it, but if this is not the thrust of the institution, then it would be a hard sell. (Lecturer-F 2023)*

The owners referred to here are the white South Africans who hold the sway in the power matrix and are the ones determining that the profit motive is maintained. It is highly unlikely that the opportunity to develop a curriculum based on a prescribed template is going to have a meaningful contribution towards the decolonisation of the curriculum.

Some scholars convincingly argue that fees are used to influence the class of students that would normally enrol at the PHEI, and this represents a subtle but deliberate move that is exclusionist (Albertus 2019 and Fomunyan 2019). In the case of the IIE, there was consensus that the structural elements that reposed decision-making power in a class of people at the top of the organisation were blocking progress for institutional transformation.

There was however little reference by the lecturers interviewed on the prevailing social structures and how these touched or influenced the students at the institution.

The failure to include the nature and extent of the obtaining social structures revealed the depth of the inhibitions that the institution has imposed. As Heleta (2016) aptly observed universities exhibit social structures of colonialism whose effect is manifest in the everyday lives and experiences of non-white higher education communities. Although the lecturers were not

expressive of this social structural aspect in a nuanced manner, the undertone of disempowerment seemed to always reveal the extent to which the burden of that structure seemed to paralyse them. Lecturer-E and B both stated that their lack of influence in formulating the material that would be used for teaching was caused by their rank and manner of operation of the institution. This manner of operation can only be explicable in the structural and systemic impediments that are subtly meant to maintain pedagogy in its colonial state.

Let me revert to the issues of financial resources as they influence the institutional position as much as they determine lecturer dispositions. Some lecturers expressed despondence and seemed to express powerlessness in the face of these financial manipulations.

*“The very nature that we are a private business institution, the owners have their eye on the return on investment and are not much concerned about being viewed right by the public. Opportunities are there for those who are given the chance to review a particular curriculum to infuse the decolonisation aspect into it, but if this is not the thrust of the institution, then it would be a hard sell.” (Lecturer-F 2023)*

The assumption that is derived from this is that there is a public position that favours a social justice process that dislodges coloniality. The reference to “the very nature” implies that the parts that would normally be referred to by Archer (1995) of the emergent composition of the institution create circumstances both in terms of culture and structure that are inimical to the drive to transform. Opportunities referred to here, seldom translate into active process since there is a perceptual conviction regarding what the lecturer refers to as the “owners.” These are the decision-makers and have a cultural and positional superiority that militates against progressive efforts needful for transformation.

Hlatshwayo’s (2022) position that there is a nexus between neo-liberalism coloniality, and market fundamentalism is confirmed in the way the lecturers defer to the notion of the economic necessity of their disempowered status. It is apparent that this lack of power against coloniality forces denotes a relationship that dehumanises and distorts the educational project. The education project as Grundmann (2021) narrates should shun institutional secondary socialisation. It is this institutional socialisation that promotes an educational context that is supported by the commodification of knowledge placing academics at the centre of selling knowledge and students as customers assimilating the same to attain the entrenched colonial expectations associated with a Western education. Lecturer sentiment confirmed the existence of the structural, social, and even personal emergent properties that have succumbed to an

education that operates as a socialising agent to sustain coloniality. Brooks et al (2013) observed that this situation is propelled by an institutional structure that poses the power matrix in the hands of a minority white and powerful clique. In the case of IIE, this would be represented at CAT by the personnel deciding policy and at campuses by Principals who are tasked to monitor the execution of this position. Heleta (2016) also confirms the entrenchment of white hegemony in HEIs working to entrench coloniality and maintain an alien episteme that is Westernised and protected.

#### **5.4. Chapter Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have examined the collected results that were designed to answer the research question. Among the dominant discourses arising in the study, are the structural and agency limitations as well as the cultural context that determines that the episteme remains in coloniality. The commodification of education as well as theorising on surface understanding of decolonisation featured in the emergent discourse.

## **CHAPTER-6 – CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Chapter Introduction**

In this chapter the conclusions arrived at in the research are delineated followed by recommendations relating to the findings of the research. It is also in this chapter that the full summation of the research will be made to provide a fitting close for the entire project.

Contextually the study set out to establish the structural and cultural conditions at the IIE that produce coloniality and inhibit decolonisation. This was mediated through an understanding of lecturers' appreciation of the concept of decolonisation, their level of agency and their perception of the nature of the curriculum. It was also critical to evaluate the nature of lecturer agency and their appreciation of both culture and structure as fundamental features determining the possibilities for decolonisation.

### **6.1. Research Conclusions**

It was evident through the interactions with lecturers and the findings of the study that the lecturers' understanding of decolonisation at IIE Rosebank College was peripheral, especially regarding the curriculum. They did not share a similar conceptual understanding of the curriculum either since the responses were limited to the syllabus and ignored the broader elements that define curriculum from an experiential perspective. None of the respondents referred to the students who should be a central element in understanding the effect of a curriculum and resultant pedagogic approaches. This profoundly illustrates the absence of judgemental rationality as expounded by Bhaskar (2016). The reason why the students are absent in the discourse generated by the lecturers is a tacit acceptance on their part of disempowerment that has been structurally and in terms of agency, infused by the system. It was thus concluded that the lecturers lacked the necessary depth of conceptualisation that would be needed to achieve the development of a concerted project to undo coloniality. The same lack of reach and depth seemed to also affect their appreciation of the structural and cultural impediments that served to sustain coloniality.

The lecturers stated the structure of the institution from the governance perspective where they identified a hierarchy that put CAT at the apex of the decision-making system without explicitly indicating how that role was actively stifling decolonisation and transformation. In the understanding of that structure, the lecturers were silent about the racial composition of the decision makers and the segmented nature of the institution in its branding that categorised students by economic if not racial class. Some of the lecturers however did mention that the

institution's ethos was propelled by a profit motive which also underlined the natural gradation that classification would cause. What was absent was an association of the racial composition of the hierarchy that was skewed and dominated by white South Africans. This then motivated the study to conclude that the lecturers had a limited appreciation of the reach of the structural issues in delimiting the extent to which coloniality could be challenged. Furthermore, although it is common cause that policies constitute a significant aspect towards defining structural elements that too was not a matter of high concern with the lecturers. The study therefore concluded that the institution has developed mechanisms that limit robust intellectual engagement with matters of coloniality and decoloniality. If the situation is maintained there will likely be no institutional involvement in providing a conducive platform to generate constructive conversations towards decolonisation.

In terms of agency, there was evidence to support the notion that the lecturers were not fully committed to influencing change. It was evident that the greater commitment on the part of the lecturers was to satisfy their contractual obligations. While that was the case, the lecturers' willingness to support the decolonisation of the curriculum was voiced by all. The need for decolonisation remained a shared aspiration but did not go beyond the intellectual rhetoric. Even in instances where a lecturer would claim their participation in developing study materials, there was no clear revelation why that activity would provide them with the ability to infuse transformation towards a social justice agenda such as decolonisation. At best the lecturers indicated that where possible they would use African authors to assert decolonisation. There was no evidence though that the use of African authors to develop a learning module would result in a decolonised curriculum. The study therefore concluded that the lecturers were not adequately empowered to fully exercise their agency towards decolonisation. Furthermore, there was no conscious advocacy on their part to catalyse transformation.

The more visible structural and cultural conditions observed by the lecturers, related to the delegation of responsibility in the development of the curriculum. One lecturer indicated that although they were allowed to contribute to the development of modules, they were given a restrictive guide that would always result in a curriculum that would ultimately conform to the colonial structures that were already in existence at the institution,

*“My only opportunity to influence curriculum comes when I am developing modules, but I am limited to the prescribed rules. I try to sneak a touch of decolonisation when I choose what authors should be used in the module but that is not enough...” (Lecturer-A 2023)*

Thus, the research conclusion is that the institution retains a strong grip and control of curriculum content and maintains coloniality by giving lecturers token responsibilities concerning which they have no real power to influence change. This therefore implies a conscious institutional strategy to protect colonial interests that are maintained by the commercial nature of the institution.

## **6.2. Power Differentials in Context**

The Social realist places a premium on the social and contextual conditions to inform causality. Decolonisation perforce requires an agential context in which actors are resourced and empowered to effect change.

The lecturers in an iterative manner underscored their inability to act upon their convictions regarding the need to decolonise the curriculum. The study thus reached a conclusion that the social structures and cultural permutations achieved at the institution had succeeded in falsifying the lecturers' perceptions of the agency reposed in them. While they were labelled as course developers and intellectual innovators, they were totally bereft of the power to effect any change at the institution. This situation was thus responsible for morphostasis which continues to be an inherent aspect of the institution.

It is also in this sense that the study concluded that the reversal of entrenched practices needed a more robust and less tentative approach. This should include a wider range of stakeholders and should be based on restructuring personnel as well as other resources.

## **6.3. Implicit Influence of the Profit Motive**

The study established the centrality of economic motivations in the retention of coloniality that is dependent on limiting the agency of purveyors and advocates of decolonisation. As a PHEI, the college is more interested in boosting enrolment figures to garner increased revenue. Lecturers' prospects for contractual longevity are also dependent on the accumulation of enough revenue that is predicated on meeting enrolment targets.

The study therefore concluded that the material concerns of lecturers and their need to retain their contracts compromise them and influence how they choose to use their agency. It is in this condition that the decolonisation project has lost traction at the institution because all the stakeholders seem to have been coopted into, regarding the material aspirations of the institution. Similarly, the class of students that the college attracts have no real exposure to the realities of decolonisation because the institution does not promote the debate.

## **6.4. Recommendations**

Having established that the PHEI is structurally and culturally configured to maintain coloniality in both subtle and overt ways, the recommendations of this study serve two purposes. The first of these purposes is to establish scholarly pursuits that may further clarify the nature of the intervention that will suitably inform what the institution needs if decolonisation were to be part of its agenda. The second objective in terms of the recommendations given relates to the possible remedies that may be needful to ensure that the PHEI espouses tendencies towards admitting social justice issues into its agenda.

### **6.4.1. Further Research**

The current study was conducted among the lecturers of the PHEI and depended solely on their sentiments on issues relating to the decolonisation of the curriculum. Further studies could pursue the following approaches:

- Involve students, lecturers and the top echelons of the hierarchy and triangulate to fully investigate the stakeholder disposition that sustains coloniality.
- Interrogate the policies of the institution to investigate the underlying systemic inhibitors of decolonisation.
- Investigate the nexus between the regulatory environment to see if there are gaps that prevent PHEIs from complying with the Government's push for a decolonised curriculum.
- Examine the racial configuration of the institution and determine how much that configuration is instrumental in sustaining coloniality.
- Examine the extent to which commercial considerations are used to curtail transformation in PHEI.

These studies if undertaken will shed more light on the areas that were outside the scope of this study as well as provide multiple angles from which scholars can tackle the unique and differentiated environment of Private Higher Educational institutions. It was apparent in the study that the lecturers were not employing their agency in any meaningful way to dislodge coloniality. The recommended studies will serve to unravel the underlying causes of that timidity.

### **6.4.2. Recommendations for Institutional Consideration**

Very little research has focused on Private Higher Education Institutions in South Africa especially relating to the subject of social justice and decolonisation. Lessons learnt from

Public Higher Education Institutions indicate that if these matters are not proactively addressed, they tend to cause social implosions that result sometimes in violent protests as was the case in the #feesmustfall movement in 2015. As such it is necessary to explore productive ways in which institutions can forestall such conflagrations by proactively configuring themselves for transformation. It is therefore recommended that the institution should consider adopting the following strategies as informed by the findings of this study:

- Add to their battery of policies, a decolonisation and transformation policy that delineates the institution's standpoint on curriculum decolonisation.
- Create structured opportunities for discourse on decoloniality that involve the entire lecturing cohort as well as incorporate student participation.
- Empower lecturers to exercise greater autonomy in the design, delivery and assessment of programmes while restructuring the institution to project a more culturally representative structure.
- Establish a research culture that incentivises research projects that promote decolonial research to influence cultural sensitivities.

While Private Higher Educational Institutions in South Africa are ostensibly configured for profit, there is a greater need now than ever before to accommodate progressive approaches that will ensure that institutions stay relevant in a fast-transforming landscape.

## **6.5. Chapter and Study Conclusion**

This qualitative study set out to establish through lecturer sentiment the inhibitors of decolonisation as informed by structure, culture, and agency. A purposive sample of lecturers at the PHEI was interviewed to establish their level of agency, as well as the structural and cultural impediments they deemed to be inhibitors of decolonial imperatives.

The study found that there was institutional inertia that prevented lecturers from effectively driving the decolonisation agenda. Furthermore, institutional culture reposed especially in the top echelons of the organisation, prevented lecturers from freely exercising their agential options to actively influence change. There were signs also that the institution prevented decolonisation discourse and maintained the status quo by creating contractual relationships that limited the lecturer's ability to catalyse transformative activities.

The study also found that the lecturers did not fully appreciate the gravity and necessity of the decolonisation process since they were predominantly seized with the need to fulfil their contractual obligations. They all observed however that the institution's priorities lay in the

motive of making profits and interventions that would propel decolonisation would have to be triggered from exogenous development which sentiment somewhat indicates a lack of readiness for change.

The study thus made recommendations for further research and stipulated possible structural and systemic introspective interventions by the institution to trigger transformative activities.

The research set out to answer the question: “*What are the structural and cultural conditions that reproduce coloniality and inhibit Decolonisation at a Private Higher Education Institution in South Africa?*” Emerging discourse from the interviews conducted pointed at power differentials represented by institutional hierarchy, the commodification of education, structural, cultural, and agential disparities that favour coloniality. Through the convergence of decolonisation frames, CDA, CR and SR, this study succeeded in shedding light on the existing conditions in the PHEI to sufficiently recommend ameliorative interventions.

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