

Music Research in a South African Higher Education Institution

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The recent South African student movements calling for ‘decolonized’ university curricula and campuses are the most audible and visible symptoms of the failure to transform the country’s higher education system since the democratic dispensation of the early 1990s. Specifically focusing on the role of music scholarship, practice, and departments within South Africa’s higher education institutions, this paper discusses the implementation of socially aware and critically engaged music research in a historically white university. It does so through the lens of a new institute for music practice and research that is committed to challenging the prevailing Eurocentric cultural hierarchy within its host institution, encourages meaningful interaction with the South African arts, and is informed by decolonial thought. The author writes from the perspective of a researcher who has been intimately involved in the direction and governance of the newly opened institute, and has witnessed the various institutional frustrations and barriers that have obstructed the institute’s progress. The paper concludes that the transformation of embedded institutional cultures of exclusion depends on transforming institutional structures in which academic disciplines are practiced. Research institutes could be pivotal in effecting such change.

Keywords: *decolonization; music research; South Africa; higher education; colonialism; decoloniality*

In the 2015 and 2016 academic years, South Africa witnessed student protests of an intensity that is unprecedented in the post-apartheid era (Clarke and Bassett 2016). Exams were postponed and cancelled, university buildings stormed and occupied, property damaged, and monuments to colonial statesmen toppled in the name of decolonization. The ‘fallist’ movements, as they have become known due to the common theme of applying the suffix ‘must fall’ to the focus of their protest, are the most tangible manifestations of pervasive frustration at the lack of social and economic restructuring since the end of apartheid, particularly

among students (le Grange 2016). In the wake of this activity, universities across the country have been facing increasing pressure to implement decolonized curricula across all disciplines. The term decolonization has become fashionable within academic and political circles, and at times is reminiscent of revolutionary rhetoric used at the height of the country's political and racial tensions in the late 1980s. While there has been much discussion on the subjects of curriculum change and decolonized education, the historical moment presented by the recent unrest amongst the student population (as well as wider civil society demanding access to higher education) presents an opportunity to scrutinize the research priorities of the post-apartheid South African university.

Although the recent demands for broad-spectrum transformation have been directed at the entire university system, in this paper I wish to focus specifically on postgraduate music research at a prestigious and historically Afrikaans-speaking institution. I do this for a number of reasons. The first is that, until recently, this institution has resisted calls to remove what many see as unnecessary and apartheid-era barriers to higher education, such as a non-inclusive language policy in which Afrikaans is encouraged. The second is that it serves as a microcosm for a wider institutional culture. Prioritizing the cultural output of the European art music tradition (and its derivatives in South Africa) over all others implies a hierarchical value of expressive culture. This is compounded by a sociocultural context in which local music making not only plays important roles in everyday South African life, but also was an integral component of the country's liberation struggle. Indeed, failing to meaningfully engage specifically with black South African music is tantamount to ignoring a rich history of cultural armament and, in doing so, this institution remains entrenched in dated ideologies that place value predominantly on music of the European classical tradition.

In this paper, I contextualize the legacies of South Africa's colonial and apartheid history. This is followed by a discussion of the role of South Africa's historically white universities in maintaining the sociopolitical dominance of whiteness and the erasure of local cultural practices. I then examine the recent hash-tag student movements as a natural, and perhaps long overdue, consequence of South Africa's continuing social and economic immobility and structural violence. Drawing from Tuck and Yang's (2012) warnings of the domestication of decolonization, I contend that in the years following the end of the apartheid regime, even esteemed scholars of education in South Africa have risked legitimizing settler moves

to innocence. Finally, I explore the efforts of a small number of dedicated scholars and students to engender transformation in music research and practice at an ideologically conservative institution, opening with a personal narrative of a black consciousness event I attended that was hosted within one of the Department of Music's main concert venues. I have chosen to include this account, as it provides a powerful manner in which to appeal to the senses and the imagination, beyond categories of analysis and theories. Its inclusion is intended to highlight specific connections to bodies in social interactions of colonization, outside abstract concepts. In this sense, it is an intentionally disruptive act and one that helps situate this paper as itself an act of decolonization, a form of storytelling that turns the narrative back upon the settler institution. I write from the perspective of a researcher who has been intimately involved in the direction and governance of a newly opened institute¹ dedicated to open, accessible, and decolonized music scholarship within a prestigious higher education institution. I have experienced first-hand the limitations and barriers placed on the road to more inclusive approaches to music research.

In this paper, I argue that despite offering some non-European avenues of study and modest changes to the curriculum, the institution is still unreceptive to music research that threatens the prevailing cultural hierarchy, encourages meaningful interaction with the South African arts, and is informed by decolonial thought. I should state from the outset that I must tread delicately, given that it involves my own first-person accounts of institutional resistance. Despite not being immediately affected by the university's unsympathetic attitude towards the newly formed research institute, I witnessed the effects on my colleagues and students. Due to the sensitive nature of the situation discussed in this paper, the names of both the research institute and its host university have been omitted. This serves not only to protect me and my career, but also to protect the institute, its researchers, and students. I have taken the utmost care to ensure that individuals and institutions cannot be easily identified. Finally, it is important to recognize the importance of language and in particular, various connotatively charged terminologies. During the apartheid era, the South African population was separated into four classifications: black, white, coloured and Indian. Despite being contested and unresolved, these remain official designations in the country today. The use of such terms in this paper for analytical purposes does not imply agreement with their existence.

Enduring Colonial Legacies in Post-Apartheid South Africa

Exploitation is fundamental to any colonial system. This has been the case across the African continent and elsewhere. European colonial ambition in Africa was driven by the quest for resources and capital, what Tuck and Yang (2012) refer to as ‘external colonialism’, and as such was fundamentally intertwined with capitalism. Within this form of colonialism, all indigenous physicality is recast as a resource to be exploited. But despite the similarities between colonial approaches to indigenous subjugation across the world, South Africa’s settler colonial history is quite unique.

The first recognizable borders of the contemporary South African state had been drawn by 1910 with the British annexation of the Zulu kingdom and the two Afrikaner republics (Transvaal and Orange Free State) into the Cape and Natal colonies (Ross 1999). The Union of South Africa, a dominion of the British Empire, was governed by a British and Afrikaner coalition parliament. The first major legislative blow to the black population passed by this parliament came in the form of the Native Land Act (1913). Although this was not the first law to limit the rights of black South Africans in the previous colonies or republics, it was the first law to formally strip people of the right to be self-sufficient (Kallen 2011). The Act was designed to regulate ownership of arable land in the newly formed country and further prevented black South Africans from renting farms from European farmers (Feinstein 2005, Higginson 2015). The result of such legislation and the introduction of taxation was that black South Africans had little choice other than to find work outside of lands on which they had previously depended. Such work was found in few places other than the gold and diamond mines (Higginson 2015). Black South Africans were allocated small plots of predominantly in-arable land large enough to ‘justify’ extremely low wages, while small enough to ensure they could not be entirely self-sufficient, thus ensuring a constant flow of labour to the mines. As one historian suggests, “the final outcome of the whole process was that, for the African people of South Africa, land was no longer abundant; in areas they could still own, land was scarce and it was labour that was plentiful” (Feinstein 2005, 48).

The migrant labour system was “an integral part of the way in which the government, with the support of industry, and in particular the mining industry,

structured South African society from early in the 20th century” (Lurie 2010, 344). It effectively served to break down the social fabric of rural South African life, with the family at its core (Hunter 2010, Henderson 2011). The system largely prevented black South African men from settling in urban areas while simultaneously forcing them into long periods of time working away from their families, often housed in enormous single sex accommodations (Hunter 2010). Due to sets of pernicious influx control laws, the separation of parents and children was particularly common in rural areas, where both men and women inevitably sought work beyond their home areas. South Africa’s children and youth have thus long been involved in fluid child-care arrangements whereby not only adults, but also children, have been mobile in pursuit of schooling, work, health care, and political safety (Henderson 2011, 85). As with all colonial exploits, the interests of the governing European state and private commerce took precedence over local populations, and thus subjugated peoples saw very little of the capital flowing to, and gains flowing from the region, causing enormous social and economic imbalances along racial lines, the legacies of which are still felt today.

During the 1948 general election, the National Party took control of the Union of South Africa and immediately began to enshrine the dominant position of white South Africans into law through what it referred to as apartheid (literally translating from Afrikaans to mean ‘apartness’). This legislated system of segregation and racially motivated social engineering has played a major role in cultivating conditions in which black and coloured South Africans are far more likely to be living in poverty and without marketable skills or access to education than their white compatriots (Home 2005). Throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, South Africa’s apartheid regime increasingly restricted the civil liberties of black South Africans through the enforcement of racially discriminatory laws. For example, the Population Registration Act (1950), which introduced identity cards stating racial classification for all citizens over the age of eighteen, enshrined racial classifications in law and restricted movement of all other ethnicities. Further legislation went on to prohibit different racial groups from living within the same ‘location’ (Group Areas Act 1950), prohibit romantic or sexual relationships between different races (Immorality Act 1950), prohibit inter-racial marriage (Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act 1949), separate public and private amenities (Reservation of Separate Amenities Act 1953) and education (Bantu Education Act 1953).

The laws passed by the apartheid regime continued and intensified existing exploitative labour conditions, and by the 1970s, the government had begun to move black South Africans to what it termed ‘Bantustans’ or ‘homelands’ (Beck 2000). These were rural areas mostly devoid of natural resources, into which large swathes of ethnic groups were forced to live, thus dividing the black majority of South Africa’s population along ethnic lines, stripping them of citizenship, and creating conditions in which economic success was nearly impossible (Kivnick 1990). Further forced removals were carried out within major metropolitan areas, uprooting families and livelihoods often with little to no warning. The result of such action was the creation of large underprivileged areas, or townships, on the outskirts of urban centers, as black and coloured South Africans travelled to find work (Hunter 2007).

Despite the dismantling of the apartheid state in the 1990s, it must be recognized that coloniality will continue to exist so long as a still-powerful minority continues to exploit previously disadvantaged South Africans. The country’s relatively peaceful transition from hundreds of years of minority rule and institutionalized racism to fully democratic state has been hailed as a remarkable achievement (Robins 2008, le Roux and Breier 2016); however, the haste to celebrate South Africa’s liberation often overlooks the lack of social and economic mobility that the country has experienced over the last two decades. Robins (2005) refers to this as the fetishizing of first-generation human rights, such as freedoms from discrimination, at the expense of second-generation socio-economic rights.

Twenty-five percent of the South African population is unemployed, of which young black South Africans bear the heaviest load. Seventy-one percent of the nation’s unemployed are between the ages of 15 and 34 (Statistics South Africa 2013). As of 2011, the South African government raised the lower poverty line to 433 ZAR (30.64 USD) per month and the higher line to 620 ZAR (43.88 USD), and the latest census report states that 45.5% of the country’s population was living in poverty in 2011 (Statistics South Africa 2014). More troubling than these numbers is the distribution of South Africa’s wealth in the post-apartheid era. Black South Africans bear the brunt of this poverty, with 54% considered poor (27). Although the number of people who can be described as poor in South Africa is decreasing, one must remember that one must only earn 14.43 ZAR (1.02 USD) per day in order to be considered not poor. According to Statistics South Africa, “there is still tremendous disparity between the average income levels of a white-headed household and a

black African-headed household” (20–21). These numerical values represent a phenomenon that is apparent upon a cursory glance at the country’s political economy: that white South Africans still enjoy a standard of living far higher than their black or coloured compatriots.

Although incidence of both absolute and relative poverty has fallen since 1994, South Africa continues to display some of the highest levels of inequality in the world (Robins 2005, Bhorat and van der Westhuisen 2012), and race and gender remain significant obstacles to economic empowerment (Seekings and Nattrass 2005). Despite some efforts by consecutive South African governments towards economic transformation, through social welfare reform and affirmative action initiatives, fiscal resource shifts towards South Africa’s poorest have largely been ineffective in reducing social inequality. As one scholar argues, “if they [fiscal resource shifts] do not translate into improved social outcomes, they are rather meaningless” (van der Berg 2006, 226–27).

Poverty and lack of socio-economic mobility are felt acutely within South Africa’s higher education sector. On paper, the government’s approach to university education is one that promotes increased access to its public institutions, particularly for the country’s historically disadvantaged peoples. The National Development Plan of 2011 presents a socially progressive attitude on the issue (Wilson-Strydom 2015); however, the government’s rhetoric is at times starkly at odds with its policies. The neoliberal economic direction taken by the government in the early post-apartheid years has resulted in previously disadvantaged South Africans not having the kinds of access to higher education congruent with the government’s rhetoric of social mobility and justice. South Africa’s universities are often unjust institutions within an extraordinarily unjust country and wider world (Sen 2006).

Despite the introduction of transformation policies, little social redress has been implemented within South Africa’s higher education institutions, and this has engendered resentment both within and outside of university campuses. Indeed, socioeconomic immobility is deeply entrenched within South Africa’s higher education sector, and both reflect and contribute to ongoing structural inequalities in wider civil society. Access to higher education for previously disadvantaged demographics has improved only marginally since the democratic dispensation of the late 1990s (le Roux and Breier 2016, Sennett, Finchilescu, Gibson and Strauss 2003, Gilmour and Soudien 1994). Black and coloured voices continue to be marginalized through admissions policies, modes of study, language barriers, and fee

increases, while simultaneously largely unable to influence the commonly held signifiers of an 'abyssal'² academic merit in research output (Mignolo 2007, Santos 2007). South Africa's universities tacitly encourage exclusionary research practices that place popular, lay, or indigenous epistemologies on the opposite side of Santos' (2014) conceptual abyss.

Complicit Institutions and the Tacit Implications of Intellectual Hegemony

The relationships between South Africa's higher education institutions and the apartheid state were complex. I am focusing on the country's historically white universities rather than its predominantly black technikons³ or further education and training colleges, as these were the institutions in which Eurocentric ideologies were largely propagated. But the identity of the historically white universities cannot simply be read off the surface as either complicit or resistant to the state. For example, every apartheid era Prime Minister (D. F. Malan, J. G. Strijdom, H. F. Verwoerd, B. J. Voster, and P. W. Botha) received their education at Afrikaans speaking higher education institutions. Indeed, Hendrick Verwoerd, who has come to be known as the architect of apartheid and who exercised considerable influence over the South African political landscape during his career, serving as editor of a state mouthpiece, minister of social welfare, minister of Bantu education, and finally prime minister, was awarded no less than three degrees from one Afrikaans-speaking university (Venter 1999). In stark contrast, a number of higher education institutions situated themselves as hubs of student activism and resistance to the apartheid state, most noticeably during the latter decades of the twentieth century.

No social institution, particularly not those which receive a large portion of their funding from the state, exists in a sociopolitical vacuum. Universities have an obligation as centers of intellectual progress to address issues that lead to human suffering. While the exclusion of non-white students during apartheid is perhaps the most visible form of unequal educational practices, access was by no means the only manner in which the South African university capitulated to state ideology. Entrenched within the state-run universities were Eurocentric and racist ideologies gestated under colonial rule and rigorously implemented during apartheid (Bunting 2004). This is not surprising given that these institutions, many of which were founded in the colonial period, were based on European models of higher

learning. Indeed, one was even physically built upon land ‘donated’ by colonial tycoon Cecil John Rhodes; displaying a monument on campus in his honour catalyzed the #RhodesMustFall protest movement.

South Africa’s universities were largely tasked with upholding the values of white European intellectual culture as superior to local ways of knowing and being; they were, and in some ways continue to be, colonial outposts (Heleta 2016, McKaiser 2016, Lebakeng, Phalane and Dalindjebo 2006). Their history is one that is fundamentally intertwined with colonial thinking and intellectual and cultural erasure. Even the most progressive of these institutions, which presented themselves as ‘open’ universities by virtue of their admission of black students, conceded to the racial politics of the time. Indeed, while campaigning for the right to admit non-white students in the early years of the Union of South Africa, one of the country’s more radical campuses continued to promote itself as an institution for the education of Europeans (King 2001).

The term *epistemicide* has been coined in recent years to describe the “murder of knowledge” that was widespread within colonial occupations (Santos 2014, 92). The term refers to the invasion and eventual destruction of Other knowledge systems, rendering unpronounceable the histories and aspirations of human dignity associated with the stewardship and curation of culture (Santos 2014, Hall 2015). In South Africa, cultural erasure took many forms, from the de-legitimization of local religions and ancestral knowledge to the induction of children into missionary schools where European ways of knowing and being were encouraged above all else. While the theft of ancestral lands was perhaps the most obvious expansion of European influence in South Africa, the erosion of local cultures, ways of knowing, and knowledge production was fundamental to the longevity of the European colonial exploitation of Southern Africa (Chikowero 2015). Archives and academic platforms tore epistemologies from their cultural context, uprooting them from their foundations in the everyday lived experience of local communities (Christen 2015). Culture is a form of collective memory; by erasing cultural practices, collective memory and identity is erased along with it (Geoghegan 1997). An enduring legacy of this is the totalization of knowledge in South Africa’s universities that largely ignores local ways of being (Santos 2014).

In order to decolonize higher education practices (including research), formerly colonized nations must be independent in organizing and developing their knowledge, free from the burden of the colonial values (Wingfield 2017). This

cannot happen while many music departments across South Africa continue to privilege the study of Western high art music in various ways that imply that music lies on *this* side of the abyss. This practice of re-colonization from within (Rosabal-Coto 2014) illustrates the extent to which the epistemicide continues to operate in plain view in publicly funded post-apartheid higher education institutions and highlights the dangers of conflating the withdrawal of colonial structures and apparatus with decolonization itself (Tuck and Yang 2012). The process of unhinging the grip of the European tradition on South Africa's music departments (and beyond) is not as simple as offering more non-western music in the academic curricula or encouraging research on local music making. Inclusivity is not decolonization. Inclusivity implies that local practices and knowledge be *included* within an academic structure that is fundamentally rooted within colonial scholarly processes and ways of knowing. As Tuck and Yang suggest, "inclusion is a form of enclosure, dangerous in how it domesticates decolonization" (3).

Inclusion can be thought of as a kind of tokenism, separate from the prevailing norms of the curriculum or research practice. It can be found in the language used to describe local subject matter (them, Other, non-white, native). More than a decade ago, distinguished South African educationalist Yusef Waghid (2002) called for South African universities to encourage applied and reflexive knowledge formation, arguing that the time had come to supplement teaching and research with community service. Such community service, Waghid envisioned, would involve "providing integrated teaching and research-based services grounded in knowledge production in the context of its application" (458). In an effort to catalyse the transformation⁴ of higher education, Waghid's vision calls for reflexive praxis in knowledge production within South Africa's universities. In doing so, he argues for a kind of research that not only serves the scholar and institution, but also engages meaningfully and beneficially with communities. But while Waghid's goal of scholarship as community service is laudable, it is not sufficient to implement reflexive scholarship within academic structures that developed as a direct result of colonial epistemic violence.⁵ Despite its merits, such community-based scholarship is tantamount to a form of inclusion, and such gestures towards inclusivity do not constitute decolonization. Decolonization would require an overhaul of the academic system. As Muller (2016) explains:

The undeniably close relationship between the study and practice of Western art music in South Africa and colonial and apartheid approaches to culture is not, as is often

mistakenly assumed, located in the material manifestations of its forms only (its instruments, its works, its conventions, its spaces, its performance practices—for all of which an argument of ‘universality’ is commonly offered in defence) but resides more significantly in the anti-intellectualism of its South African versions. This has manifested variously in its indifference to the local, its overwhelming orientation towards the past, its deference towards geographically distant cultural centres, its isolation from art, its alienation from critical thinking and its resultant curious enchantment with what is derivative. Wherever music exists in the grip of these combined forces, *it is dead*. (5)

Inclusivity does not deal with the kinds of anti-intellectualism and the resultant effects on both research and practice that are engendered by preoccupation with a hegemonic monoculture both alienated and distant from everyday South African lived experiences. Such approaches risk reducing the process of decolonization to an encompassing term for the kinds of piecemeal transformation that has so far achieved little meaningful change. Tuck and Yang (2012) warn of the risks involved in reducing decolonization to a metaphor for various issues involving peoples in post-colonial lands, arguing that decolonization requires nothing less than the repatriation of local life. Overwhelming deference to the European traditions supported and promoted under the apartheid regime not only tacitly resists efforts to transform universities into more equitable spaces, but such music departments appear to still be continuing their segregation era obligation as institutions that promote the state-sponsored ideological values that helped fuel apartheid, most notably the superiority of European culture. Put simply, in their reluctance to transform, higher education institutions are supporting the coloniality of knowledge in South Africa, insofar as the relationships between colonial ways of knowing and current thinking are structural and enduring (Suárez-Krabbe 2009).

For centuries, injustice, marginalization, and Othering have been woven into the very fabric of Euro-American research into local peoples and cultures, research methodologies, and presentation of knowledge (Spivak 1988, Tuhiwai-Smith 1999). Not only are scholarly conceptions of a non-Western Other inherently patronizing insofar as they are constructed entirely in relation to the West (Said 1978), but local concerns are often marginalized and educational issues explained away through imagined deficiencies in biology or culture (Parker and Marvin 2002, Chadderton 2012). In order to decolonize attitudes and practices within the nation’s higher education system, institutions should confront the legacies of these attitudes through a form of epistemic violence turned upon the dominant

epistemologies of the Euro-American academe. I use the term violence carefully, but without reservation, as its applicability is made manifest through its function as a counterbalance to the physical, cultural, epistemic, and structural violence of colonialism. This concept grows out of Fanon's (1968) thought-experiment on emancipatory and cathartic violence as a process through which the colonized may be liberated. In his words:

The violence which has ruled over the ordering of the colonial world, which has ceaselessly drummed the rhythm for the destruction of native social forms and broken up without reserve the systems of reference of the economy, the customs of dress and external life, that same violence will be claimed and taken over by the native at the moment when, deciding to embody history in his own person, he surges into the forbidden quarters. (40)

Thus, for Fanon, "decolonization is always a violent phenomenon" (33). There is no friendly understanding between colonizer and colonized. Given the egregious inequalities present within the current political economy of South Africa, it is clear that though politically motivated violence has ceased since the democratic dispensation, the country is still struggling with the legacies of structural violence left in the wake of social, economic, and political oppression (Fassin 2007). South Africa's higher education sector is burdened with the legacies of Western epistemicide and will continue to marginalize local knowledge and voices until the institutions, processes, and platforms through which they are suppressed are radically challenged.

The kind of reverse epistemic violence discussed here must undermine hundreds of years of colonial mythologizing of Euro-American academic practices and the demonization and delegitimization of local epistemologies and ways of knowing. As Fanon (1961) reminds us:

The native is declared insensible to ethics; he represents not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values. He is, let us dare to admit, the enemy of values, and in this sense he is the absolute evil. He is the corrosive element, destroying all that comes near him; he is the deforming element, disfiguring all that has to do with beauty or morality; he is the depository of maleficent powers, the unconscious and irretrievable instrument of blind forces. (41)

Answers to the questions surrounding decolonization are complex, and this paper does not have the scope to provide a road map to decoloniality in South African higher education. It would be hubris of me to suggest I have the answers, but research from the margins of academe can have profound influence on the dominant epistemologies of institutions (Harding 1998, Pillow 2003). Research and

practice that privileges local ways of being, and known as norms rather than oddities to be studied, could assist in dismantling the academic systems of what Bunting (2004) calls instrumentalist institutions—that is to say the university systems that sought to encourage Eurocentric scholarship and epistemologies in South Africa.

Hash-Tag Student Protests

Large-scale protests are nothing new in post-apartheid South Africa. Issues involving service delivery, access to HIV/AIDS medication, affordable housing, attacks on white-owned farms, and xenophobic incidents have all motivated mass protest action; however, the glacial pace of transformation within South Africa's higher education institutions and perceived resistance to change has resulted in student protests on a magnitude not seen since the apartheid era.

In March 2015, a small group of students from the University of Cape Town (UCT) defaced and protested against a statue commemorating colonial-era statesman Cecil John Rhodes on the UCT campus. The statue was erected in recognition of the land donated by Rhodes, upon which UCT now stands, in order to found an educational institution. But for the protesters, Rhodes' reputation and record as a committed imperialist conflicted with the values of a liberated South Africa. The #RhodesMustFall (RMF) movement, as it became known on social media, gained significant momentum, and within a few weeks of the initial protests, UCT management had the Rhodes statue removed from its prominent space on the upper campus.

The UCT Rhodes statue can be seen, and indeed was seen by many students, as a microcosm of what one UCT professor calls 'resilient colonialism' within South Africa's higher education system (Nyamnjoh 2016). Extrapolated from this microcosm were longstanding issues such as the lack of black professors at historically white institutions, issues concerning access for previously disadvantaged communities, and the absence of prominent black thinkers within the university curricula. The Rhodes statue represented the willingness of South Africa's higher education institutions to sacrifice local relevance for international recognition.

The RMF movement was not only a reaction to resilient colonialism in the new South Africa; it also catalyzed a range of protests, building occupations, demonstrations, and online activism that became known as the hash-tag student

movements, or more simply ‘fallism’. By October 2015, after the successes of RMF, a new group of student activists had garnered national attention. Students from the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg began protesting against a proposed increase in tuition fees using the #FeesMustFall tag on social media. The movement would become known by the same hash-tag moniker. As the name of the movement suggests, the activists sought an end to exclusion through costly tuition fees. #FeesMustFall spread to campuses across South Africa and eventually secured a pledge from the then president Jacob Zuma that there would be no further tuition fee increases that year. This extraordinary move undercut a decision taken by the Minister of Higher Education and Training to increase fees by 6 percent. The powerful imagery of Rhodes being unceremoniously dethroned from his perch overlooking land that he illegitimately called his own inspired and mobilized students across the country to raise their voices against what they saw as the ongoing injustice of South African higher education institutions’ role as a space of privilege and exclusion.

The recent hash-tag student movements emerged as a reaction to various concerns that many students perceived as vestiges of South Africa’s colonial past or ongoing hegemonic and discriminatory institutional and governmental practices within the higher education system (Cornell, Ratele, and Kessi 2016, Nyamnjoh 2016, le Grange 2016). Despite the differing agendas of each individual group, these movements have, broadly speaking, demanded wide scale transformation across campuses, curricula, and policy. Fallism is the most visible and audible consequence of the failure to implement institutional transformation in higher education.

Transformation from Within and Institutional Hostility

While writing this paper, one that is informed by decolonial thought, I have found myself reflecting upon the manner in which this research is presented. I believe it is important that this paper draw from research methods that disrupt and problematize standard academic practice. Broadly speaking, the discipline of anthropology has been at the heart of racist colonial conjectures towards defining and answering ‘the native question’. It is imperative that current anthropological research, such as my own, is cognizant of the roles that 19th century scholars played to help legitimize Othering through pseudoscientific social Darwinism. As a result,

I open this section with a narrative—my narrative. Ethnographic accounts are commonplace within anthropological and ethnomusicological literature, but personal stories are not. I tell a story of my own experience, from the perspective of a European outsider, amongst white South Africans, within the context of a performance of black South African struggle songs.

The mid-summer sun glints from the whitewashed walls of historic, Dutch-inspired buildings. A friend and I are on our way to a black consciousness event and performance on the subject of contemporary South African struggle songs that is being held in one of the university's main concert venues. They have been invited to present papers as well as perform a newly curated repertoire of struggle songs by the director of a new institute that operates independently of the department of music. As we approach from the main campus area, we pass by rows of well-groomed trees before coming to a paved redbrick forecourt.

Entering the main reception area, the warm summer air disappears behind me, and I am approached by what appears to be a student volunteer at the entrance, who initially greets me in Afrikaans but promptly changes to English upon noticing my quizzically blank expression. Once we enter the hall, we take our seats and wait. I am struck by the homogenous mass of European faces. Only a small number of individuals frustrate the otherwise uninterrupted whiteness. There is no natural light in the concert hall. It is a cavernous space, filled with resonant wooden flooring and a collection of black and chrome seats. The customary uniformity of the seating arrangement has been disturbed for this event, and we are seated more intimately both to one another and to the performers in a semicircle shape. The barely audible droning of the air-conditioning and chattering of unintelligible conversations in Afrikaans and English reverberate around the room, each sound absorbed and reflected skillfully around the space by wooden panels and foam dampeners. I could discuss the debates that were fostered during the symposium, but I believe as important as those discussions are that the most poignant statements were made by the art that was created in that space.

As the performances begin, the hall plays host to unfamiliar sounds of ongoing struggle, sorrow, anger, and resistance. The concert hall space of this historic

institution is quite literally disquieted by the soulful melodies and harmonies that sonically represent black struggle. The memories of those who had used their voices and their songs to demand freedom in the past resonate throughout the hall, aided by the very panels and dampeners that were designed and placed strategically to facilitate the optimum sound and sonority for music of the European tradition, the Germanic forbearers of South Africa's Afrikaners. The interplaying grooves of jazz and vernacular melodies themselves convey a far more emotionally powerful history of struggle than words for anyone prepared to listen.

There is a palpable discomfort. It is as if the very walls are in anguish at their own precision and ergonomics of resonance. But it is for this very reason that it is so important that this music is played in this space. It is imperative that songs of struggle engender discomfort in these locations. These are spaces of so-called high culture, a culture whose white hands are stained as red as the forecourt bricks with the blood of erasure. These are the spaces whose opulence becomes profane when juxtaposed with the violence of ongoing black poverty. As the hall fills with the sounds that represent a shameful and bloodied history, there is a sense that this audience, in this space, in this university, does not know quite how to respond to being confronted with beauty, frustration, anger, and the complexities and contradictions that exist within the struggle repertoire. They do nothing but sit in silence.

Participation is a fundamental component of the performance culture that surrounds South Africa's liberation music. To participate is to become a collective, and there is indeed strength and anonymity in numbers. Often, these songs have no known composer or author and stylistically lend themselves towards participation through call and response structures and cyclical melodic and harmonic patterns. Participation strengthens community and allows for collective grieving in the face of oppression, cultural erasure, forced relocation, arbitrary imprisonment, disappearances and violence. By sitting in silence, the spectators overtly illustrate how alien these cultural practices are to them, to us, to me. These are practices that have developed under oppression that the vast majority of graduates from this privileged institution have never and will never experience.

Activist and music producer Sifiso Ntuli perhaps best explains those precious few minutes of disquiet.⁶ He argues that struggle songs communicate in far more powerful and meaningful ways than just rhetoric.

Song is something that we communicated with people who otherwise would not have understood where we were coming from. You could give them a long political speech—they would still not understand. But I tell you: when you finish that song, people will be like “Damn, I know where you niggas are coming from. I know where you guys are coming from. Death unto Apartheid!” (from Amandla!: A revolution in four-part harmony, 2002).

I have presented this short narrative of my experience for three reasons. The first is that it illustrates the level of discomfort that introducing black African expressive cultures can engender within a historically white space. The symposium introduced the meanings described by Ntuli into an alien space (the concert hall) within an alien space (the Eurocentric university). In doing so, it was, if only for a short time, able to challenge the comfortable status quo of whiteness, opulence, and indifference. Secondly, it serves potential decolonial value by virtue of introducing narrative inquiry into the methodology of this paper. An important characteristic of narrative is that it is able to allow for new and diverse meanings to emerge through the process of story-telling and challenge long established conventions concerning scholarly enquiry (Hamdan 2009). Stories should not simply represent a cursory subsection of empirical research, removed from more established norms. Finally, it serves as a relevant example of the small-scale transformation that is currently happening in even the most conservative of university spaces. The institute of which I have been a part prides itself on both stimulating an otherwise stagnating field of research—music studies—within its broader institution and catalyzing radical disciplinary reform. It does this through meaningful engagement with South Africa’s many musicking⁷ phenomena, critical examination of the country’s history, and sponsorship of new scholarship fundamentally driven not only by academic excellence but also artistic merit and social redress, such as the performance described in the above narrative.

From its inception, the institute characterized itself as transformational in its approach to scholarship and musicianship. Despite the importance of scholarship that seeks to critically engage with difficult issues in South Africa’s past (and future), the transposition of material and staff from the Department of Music to the new institute was not a simple or smooth process. The institute receives external funding for the majority of its projects through a successful application to a prestigious grant-awarding organization. This has been its main source of financial

assistance. Despite numerous applications for various additional funding opportunities offered by the university, the institute, at the time of writing, received no internal funding. Indeed, every internal funding application to date has been unsuccessful. The institute also had no operational base for more than a year, and no institutional operational funding support. Relations between the institute and the Department of Music have been difficult since its establishment. Aside from the black consciousness event described earlier, there have been no further events held in collaboration with the department. All of the performance events, guest lectures, seminars, and symposia have been accommodated in other spaces, despite the at times questionable suitability of these venues. From communication errors to overly booked venues, during my time in the institute it seemed that the use of spaces within the Department of Music was all but prohibited for the new institute. Further, progress on the relationship between the archival material that leads the thrust of the institute's decolonization research program, and the role of the wider institution in its stewardship has been painfully slow. This is not to say that the institute has been entirely alienated from the rest of the university; there have been a number of eager collaborators, including anthropologists, sociologists, archivists, and performers. I simply illustrate the barriers and frustrations that have been needlessly placed in the path of the institute's progress. Put plainly, the institute must adhere to the strictures of the university's bureaucracies and rules while receiving little to no financial or institutional support.

Concerns regarding resistance to transformation within South African university music departments have simmered for a long time. Indeed, noted South African musicologist Christopher Ballantine remarked upon the growing importance of transformation at the Fourth Symposium for Ethnomusicology held at Rhodes University in the Eastern Cape in 1983 (Ballantine 1984, Stolp 2015). As one scholar notes, in the nearly two and a half decades since the country's democratic dispensation, higher education music departments have generally maintained the focus of their curricula, teaching, and research on the Western classical canon (Stolp 2015). They have, tacitly or otherwise, largely remained resolute to their colonial and apartheid era mandate to prioritize western culture.

In 2015, the then South African minister for higher education and training, Blade Nzimande, stated that racism was rife in the country's historically white universities, responding to student allegations of systemic discrimination within the higher education sector (Havargal 2015). As troubling as this may be, racism is

only a fragment of a larger institutional problem. Racism alone does not fully account for twenty-five years of resistance to transformation. Such resistance in the country's higher education music departments perceived by scholars such as Ballantine, Muller, and Stolp becomes even more conspicuous when juxtaposed against the backdrop of national veneration of South Africa's expressive culture in struggle, celebration, and ritual process. Muller's observations of institutional preoccupation with distant cultural centers, overwhelming orientation towards the past, and indifference to the local raise serious questions concerning the relative absence of local musicking and knowledge within South African university music departments. In attempting to account for such discrepancies, some scholars suggest that the opposition to transformation, far from being simply racially motivated, is ideologically based (Stolp 2015). They argue that European art music and its associated manifestations within the conservatoire and academe serves as one of the last remaining cultural spaces for a South African minority, whose perception of their own power and influence considerably reduced after 1994, despite still commanding significant socioeconomic privilege (Stolp 2012). By resisting transformation through tokenism and inclusion (perhaps by introducing elements of local music into the broader curriculum), such institutions are depriving future generations of students the opportunity to meaningfully engage with South Africa's rich expressive cultures, history, and identities. The processes through which music performance and research might provide vehicles that interrogate social issues are effectively silenced (Stolp 2015).

Perhaps the most troubling instances of institutional resistance of which I became aware were directed towards students associated with members of the institute and the institute itself. My first-hand experience as an examiner for a postgraduate research student placed me in the center of a political and ideological dispute between the institute in which I worked and the Department of Music. Despite being supervised by the director of the new institute, the candidate was enrolled as a student in the Department of Music. The thesis, which broadly speaking argued for an approach to social transformation rooted in the lived experiences of historically disadvantaged people, was highly critical of the glacial pace at which South Africa's higher education institutions were implementing transformative policies. Indeed, it included pointed critiques of the very institution at which the candidate was enrolled. Upon reviewing the candidate's work, I was surprised to learn that the external examiner had suggested the thesis should fail, while my own

evaluation was relatively positive. Of course, external examination falls beyond the jurisdiction of the department, but it is important to recognize that this thesis could be, and very likely was, considered incendiary in its rhetoric towards a number of South African higher education institutions, their policies, and management. Due to the discrepancies between the assessments of the thesis, a meeting was organized by the department of music, in which the examiners were invited to discuss the final grade that the thesis was to be awarded. It is customary for the candidate's supervisor to be present at such meetings, but upon my arrival I was informed that he had not been notified until after all other participants had arrived or were waiting to be present via a previously arranged conference call. My own presence, as examiner, was requested with advanced notice. The chair of the meeting offered to reschedule, but given that this would likely cause time constraints for the candidate to complete any corrections, the supervisor declined and the meeting continued without them. Further, the disparaging tone of the discussion around the caliber of the candidate's supervision was thinly veiled. Despite these obstacles, the thesis was eventually passed with amendments, and the student subsequently received a prestigious doctoral bursary from another South African university. The experience left me troubled. Of course, situations like these rarely leave the confines of institutional offices and closed-door meetings; such is the concern for one's own career. Indeed, the very fact that I must shield the identities of those involved and make no directly traceable reference to any South African higher education institution for fear of repercussions speaks directly to the arguments of suppression of decolonial scholarship presented in this paper. Involving postgraduate students in internal grievances is entirely unacceptable academic practice and illustrates the precarious position of those who work within academic institutions and who are committed to transformation.

Conclusion

South Africa's universities are charged with educating and training the next generation of thinkers, professionals, politicians, professors, artists, scholars, and performers, to name only a few. The time that I spent involved in the internal governance of a music and research institute informed by decolonial and progressive ideals has illustrated that the attitude towards music scholarship and

performance at its host institution is still unreceptive to decolonized scholarship. The ideological opposition between the music and research institute and the Department of Music highlights deeply held competing positions on how to train future performers, conductors, artists, scholars of music, and music educators. As such, this conflict concerning music education and the ramifications of prevailing educational norms and values also serves as a microcosm for wider issues across the entire higher education sector.

The importance of introducing local South African expressive culture into the country's music departments cannot be overstated, but only if such research and practice also helps propel university policy and cultivate a scholarly environment in which researchers become meaningfully involved with local South African cultural expression, as well as critically engage with the country's national history and that of the host institution. Courageous young postgraduate music scholars, encouraged by progressive academics, are indeed conducting such research. By discouraging research and practice involving local music making and epistemologies, higher education institutions tacitly signify what avenues of research and practice are respected. Superficial changes and inclusive language policies mean very little while the university continues to subvert ongoing efforts towards liberating scholarship from South Africa's colonial past. I shall repeat the point, as it is worth repeating, inclusion is not synonymous with decolonization.

Institutes such as the one in which I have been involved are of vital importance to the continuing efforts of transformation within the country's higher education sector. They are attempting to navigate a new trajectory of scholarly interest, one that is socially aware and grounded in the musicking practices of South Africa's many peoples. For the most part, their determination is commendable, particularly while confronted with institutional hostility, barriers to funding, and dubious academic procedures, but even these efforts can not only be uncomfortably reminiscent of the status quo, but also are often ideologically ambiguous (Muller 2018). At times, it is difficult to reconcile the rhetoric of decolonization with the majority white researcher and staff profile, as well the institute's research interests in compositions and archives from apartheid era white South African men. Despite these ambiguities, these are the first steps towards engendering transformation from within some of South Africa's most unapologetic institutions.

About the Author

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Notes

¹ To ensure that neither the institute nor the university may be easily identified, throughout this article the institute in which I worked will be referred to simply as ‘the institute’ and the wider university of which the institute is a part will be referred to as ‘the institution’ or ‘the university’.

² I borrow this term from Santos (2007), who suggests that modern Western thinking operates in an abyssal manner insofar as knowledge is divided between one side of a conceptual abyss and the other. Knowledge on this side of the abyss becomes fact while knowledge on the Other side falls into obscurity and exclusion.

³ Under South Africa’s apartheid National Party government, the country’s higher education system operated two categories of institution: universities and technikons. Universities were concerned with various avenues of scholarship while the technikons were tasked with applying such knowledge to the real world (Bunting 2004). That is to say the universities ‘thought’ and the technikons ‘did’.

⁴ The term ‘transformation’ was frequently used in the early post-apartheid years to describe South Africa’s restructuring into a more socially and economically equitable nation. It was particularly common within discussions concerning access

to higher education. Since the 2016 student movements, however, the term has largely been supplanted by 'decolonization', although it is worth noting that the terms are often used interchangeably.

⁵ This is of course not to say that reflexive scholarship is meaningless. Rather, I am suggesting that such calls to reflexivity can sit uncomfortably within research contexts in postcolonial lands if the institutional structures that developed from colonization are not challenged.

⁶ Sifiso Ntuli is a prominent South Africa cultural activist and apartheid struggle veteran. An interview in which he discusses his work can be found at the following url: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2xzIqLBPdfQ&t=129s>.

⁷ Musicking, a term coined by musicologist Christopher Small (1998), refers to the act of being involved in a musical process. The fundamental idea behind the concept of musicking is that music is not something to be considered abstractly, but rather should be thought of as a human act, and further one that does not discriminate based on so-called musical ability. Small's main objective was to change how we think about music; to change our understanding of music from something we listen to, visually represent in scores, buy, sell or own, to one that incorporates the entire act of performance, including people (performing or listening), places, actions, and relationships involved.