Decolonizing Communication Studies

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Edited by

Kehbuma Langmia

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This book edition is dedicated to all those communication scholars who are focused on decolonizing the communication discipline.

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INTRODUCTION

KEHBUMA LANGMIA

"In the colonial context there is no truthful behavior."
Frantz Fanon

Do Black lives matter in communications studies?

I pose this question as western civilization continues its march to the brink of collapse driven by political strife, growing inequality, climate change, and a pandemic which is worsening racial gaps. All civilizations end. All empires end. Everything is subject to decay and deterioration. Which means that we have to find opportunities in the chaos and uncertainty and be brave enough to create something new.

To achieve this new future, we need now more than ever what Asante (2020, 39) has termed "audacity of memory". With the memory that humankind originated from Africa, there is apparently no reason, whatsoever, why Africans, according to Molefi Asante, the Black race today should be on the "periphery of humanity" (Asante, 2020, 24).

When is the communication discipline going to assume independence from other disciplines in the social sciences and humanities? Why do we still borrow theoretical and methodological frameworks from anthropology, sociology, political science, history, and ethnography? Ama Mazama is right when she says that western theories are used as weapons of mental incarceration and westernization. A plethora of communication-driven theories like agenda setting, social learning, cognitive dissonance, magic bullet, spiral of silence, propaganda, public sphere, group think, cultivation, etc. have Euro-American geo-political and socio-cultural roots. But the communication studies discipline has spread its tentacles to mass and media communication schools and departments in Asia, Africa, Middle East and the Caribbeans. The discipline is presently in the state of what Emeka Nwadiora calls "psychological homelessness" (Asante, 2020, 59). In the age of digital and electronic communication, the communication discipline

needs its own paradigm shift that responds to the changing phase of human communication landscape before assuming the role of interdependence with some discipline in the humanities, social science, and classics. We cannot continue to borrow ourselves into the future. We will be bankrupt.

With the knowledge that writing as mankind knows it originated with the hieroglyphics of Kemet a thousand years before Christ, there is no fundamental rationale for the discipline to be so heavily Europeanized and Americanized. Authors of this volume, two centuries after the Berlin Conference of 1884/1885 that subjugated Africa and Africans to the lowest rung of human growth on planet earth, have unearthed what seems to be the rationale for why the communication studies discipline needs to be decolonized and to some extent de-westernized to accommodate and include all humankind involved in all forms of communication. By decolonization, we mean Afrocentric communicative tendencies that are visibly gleaned among interactants of African descent that have been passed down from generation to generation (more on this in the book).

To decolonize is to unshackle the cocoon of epistemologically imposed social and cultural norms that people outside the periphery of Europe and America have been subjected to in Africa since the Berlin Conference of 1884/1885. The continent and those that were forced on slave ships to the new world without their consent to the Americas and Europe have internalized western ways of life that are supposedly superior to the ones they have been used to. The educational curricula regardless of discipline in Africa and outside Africa on people with African descent, have been colonized. That means they have been taught that Africa has no history (Asante, 2015) and so does not have any role in geopolitical diplomacy without being 'hand-held' by their colonial masters. This means that for more than 400 years, people of Black ancestry have imbibed foreign educational disciplines, communication studies inclusive, without their role in influencing the curricula and pedagogical standpoints. It means that in the academia, when White supremacy sneezes the minority nations catch not just cold, but that the cold eventually turns to pneumonia. If the communication studies discipline continues on this path (McCann, Mack & Self, 2020) when are we non-western communication scholars going to experience scholastic renaissance that changes the paradigm shift for the next generation? We can only influence the trajectory of the communication discipline if we strive to harvest socio-cultural, political, and economic foundational resources from non-western countries that show us as players and not pawns in the academic journey of self-empowerment. If our minds

are disentangled from the cocoon of western psycho-cognitive imprisonment, we will subsequently liberate our discipline from westerners who still have a firm foothold on the direction of the discipline as if we don't matter. This was one of the reasons we decided in 2018 to publish the book titled *Black/Africana communication* theory. This was the beginning for us to start turning the corner by making our voices heard in the wilderness of imposed silence on the contribution of African scholars in the growth of the communication discipline. In short, dependency has its drawbacks. Let it not become the cankerworm or the cancer in our cognitive universe as we wallow in this scholarly journey to assert our wellbeing that the Black communication scholar also matters. We are determined to set the record straight by pushing our own epistemic communicative resources from Africa. This volume has done just that.

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CHAPTER 1

DECOLONISING CURRICULA: UNRAVELLING THE MASTER SIGNIFIER IN STUDENTS' DISCOURSE FROM THEIR DEMANDS DURING THE #FEESMUSTFALL PROTEST IN SOUTH AFRICA

GLENDA DANIELS
UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

More than two decades into the democratic South Africa students saw the cracks of inequality, embarked upon the #feesmustfall protests and demanded their universities "transform" through a "decolonialised" curricula. What did this mean to them? To analyse this, the chapter deploys some theoretical conceptual tools borrowed from political philosophy as well as an analysis of the actual discourse of the students. This chapter used a sample of comments from a survey of students at the Media Studies department at Wits University, in 2015-16, collated by myself as lecturer, to attempt to deconstruct what students desired when they demanded a decolonised curricula in media studies. The latter issue of decolonisation, which has also been recently theorised by scholars of the global South: Chiumbu and Iqani (2020), Langmia (2018), Mutsvairo *et al* (2021), Chasi (2014) Mano (2015), Rodny- Gumede (2018) Milton (2019) Frassineli (2018).

So, while there is the above literature, and this continues to emerge, on decolonisation of universities and in particular for this chapter, on communication and media, nonetheless in 2015, as educators, we stood at a crossroads to be interpellated (hailed or "called out") by students about: the power we command, what we teach, how we teach, and its relevance to the

global south. We[1], who were occupying places and spaces of power as purveyors of knowledge, were now the subjects. The context was political: a rising consciousness about the lasting effects of the degradation of imperialism as theorised by Franz Fanon (1963, 2008) and Steve Biko (1978) led to student uprisings in 2015. It started with the #RhodesMustFall campaign at the beginning of 2015 to culminate in the #FeesMustFall campaign at the end of the year.[2] The upheavals or mini revolutions required political imagination and listening to the voices of interpellation (the students) who were hailing the voices of power (the administrations, the government, the academics and old curricula).

The statue of Cecil John Rhodes (a dedicated ideologist of colonialism and British race supremacy) had prime position at the University of Cape Town – perched prominently on the steps in front of the central campus, until it was removed in January 2015. It was a symbolic break from the past vis-à-vis transformation so that a "more inclusive and welcoming [to black students] university" could be fostered, according to its then vice chancellor Max Price (2015). From statues to fees i.e. symbols to economics, and then the demands for the transformation of curricula in line with "decolonisation". The latter is the focus of this chapter.

Theoretical Framework

What is under scrutiny is the students' attachment to the signifiers "decolonisation" and "transformation", and the status of these signifiers for them. In deploying the notion of "passionate attachment" (to be defined shortly), what is involved is an attempt to conceptually delineate a determinate relation between the subject, students, (who attempt to turn the gaze to make the whole system, the subject) and the signifier decolonisation. And then, of course, how the students turned their gaze to subjectivise those in power. In trying to defragment this, Fanon, Biko and Mbembe's (2001) theories of subjection, racism, the postcolony and decoloniality, as well as Butler's concept of "passionate attachment", and Zizek's of the ideological signifier as a "rigid designator" i.e. as circular and thus foreclosing *a priori*

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[1] By "we" I am being quite specific here, I mean lecturers, academic staff.
[2] The #RhodesMustFall campaign began at the beginning of 2015 at the University of Cape Town (UCT) which brought down the statue of Cecil John Rhodes, a major larger than life symbol of colonialism and racism in South Africa and the second was the #FeesMustFall protest which began at Wits University at the end of 2015 which achieved the reduction of fee increases at South African universities from 10% to zero percent.

any empirical resistance (1989: 89), have all proved to be useful as has my own recent theorising on media studies, decoloniality and freedom of expression in *Power and Loss in South African journalism: news in the age of social media* (Daniels, 2020). Master signifier, to simplify it, means a nodal point, a pure signifier and a kind of knot of meanings, all rigidly designated in one thing for example in blackness, or whiteness. The questions that inform the theoretical framework include: Is decolonisation some sort of absolute, a transcendental signifier that anchors the students' discourse? Is it a conceptual lynchpin, to which students are passionately attached? This would fit into the definitions of a master signifier as theorised by Zizek.

Explaining some main concepts

Passionate attachment: one can be overly attached to one's identity (in race, for example, of our blackness) which could then result in victimhood.

Interpellation: naming, hailing, labelling, calling and subjecting a person to a name, for example, lesbian, black, racist. See Fanon's examples in Black Skins White Masks (2008:82) where he discusses being interpellated as nigger. This is a demand or social injunction with the aim of subjecting and ensuring the subject toes the line. But the subject only becomes the subject by heeding the call, acknowledging the hailing (or interpellation) or turning around in a self-reflexive move (see Butler).

Resignification: not to repeat oppressive norms, but to detach from them; it is a form of resistance which liberates from past fixed attachments.
It's a form of resistance, as in not acknowledging the name, or labelling. To put it in a Fanonian way: "we must find a different path" (1963:251).

Signifier: not just a sign, a representation, standing for something but a mark which represents the subject.

Floating signifier: a signifier with no fixed meaning, whose meaning is not closed off and whose meaning is not attached or linked to another signifier.

Master signifier: is a quasi-transcendental big other, it's an empty signifier that puts an end to the chain of meaning, anchoring all meaning, or fixing meaning, stitching meaning at the end of the day. To explain master signifier further, let us turn to the term "rigid designator" in discussing the role of "The People" within Communist Party ideology, as Zizek did. In the

discourse of the old communist parties, the people, are by definition attached to the cause of communism, (Zizek 1989:147).

Blended with Zizek's concepts as outlined above, this analysis also deploys Butler's theories on power and subjection blended from Hegel, Freud, Foucault and Althusser to develop her concept of "passionate attachment". An attachment, argues Butler (1997:208), is always an attachment to an object – it has the action of "binding to" (but is also tied to a warding off), which is the constitutive action of attachment. The above theories of subjection are important in this chapter to show how, as a form of power, subjection is paradoxical. We are more accustomed to thinking of power as something external to a subject, "something that presses upon a subject" (Daniels: 2006) rather than the subject being, in some sense, dependent on that power.

The main point to be used from this theory is that of power pressing upon and the warding off of the hegemonic curricula by students, showing the demand for resignifications from the past, or wanting a different path *ala* Fanon. So, it's just one theory of the subject being passionately attached to his or her subordination. In this case, however, we see students turning the gaze around and subjecting the old voices of power to their scrutiny, and it's found wanting. There is now a decided unsettling of past attachments to the voices of authority and power. This we will see in the discourse analysis portion of the chapter. And so, our authority as lecturers is interpellated and unsettled. To understand interpellation, let us turn to Butler's Althusserian example of turning towards the voice of power when hailed - of the passer-by who turns, without prompting, to the voice of the law. The paradox is that we accept certain terms of subjection and are often dependent on those terms for our existence and subordination takes place through language. The authoritative voice of the policeman hails a passer-by on the street: "Hey, you". The passer-by turns, recognising himself as the one who was hailed. Yet, why does this passer-by turn around and, thus, become subordinated through language? Is it a guilty conscience? In this research, the students interpellate the higher education curricula, the lecturers, the universities' administrations, whiteness, and patriarchy, among others, undesirables. This research does not attempt to duplicate Fanon, Biko, Zizek or Butler's concepts, but rather to merely draw on them, blending them in order to interrogate the status of transformation as a rigid designator that reflects the passion invested in it. Such a passionate belief is *a priori* insulated and is the pivot of other beliefs, less passionately invested and, thus, more open to critical scrutiny and interrogation.

Method: Survey, Ideology and Discourse

This article deployed a survey conducted with third year and honours students in 2015 to gather comments on what they meant by decolonisation. The methodology is both qualitative, using discourse analysis, as well as theoretical, using concepts to draw out patterns and themes to seek a master signifier. This chapter combines and integrates these methods to reach some political philosophical conclusions about the master signifier in the discourse of students. It deploys theories of decoloniality and subjection borrowed from the works of Fanon, Biko, Mbembe and blended with master and floating signifiers from Zizek's *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989) and Butler's "passionate attachment" from *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (1997) to offer critical reflections about students' demands vis-à-vis transformation and decolonisation.

So what about a discourse? Stuart Hall (1996) leaning on social theorist Michel Foucault (1926-1984), described it well: A discourse does not consist of one statement, but several statements working together to form a "discursive formation" (The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power). This discursive formation for this chapter is the #MustFall movements.

Disagreeing with Foucault, Hall did not believe that a discourse was true or false or scientific. However, both believed that discourse was entwined with power.

As previously discussed, the method resides in the theory but a survey method was also used to find out what the students were looking for. What did their discourse on transformation reveal? On the concepts of discourse and ideology, the following theorists, besides Hall and Foucault, were consulted: Louis Althusser (1994); Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985); Diane Macdonell (1986); Michel Pécheux (1982) and Fairclough. These theorists have articulated concepts of meaning, understanding and language that have been particularly apposite to an analysis of students' discourse on decolonisation and transformation of curricula. The main point, taken from Pécheux and Macdonell, is that the meaning of a word or expression is not intrinsic. Rather, it is dependent on the particular context in which it is articulated. The context here was that 21 years into the South Africa, the structures of society remained unequal.

The field of discourse is not homogenous, according to Macdonell (1986:54); it is social and the statements made, the words used and the meanings of the words used, depend on where and against what the

statement is made. Drawing on the works of Pécheux, she wrote: "words, expressions, propositions among others, change their meaning according to the positions held by those who use them". Meanings are therefore part of the "ideological sphere" (Macdonell 1986: 46). In addition, Fairclough's critical discourse analysis method was also consulted (Fairclough 1989): a close analysis of language contributed to understandings about power relations and ideology in discourse. Most appropriate for this study was his social analysis (explanation). It is the interconnectedness, in this case the intersectionality of struggles and what signifiers were used, that is at issue.

The #MustFall struggles took place in a discursive system encompassing multiple views.

The context here is that 21 years into the new democracy, students found themselves unable to pay huge fee increases; they were struggling for accommodation and food; and these day to day life struggles become entangled with a need for transformation in curricula too – when they deconstruct that the majority of their theorists are Eurocentric, pale and male, and old.

A qualitative critical discourse analysis, using the sympathetic and sometimes ambivalent voices of power, and the students' voices, allowed for an assessment of the patterns created in the way students use the signifier – decolonisation. The primary sources being the students' own discourse through a survey (author generated) conducted in 2015 with Honours and third year Media Studies students. About 40 students participated in the survey. The questions in the survey were:

*What do you understand by the term transformation/and or what is transformation to you? *What did the Media Studies department need to do to transform/and or decolonise?

The chapter now proceeds with the discussion and then applying the theoretical conceptual tools as framed in the theoretical outline to make sense of the discourse in reaching some conclusions.

Discussion: The voices of power

The students turned their gaze on power and interpellated universities as "white", "patriarchal" and "colonial" (Pambo 2015; Duma 2015). Theorising contemporary race issues, Sithole wrote in *Meditations in Black* (2016) that the racist gaze sees not the human but the black (2016:7) and that the black

struggle was about the existential demand to be human. The philosophising demanded a reconfiguration of the subject. This demand has become intertwined with a revival and new awareness of the importance of Black Consciousness as fostered by Biko, who railed against the fact that a minority should impose its value system on the majority (Maluleke 2015). Biko was determined to resist both the colonial push "to empty the native mind of all content" and destroy, disfigure and distort the past of the oppressed (ibid). Nonetheless, Biko set out for a quest of true humanity arguing that blacks had "had enough experience as objects of racism to wish to turn the tables". Likewise, Fanon pleaded to resist a "desire to catch up with Europe" (1963:251); indeed, he offered a rational alternative: we must find a different path which would advance humanity. It is within these theoretical frameworks that the students' must fall movements rose in 2015.

So, the students at the country's most privileged university, UCT, in January 2015 excavated the racist gaze literally and symbolically by removing the statute of the arch racist/colonialist Cecil John Rhodes. Then the subjected (the students) turned their gaze away from themselves as subject to interpellate and subjectivise the powers that existed within all the authorities mentioned already: university vice chancellors, academics, the president of the country, the Education minister and the government. The gaze went beyond race, the tentacles spread. Women students called for #PatriarchyMustFall, raising the issue of rampant violence against women which led to the Decolonising Feminism conference hosted by the Wits Centre for Diversity Studies in August 2016 in Johannesburg.[3] At this conference, feminist academic Pumla Gqola called for a "globally promiscuous project" vis-à-vis the questions: what does it mean to be an African feminist woman who is both rioting and writing? And, "what does a decolonised feminist do?" Gqola invoked metaphors of fire and violence as opposed to the first, second and third waves of feminism from the west (2016). This conference took place shortly after black women feminist students staged an anti-rape protest at the Independent Electoral Committee operations centre while President Jacob Zuma was addressing the audience.

Some sympathetic, and ambivalent, voices from power

The discourse of the students, which will be delineated further in the chapter, showed the clear inter-sectionality of race, gender, class consciousness

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[3] The conference critiqued the difference between white feminism and black feminism given that the sources and structures of power in society were different.

struggles which may have interesting implications for what the master signifier could be. The students' interpellated figures of power, who were not necessarily the arch imperialist racist and colonial figures such as Rhodes, but instead were figures who were in ambivalent positions of authority. For example, lecturers at universities, part of the power system with structures of the past, in many ways still firmly in place. Besides Gqola, other academics (and those in positions of power) were sympathetic to students' demands. As social theorist Xolela Mangcu, who was positioned at UCT, observed of himself that he was not surprised at the #RhodesMustFall movement, as this did not happen without a context: "These students are resisting the world adults failed to decolonise, as well as demanding the mandate to transform the universities" (Mangcu 2015).

Mangcu captured it succinctly: "Their demands resonated around the country because it spoke of a latent sentiment of alienation that young people have from the culture of the country, which is particularly predominant in the universities. The people that teach them, the curriculum they study, books they read and the symbols all around them tell them that the narrative of the revolution was a lie." (ibid).

These voices provide context and highlight the importance of race, class and gender injustice and inequalities before we proceed to the main data i.e. the students' discourse on decolonisation and transformation of curricula. Transformation during 2015 was understood to mean: access i.e. inclusion of poor students into universities; an increased black professoriate; an increased number of women into this cohort, particularly black women; and curriculum transformation – which is what this chapter aims to uncover to then extrapolate a master signifier. This chapter narrows the focus down to the discourse of students about curriculum transformation.

"Curriculum transformation is not just about introducing black authors and philosophers but questioning the logics and the Eurocentric views in the field of maths and science too", according to vice chancellor of Wits University, Adam Habib (2015), who was also chairperson of Universities South Africa. What, he asked self-reflexively, was the right thing to do? "I live in a neo-liberal world and I am the VC at Wits. Do I change the curriculum or do I ask what spaces we need to create? But how do we force white professors to re-think curriculum? Where do we find black professors who will teach it?"

Head of the Political Studies department at Wits University Daryl Glaser (2015) opined that curriculum transformation was about the introduction of

"black thought". Interjecting in the debate, senior lecturer in history department at Rhodes Vashna Jagarnath proffered that the reasons for not changing curricula are "just excuses" (Jagarnath 2015). South African universities used theory developed in the global north to answer questions relating to issues in the global south, she countered. Jagarnath felt that Eurocentric curricula showed black people as data and never as intellectuals, while the current curricula legitimised colonialism. "I have broadened history to include African women. I teach about Winnie Mandela as an intellectual and a feminist, not from a patriarchal view we are accustomed to. Apparently I teach very dangerous stuff" (ibid). The discourse of Jagarnath reveals the intersectionality of struggles and issues she is trying to bring in to her teaching – race, class and gender – which were missing in the past.

There were some who viewed the issues mainly from a numbers and funding point of view. Vice chancellor of Stellenbosch University Wim de Villiers intended making the university more inclusive by "setting funds aside specifically for a more diverse staff corps" (Shabangu 2015).

One of the key movements during both the Rhodes must fall and fees must fall the #MustFall protests was the Open Stellenbosch movement at Stellenbosch University to drop Afrikaans as a medium of instruction at the university. The movement won this demand through its protests. "It is Open Stellenbosch belief that untransformed, racist institutional culture is the root of the problem of staff diversity," articulated Mohammed Shabangu, spokesperson for the Open Stellenbosch movement (Shabangu 2015). "To understand institutional culture and how it works, management is going to have to open itself to a conversation with marginalised groups on campus," Shabangu explained.

As the discourse above reveals, the students felt that deliberately or otherwise, dominant Western scholarship reflected an alienation of African in particular and south theorising in general (Zwane 2015).

Students' voices on Decolonising the curricula

What precisely are students looking for when they interpellate curricula? The aim was to isolate the master signifier in their discourse. What were the students aiming at, what was the rigid designator when they demanded "Decolonisation" and "Transformation" during the #MustFall campaigns? Who was interpellated and how? What was rigidly designated or fixed, to which all meanings were derived, which then became the master signifier?

And, then following this was a fixed binary opposition, what floated? Was there evidence of passionate attachment in the student's discourse? If so, what are they passionately attached to?

#TransformWits activist and member of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), Vuyani Pambo, voiced his dissatisfaction thus: "Management has been pretending to be listening to our calls and has been dragging its feet … the curriculum we get from these institutions is alienating. Black students cannot find themselves in the literature that they read…we need more black lecturers, **especially** female lecturers, an Afrocentric curriculum and more student activism".[4]

The Pambo's discourse is crystal clear. It reveals the frustration in an intersectional way: race, class and gender but also general alienation. While the research aimed to uncover what the master signifier was for a purposively chosen department at one university, in tandem with this would be what students were passionately attached to. A clue to the answer may be in the discourse of PhD candidate in the Media Studies department at Wits University, Katlego Disemelo. An ardent activist during the #FeesMustFall protest in October 2015, Disemelo expressed eloquently the struggles, which also emphasised that no particular struggle was removed from the other completely, nor were disparate ideological positions revealed (Disemelo 2015). He noted "It is also about laying bare the failures of the heterosexual, patriarchal, neoliberal capitalist values which have become so characteristic of the country's universities. These may seem like disparate ideological positions. They aren't. They all address the conditions of structural disenfranchisement under which many non-white and non-privileged students and outsourced workers languish on a daily basis in these institutions."

Disemelo's discourse revealed the crossing-cutting of the struggles from political to economic to gender to sexuality; racism, classism, sexism and heterosexism as the techniques of power which uphold enslavement.

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[4] *City Press* (2015) Serving white interests. 8 September 2015.

Findings and Discussion: The third year and honours students' discourse

A deconstruction of the Discourse

The emergent trend and pattern is "change" but change is not rigidly designated or tied to any one signifier. The different signifiers attached to change included: race, diversity, gender, inclusivity, as well as transport to and from the taxi rank in Bree Street.

Some of the student discourse illustrates this clearly, for example, one fuller answer to the question in the survey was:

"My understanding is that it is about diversity in the demographics of various institutions, and also fostering for equality."

"A change in the structure of something."

"Transformation is the idea of integrating all races in a collective, creating diversity and eradicating a dominant or superior race."

"It is about trying to make everyone feel accounted for, and therefore feel equal within their community and institution." "It is a very important process which refers to reform and change in terms of ideologies of governing how society functions and how people are treated it is a movement for justice and for equality."

"I understand the term transformation as being the immutable changer that should happen due to the changes in the structure of society and circumstances of the past."

"The transition from apartheid into democracy. The institution needs to move forward into the future."

"Restructuring and implementing equality of different races."

"It means changing something for the better, making it accessible and easier for everyone. To make everyone feel part of something or not excluded."

"It is a term used to define gradual change over a period of time in order to receive an improved outcome."

"Implementing an alternative administration which is different dominant hegemonic rule."

There is definitely evidence of passionate attachment – to "change". But change was tied to different signifiers: equality, justice, a feeding scheme, inclusion, alternative admin, race changes, gender changes, modernisation, improvement, diversity, from apartheid to democracy. The latter were all floating signifiers, tied to the master signifier, change.

A further interesting finding is that the majority of those students who took the survey said that in fact they found that the Media Studies department was already transformed. Of the 40 responses, 30 said yes (75%), 4 (10%) were neutral and 6 (15%) said no. It is possible that this result was due to the fact that the survey was conducted by a lecturer, the author of this chapter, or it could be a genuine finding given that the department had revised the curriculum to have the South theorists dominate as opposed to the north.
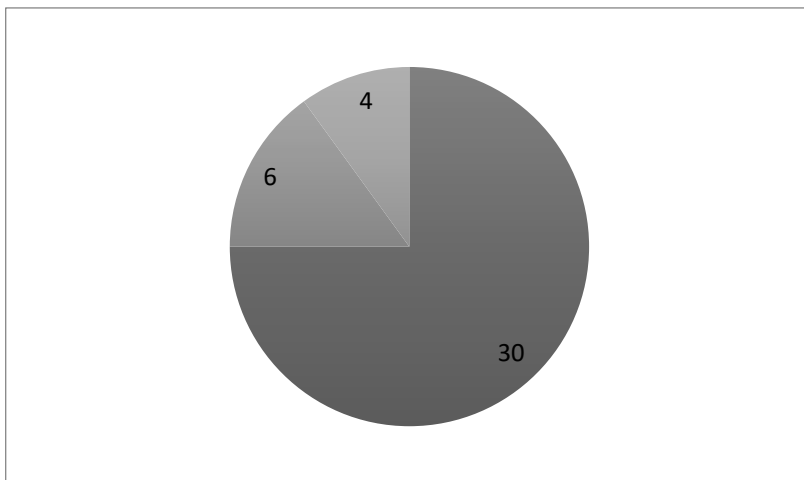

Figure 1: Perceptions of transformation from Media Studies students (Author generated graph)

What the students wanted changed in curricula: unveiling the discourse

This section does not list all the responses, as many of the students praised the department and did not say what they wanted changed. As some background, the media studies department had workshops every year on

curricula change, especially in the years just before and after the protests. Some of the changes included:

constantly redesigning courses so theorists cited are globally representative rather than all white Americans/Europeans. It used case studies and examples that are relevant to students' lives. We introduced a careful programme of support and mentoring for tutors, who are a crucial part of the transformation agenda as they work on the ground with students.

The department offered financial support to deserving and needy students in the form of paid employment, from research and admin assistance to Wits Plus and sessional teaching; engaged with a range of guest lecturers to ensure diversity in the classroom; agitated for South African blacks in the posts which became available in 2017 and was successful with this.

It then contracted with Oxford University Press to produce a new theory primer book: *Media Studies: Critical African and Decolonial approaches* edited by Sarah Chiumbu and Mehita Iqani. This was published in 2020 and indeed the book cites the processes above. In this book, in response to students' radical gazes, I wrote a chapter on freedom of expression from a black consciousness, feminist and decolonial approach, in many ways as a response to the students discourse; as seen in the next section. Here, the research selects purposively what change the students sought. The below student discourses are classified according to the themes which emerged.

Local content

More local content (*"I think we should have more South African content in the curriculum", "Need to facilitate more South African centred lectures, more focus on all races in the media", "Academics that have theorised SA's unique media landscape need to be prescribed in the course"*).

Less theory and more real world

More practical's and less theory (*"In the last year of study there should be practicals whereby students go out in the real world and experience journalism", "It should introduce more practical ways to address the curriculum so that the understanding is beyond theory", "More real word examples – videos, movies, books, etc. Including more videos, etc. as empirical examples. The help contextualising well, as well as communicating more effectively"*).

Engaged and communicative lecturers please

More engaged lecturers (*"The supervisors need to become more engaged with the student papers", "More engagement. A need for theory linked to opinions and experiences. Giving ideas of jobs/ experiences within the field. Expansion if departmental knowledge also gives an upper hand for faculty and students", "More engagement with students on an online platform to ensure that there is a constant flow of communication and have hands on engagement with students"*).

Embracing cultures, languages and diversity

Embracing all cultures and races (*"Embracing all races. Embracing culture and religion from diverse background", "Media Studies needs to be more compassionate to students who do not have the best writing skills because English is not our first language", "Incorporate different ideas across many cultures and races", "Encourage more black students. Encourage respect and dignity amongst students; black/white/ Indian/coloured"*).

Push the boundaries

Readings that are offensive (*"I think there should be readings that are offensive because media studies should cover all spectrums of the debate"*).

Discuss what Stereotyping is

*T*eaching how to recognise stereotypes (*"Teaching students to recognise stereotypes and binaries linked to certain communities/groups or people and in this way promoting critical thinkers; seeing an objective world and to teach students of a full unpoliticized history of South Africa to highlight how many structures and internalized ideals have stemmed from that"*).

More African scholars

More African scholars, language, race, diversity, gender, culture, religion, etc. (*"We could perhaps look at integrating more diverse staff, particularly Black South African staff", "It is very western orientated; perhaps focus more on African perspective", "They can try to incorporate other fields of studies –African theories or theorists"*).

Teach digital media

Teaching digital media (*"There is a huge lack in the study of digital media in SA. Often it is mentioned within the course but a thorough interrogation of it is needed especially since you are teaching a generation that only operates within digital media", "I think media studies needs to use a more diverse and current way of exposing students to the various prevalent media forms and content in the world"*).

More politics

More current affairs (*"Stay relevant to current issues around the world", "Highlighting current affairs and help students to become more active citizens", "Continue to focus on the changing role of the media in our developing democracy"*).

What emerged here was also passionate attachment to change vis-à-vis these floating signifiers:

There was a passionate attachment to change but change was not rigidly designated i.e. not fixed to say race, for example, or blackness or gender. The students interpellated their academics and their institutions on a variety of levels in their discursive formations which were rich and textured. While they desired more African scholars, and black through they also desired more alternative media examples to be taught.

Conclusions: Passionate Attachment to *change* but Signifiers Float

The chapter comes to four main conclusions: the students's discourse revealing what they understood by decolonising was wide ranging and diverse, showing clear intersectionalities of race, class gender, sexuality, culture, language, class issues, indeed what was emphasised in teaching. In fact, all in all, this broad understanding is encouraging and could be used in rather practical ways for future planning of curricular in media studies.

Theoretically, there is passionate attachment to "Change" but this is not rigidly designated in the sense that it is not tied to one thing. There is no master signifier for change. The last section regarding the students in the classroom was almost a surprising moment after the discourse of the student protest leaders and some academics included. The varied signifiers for change float. This is clear from the patterns that emerge from the qualitative

analysis of the way the signifier "change" is distributed and deployed throughout the students discourse or discursive formation, and from the review of the meanings. Many of the students' pronouncements on change were also based on the need for transformation in general but there is no vagueness, indeed there are specifics.

In many instances there are references to race and gender but in just as many there are references to wanting less theory, "more practical's" and more digital media courses. The signifiers are vastly divergent, for example, from race and gender to transport issues. The iteration and reiteration for change takes such varied and disparate forms that one has to say the signifiers float with a lack fixedness and stability. However, while this may be the case, what is clearly in evidence is firstly, that the demand for change is fixed and secondly, that interpellation has taken place.

The students have hailed the universities (including its lecturers) as relics of apartheid structures, in terms of the techniques and technologies of power, mentioned early in the chapter, and they have demanded transformation. In response, the universities' have made half turns towards the voices of interpellation. These half turns, due to ambivalence given positionalities, include engagement with students – but not full engagement – and changing of curricula to some extent.

Some of these half turns from those interpellated include, at Wits University, the vice chancellor being held captive and asked to occupy the floor at the old Senate House (in 2016 renamed after ANC MK hero, Solomon Mahlangu House) at the start of the fees must fall protests; surveys being done in various schools and departments[5] - such as the one deconstructed in this chapter; the removal of colonial statues; and then a zero percent increase in fees (in 2015).

In Butlerian terms about being passionately attached to one's own oppression, this chapter rounds off the argument that students have passionate attachment to decolonisation and transformation but this is not an attachment to their own subjection. Quite the reverse – it is a warding off of past oppressions. Nor is it a shell – or hollow – while there is a Master signifier i.e. "change" – there are many floating signifiers attached to change. So harking back to the theory delineated at the beginning of the chapter, Butler, in discussing subjection theories using the concept of interpellation, writes that in the

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[5] After all lecturers earn a living and want to protect their position. So while they are sympathetic and empathetic they are not fully turned towards the plight of students.

ideological state apparatuses the subordination of the subject takes place through language. In the Althusser example of the passer-by being hailed by a policeman, as "hey you" and then turns. Butler asks why this person responds to the authoritative voice of the law. The point is that Althusser does not answer the question. Butler argues that the subject is passionately attached to his or her own subordination through a reflexive, sometimes a violent or melancholic, turn. There were violent turns in the students' #MustFall movements but these were not towards their own oppression. The various kinds of violence: language, arson, removal of statues, placards and songs were towards the powerful. We witnessed a turn away from the voice of power – old power. The students interpellated or hailed their vice chancellors in the following way: sit down and listen and to their lecturers in the following way: we want more black thought, more local theory, in fact we want less theory, more diversity, more blacks and more women. They demanded resignifications from the past oppressions and voices of superiority.

Evidently, resignifications are needed in South Africa for a deepening of democracy. Ideological and other interpellations could also be the site of radical reoccupation and resignification, and we witnessed this during the #MustFall protests. In South Africa, with regard to decolonisation, these resignifications can occur through the course of debate, for example, where norms can be reiterated in unpredictable ways. If decolonisation is rigidly designated and if passion is invested in one particular transformation to the exclusion and regression of other signifiers, then that is rendered a master signifier. In this case, it could have been race, but race was found to be one of many signifiers of past oppression attesting to the intersectionality of the struggles and demands.

The students' discourse showed fluidity and a lack of rigid designation. There was a turning away from themselves to look outwardly and interpellate power structures seen in lecturers, curricula, and universities as a whole. They are subjecting the hegemonic voices and powers to their scrutiny. There are unpredictable ways that this scrutiny is taking place, showing contingency and resignifications from old norms which oppress.

Transformation, it is argued here, is a floating signifier in their discourse on transformation – it means many things. It isn't a meaning tied in a knot to one meaning – like "the people" and "communism" in the Stalinist era, therefore, there is no master signifier.

It is through the embrace of these injurious terms and through the reiteration of such norms that there are possibilities for resignification. This would, this chapter argued, involve a detaching from the signifier, decolonisation as a master signifier to embracing it rather as a 'floating signifier'. In other words, in South Africa today, it is not *a priori* a central principle of *all* social experiences. It is rather, as itself, a contingent series of phenomena to be accounted for. Such detachment could undo and unsettle the passionate attachment to subjection. The discourse is a social one, and a social discourse is historical – it is a discourse at a particular point in time in South Africa's history (of transformation politics). Who is to say that this discourse will always remain without new resignifications, that it might not take an unpredictable turn? So, what floats and what is rigidly designated (as master signifier)? Zizek, in a chapter entitled *Che Vuoi?,* explains "ideological quilting" using Lacanian *point de caption,* that within different political contexts there will be different "floating signifiers" that form a quilt of ideology, and the fixed meanings emerging from the nodal points. In other words, there will be one signifier that effects identity and within that particular context, unifies a given field, giving it meaning and constituting identity.

Within different political contexts there will be different "floating signifiers" that form a quilt of ideology, and the fixed meanings emerging from the nodal points. In other words, there will be one signifier that effects identity and within that particular context, unifies a given field, giving it meaning and constituting identity. So yes, in this case, "change" was the one fixed signifier, but it meant many things. There was no ideological quilting to make a nodal point. There was no unified field tied to "decolonising". There was no rigid designator, thus foreclosing any empirical resistance. The passion was in evidence but was not invested in one thing. There was a lack of totalisation and fixity in the students' discourse, which marked the intersectionality of struggles.

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