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Decolonising the African doctorate: transforming the foundations of knowledge

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Abstract
Despite revolutions, ongoing student protests, and long-standing transformational efforts, African higher education remains steeped in a colonial model, with current structures, approaches, and purposes paralleling Western universities. The doctorate, the highest level of formal education one can attain, reflects this commitment to Western domination, relying upon European conceptions of knowledge to shape the entire research process. Thus, knowledge construction in higher education, and particularly in the African doctorate, has remained fixed to Eurocentrism. This conceptual article presents a critical race theory model to transform the African doctorate towards a social justice orientation, arguing for investments in race-conscious, Black affirming approaches that recognise doctoral researcher positionalities and African languages as ways to disrupt socio-political and racialised contexts. This transformation requires re-alignment of the entire research endeavour through an Ubuntu lens, with doctoral recipients engaging in training and support that embody antiracist, decolonial, and African Indigenous-affirming approaches.

Keywords Decolonising · Higher education · Doctoral education · African higher education · Critical race theory

Sthandwa Mohlanga (a pseudonym) is a multi-generational educator in South Africa's Western Cape. Both of Sthandwa's parents were apartheid-era teachers; her umama taught isiXhosa while her ubaba taught isiZulu in legally mandated all-Black schools. Sthandwa became a teacher so she could sustain African languages like her parents did before her

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and came to university to normalise African languages across school systems. Her doctoral faculty required exams and a thesis in English, despite that her study would be in isiXhosa. Frustrated by what she viewed as university-based linguicide, she left her doctorate program, and began searching for African-language based doctoral programs. Outside of linguistics, however, she found very few programs that allowed African languages. Sthandwa returned to the secondary classroom to teach isiZulu and isiXhosa, lamenting that her influence would remain limited to her classrooms, given that learners must excel in English across the rest of their subjects.

Sthandwa's experience illustrates the commitment of South African doctoral education to a Western-centric approach, where a still intact linguistic barrier limits what counts as knowledge and who is legitimised as knowledgeable (Babaci-Wilhite et al., 2012). Indeed, much has been written about South African, and more broadly African, higher education's commitment to knowledge, teaching, research, and language coloniality (Dei, 2016; Knaus et al., 2022; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). Despite innumerable exceptions, students across all levels of education must formulate knowledges through Western lenses (Datta, 2018; Mkabela, 2005). Mainstream doctoral education, the pinnacle of formal learning, exacerbates these approaches, requiring graduates to model and expand Western thinking. Yet doctoral education is also 'central to the development of much-need locally relevant knowledge in Africa' (Cross & Backhouse, 2014, p. 155), thus creating an epistemic dilemma. To tailor expertise to African contexts, doctoral education must centre localised circumstances, histories, languages, and knowledges within African frames (Dei, 2014). Recovering doctoral education from colonial foundations and ongoing imperial impacts requires a commitment to decolonising the doctoral process, while restoring African Indigenous identities, languages, and experiences (Datta, 2018).

To address anti-Black[1] Western perspectives applied to localised contexts, doctoral education must engage a 'continuous process of anti-colonial struggle that Honours Indigenous approaches to knowing the world, recognizing Indigenous land, Indigenous peoples, and Indigenous sovereignty' (Datta, 2018, p. 2). African Indigenous worldviews, based upon Ubuntu, invoke '... a spirituality in which who we are, and what we do are intimately related' (Masango, 2006, p. 930). Spirituality is a framework through which Black Africans understand themselves and their relationship with nature, hence an inseparability of spirituality, human beings, and nature (Gumbo & Gaotlhobogwe, 2021). Decolonising research must therefore treat knowledge as inseparable from African knowledges, spirituality, and sovereignty.

Smith (2012) describes decolonisation as a process to conduct research with Indigenous communities in which Indigenous voices and epistemologies are the centre in the research process. Thus, we argue for a global need to transform doctoral education, with African centrism leading the way towards a blended local and global approach to knowledge construction. We recognise that varied attempts to transform and decolonise have met with limited successes in part because institutions often engage in what Ahmed (2006) refers to as speech acts, wherein decoloniality is proclaimed without any sustained efforts at systems change. Despite the lack of global change towards context-specific decoloniality (Nerad, 2020; Yudkevich et al., 2020), many piecemeal efforts have begun to transform doctoral processes (Minthorn, 2020; Paperson, 2017). Our focus here is not to catalogue what we frame as outliers, but to elevate a larger agenda to transform (Cloete et al., 2015;

[1] In this paper, we link African and Indigenous to refer to the contested contexts, histories, languages, and knowledges of Black Africans in Africa and across the Diaspora (Dei et al., 2022; Wane, 2005).

Yudkevich et al., 2020). Thus, in this conceptual article, we frame a need to decolonise education, higher education, and specifically doctoral education, and argue for a global need to reframe individualism in research. We then apply four critical race theory tenets (the permanence of racism, colonial purpose of schooling, importance of voice, and interest convergence), suggesting that race centrism, African Indigenous perspectives, and recognition of the ongoing nature of knowledge coloniality must conceptualise doctoral education transformation.

Europeanisation of doctoral education

The scant literature on the evolution of South African doctoral education traces its inception to 1899, when one of the first British colonial universities, the University of the Cape of Good Hope, conferred the first Doctor of Law (Chaya, 2017). The degree was initially examination-based, and following British higher education trends of the time, soon expanded to a thesis and examination. European exclusionary structures remained across the colonial educational system, and it was not until 1946 that a South African university awarded a doctoral degree to a Black person. By 2017, South African universities had produced a total of 28,686 doctorates (DHET, 2020), and with gradual increases in doctoral recipients, 2021 saw 3574 doctoral graduates (Khuluvhe & Netshifhefhe, 2023). This total, however, remains far below the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 target to produce more than 5000 doctoral graduates per year. South Africa's production also remains far below BRICS nations, as for example, in 2015, South Africa produced 2530 graduates compared to Brazil's 18,625 degrees (DHET, 2020). Within the struggle to produce more academic doctors, the demographic profile of South African doctoral graduates has changed drastically as Black doctoral students increased from 25% in 2000 to 54% in 2018 (DHET, 2020; Mouton et al., 2022).

As South African institutions diversify the student, faculty, and staff ranks, however, models of doctoral education remain rooted in coloniality (Mkhize, 2022). Khessi et al. (2020), in their introduction to the special issue of Critical African Studies, confirm that colonial practices continue to shape doctoral preparation across the African continent. This is evidenced in CHE's (2022, p. 64) national review of doctoral qualifications which noted that many institutions have not yet considered decolonisation of the doctorate, much less committed to locally constructed knowledges. This stagnation goes against the #FeesMustFall campaign in which students called for decolonisation of the entire university curriculum (Mavunga, 2019).

According to Cross and Backhouse (2014), doctoral education has remained like those in European universities well into the 2000s. We argue that while access for Black doctoral students continues to increase, the past 20 years of South African higher education have not transformed the exclusionary infrastructures of European education (Knaus, 2018; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021). Mainstream attempts to address this reliance concentrate on resource disparities across institutions, exchange programmes with those in the global north, supervisor training, support workshops, and related learning opportunities, all designed to encourage navigation of Western infrastructures (Cross & Backhouse, 2014; Mkhize, 2022). Thus, South African doctoral candidates are required to excel at epistemological, conceptual, ethical, and practical aspects of Western learning. As Maringe et al., (2021, p. 14) argue:

> The greatest mistake made by Western nations when they colonised Africa was to construct hierarchies of knowledge where Western knowledge was perched at the top

of the tree, whilst indigenous knowledge systems were either denigrated as non-existent or as far too inferior to be worth including as part of any worthwhile curricula.

This prioritisation of Western knowledges, long dismissed by scholarly literature (Chilisa, 2020; Smith, 2012), continues to be evident through the development of research goals, questions, and approaches before actual engagement with those under study. Such beforehand, engagement is supported by literature reviews that exclude African scholars, languages, and decolonial knowledges, denying knowledge sovereignty, relevant local and historical contexts, and controlling the framing of participants and problems under study (Patel, 2016). Datta clarifies how researchers are required to intentionally exclude participant values, resulting in processes of data collection, analyses, and presentations that remove those under study from their community contexts. Researchers are further required to adhere to a 'fixed Western and academic mindset' (Datta, 2018, p. 8), to fit within many peer review publications. The paradigms, theoretical frameworks, methodologies, and dissemination channels thus remain segregated from Indigenous praxis (Manthalu et al., 2019).

While many programs and researchers challenge these principles as outdated, unethical, and colonial, these practices remain the foundation of research preparation, ensuring African scholars enact the same anti-Black, anti-Indigenous research (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). Within this Western dominance, many Indigenous individuals, decolonial movements, and anti-colonial academic programs exist across the West (Chilisa, 2020; Paperson, 2017). Certain Western approaches, methods, and ways to engage also promote the relevance of research with Indigenous African communities, particularly ethnographic and participatory action research (Chilisa, 2020; Datta, 2018; Mkabela, 2005) and those levied by Indigenous researchers themselves (Chilisa, 2020; Patel, 2016; Shotton et al., 2018). We caution, however, that in all Western methodologies, inherent biases—such as ownership over knowledge—remain (Smith, 2012). As Indigenous researchers have long argued, one cannot discover knowledge as knowledge already exists in the land and peoples (Datta, 2018). It is in this light that one Indigenous participant described Western academic approaches: 'researchers are like mosquitos; they suck your blood and leave' (Cochran, 2008 as cited in Datta, 2018, p. 9). In this metaphor, we posit that the infrastructures of African-based doctoral education have retained a commitment to European knowledge in ways that sustain extraction-based research.

The need to decolonise doctoral education

It should be clear that current South African universities are inadequately positioned to fully decolonise while remaining well-resourced. Indeed, many Africans study doctoral programs in European universities due to the external funding that attracts them, and the elevated elitism reinforced through such universities (Stackhouse & Harle, 2014). The global funding model relies upon the West, reflecting the intent of Western universities as global knowledge producers, while sustaining barriers to meaningful student exchanges, wherein European and American students might, for example, reorient Western knowledge through study in African universities (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021). While we centre the decolonisation of language and research methods in relation to doctoral preparation, we recognise that admissions, student supports, peer collaborations, supervising, internationalisation, and disciplinary considerations must quickly follow. And while some universities across the West are belatedly updating such infrastructures, Western universities are not

widely committed to decoloniality (Higgs, 2016; Pewewardy et al., 2022). African universities, particularly through doctoral knowledge construction processes, must therefore play a leading role in global decoloniality through dismantling the infrastructures of Western doctoral education (Knaus & Brown, 2018).

To address a world that remains anti-Black, anti-African, and anti-Indigenous, African universities must elevate a collective, continental focus on decolonising doctoral education (Simukungwe, 2019). We see doctoral education as key to decolonising because doctoral graduates hold intellectual leadership roles in public and private educational, cultural, historical, and social institutions (Walker et al., 2008). While many rightfully critique the underlying need for the doctorate more broadly—from lenses of academic and linguistic exclusion, intellectual hazing, racism, and so on (Deem, 2020; Golde & Dore, 2001; Green, 2008; Lee and Danby, 2012; Patel, 2016)—we argue that decolonising doctoral education can serve as a key societal lever to transform all other related infrastructures (Sarrico, 2022).

The worth of the doctorate, however, is tied to the extent that we can disentangle coloniality from doctoral education; we must break free from producing academic doctors prepared in isolation from African Indigenous communities (Cross & Backhouse, 2014). Sub-Saharan universities are among the only educational investments in place to lead the emergence from the post-colonial era, and the only intentional organising spaces to produce agents of transformation, nation-building, and strengthen locally relevant knowledge. Transformation not only includes diversification of enrolments, resources, and funding, but must also confront colonialism, racism, sexism, and related epistemicide (Cloete et al., 2015; Mkhize, 2022). As research-intensive knowledge production programs, doctoral education must foster intellectual movements that decolonise all aspects of African societies, and we conceptualise the African doctorate as developing the next generations of scholars who invest in and elevate diverse African knowledges into the mainstream (Knaus & Brown, 2018).

Decentering the researcher

Numerous Indigenous-centric methods already exist across the academy, including Rekh, Utch and Nhem, Archeoastronomical, Behsau-Pehsa, Epyptological, Hermeneutic, Griot, Sankofa, Pan Africanism, Ubuntugogy, and innumerable manifestations of Indigenous and decolonial approaches (Chigevenga, 2022). All of these, with local interpretations and models, can be used to operationalise local benefit while elevating pan-African knowledge bases by, in part, decentring the researcher (Chigevenga, 2022; Waghid, 2021a). As Chigevenga (2022) argues, 'the objectives of research should be to benefit the communities from whom knowledge is drawn and this can only be achieved if the values and ethics of such communities shape the methods of extracting knowledge' (Chigevenga, 2022, p. 200). In short, research methods must be informed by humanity toward others, based in spirituality, consensus building, and dialogue (Chigevenga, 2022; Gumbo et al., 2022).

Yet the foundation of European knowledge remains an orientation to seeing the individual as all-encompassing and the locus of learning, researching, and knowing. Challenging the Western notion of self as tied to conceptions of whiteness (Knaus, 2018), African Indigenous approaches downplay individuality in favour of communal approaches (Msila, 2016). At a practical level, however, the apprenticeship model of doctoral research is highly individualistic (Academy of Science in South Africa [ASSAf], 2010; Cross & Backhouse,

2014), emphasising a supervisory approach that embodies Western and capitalistic commitments to individualism as power. This foundation of self becomes a tension for supervisors of doctoral students, who must wrestle with conflicting cultural meanings and values of individualism in their work, in the work of doctoral students, and across the academy.

Waghid (2021b) argues that the recognition of otherness and the political struggle for self-determination is foundational to decolonising higher education and research. Indeed, we highlight the need to decentralise the researcher in relation to centring others, elevating a political purpose of research and writing that speaks to the lived conditions of oppression and structural silencing of Blackness, Black people, and Black subjectivities (Wa Thiong'o, 1986). Here, Waghid helps balance individualism and collectivism in research processes, considering Ubuntu as a pan-African philosophy that views others within their own contexts, as connected to each of us, and yet also distinct (Gumbo et al., 2022).

If decolonisation of higher education, and therefore doctoral education, means 'to resolve the imperialist legacy of both colonialism and coloniality' (Waghid, 2021b, p. 1), then we must begin by recognising the ongoing legacy of colonialism. This recognition suggests that African Indigenous scholars' narratives—of Indigeneity, decoloniality, resistance, survival, and more—must flourish (Gumbo, 2020; Harrison & Clarke, 2022). This then becomes a healthy tension, moving from the centre of individualism in a Western sense, towards an Ubuntu approach of cultural voice that reflects researchers and those they represent (Datta, 2018; Smith, 2012). As Datta (2018) elaborated, 'decolonization is an ongoing process of becoming, unlearning, and relearning regarding who we are as a researcher and educator and taking responsibilities for participants' (p. 2). This tension recognises life as ongoing processes, shifting from Western individualism to dismantle the very idea of knowledge and positionality as situational, conditional, ever changing, and rooted in historical, linguistic, and local contexts (Chigevenga, 2022; Patel, 2016).

Yet mainstream research processes continue to be structured by Western-oriented ethics that deny the very notion of Ubuntu. Chigevenga (2022) argues that many review boards in African institutions are led by foreign ethics boards (such as the American Psychological Association and British Psychology Society) which mis-frame ethical codes of conduct. This cascades into power imbalances where institutions granting permission for research seldom have relations with local families, clans, communities, and/or local political infrastructures (Smith, 2012). Thus, Mpoe and Swartz (2019) argue that scholars who research marginalised communities must more deeply foreground language, interpretation, translation, transcription, and ethics. As an elder in Datta's (2018) research questioned: 'If your research cannot talk about how we are facing problems in our everyday lives, why should I engage with your research?' (p. 9). In this way, decolonising educational research requires transforming from epistemicide and individualism, and towards Ubuntu as Indigenous ownership over narratives, experiences, interpretations, and knowledges (Gumbo et al., 2022).

Critical race theory as doctoral programme guide

Given the inability to transform South African doctoral programmes, we argue a conceptual framework is needed to help guide the decolonial process beyond decentring the researcher. Critical race theory (CRT), with its commitment to social justice and race-centrism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017), offers a way to reframe a societal orientation to decolonial knowledge construction processes. Indeed, CRT can re-conceptualise the

African doctorate through four tenets that align a Black-affirming antiracist orientation to prepare graduates to decolonise institutions, processes, and ultimately, societies.

Doctoral education to challenge racism

The first tenet of CRT is the permanence of racism, or what applied critical race theorists refer to as racism being everywhere, all the time (Bell, 1992; Rogers-Ard & Knaus, 2020). While many in South Africa argue for an overly simplistic nonracial orientation (Bass et al., 2012; Kotze, 2012; Rassool, 2019), we recognise that South Africa remains organised by anti-Black racism and that race consciousness continues to be needed (Knaus & Brown, 2016; Minofu, 2021; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Indeed, Africa was brutalised and colonised, and the institution of slavery was cultivated specifically by white European and American scientific and business industries for the purpose of anti-Black civilising (King, 2022). CRT thus situates global universities, African institutions, and especially doctoral education as structurally designed to foster anti-Blackness, with every structure, practise, and approach (Knaus et al., 2022; Thomas & Maree, 2021). As Lushaba (2018) powerfully summarised, 'thus, today, we [Black people] find ourselves in institutions of higher learning whose material, cultural, aesthetic, symbolic and intellectual production are pointed in a direction away from us' (p. 272). Even with increased recognition of oppression, South African higher education remains fundamentally structured by whiteness as the only legitimate way of thinking (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). This arouses a critical question of Western intentionality: 'But what do we actually want from the colony? It's absolute demise' (Nkopo, 2018, p. 159).

The permanence of racism tenet suggests that the entire foundation of preparation of doctoral students must rest on an anti-racist, decolonial framework to address ongoing, multifaceted efforts to continue racism. Rather than piecemeal attempts to change aspects of doctoral processes, such as revising admissions processes, teaching transformative paradigms, or decolonising research training, CRT asserts that doctoral preparation must challenge structural racism through processes and outcomes of research, teaching, learning, and community engagement. Even within admissions, for example, acceptance of racism as an organising principle in shaping post-apartheid education in South Africa forces administrators to contend with Derrick Bell's (1992) recognition: 'Standards of qualification now subtly play the role once performed overtly by policies of racial exclusion' (p. 139). Thus, entry into and through South Africa's doctoral programs remains limited by continued apartheid-era infrastructures, regardless of how policy contexts adopt languages of nonracialism and Black empowerment (Knaus & Brown, 2016). Reformulating admissions that were designed first to exclude Black people and then adjusted to reluctantly admit those Black people who attended elite high schools or otherwise were resourced to academically succeed within Western models requires sustained analysis, disrupting, and dismantling (Knaus & Brown, 2016). CRT suggests a racism-conscious admissions transformation, with historic conditions, continued oppressions, and systemic barriers all being considered and confronted during admissions. In short, all aspects of doctoral processes in African universities must assert justice-oriented practices that interrupt the status quo. Since there is no higher level of academic training and qualification in South Africa, a CRT lens suggests that doctoral education must identify, model, and elevate decolonial Black centrism.

Doctoral education to challenge purpose of schooling

If the first tenet centres the doctorate as a decolonial foundation to disrupt systemic racism, CRT's second tenet recognises that the very purpose of schooling has been to colonise thought, expression, and dissemination, such that all knowledge produced is intended to extend a colonial, anti-Black foundation (Rogers-Ard & Knaus, 2020). Much has been written about the colonial roots of South African schooling, and the sustained impact of apartheid's segregationist anti-Black Bantu-framed education (Chisholm, 2018; Christie, 2020; Hlatshwayo, 2000; Kros, 2010; Nkabinde, 1997). Within a societal context that persistently wrestles with the purposes of higher education (Swartz et al., 2019), schools and colleges continue to serve as the primary tool through which white supremacy is taught (Knaus, 2018). Indeed, as Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) argued, 'knowledge production has continued to reinforce Western hegemony over the African continent; and the schools, colleges and universities continue to contribute towards universalization of Western values' (p. 52). Thus, with the overthrow of apartheid, English was elevated to the formal language of instruction, despite ten other official African languages (Fiske & Ladd, 2004). English, then, became the official vehicle and the magic formula to colonial elitedom (Wa Thiong'o, 1986, p. 12). In addition to language, the infrastructures of apartheid continue to shape the quality of schools, curricular access, and ultimately, entry to the global marketplace of higher education. While numerous exceptions of Black wealth exist, formal education continues to educate most Black residents within impoverished climates, with outdated, inadequate, insufficient, and often clearly racist curriculum, school conditions, and assessment metrics (Knaus & Brown, 2016).

As the storyteller Nyoka (2004) reminded in their powerful apartheid-era reflection: 'when you look back on our past, at the pain and misery that our people suffered, you realise that our silence was a sin. It was complicity and co-operation in our own abuse' (p. 168). CRT contends that, while (some) universities had a history of investing in anti-apartheid struggles, the purpose and function of a university, and education more broadly, remains that of colonising into social and linguistic compliance. Indeed, universities parallel prisons in their commitment to silencing, through language, protocols, elitism, and English-centrism (Lulat, 2005). Kathrada (2009), reflecting on the passing of his mother while imprisoned on Robben Island, explained, 'because we were severely restricted in what we were allowed to write in our prison letters, I had to leave quite a bit out' (p. 64). This description of leaving quite a bit out can be due to apartheid-era prison authorities, colonial-era academic infrastructures, and the requirement to write entirely in English, towards Western audiences.

CRT thus conceptualises the doctoral preparation process as a fostering of intellectual silence, rewarding students who speak and write within the linguistic confines of colonial academia. Channels in which to speak are predetermined, with peer review processes, reliance upon English-centric journal outlets, and conferences that promote the reading aloud of papers, rather than encouraging difficult dialogues on how to recognise the harms caused by Western education, and to in turn remove lingering infrastructures (Patel, 2016). The thesis itself embodies this silencing, with doctoral applicants required to submit a proposal for study, which itself requires access to writing resources, libraries, and academic mentorship, all before even being admitted. The literature reflects the prioritisation of academic citations, demonstrating knowledge of academic fields that legally excluded most Black people until just a few decades ago. As the culminating

outcome of academic knowledge, the thesis must therefore 'create an alignment between the purpose of schools and the national interest of supporting all people's right to live, free of oppression, poverty, and state-enforced violence' (Knaus & Brown, 2018, p. 283).

Doctoral education to centre Black and African Indigenous voices

A third tenet of CRT highlights the importance of voice, defined by Knaus (2011) as 'developing a language to express stories that reflect what we live, how we live, and how [we] feel about both' (p. 74). Many CRT scholars approach voice as a counter storytelling framework (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Yosso, 2006), yet we push beyond countering white supremacy towards investing in voice development. Chilisa argues that a decolonial education of Black people centres upon the right to have a say on whether Black people can be written about, what can be written about them, and how it can be written and disseminated (Chilisa, 2020, p. 4). Thus, as formal education is designed to silence Black thought, CRT thus suggests a transformation to centre the development of Black and Indigenous voices as knowledges (Wa Thiong'o, 1986; Zamudio et al., 2011).

As the academic mainstream remains dominated by Western publication outlets and corporate digital media, CRT recognises that many expressions of Black voice already exist, and what is needed are infrastructures to foster such (Sankofa Waters, 2016). A CRT application to Chilisa's (2020) argument that Indigenous African researchers, 'should also have the option of being trained to conduct the research themselves' (p. 4), suggests that doctoral prepared researchers might need to learn *and* teach Indigenous research skills. Knaus and Brown (2018) asserted the need for an Intentionally Indigenous African Higher Education (IIAHE), moving from Western subjectivities towards 'a foundation of knowledge that adequately centres the lived realities of African communities' (p. 281). At the core of any Intentionally Indigenous African foundation rests the many languages and Black-affirming voices reflective of the vast Diaspora. This, then, becomes the CRT role of doctoral training—preparation of future generations to elevate, centre, and strengthen Black and African Indigenous voices (Chilisa, 2020).

In 'The Fall' (Conrad et al., 2017), a play written and directed by then-University of Cape Town students about the struggles within the #RhodesMustFall movement, Kgothatso (played by Oarabile Ditsele) proclaims that, within academia:

> All you see around these walls are white faces. The curriculum promotes white excellence, and anything you do as a black body is just not good enough. That's how racism works. It undoes you, thought by thought, doubt by doubt, and slowly your self-belief crumbles. (p. 77)

Transforming the purpose of doctoral education towards processes that strengthen Black and African Indigenous-centric voices directly challenges not just the curriculum, but the ongoing impacts of this intentional white supremacist epistemological undoing. This entails centring Ubuntu-based Indigenous knowledges across the curriculum, with a specific focus on reflexivity and interdependence centred on Black rights (Gumbo et al., 2022; Harrison & Clarke, 2022).

Affirmation of identities, cultural contexts, histories, languages, and African perspectives become central to African-centric doctoral education, part of the very foundation of what knowledge construction means (Chilisa, 2020; Waghid, 2002). And in applying CRT to this affirmation and purpose, voice emerges as an organising goal, where recognition

and investment into the full range of intersectional identities (gender, sexuality, race, class, language, and more) that constitute local and global African Indigenous communities becomes part of the very process of learning, researching, serving, and teaching (Knaus et al., 2022). We argue that ongoing racism must be met with sustained, intentional, anti-racist, and healing-focused voice investment as doctoral processes to centre knowledge agency.

Doctoral education to challenge white interests

Any systematic effort to transform the foundation of schooling must recognise white colonisation and imperialism as ongoing efforts to extract wealth and diminish Blackness. While scholars have asserted a post-colonial shift to neo-coloniality, or an era of democratisation in South Africa, student protests suggest that white interests have not loosened their extractive grasp over land, resources, or knowledge (Luescher et al., 2022). As Lushaba (2018) questioned (in this case, through his home department): 'What is the responsibility of political science in a recently decolonised country?' (p. 282). Within the field of political science, Laakso and Adu (2023) further clarified structural challenges, such as institutional barriers, student employability, and limited resources, continue to limit faculty efforts to decolonise. While we advocate for transforming the ethical purpose of academia long steeped in the 'dehumanisation of Black people in South Africa' (Lushaba, 2018, p. 282), CRT also offers caution that South Africa has not fully decolonised. As we have seen with the co-optation of the transformation agenda, efforts to deracialise South Africa have largely represented efforts to stop Black people from talking about and organising against racism (Knaus & Brown, 2016). As Patel (2016), in this case, writing about the West, argues:

> Considering the demographics of those who make it into doctoral programs at research-intensive universities, the viability of that population knowing the needs, logics, and intelligences in communities far flung from the academy should minimally be up for discussion. (2016, p. 63)

Thus, African doctoral transformation must foreground Black African scholars who remain in reflexive relationship with those intentionally flung far from the academy.

Returning to 'The Fall' (Conrad et al., 2017), Cahya (played by Cleo Raatus) speaks to decolonisation as 'an intersectional movement' (p. 55) and raises concerns about continued sexism limiting collective struggles. Cahya asserted, 'I will not be part of a movement that wants to decolonise this university and replace it with an African patriarchy' (p. 55). As Ramaru (2018) reminded, white interests operate especially amidst sites of resistance: 'As the #RMF movement transitioned into the #FeesMustFall movement, which called for free decolonised intersectional education in the country, the movement also transitioned into a more hostile space for Black Feminists, Black womxn, and queer people' (p. 156). Ramaru bravely named the violence that targets those whose intersectional marginalisation aligned with previous movements that were co-opted in the interests of sustaining white domination (see also Luescher et al., 2022). Whiteness ultimately benefits when heteropatriarchy takes over decolonial movements, further oppressing the very Black and queer leaders who began the movement, echoing racism/sexism that also violently targeted the Black women who led the Movement for Black Lives in the USA (Khan-Cullors and Bandele, 2017).

Bell's notion of interest convergence, then, serves as a strategic reminder to plan for overt and covert efforts to reinsert whiteness at every possible opportunity. Bell (2004)

defined interest convergence as policies that are framed as addressing racial inequities but in reality, 'provide benefits for blacks that are more symbolic than substantive' (p. 56). Instead of addressing underlying structural racism, Bell recognised that racial progress occurs only when such progress also serves to advance white interests. Key examples of interest convergence have been witnessed across global history. As Tocqueville argued in the late 1700s, 'in the United States people abolish slavery for the sake not of the Negroes but of the white men' (as cited in Bell, 2004, p. 50). So, too, with every effort that appeared to ease racism in the USA, in the end, whiteness and white supremacy remained the primary benefactors (Bell, 1998).

Interest convergence offers guidance for those conceptualising the doctoral process as ways to invest in Indigenous African knowledges. As efforts to decolonise take tangible form, those who plan for transformation must consider co-optation of those forms. Indeed, as universities continue to co-opt the term decoloniality, the reality is that white infrastructures remain intact, sustaining investment in Western knowledges (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Thus, endeavours to transform will face continual efforts to reassert whiteness through colonial methods, questioning transformed admissions processes, challenging less toxic exam structures, and dismissal of writing that centres community voice. We must resist these efforts through preparing doctoral students to, in turn, plan for colonial resistance.

Doctoral education as transformative investment

If African universities are to succeed in decolonising doctoral education, we must think differently and attend to these fundamental research-related issues. In every doctoral program, the basic departure should be to re-design the program so that structures serve local and global contexts and contribute toward sustainable development, all through Indigenous Black lenses. Such re-design must attend to the infrastructures of learning such as pre-admission, student services, advising, and supervising. Across these infrastructures, integration of the philosophical, cultural, social, and historical stances that prospective doctoral students bring from untransformed schooling, undergraduate, and postgraduate programs is essential. Key guiding questions to leverage transformation steps should take a central reflexive role, in ways that respond to program type, location, and related contexts. Ontologically, thinking about research should integrate relational aspects of Indigenous communities, particularly the interconnectivity between spiritual and physical worlds (Cajete, 2000; Hart, 2010).

Methodologically, every doctoral student's work should at least attend to transformative research paradigms or otherwise promote decoloniality (Chilisa & Kawulich, 2012). Moving beyond interdisciplinarity to integration of multiple methods from diverse knowledge systems (Chilisa, 2020)—such as orality, experientialism, acting, dancing, and music—all can better reflect and extend localised knowledge and expression. Voice-centric research can honour the multitude of oral communication approaches used by African Indigenous communities and the wider African Diaspora (Brock, 2005; Sankofa Waters, 2016). Thus, from methods to literature reviews, expansion beyond the limitations of the written word helps recognise and elevate knowledges that 'can be inferred by the researcher from oral traditions, stories, legends, language, and artifacts' (Chilisa, 2020, p. 44).

Regarding epistemology, knowledge is fluid, flowing from generation to generation through various forms of storytelling (including oral, food, music, geographic, familial, and related artistic expressions), and includes multiple community practices and sites often

dismissed by Western universities (Hungwe, 2022). Indigenous African students experience environments within their many lenses, which shapes their knowledge and stories; they need to be offered systemic support to conceptualise such long-dismissed nuances within doctoral programs. Students, educators, researchers, and communities all experience contextual forms of rituals and ceremonies—including dreaming, visioning, meditating, and praying—and they possess knowledge from such experiences. Foregrounding such practices can help students realise the application of inner-space discovery. Reflexivity efforts, specifically praxis journals and community-reflective opportunities to record researcher inner workings in relation to communities they are working within, can be integrated across graduate programs (Brock, 2005; Winberg, 2006).

Doctoral education requires preparation for researchers to have multiple methods of co-creating participant questions, orientations, and considerations to their research (Datta, 2018). Those who are concerned with transforming doctoral processes must help students consider multiple approaches to collaboratively selecting research topics within contexts, and then preparing research proposals and guidelines within the values of Ubuntu-based research. This entails focusing on issues that are important for local communities versus researcher objectives, academic goals, and prior disciplinary training. To contend with university- and whiteness-informed interest convergence, a recurring question must be asked (and answered, see Patel, 2016): Who owns research processes and findings? Often, researchers claim the discovery of knowledge ('I found...'). The elders reported by Datta (2018) confront this notion: 'If I share our knowledge with you, you should not say that you discovered it. If you do so, it will be stealing' (p. 8). Ubuntu thus continually reminds us of the centring required, and the collaborative, healing-centred skills that we need to cultivate in doctoral researchers.

Ultimately, we argue that CRT can help guide how researchers in African contexts elevate decolonising and African Indigenising approaches to integrate anti-racist theory and practice, cross-cultural research methodology, critical investigations, and land-based approaches. Researchers in Western contexts, too, should adapt such practices to challenge coloniality pressures from within their very institutions. As we argue for transforming from science-oriented researchers to participant-oriented researchers, we advocate for future generations to redefine notions of science, knowledge, and power, from and within localised communities. This means universities must prepare students to orient research processes toward collaborations, collective ownership, collective processing, collective data sharing and outcomes, and collective dissemination. Doctoral researchers thus would begin to view themselves as part of an Ubuntu collective, moving from 'I' (etic—'I discover') to 'we' (emic—'we/I learn'). In this way, we assert that societal decoloniality depends upon doctoral graduates who contribute knowledge and practices that directly elevate localised, regional, and global African Indigenous communities.

Conclusion

If we embrace Dei et al.'s (2022) human rights argument that '... language and culture are inherently inalienable, and the denial of these attributes is a denial of one's humanity' (p. 198), then we must in turn see education, higher education, and especially doctoral education as pathways towards strengthening African Indigenous language and culture. While we continue to struggle against the denial of African languages and cultures, in recognition of applied critical race theory's argument that racism will remain everywhere and all the time, the goal of

African Indigenous research must move beyond anti-colonial and build towards Black-affirming knowledge systems. The African continent cannot afford to exclude potential scholars such as Sthandwa in the opening narrative of this article; we have lost too many generations to the violence and residual traumas of white colonialism. As South Africa and the African continent continue to debate whether and how to decolonise, our youth demand action.

CRT thus offers one way to re-conceptualise and implement African doctoral transformation. As we have asserted, the future of doctoral education is tied to the future of humanity. If higher education cannot find a way to invest in future generations of transformative agents, and especially those who carry forward the sustainable knowledge practices that remain in harmony with the land and each other, we will continue to destroy ourselves and the planet. Thus, CRT offers a guiderail for systemic transformation of the entire doctoral experience, reminding of the need to disrupt and dismantle all university infrastructures that encourage intersectional racism and colonialities. We thus call for a dramatic expansion of niche African Indigenous Knowledge (AIK) programs, courses, and faculties with a simultaneous re-framing of all disciplinary programs, courses, and faculties. The very framing of knowledge must be dismantled through re-imagining and re-organising university learning, researching, and serving. The task of dismantling and rebuilding must be confronted with the same intensity with which coloniality spread, but instead with an ethic of love and healing at the centre.

CRT further lays forth that those leading such transformation must cultivate infrastructures for the development and expression of voices from across the African Diaspora. At a minimum, this means collaborative African Indigenous leadership to inform transformational actions, but also ongoing methods of centring Black voice and knowledges in the transformative process itself. If Black voices (by which CRT would argue is not merely Black people, but instead African ideologies and practises) are not central to transformational process, we will retain the glacial pace of change, in South Africa and across the continent. This requires that transformation of academic programs not be led by traditionalised experts, but in tandem with respected African elders who have long practised from outside the bounds of academia.

CRT lastly reminds of the need to be continually vigilant of ongoing efforts to normalise whiteness and Western ideologies, through the many mechanisms of colonial funding, publication, and related knowledge endeavours. CRT cautions that critical voices must be elevated, not to stymie change, but to raise alarms, to alert to realities that we are operating within the very systems needing to be changed. Higher education leaders have been prepared to lead and sustain such infrastructures, even if our intentions have been to resist such. CRT thus serves as a guiding star, reminding that while pitfalls will continue, the goal of a racially affirming, healing-centric, Indigenous-centric society is the only path towards collective survival.

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