

## Article

# The Mediation of Coloniality in Decolonisation Developments in South African Theological Education

Marilyn Naidoo 

Department of Philosophy, Systematic and Practical Theology, University of South Africa,  
Pretoria 0003, South Africa; naidom2@unisa.ac.za

**Abstract:** The imperial nature of Christianity structured around colonialism, white supremacy, and apartheid was governed by racially motivated logics that fundamentally define the idea of who could be human. Decades later, the uncomfortable emphasis on decoloniality in South African theological education arises in a contested space despite the need to decentre white, Western methods, interpretations, and experiences. Academic readiness and ownership regarding the implementation of decolonisation initiatives constitute a significant obstacle. They highlight how coloniality mediates and attempts to erase decolonising praxis. This article employs the theoretical framing of Grosfoguel's analysis of the coloniality of power, of knowledge, and of being, surveys recent educational developments in theological education towards redress to reveal a hesitancy and considers the perspective change of educators towards decolonisation praxis. This article underscores a contextual challenge for the legitimacy of decolonisation and the need to restore its significance amidst the slow pace of educational transformation in theological education.

**Keywords:** decolonisation; theological education; South Africa; conscientisation; higher education; social justice; whiteness



**Citation:** Naidoo, Marilyn. 2024. The Mediation of Coloniality in Decolonisation Developments in South African Theological Education. *Religions* 15: 160. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15020160>

Academic Editor: Fábio Py

Received: 16 December 2023

Revised: 24 January 2024

Accepted: 25 January 2024

Published: 28 January 2024



**Copyright:** © 2024 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

## 1. Introduction

South Africa remains a divided society with profound social divisions continuing because of the assimilation of apartheid structures, stereotypes, and ideas that limit the capacity to adjust to an evolving context. We need to acknowledge South Africa's colonial background and how it has shaped mindsets and continues to impact current independent and autonomous progress. As Drew Smith (2015, p. 4) states, there is "an emphatic contestation of any attempt to foreclose the discussion on race while the legacy of hundreds of years of race-based social policies and structures continue to shape and color present-day black realities".

The topic of how theological education creates and perpetuates a colonial mentality is a crucial one to address when examining the role of religion, theology, and churches in the history of colonialism. Our received theological education was birthed in the imperial project which was furthered by the Christian missionary enterprise that instituted a civilisation built on the Reformation and Renaissance of Europe. It was an engagement from the West to the 'rest' with no expectation of mutual exchange since the 'others' were seen as in need of enlightenment and viewed as not civilised enough to enlighten the West. The colonial mentality involved control and domination over less-than cultures and peoples, races, geographies, genders, and sexualities. As part of Empire, "whiteness provides the superstructure on which Enlightenment rationality was built constructed as the norm and had nothing to do with Christian cognition" (Reddie 2020, p. 12). European theological knowledge was seen as universal, and this Christian gospel was seen as 'truth' for all times and places.

To comprehend Christianity and its purpose in Africa, it is crucial to acknowledge the abuse of authority and unfair treatment inflicted upon African populations. This

includes the forced assimilation of Africans into European civilisations, which resulted in the distortion of their cultural legacy (Mkandawire 2005, p. 5). An ongoing source of contention that was central to the processes of Christianisation is the concept of African identity (Bediako 1995). Wa Thiong'o (1993, p. 10) states that "much of what has been taken for theological education in Africa is in fact not African but rather a reflection of Europe in Africa".

This Empire persists, frequently under a false facade, yet it remains formidable and destructive. These patterns or norms suppress individuals by restricting their opportunities for engagement and deforming theological education. "Critical perspectives acknowledge that such practices are especially significant in that they most often negatively impact black people via subordination, marginality, and disadvantage" (Steyn 2007, p. 420). Being silent about the awkward past so as to maintain unity, which is key to the way the church understands itself, has resulted in a unity which "has often proved more illusionary than real" (Reddie 2021, p. 134). Embracing this uncritical unity without considering what makes it up or without dismantling prevailing constructs allows the status quo to be sustained.

In the past decade, the decolonisation of South African higher education has seen some changes in curricula, pedagogies, and research practices. Nevertheless, the call for decolonisation in higher education has stagnated at an implementation level as it is seen as possibly a fad and less important than the more pressing issues of reduced educational funding, lower throughput rates, and general inertia in the curriculum (Jansen 2017, p. 42). An analysis of the curricula, pedagogies, publications, and research foci of theological institutions would yield support for the claim that epistemic justice has yet to be achieved. Disciplinary discourses and theories have flourished, yet academic readiness and ownership regarding the implementation of curriculum decolonisation initiatives constitute a significant obstacle. Christian theology has asked critical questions about how it may meaningfully address and correct the injustices to which it has contributed. As a Black woman and a practical theologian concerned about liberative praxis, who has felt the 'white' gaze and who experiences ongoing racial and gender invisibility, I locate myself in the humanness of education and wonder why the visibility of the 'other' is not more evident in a Christian space. Decolonisation helps us with this by enabling us to see the issues of identity, representation, and personhood through the power-knowledge dynamic, which helps us to be human again.

This article presents a contextual challenge, revisiting the decolonial mandate within theological higher education to understand the hesitancy towards curriculum implementation. It reviews what has taken place to date and concludes by considering the needed changes in the consciousness and self-reflexivity of educators that can begin to make a difference towards inclusive theological education. This article underscores the need to restore the significance of decolonisation, and its legitimacy, highlighting how coloniality mediates, especially via the deep tentacles of racism, and attempts to erase decolonising praxis.

## 2. Delineating the Decolonisation Discourse

It is important to note that the colonisation process did not introduce education, as education was always an ongoing part of local culture, but colonisation brought in foreign knowledge systems promoting coloniality. It is important to differentiate coloniality from colonialism, as the former pertains to enduring power structures that have arisen due to colonialism. Coloniality, according to Mignolo (2011, p. 47), is about "the enduring logics, structures, systems and institutions that uphold discrimination and create zones of being and non-being", based on colonial difference. Colonial difference refers to the ways in which colonialism has created unequal power relations between colonisers and colonised peoples.

Decolonisation, on the other hand, highlights that the violence caused by colonialism still exists, and coloniality proposes three ways in which decoloniality can be understood: the coloniality of power, the coloniality of knowledge, and the coloniality of being (Gros-

foguel 2007). Le Grange (2016, p. 3) states that decolonisation was critical “to the first- and second-generation colonialism, neo-colonialism and the recent (re)ascendency of neoliberalism”. Le Grange (2016, p. 6) explains that the initial colonisation was a material one of belongings and the devaluing of indigenous ways, that this progressed to a colonisation of the mind through capitalism, education, and new sciences built around white superiority, and that finally neo-colonialism emerged, and that in spite of African political independence, the gaze of the West remains present.

The colonality of being refers to zones of being and non-being; as noted above, it “denies particular groups ontological density for the purpose of unequal power dynamics” (Marzagora 2016, p. 164). Race is the most important category in South Africa; Soudien (2009, p. 149) argues that race is the process by which additional manifestations of distinction are established, strengthened, or manifested. Racism intersects with other forms of discrimination like religion, gender, ethnicity, language, and sexual orientation, and it justifies and reproduces itself using these differences. Coloniality speaks to the lived experiences of black people, where whiteness “gained ontological destiny far above blackness” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013, p. 333). Here, black people were stripped of dignity and made invisible in institutions of learning. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013, p. 334) refers to this as the “objectification, thingification” of Africans. These conceptualisations of the colonality of being enable understandings of the colonality of power and knowledge.

The colonality of power concerns the pervasive and long-standing power dynamics of a global nature that are constructed in an unequal way and that exploit and oppress. This power exists in mindsets, structures, systems, and institutions. According to Maldonado-Torres (2008, p. 43), it shapes “culture, labour, inter-subjectivity relations and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations”. Christianity in South Africa, by means of its doctrinal emphasis throughout the eras of colonialism, modernity, and apartheid, served as a conduit to put into place colonial distinctions and construct zones of existence and nonexistence, or zones of being and non-being.

The focus of the colonality of knowledge, according to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013, p. 336), is “on teasing out epistemological issues, politics of knowledge generation, as well as questions of who generates which knowledge, and for what purpose”. It is important to note that knowledge creation is dependent on the geopolitics of knowledge (Mignolo 2011) as knowledge is socially constructed and political. It creates and controls epistemologies, thereby sustaining colonality. Depending on the knowledge and power dynamic, some knowledge is positioned with a global gaze like Eurocentrism, while others are not seen. Kang (2010, p. 36) reminds us that “third world historians feel the need to refer to works in European history, historians of Europe do not feel any need to reciprocate. . . they produce their work in relative ignorance of non-western histories”. A knowledge hierarchy exists in which Western knowledge occupies the apex and others seen as marginal. Indigenous knowledge has been dismissed as being unscientific, inferior, or overly subjective (Wa Thiong’o 1993). One possible reason for Africa being dominated by others is that it is hindered by its marginalisation within the global power structure: “academic marginalisation being a corollary of economic insignificance” (Hanciles 2008, p. 76). It is crucial to critically examine universal assertions and the erosion of specific identities, given that the power dynamic within the discourse on globalisation, despite permitting engagement, is not equitable. Kang (2010, p. 35) states that

It is not, therefore, surprising to see that most resources for theological education—institutional, financial, and human—with enormous means to research, archive, and disseminate knowledge, have resided in the global North, while the dire need for theological educational infrastructures and resources has drastically grown in the global South.

Places of higher learning like universities serve as pivotal locations via which colonialism functions “and colonial knowledge in particular—is produced, consecrated, institutionalised and naturalized” (Day 2021, p. 8). Western knowledge has been engaged in epistemicide, or the killing of other knowledge systems (de Sousa Santos 2018, p. 39).

This is consistent with the remarks of [Hinze \(2016, p. 49\)](#): “unlearning coloniality entails decolonizing epistemology—the very conditions of how we think about ourselves, the world, and God. To accomplish this requires epistemological disobedience—that is, challenging the colonial matrix of knowledge and power, and the ways this matrix (mis)shapes one’s ways of understanding oneself, others, and the basic conditions for thinking and acting”. Epistemic disobedience is about a refusal to accept hegemonic narratives and about epistemological delinking and relinking to challenge and undermine the systems and structures of coloniality ([Mignolo 2007](#)). According to [Quijano \(2000\)](#), through the re-configuration of knowledge and the process by which information is generated, it becomes feasible to alter and undermine the multiple interconnected realities that create the colonial framework of power. The mentioned domains of economy, authority, gender/sexuality, and knowledge symbolise the expansion of Western dominance in geographical, political, and ontological–epistemological aspects ([Mignolo 2007, p. 450](#)). Each of these distinct realities is founded on a unique set of logics and knowledges that have produced and continue to produce a world of inequality.

Decolonial work involves asking whether the knowledge that is transmitted represents us, so it involves the questioning of what is considered knowledge, who created the knowledge for whom, shaped by what agenda, who was excluded from the knowledge production, and what power centres are linked to it ([Mignolo 2011, p. 49](#)). The production of knowledge is dependent on the historical milieu and the obstacles that confront a given culture. It rejects universal definitions of knowledge as individuals themselves participate in dialogue and assume the roles of both actors and subjects. Knowledge generation must be in line with African realities; it does not discard Eurocentric knowledge, but its hegemony, or the notion that it is universal and exclusive. In my discipline of practical theology, the Western motif still dominates, even though the field is very much focused on praxis. As [Dreyer \(2017, p. 5\)](#) states, “practical theological research in South Africa is still very much oriented towards Europe and North America in terms of its knowledge-generating practices”, and this is supported by academic societies and journals that deepen that hegemony. Epistemic justice is found wanting, as knowledge privileges white modes of thought.

As a remedy, [de Sousa Santos \(2007, p. 47\)](#) speaks of “ecologies of knowledge” to deny Western knowledge as “abyssal thinking”. A plurality of knowledges is an alternative by which we can appreciate diversity and see a mutual exchange of different knowledges, according to [Mbembe \(2016, p. 30\)](#), “via a horizontal strategy of openness to dialogue among different epistemic traditions”.

### 3. South African Developments in Decolonisation

Given the uneven nature of transformation initiatives in higher education ([Du Plessis 2021; Lange 2021](#)), there is a need to challenge power and knowledge in the learning environment. This also includes the need for new curriculum adjustments and transformative pedagogies to enable students to deal with historical educational obstacles in learning and institutional systems that model justice.

Decolonisation is used as an analytical and practical process, and, according to [Smith \(1999, p. 21\)](#), decolonisation involves “deconstruction and reconstruction, self-determination and social justice, ethics, language, internalisation of indigenous experiences, history, and critique”. Although institutional transformation forums were established in universities, elements of apartheid remained “embedded in institutional cultures and in the curriculum. . . to alienate black and other disadvantaged students” ([Heleta 2018, p. 50](#)).

The decolonisation debate in higher education came to the forefront and was brought to public attention during the #Fees Must Fall movement in 2015, which brought attention to redress, diversity, and the discriminatory nature of institutional cultures ([Le Grange 2016; Heleta 2018](#)). Furthermore, the movement demonstrated how the decolonial agenda and the fight against sexist ideologies, in addition to class- and gender-exclusionary categorisations, are perpetually at odds. Student protests demanded the decolonisation of the curriculum,

the removal of symbols of apartheid, and that institutions deal with internal racism and patriarchy. Heleta (2018, p. 549) reminds us that the move towards decolonisation came from students and not from educators or the leadership of universities, revealing the role of higher education in maintaining the status quo. Academic theology was also affected by the #Photos Must Fall incident in 2018 at the faculty of theology of Stellenbosch university. Nell (2018, p. 1) states that “students still experienced that black people are socially, economically and psychologically abused by the white systems, including university campuses”.

It must be noted that higher education grounds systems of knowledge production in the education of professionals and is implicated in making credible certain bodies of knowledge while marginalising others. In this instance, the university faced criticism for its European heritage, its endorsement of the universalisation of the white experience of the world as the sole valid experience and developmental trajectory, its use of European languages as the medium of instruction, its culture and symbols of whiteness, as well as for the cultural and emotional detachment of its personnel from black students (Lange 2021, p. 273). It was clear that the curriculum was used as an ideological means to protect privilege (Le Grange 2016). These recent student protest movements have highlighted the lack of attention on the link between colonialism and the historic and ongoing inequities in education and have not only brought attention to this unevenness, but also to the need to reform the curriculum by centring African realities. Here we see that social and structural transformations, including decolonisation, rarely occur in the absence of dissent, disruption, and protest. The dominant does not simply yield because they believe it to be the moral thing to do; rather, they only act when they are pushed to do so, in this case by the policies of the government.

Some public universities are committed to Africanisation and decolonisation; for example, the University of South Africa (UNISA) is home to the African Decolonial Research Network. The university is committed to accelerating the transformation of the curriculum, engaging with its own ongoing research in teaching and learning and providing professional development to educators and student support. Like other universities, UNISA has engaged with calls for curriculum transformation, indigenous knowledge advancement, and the Africanisation of the curriculum, confronting the challenges of multiculturalism and decoloniality scholarship. The focus on knowledge is not intended to completely exclude Western knowledge, but its purpose is “decentring it or perhaps deterritorializing it” (Le Grange 2016, p. 6). Here, it is a “borrowing and learning from, not the same as being dependent upon, there is a thinking through and beyond” (Ward 2017, p. 563). It would be simplistic to suggest that one could ignore the interconnections between the social and epistemological aspects of knowledge originating from both the West and the global South. However, the focus is on retrieving identity wherever possible and “defining clearly what the centre is” (Wa Thiong’o 1993, p. 33).

#### 4. Theological Education Embracing Decolonisation?

Theological education, like everything else in South Africa, has been shaped by structural racism, which has not disappeared with apartheid (Naidoo 2016a), and there are various dimensions of education that remain unchanged (Du Plessis 2021). In spite of the fact that all accredited theological education subscribes to the conventions of the *Higher Education South Africa Report* (2014, p. 7), i.e., “that higher education transformation entails decolonizing, deracialising, demasculinising and degendering, and engaging with ontological and epistemological issues in all their complexity, including their implications for research, methodology, scholarship, learning and teaching, curriculum and pedagogy”, a reluctance to engage with these critical issues still exists. Some academics view the concept of decolonisation as too ideological, even though every theological position corresponds to a specific ideology. As Brunsdon (2019, p. 1) states, “in South Africa it is politically and historically polarised to the point that the very issue invokes emotions of frustration and anger”. This comment alludes to white sensitivity; DiAngelo (2018, p. 3) states that “white fragility references a lack of ‘racial stamina’ that white people have for conversations about



race". Other academics consider the vision of decolonisation impossible considering the globalisation of knowledge and its relevance in light of internationalisation requirements (Naidoo 2016b, p. 4). Academics are reluctant as the African knowledge base is insufficiently developed due to the economics of publishing, the lack of research, and the scarcity of resources for scholarship, which could mean an inadvertent lowering of standards (Maluleke 2000, p. 103). Here, we note that the opposition from those in power serves to underscore the academy's status as a vestige of coloniality which is profoundly rooted in the social positioning that perpetually segregates and ascribes merit to certain individuals while disregarding others (Wynter 2003, p. 266).

In the main, faculties of theology at universities employ Western theology, which determines what is theologically normative while the focus on major issues of African culture and scholarship remains limited. This is because historically faculties have been dominated by white people. The universals created during the Enlightenment have held, as has the cognitive captivity of a theology steeped in the dominant tradition, the Reformed tradition privileged in South African universities. It has been argued that Western theology is normative, whereas other theologies, be they Black, liberation, or feminist theologies, are contextual or local, and limited in scope and perspective (Césaire 2000). Regrettably, due to the prevalence of Western theology, many local scholars even lack an understanding of the evolution of African theology or have not "engaged three decades of rigorous post-independence African scholarship" (Walls 2000, p. 1).

In a world of plurality and diversity, theology cannot speak universally because of the embodied nature of theology, where place does matter and sociality includes different languages, histories, cultures, or lands. The privileged canons of theological knowledge need to be dismantled, and the focus should be on developing inclusive perspectives that recognise diversity as a manifestation of God's creativity, and as a theological virtue. As Ward suggests, we need to overcome the concern of contamination and syncretism since theological purism does not exist. "There is no pure theology since theology is how we make sense of our world from within our context" (Ward 2017, p. 564).

Acknowledging the knowledge constraints of a dominant tradition or the "White bodies" modalities of curriculum knowledge production (Le Grange 2016, p. 5) allows for the deconstruction of policies and practices that can create more space for other denominational traditions. In this way, "provincializing' the (white) western context" (Chakrabarty 2000, p. 6) is possible. However, by virtue of its overarching nature, whiteness occupies a central position in all cultural and epistemological productions, thereby designating alternative points of view as "other" (Reddie 2020, p. 3). Regarding challenges in my academic discipline of practical theology, Andrews (2012, p. 9) suggests that they involve "understanding how the myths of colour-blindness, meritocracy and the refusal to dismantle socially and economically inherited white dominance function to distort strategies of social justice". The prevalence and excessive presence of whiteness results in an overpowering and disproportionate silencing of black voices. According to Van Wyngaard (2014, p. 160), salvation is not achieved by converting the affluent so that they stand in solidarity with the oppressed. Instead, salvation is found in an inclusive environment where no conversion is necessary, except for accepting and tolerating the 'other'. The act of observing the 'other' allows for the continued dominance and authority over the 'other' in the absence of colonial authorities. Whiteness is currently faced with the challenge of preserving its privilege in the face of black people having political, demographic, and cultural dominance (Steyn 2007, p. 423).

Within accredited private theological education, those involved in ministerial training at seminaries and theological colleges see the need for contextually relevant content, yet the focus is mostly on biblical and theological knowledge aligned with missionary discourse. The fear towards decolonisation is due to the fact that it is seen as carrying political implications, and that the infiltration of liberal ideologies could result in the rejection of biblical truth. Some institutions might be hesitant to embrace social justice due to historical conservatism or a focus on preserving traditional teachings and practices. For

example, in the evangelical tradition, Tite Tienou states that institutions are “only willing to tolerate evangelicals of color to the extent that they can be safely incorporated within white evangelicalism, they add theological difference without theological consequence” (Smith 2019, p. 6). These institutional cultures evidence unchanged spaces (Naidoo 2016a) maintaining the status quo. The effects of coloniality are not only present in the mind but extend to lived experience. As a consequence, individuals develop unresolved tensions that manifest themselves in interpersonal relationships and institutional identities. The failure to see our shared humanity as a starting point, the persistent racialised and segregated socialisation, and the emergence of new kinds of segregation all undermine our shared identity and highlight our distinctions. To avoid the ‘colour-blind’ rhetoric and the assimilation of black students into the dominant culture, ‘difficult’ conversations are needed to acknowledge the power dynamics within institutional cultures and work towards a more honest and liberative space.

While the resistance to decolonisation continues, theology in this context is facing growing demands to communicate using a language that is true to the narrative and perspective of Christianity and to address the felt experiences of people. It is about “acknowledging, interpreting and enhancing agency of African Christians” (Maluleke 2000, p. 105) in their everyday battles against economic and cultural challenges that want to exclude them. It is about viewing the other with dignity and equality. By sustaining the status quo of unevenness in education, this adds to the complicity with coloniality, which is the same as the complicity of the Christian missionary enterprise with the structures of colonialism. Decoloniality permits us to see how coloniality has allowed certain forms of existence, framed by colonial ways of being, to become business as usual in the present time.

### 5. Deepening Decolonisation Praxis amongst Educators

Because of the complicity of theological education in sustaining white privilege and universal theological knowledge, it must work harder to decolonise harmful patterns of relating. More recently, and since the #Fee Must Fall movement, a few dedicated academics have begun to actively support decolonisation and are exerting considerable effort to promote its implementation. Decolonial theologies are establishing a distinct position within theological discourses, aiming to actively engage in the worldwide endeavour to achieve a comprehensive decolonisation that fully accomplishes historical liberation (Ramantswana 2016; Vellem 2017; Mashau 2018; Urbaniak 2019). The diversity of perspectives includes Black theology, which challenges the conventional ideas of Western Christianity that exclude or ignore the Black experience and promotes a critical understanding of different types of injustices that impact Black individuals (Reddie 2020). According to Cone (1990, p. 40), by “conscientising and empowering Black students through biblical hermeneutics and Black theological reflection, a critical re-reading of African histories is possible together with the notion of Black self-determination”. African theology is viewed as an inherently decolonial discipline focused on theologising African realities (Sakupapa 2018). These theologies will continue the work of deconstructing Western cultural and intellectual dominance and should create alternative ways of education that involve “diverse, truth-telling, and healing communities that defy how we presently exist” (Day 2021, p. 128).

Thus far, attention has been placed on the epistemological dimensions of decolonisation, and despite the emergence of a decolonial discourse, this has not been translated into the theological curriculum. Here, the emphasis is on the coloniality of being and the humanisation of theological education. What is needed is a theological education that is unifying, humanising, that has a dignifying potential committed to the Christian values of personhood and community, and that is open to the building of humane patterns of social life. Curriculum changes towards that kind of goal would depend on the work of educators, yet there has been minimal focus on the educators who are supposed to create the decolonisation imperatives. Additionally, teaching occurs with both deliberate and unintentional cultural assumptions on the part of the educator. Given that academic readiness and ownership are among the obstacles faced, it is important to note that decolonisation “is

about the consciousness and rejection of values, norms, customs and worldviews imposed by the [former] colonisers" (Césaire 2000, p. 89). Consciousness is the defining characteristic of humanity; it enables individuals to exercise their freedom as authors and independent actors in shaping history, rather than being mere subjects of it. As Fanon (1967) stated, decolonisation is not possible without personal freedom and personal liberation. Academics who are epistemologically curious question what they know and why things work the way they do, as well as how those things affect their world (Freire [1973] 1990). It is important to acknowledge and address the mistakes made as a society and to be prepared to educate ourselves for a completely new future.

Merely altering the curriculum would only provide a superficial solution without the essential underlying shift in the worldviews and consciousness of theological educators. Moreover, religious communities have faith in the idea that internal spiritual and psychological growth can lead to external practice and behaviour changes. It begins with the ontology of the educator focusing on reflective 'modes of being' in response to modernity's violence. For educators, it will entail recognising and accepting one's privilege, engaging in personal growth, and practicing self-reflection to abandon outdated knowledge. Decolonisation must address and overcome the internalised cognitive patterns and enduring vestiges of racial positioning. It is about how we view ourselves and others, and overcoming the deformation of coloniality.

The concept of dignity is significant here as it includes both an intrinsic dignity, i.e., personal worth and value, but also engagement and seeing people in a respectful way, which is a relational dignity. It supports the preservation of a moral framework that upholds the principle of inherent equality among all individuals. Paul Ricoeur (1992, p. 28) stresses that, in an ethics of care, achieving a good life cannot be achieved unless it is "with and for others". Decolonisation here "continues to examine and pursue the full repercussions of a praxis of being human in a shared world" (Wynter 2003, p. 265); this kind of real political action depends on ontology, and on being able to respond to it.

At the same time, critical self-reflection and the appraisal of one's theological education and how colonialism has shaped it is one approach to acknowledging colonial difference. For educators, this may involve analysing theological texts, teachings, and practices to gauge whether they reflect the perspectives and experiences of persons from diverse cultural and racial origins. It is also about writing consciously from the African context, culture, and worldview, and the recognition of complicity with Western conceptual models and dependence on key scholars. This process of conscientisation (Freire [1973] 1990) will require the prioritisation of honesty and transparency, the crossing of borders towards the 'other', and the observance of human dignity.

Fundamental internal change should be evident inside the theological institutions as well. For instance, the lack of diversity in institutions in terms of race, gender, and class poses a hurdle to the development of an alternative paradigm. Educators are also expected to promote social justice in an unjust world so that students and graduates will become the 'critical mass' of people who are prepared to advocate for change. Nurturing transformative agents for church and society involves an ongoing process of de-learning or unlearning the colonial mindset.

## 6. Conclusions

This article examined the current state of theological education in South Africa using the analytical framework of decolonisation which challenges the racialised undertones of theological interpretations that have evolved to be white and normative, and which advocates for the incorporation of marginalised knowledge. The transformation of the higher education landscape requires all theological training entities to engage with the ideals of social justice and support political change, yet hesitancy towards the implementation of such a transformation exists amongst educators. By unpacking the enduring logics of coloniality, this article underlined the fact that theological education is complicit in sustaining colonial difference. This article gave special attention to the consciousness



of educators and the need for self-reflexivity, which can begin to make a difference in theological education by helping it to embrace the mandate of decolonisation.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Data Availability Statement:** No new data were created.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## References

- Andrews, Dale. 2012. *Practical Theology for Black Churches: Bridging Black Theology and African American Folk Religion*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Bediako, Kwame. 1995. *Christianity in Africa*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books.
- Brunsdon, R. Alfred. 2019. "Selfishly backward" or "selflessly forward?": A white male's insider perspective on a challenge and opportunity of decolonisation for practical theology in the South African context. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 75: 1–8. [CrossRef]
- Césaire, Aime. 2000. *Discourse on Colonialism*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. 2000. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Cone, James. 1990. *A Black Theology of Liberation*. New York: Maryknoll.
- Day, Kerri. 2021. *Notes of a Native Daughter: Testifying in Theological Education*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- de Sousa Santos, Boaventura. 2007. Beyond abyssal thinking: From global lines to ecologies of knowledges. *Review* 30: 45–89.
- de Sousa Santos, Boaventura. 2018. *The End of the Cognitive Empire: The Coming of Age of Epistemology of the South*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- DiAngelo, Robin. 2018. *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Dreyer, Jaco S. 2017. Practical theology and the call for the decolonisation of higher education in South Africa: Reflections and proposals. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 73: 1–9. [CrossRef]
- Du Plessis, Pierre. 2021. Decolonisation of education in South Africa: Challenges to decolonise the university curriculum. *South African Journal of Higher Education* 35: 54–69. [CrossRef]
- Fanon, Frantz. 1967. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Constance Farrington. London: Penguin.
- Freire, Paulo. 1990. *Education for Critical Consciousness*. New York: Continuum. First published 1973.
- Grosfoguel, Ramon. 2007. The epistemic decolonial turn: Beyond political- economy paradigms. *Cultural Studies* 21: 203–46. [CrossRef]
- Hanciles, Jehu. 2008. 'African Christianity, globalization and mission: Marginalizing the center. In *Interpreting Contemporary Christianity: Global Processes and Local Identities*. Edited by Ogbu Uke Kalu and Low Elaine. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, pp. 71–92.
- Heleta, Savo. 2018. Decolonizing Knowledge in South Africa: Dismantling the 'pedagogy of big lies. *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 40: 47–65. [CrossRef]
- Higher Education South Africa Report. 2014. HESA presentation to the Portfolio Committee on Higher Education and Training. South African Higher Education in the 20th Year of Democracy: Contexts, Achievements and Key Challenges. Available online: <https://static.pmg.org.za/140305hesa.pdf> (accessed on 12 October 2023).
- Hinze, Bradford E. 2016. *Decolonizing everyday practices: Sites of struggle in church and society*. Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America. Volume 71, pp. 46–61. Available online: <https://ejournals.bc.edu/index.php/ctsa/issue/view/931> (accessed on 24 January 2024).
- Jansen, Jonathan. 2017. *Sense and Non-Sense in Decolonization of Curriculum: As by Fire the End of the South African University*. Cape Town: Tafelberg.
- Kang, Namsoon. 2010. Envisioning Postcolonial Theological Education: Dilemmas and Possibilities. In *Theological Education in World Christianity*. Edited by Werner Dietrich, Esterline David, Kang Namsoon and Raja Joshua. Oxford: Regnum, pp. 30–41.
- Lange, Lis. 2021. South African universities between decolonisation and the Fourth Industrial Revolution. In *The Responsive University and the Crisis in South Africa*. Edited by Brink Chris. Leiden: Brill, pp. 272–99.
- Le Grange, Lesley. 2016. Decolonising the university curriculum. *South African Journal of Higher Education* 30: 1–12.
- Maldonado-Torres, Nelson. 2008. *Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Maluleke, Sam. Tinyiko. 2000. The rediscovery of the agency of Africans. *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 4: 104–8.
- Marzagora, Sara. 2016. The Humanism of Reconstruction: African Intellectuals, Decolonial Critical Theory and the Opposition to the "Posts" (postmodernism, poststructuralism, postcolonialism). *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 28: 161–78. [CrossRef]
- Mashau, Derrick. Thinandavha. 2018. Unshackling the chains of coloniality: Reimagining decoloniality, Africanisation and Reformation for a non-racial South Africa. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 74: 1–9. [CrossRef]
- Mbembe, Joseph. Achille. 2016. Decolonizing the University: New Directions. *Arts & Humanities in Higher Education* 15: 29–45.
- Mignolo, D. Walter. 2011. Epistemic Disobedience and the Decolonial Option: A Manifesto. *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 1: 44–66. [CrossRef]
- Mignolo, Walter. 2007. Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of De-Coloniality. *Cultural Studies* 21: 449–514. [CrossRef]

- Mkandawire, Thandika, ed. 2005. *African Intellectuals: Rethinking Politics, Language, Gender and Development Modern Democracy*. New York: Harper and Brothers.
- Naidoo, Marilyn. 2016a. An ethnographic study on managing diversity in two protestant theological colleges. *HTS Theological Studies* 74: 1–8. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Naidoo, Marilyn. 2016b. Overcoming alienation in Africanising theological education. *HTS Theological Studies* 72: 1–8. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Sabelo. 2013. The Entrapment of Africa within the Global Colonial Matrices of Power: Eurocentrism, Coloniality and Deimperialization in the Twenty-first Century. *Journal of Developing Societies* 29: 331–53. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Nell, Ian. 2018. We know to whom we belong? The drama of ministerial practice in a postcolonial African context. *Verbum et Ecclesia* 39: 1–8. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Quijano, Aníbal. 2000. Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America. *Nepantla: Views from the South* 1: 533–80. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Ramantswana, Hulisani. 2016. Decolonising Biblical Hermeneutics in the (South) African Context. *Acta Theologica* 24: 178–203.
- Reddie, Anthony. 2020. Reassessing the Inculcation of an Anti-Racist Ethic for Christian Ministry: From Racism Awareness to Deconstructing Whiteness. *Religions* 11: 497. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Reddie, Anthony. 2021. Being(s) in the World: Navigating the Macro Changes in Pastoral Theology in a Neo-Liberal Age. *International Journal of Practical Theology* 25: 132–40. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Ricoeur, Paul. 1992. *Oneself as Another*. London: University of Chicago Press.
- Sakupapa, Chalwe. Teddy. 2018. The Decolonising Content of African Theology and the Decolonisation of African Theology: Reflections on a Decolonial Future for African Theology. *Missionalia* 46: 406–24.
- Smith, Andrea. 2019. *From Racial Reconciliation to Racial Justice in Christian Evangelicalism*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Smith, R. Drew. 2015. Introduction. In *Contesting Post-Racialism: Conflicted Churches in the United States and South Africa*. Edited by Smith R. Drew, William Ackah, Anthony G. Reddie and Rothney S Tshaka. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, pp. 3–10.
- Smith, Tuhiwai. Linda. 1999. *Decolonising Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London: Zed Books.
- Soudien, Chris. 2009. Multicultural education in South Africa. In *The Routledge International Companion to Multicultural Education*. Edited by James A. Banks. London: Routledge, pp. 146–58.
- Steyn, Melissa. 2007. As the postcolonial moment deepens: A response to Green, Sonn, and Matsebula. *South African Journal of Psychology* 37: 420–24. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Urbaniak, Jakub. 2019. James Cone vis-a-vis African Religiosity: A Decolonial Perspective. *HTS Theological Studies* 75: 1–8. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Van Wyngaard, Johannes. George. 2014. The Language of ‘Diversity’ in Reconstructing Whiteness in the Dutch Reformed Church. In *Churches, Blackness and Contested Multiculturalism*. Edited by Smith R. Drew, William Ackah and Anthony George Reddie. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 157–70.
- Vellem, Vhumani. 2017. Un-Thinking the West: The Spirit of Doing Black Theology of Liberation in Decolonial Times. *HTS Theological Studies* 73: 1–8. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Wa Thiong’o, Ngugi. 1993. *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers.
- Walls, Andrew. 2000. Of Ivory Towers and Ashrams some reflections on theological scholarship in Africa. *Journal of African Christian Thought* 3: 1–2.
- Ward, Graham. 2017. Decolonizing Theology. *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 3: 561–84. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Wynter, Sylvia. 2003. Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human after Man, its Overrepresentation: An Argument. *CR: The New Continental Review* 3: 257–337. [\[CrossRef\]](#)

**Disclaimer/Publisher’s Note:** The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.