

Changing (decolonizing?) the curriculum

Instead of requiring Senate, faculty and/or departmental committees to do their jobs, VC Price and the Fallist-dominated Students' Representative Council created the Curriculum Change Working Group (CCWG). It is [led](#) by "black academics and students traditionally excluded from formal institutional structures and processes of curriculum oversight" and "intimately intertwined with student mobilisation". Members of the CCWG maintain that the "notion of blackness in this context extends beyond simply a racial category". It embraces those who have a particular "[consciousness around coloniality](#)". It is premised on the belief that there is a "narrow approach often adopted in [current] curricula, particularly towards scholarship on and in Africa" that "perpetuat[es] dominant cultural assumptions and privileging particular epistemologies from the global North while reinforcing existing unequal and racialized relations of power".

According to Price, the group has "considerable experience, knowledge and expertise related to the development of contextually and socially relevant curricula and are well versed in the use of inclusive approaches to teaching and learning". Members of the CCWG collaborated closely with faculty academic representatives, student representatives from faculty councils and those academics and students "who wanted to get involved". Price urged the CCWG to engage with Fallists after it became clear that there was deadlock between them and university's management.

Initially, the CCWG was co-chaired by Assoc. Prof. Harry Garuba (Acting Deputy Dean: Research and Postgraduate Affairs) and Assoc. Prof. Elelwani Ramugondo (Occupational Therapy). The other members of the Group were Prof. Sandra Klopper (DVC: Teaching and Learning), Prof. Sakhela Buhlungu (Dean: Humanities), Prof. Harsha Kathard (Department of Health Sciences Education), Assoc. Prof. Denver Hendricks (Deputy Dean: Health Sciences), Dr Kasturi Behari-Leak (Academic Staff Development, CHED), Goitsione Mokou (Education Masters student), Rorisang Moseli (SRC President), and Brian Kamanzi (RMF and Engineering Masters student). Soon after its establishment, Profs Klopper and Buhlungu ceased to serve on the CCWG.

CCWG members contributed to an [article](#) in *The Conversation* that gives a "clear and practical example" of the group's work. This involved getting the late Dean of Health Sciences to [capitulate](#) to Fallists' demands when they occupied his offices for two weeks, provided that they resumed attending classes. The protesting Health Sciences students did not return to class.

Thereafter, Transformation DVC Feris and the CCWG [used](#) a theoretical framework based "critical realism" to get to work.

What is Critical Realism? How does it work? [Critical realism](#) (CR) represents a heterogeneous assemblage of elements produced by a broad alliance of social theorists and researchers trying to develop a “properly [Post-Positivist](#)” (PP) social science.

CRPPists believe that:

1. many different things qualify as research;
2. scientific theory and ‘real world’ practice cannot be kept separate;
3. one cannot afford to ignore beliefs for the sake of ‘just the facts’;
4. the researchers’ motivations for and commitment to research are central and crucial to the enterprise; and
5. the idea that research is concerned only with scientifically correct techniques for collecting and categorizing information is now inadequate.

In ‘reality’, CR is not an empirical program. It is not a methodology. It is not even truly a theory, because it explains nothing. It asserts that much of reality exists and operates independently of our awareness or knowledge of it. It emphasizes questioning-and-critical-ontology and pluralism over logic-based, scientific, epistemological competition that filters out less viable ideas and approaches based on their ability to explain phenomena and answer clear-cut questions.

In short, in contrast the Cartesian view: “I **THINK** therefore I am”, CRPPists think because they **ARE**. Knowledge and truth have only ‘relative/situational/contextual’ reality that is always historically, socially, contextually, culturally and (according to the CCWG,) at least partially racially situated. There are no truth values or criteria of rationality that exist outside of historical time and current social context. The larger the number of CRPPists involved and the more ‘plural’ their answers/solutions, the longer it takes to pick the ones to implement, let alone get on with the job.

CRPPists use their “passion and intuition” to isolate “subtle underlying and invisible mechanisms”, in the light of perceived historical and present transient practices/processes, to show how these acted/act as negative influences. Their goal is to demonstrate that all representations and particular perspectives have limitations. The “scientific method” is particularly fallible because its proponents are blinkered by objectivity, and the scientific knowledge they use to formulate conceptual frameworks is not unique evidence in parsing the empirical world.

CCWG Progress to Date – Confirming my initial [concerns](#) vis-à-vis the creation of the CCWG, even a cursory reading of the CCWG’s recently released summary report to date [Curriculum Change Framework](#), reveals why it is described as a ‘framework’ and not a report, let alone a ‘strategy’.

First, it avoids focusing on curriculum change at UCT specifically by maintaining that “recent student-led protests in the South African Higher Education sector can therefore not be understood outside of the broader national and global political, economic and socio-historical context”, and without a “very strongly forged student-worker alliance”. They don’t define the term “worker”, but this presumably means ALL employees at UCT. Although academic comparison with other local and comparable international universities could contribute to UCT’s adaptive educational evolution, forcing those involved with the process of decolonization to consider politics, economics and sociology (even *sensu stricto* locally) makes it an enormously challenging task. Moreover, instead of dealing with curriculum change, the CCWG also calls for a “de-commodification of higher education” because “corporatisation has become a driving force within the academy”. This overwhelming institutional ‘cancer’ has been known for more than a decade since the [‘Moran Report’](#) – apparently unread by the CCWG.

Instead, the CCWG collectively relies on rhetoric vis-à-vis “the distinction between ‘who is human and who is not’ within the academy” and the “great symbolic power” of Rhodes’ statue that “glorifies a mass-murderer who exploited black labour and stole land from indigenous people”. The statue’s “presence erases black history and is an act of violence against black [POC] students, workers and staff.”

The CCWG never identifies just who at UCT is not “human”, except maybe balaclava-clad, stone-throwing, fire-bombing members of ‘constituencies’ who persist in overt defamation, intimidation, destruction and violence. My [research](#) on Rhodes indicates that no “constituency” within UCT ever formally celebrated the man or his legacy in any regular or special manner. There is no annual celebration of his [and my] birthday (5 July), and there were no centennial events in 1953 and 2002 marking his years of birth and death. Perhaps UCT undergraduate males should have emulated their colleagues from Harvard University, where it is a ritual prank (and no vulgar sign of disrespect) to urinate on the statue of John Harvard.

Then the CCWG Framework shifts focus to ‘anatomy’, stating that “bodies of a particular kind (white, and generally male) are perceived as trustworthy, and are never to be challenged”. This unsubstantiated denigration has no place in a non-racial tertiary institution founded on “the untrammelled pursuit of the truth” and which provides “spaces for learning that allow for questioning, without any bounds”.

In addition to rhetoric, the CCWG Framework invokes the premise that “curriculum creation and enactment cannot be imagined as independent of a given socio-political structure and context and its inherent moral codes” and must “reflect the critical relationship between education and identity formation of the ideal learner-subject”. Its members (neither individually nor collectively) provide neither a justification for key roles for politics and populism in education or research, nor an exposition of “identity formation” or the “ideal learner-subject”. All the Framework does is refer to a “coloniality of being that gives a human being his, her or their ontological density”. This involves the assumption of a southern African “Black Colonial Being”, [invoking](#) German philosopher Prof. [Martin Heidegger’s “Dasein”](#). Dasein a “primal nature of being”, a self-identity based on a “shared history and *destiny*” also underpinned by the anti-Cartesian ontology-based belief: “I think because I AM”. This collective-think, exclusionary ethos ‘worked’ for a few years for Hitler and his Nazis, who were bent on (with Heidegger’s explicit support) wiping out Jewry and achieving world domination via war.

‘Given’ this premise, “any curriculum change process must consider the question of unintended consequences for those who are powerless to self-determine and self-actualise in their own interests”. The Framework nowhere defines “unintended consequences” or identifies “who are powerless”. The Fallists (and the policy-challenging Black Academic Caucus that backs them totally) who intimidated defenceless women, burnt bakkies, busses and offices (including Price’s) and stoned/beat security guards seem pretty “powerful” to me. The Framework then moves on to a more extensive explication of ‘power’.

Ultimately, “knowledge-power relations [not rational debate?] regulate what is considered legitimate knowledge and validate the reproduction of the ideal social subject”. “Curriculum change, particularly when called for by students, is therefore essentially about contesting power”. In the case of UCT, there is currently a power struggle between Fallists (mainly from the Faculties of Health Sciences and Humanities and the BAC) vs the current Commodified/Corporatized, socially engineering CHED and decimated Executive. The un-consulted, poorly represented “Silenced Majority” of students and academics who came to UCT to learn and conduct research are stuck in the middle and live in fear of attack – or succumb to it.

The Framework’s “Recommendations” favour a Fallist/BAC hegemony which will provide “leadership that has a proven track-record in addressing inequities in the academy, and that is sensitive to what it means and feels like to be marginalised”. Because current “knowledge production is regarded as potentially violent towards marginalized communities”, colonialist literature must go and be replaced by “texts from the epistemologically disenfranchised”. Because the “continued and uncritical use of traditional epistemologies, theories, methodologies and

ideologies” “reproduces the status quo in ways that are socially unjust, exclusionary and limiting, “the ‘new’ educators need to be “individuals and groups from marginalized communities”. They will also “increasingly become drivers of research” within the academy. Even knowledge needs to be ‘re-understood’.

In short: “Knowledge must be understood as both situational and relational, with questions rather than method, driving knowledge production.” “Transdisciplinarity must be encouraged.” “A pedagogy of being and doing should be embraced, so that pedagogic relationships are imbued with a consciousness that is inclusive, socially just and constructive.” This is because current curricula are “embedded with colonial lies” and need to be “disrupted”. This interpretation stands in sharp contrast to VC T.B. Davie’s vision that UCT must be dedicated to “the advancement of knowledge by the methods of study and research founded on absolute intellectual integrity and pursued in an atmosphere of academic freedom”. The primary goal of a “Real” university is the “untrammelled pursuit of truth and not what it is demanded by others for the purposes of sectional, political, religious or ideological dogmas or beliefs”.

But, the Framework is still not finished. The current racist methods of assessment of students (examinations and production of publishable dissertations?) and academics (the current stringent policies relating to *ad hominem* promotion?) at UCT have to go. “Assessment should be re-conceptualised as social practice in order to surface challenges that accompany it.” The CCWG nowhere explains how “surfacing” is to be applied.

In all this “students must play a critical role”. Does this mean that students can unilaterally overhaul/veto what UCT stands for, who should be employed/promoted and how she should function?

My rejoinder - I deal with the CCWG Framework by asking questions of, and making requests to, members of the CCWG (individually and collectively) that stem from my research.

What are the current socially unjust, exclusionary and limiting traditional epistemologies, theories, methodologies and ideologies that negatively impact anyone at UCT?

Who are their racist promoters?

Who are the excluded leaders that have proven track-records in addressing inequities in the UCT academy?

Give examples of knowledge production during post-1950 (and especially post-1980) UCT that was “violent” towards “marginalized” constituencies.

What is the violent colonialist literature that must go? Provide a list of alternative non-violent replacement texts authored by the epistemologically disenfranchised.

Who are the ‘new’, multi-lingual educators and researchers from marginalized communities that have been produced by nearly three decades of ASP, ADP, CHED in general, and members of the BAC in particular?

How can knowledge be understood as only situational and relational, without regard to competing ideas and evidence? Some who supported Apartheid or failed to take the necessary local and global action to stop it claimed that South Africa’s situation during the 1950s and 60s in relation to that in many countries in Africa to the north and within the Cold War ‘justified’ a lack of intervention.

Finally, about the role of students in this process, I quote VC Ramphela:

“Given their status as a transient population ... students cannot be allowed to participate in decisions where conflicts of interest are so glaring as to make a mockery of the integrity of higher-education institutions.”

Perhaps the Fallists themselves need to be quoted to reveal their ‘true’ aims. Their strategy has been revealed vividly by Fallist senior academic Dr Lwazi Lushaba (UCT Political Studies) who, on 1 November 2017, [made no bones](#) about it at the UCT Assembly co-chaired by UCT Council and IRTC-SC vice-chairperson Debbie Budlender. He said *inter alia*:

“This struggle is not for poor people. It is for Black people.” “If you are Black, you are disadvantaged in every respect. If you are White, you are advantaged in every respect.” UCT continues to “teach precisely the same ideas it taught during Apartheid to perpetuate the colonial system”. “There is a structure [current *ad hominem* promotion procedures] that ensures that we are kept outside of the academy. This is not accidental. It is by design.” “We must tell the White people who are threatening to walk away that a time will come along soon when we will run UCT on our own and give them a new value system and not at the whim of ‘White’ sentiment.”

Render unto the CCWG - To give the CCWG all the credit it is due, in addition to persuading the late Dean of Health Science to capitulate to the demands of Fallist students who invaded and occupied

the faculty's offices for two weeks, it is necessary to outline its achievements in the decolonization of specific disciplines. Curiously, rather than choosing a discipline in the Humanities or Health Sciences with which they are most competent to assess, Transformation DVC Feris [she is mentioned only once in the Framework and her surname is mis-spelled "Ferris"] and members of the CCWG collectively chose to focus on Mathematics.

What transpired has come to be known as the "Raju Affair". The "Affair" is discussed in great detail in four pieces: [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#). Curiously, in their deliberations, the CCWG apparently did not consult with two DVCs ([Phakeng](#) and [Reddy](#)), who are highly NRF-rated mathematical scientists and educators, or any senior academic within UCT's Department of Mathematics and Applied Mathematics. First, some background.

The Department of Mathematics and Applied Mathematics (MAM) at UCT is the top-rated such department in Africa, with 20 NRF rated researchers, including 1 P and 5 A-rated researchers. Although I don't have access to the relevant sources, I gainsay that it ranks among the top 50 maths departments worldwide. This pre-eminence did not happen by accident. It also, as outlined above, MAM has a long tradition in supporting POC-undergrads.

The CCWG invited Prof. C.K. Raju to help decolonize mathematics, although they only mention him once in their Framework. Raju is perhaps most noted for: his views that infinitesimal calculus was developed in India and transmitted by missionaries to Europe where it was distorted to conform to the dictates of Christian religious authoritarians; and that [Albert Einstein](#)'s theories of special and general relativity were anticipated much earlier by [Henri Poincaré](#) and were flawed [corrected by Raju] to the extent that much of modern physics needs to be reformulated.

Raju's current activities as a "Distinguished Professor" involve "conducting, promoting and facilitating studies and research in the broad areas of history, philosophy, culture, science and technology", and "undertaking and promoting research in relation to the past, the present and the future courses, contents, and trends of civilizations in general, and Indian civilization in particular". However, ALL UCT's mathematical scientists (including physicists, chemists, engineers, biologists, etc.) (who rarely agree on matters scientific) concur that Raju grossly mis-represented the history of Mathematics in general and of formal maths in particular and used *ad hominem* attacks rather than logical arguments to promote decolonization and 'deal' with his critics. He referred to the late Stephen Hawking and his close UCT-based collaborator [George Ellis](#) as a fraud and Apartheid scientist respectively.

I list but a few [of many, many] noteworthy Raju quotes to back up my conclusions:

Formal mathematicians facilitated and directed astronomical observation missions in order to help the French better determine the location of Haiti to help make the delivery of slaves and export of the products of their labour more efficient.

Many in the UCT Faculty of Science judge on prejudice rather than academic content: thus, residual prejudices from Apartheid may be a major cause of the poor performance of black students.

A [false history of science was used to initiate colonial education](#), in support of colonialism. This false history persists.

[Pythagoras is myth](#) and there is [no historical evidence for Euclid](#).

Deductive proof doesn't lead to valid knowledge.

Formal, logic-based mathematics creates a slave mentality.

The entire colonial tradition of education teaches us to trust only Western-approved experts, and distrust everyone else.

The superiority of [ganita] his [alternative philosophy of zeroism-based mathematics](#) -, has been demonstrated by "[teaching experiments performed](#) with eight groups in five universities in three countries – Malaysia, [Iran](#) and [India](#)". It is so easy that the [calculus can be taught in five days](#)".

Using Zeroism, he have provided [a better theory of gravitation](#) arising from correcting Newton's wrong metaphysical presumptions about calculus.

Academic imperialism begins with Western education, which has not been seriously challenged in hard sciences. Colonialism changed the system of education as a key means of containing revolt, and stabilising Western rule.

We need to construct a new pedagogy, particularly in the hard sciences, and demonstrate its practical value, to dismantle the Western power structure at the level of higher-education and research.

The point about academic imperialism is not just to talk about it, but to end it.

When George Ellis, I and several other [Fellows](#) of UCT objected to the CCWG's procedures and actions, VC Price undertook to convene meeting of Fellows and selected academics to comment on them. This meeting was never held.

Possible future CCWG forays? - Another possible direction that the CCWG might pursue is to [attempt](#) to reify human races. I illustrate this with quotes from a leading decolonist philosopher, [Achille Mbembe](#) (who is highly touted by DVC [Liz Lange](#)) and focuses on genomic evidence (i.e. based on an organism's complete set of DNA):

“Race has once again re-entered the domain of biological truth, viewed now through a molecular gaze. A new molecular deployment of race has emerged out of genomic thinking.”

“Worldwide, we witness a renewed interest in the identification of biological differences.”

“Genomics, for instance, has produced new complexity into the figure of humanity.”

“We now realize that there is probably more to race than we ever imagined.”

If Mbembe is suggesting that the ability to comprehensively investigate the structure, function, mapping and evolution of human DNA means that the biological ontology of human races can or needs to be revisited, let alone reified, he is seriously mistaken. But, because Mbembe's publication cites no supporting research for his views, it is not possible to track down the evidence for his stance. For more information on the utility of genomics in 'scientific' racism see [here](#) and [here](#).