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Editorial Note:

This latest issue of the Journal of Contemporary Society Education (JCSE) arrives at a moment when the boundaries between the academic, the social, and the urgently practical have never been more porous. A glance at the twenty-one articles in this forthcoming collection reveals a publication that understands its mandate: to serve not merely as a repository of scholarship, but as a sharp, coherent lens through which to examine the pressing complexities of contemporary society, with a firm grounding in education as a transformative force.

What distinguishes this issue is its refusal to settle for disciplinary comfort. The contributions, drawn from institutions across Africa, demonstrate a welcome intellectual restlessness. We see scholars interrogating the intimate, such as Mudau et al.'s exploration of language as a source of family conflict within Vhavenda families alongside those grappling with structural questions, such as Sikwela and Diedericks' critical look at performance management as "a mirror of inertia" in public administration. This range is not a sign of incoherence; it is a testament to the journal's understanding that societal education occurs in classrooms, in homes, in municipal water governance (as Zulu and Nojiyeza's work on Zululand shows), and in the very language we use to communicate.

Several pieces stand out for their conceptual bravery. Maungedzo's reframing of academic literacy through sociocultural theory for rural teacher development tackles a perennial challenge with fresh theoretical rigour. Similarly, Lubombo and Zethi's work on "linguistic justice" and the Disciplinary Literacies framework asks a question that South African higher education can no longer afford to postpone: how do we re-imagine instructional communication not as a barrier, but as an equitable foundation? These are not abstract debates; they are core pedagogical interventions.

The journal also demonstrates a commendable commitment to surfacing marginalised voices and experiences. Nkumane's exploration of intersectionality and the lived experiences of Black women scholars at UNISA, and Sibango's ethnographic look at how belonging is negotiated in Anthropology departments, remind us that the university itself is a site of intense social contestation. When Lekoa and Nojiyeza connect off-campus housing to "ecologies of distress" affecting student mental health, they do what good contemporary scholarship must: they trace the material conditions of life directly into the outcomes of education.

If there is a through-line to this collection, it is the insistence that no social phenomenon, whether climate governance under the AU (Yemisi and Ani), the antinomies of decolonisation in literature (Moopi), or the gendered nexus of marital status and poverty (Dunga), exists outside the purview of rigorous inquiry. The JCSE is building a platform where scholars can hold those complex phenomena up to the light.

This volume does not offer easy answers. It offers something more valuable: a coherent, sharply focused set of questions, pursued with methodological care and regional relevance. For a journal of contemporary society and education, that is precisely the work that matters.

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UNDERSTANDING HOW BELONGING AND ORIGINALITY ARE NEGOTIATED IN THREE SOUTH AFRICAN ANTHROPOLOGY DEPARTMENTS

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Abstract

As of recent, debates around the decolonisation and decoloniality of academia have deepened within the context of the Global South, particularly in Africa, where the legacies of colonial knowledge production are still largely embedded. While the discipline of Anthropology often positions itself as reflexive and inclusive, ten young academics and students from three South African Anthropology Departments who participated in this study suggest that the revolutionary promise of Anthropology is blurred by persistent Eurocentric notions and ways of approaching academia. Although this number is not completely representative of the target population, it provides a highly significant insight into the experiences of BIPOC young academics and students. Two of these departments are from universities that are Afrikaans medium, and one is an English medium. Drawing on interviews conducted with BIPOC¹ junior/emerging staff members (i.e., support, research and academic), including postgraduate students in the discipline of Anthropology, this paper highlights tensions that speak to what I refer to as academic exclusion² and the marginalisation of young BIPOC emerging scholars and postgraduate students, and lastly, the connections between the general academy and anthropology's promises of being inclusive and how the aforementioned "manifest".

1. Introduction: Between Promise and Practice

As much as the notion of "decolonising academia" has been (and still is) preached, according to the participants of this study, marginalisation, negotiating belonging, and the struggle of relating to the curriculum in the three South African Anthropology departments that this study focused on still exist. The students of colour state that one has to negotiate and provide a picture-perfect explanation when they employ

African intelligence (AI), African epistemologies, languages, and ways of living. Sometimes they have to cut out certain ideas to meet the standards and/or expectations. The young individuals who are in research and academic positions, still at the beginning of their careers, brought up the idea of being diversity hires (tokenistic diversity). They stated that academia needs to move beyond meeting the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) Strategy; instead, structural change needs to

¹ Black, Indigenous, and people of colour.

² Typically, Academic exclusion happens when a student is not allowed to continue with their studies as a result of poor academic progress and sometimes financial struggles. In the context of this study, academic exclusion refers to students who are marginalised and treated differently in these three South African Anthropology Departments because of their race and academic interests.

take place. By telling these stories, the research contributes to broader debates on decolonising academia and the need to reimagine Anthropology further (as more inclusive and dialogical). These voices are of importance for educators, institutions, and scholars committed to fostering more context-sensitive academic spaces.

This paper prioritises the voices and experiences of students and emerging academics in South Africa who are actively engaged in Anthropology. These include postgraduate students who have majored in Anthropology, as well as early-career researchers and young scholars in academic positions within Anthropology. Drawing on their perspectives, this paper examines how marginalisation manifests and how belonging continues to be negotiated within the discipline. It further explores how these realities contradict the promise of “freedom” associated with post-apartheid transformation, decolonisation, and decoloniality. By employing a qualitative approach, focusing on interviews and questionnaires, this study unearths how this specific group of people navigates the discipline’s colonial and apartheid legacies, epistemological boundaries, and institutional power dynamics (Fabian, 1999). Participants reflect on themes such as representation, inclusion, and academic citizenship, questioning whether Anthropology as currently taught and practised in these particular departments genuinely makes space for African worldviews, experiences, and ways of knowing and/or being (Prah, 2008). Or whether the discipline continues to maintain Western academic epistemologies and frameworks (Mbembe, 2016 and Nyamnjoh, 2019).

2. Literature Review: Apartheid Anthropology and the Contemporary Anthropology in these three departments that this

study focuses on are two sides of the same coin.

South African Anthropology has a complex history that is deeply intertwined with the country's political and social landscape, particularly in its colonial and apartheid eras (Kuper, 1999). In his paper, Kuper (1999) critically examines the historical development and intellectual debates within anthropology in the context of South Africa. Kuper (1999) highlights how British Social Anthropology, which was practised earlier when Anthropology was still emerging as a discipline with influences such as Radcliffe-Brown, became deeply intertwined with oppressive administration and the evolution of Apartheid South Africa. Social Anthropology played a role in political agendas such as segregation (Kuper, 1999 and Cocks, 2001). Kuper further explores Afrikaans anthropology, demonstrating how it aligned with and provided justification for the Apartheid regime through theories such as "ethnos". Kuper (1999) further reveals how Afrikaans Anthropology was largely shaped by the political landscape of South Africa, and how debates on cultural identity and social change remain relevant in the post-Apartheid era. The works of Kuper and Cocks are of importance as they lay the historical foundation of the discipline. Some of the arguments which speak directly to the apartheid era presented in their work connect with the current contexts and experiences. Apartheid Anthropology and the contemporary Anthropology of the three departments that this study focusses on are two sides of the same coin (Mignolo, 2020).

In addition to Contemporary Anthropology still being exclusionary to some groups, the work of Mullings (2005) critically examines how racism in general keeps on transforming over several events, marked/unmarked in the discipline. Mullings (2005) highlights that, despite Anthropology’s complicated past and its

involvement with scientific racism, it is uniquely positioned to develop theories and methods for understanding these evolving forms of racism. This paper uses Anthropology to call out the current shortfalls of academia, academic exclusion in this instance from the discipline itself. Mullings (2005) then calls for an Anthropology that actively confronts the systemic nature of exclusion resulting from racism, pushing for an academia that moves beyond mere social construction to address its pervasive and detrimental impacts. This paper shares the same sentiments as Mullings and calls for further decolonisation and decoloniality in the discipline.

Lastly, according to Baker (2021) and Leonard (2021) BIPOC scholars are encouraged to take up space and employ their ways of knowing within what they refer to as the decolonial project. However, they are expected and are socialised to “play the game” by adapting to academic standards and structures that exclude their aligned participation (Leonard, 2021). Leonard (2021), an Indigenous linguistic anthropologist, critiques Anthropology, particularly the sub-discipline of Linguistics, asserting that based on their personal experiences and exposure, they have been in instances where white supremacy and epistemological racism were perpetuated. This manifested through expecting Indigenous and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour) ways of knowing and producing knowledge were overlooked and undervalued when they did not adapt to Euro-American norms of producing knowledge (Leonard, 2021). Leonard’s work is of importance as this particular paper draws from it to show how certain students and young academics from certain institutions within the context of South Africa still perpetuate these habits of silencing ways of knowing that do not “meet the academic standard.” This paper does not devalue the decolonial work done

by academia but problematises certain expectations that are largely “one size fits all.” Leonard (2021) advocates for a reimagined discipline built on Indigenous research methodologies such as “relational accountability” and the “R’s” (respect, responsibility, reciprocity, and rights), to foster a truly anti-racist praxis that centres BIPOC epistemologies and voice. Leonard’s proposition is of importance as it advocates for academic freedom and citizenship; this paper also advocates for the same in the context of South Africa.

3. Collecting Data, Data Management and Ethical Considerations

This study utilised a qualitative methodological approach. In particular, it utilised participant observation, as this approach foregrounds the voices and lived experiences of the participants holistically (Makana, 2018). Participant Observation also emphasises ethical engagement, making it a feasible method for capturing nuanced experiences and stories (Makana, 2018 and Knowles, 2021). Through attentive engagement with everyday experiences, the use of participant observation enables Anthropology to continue to practise a kind of research where scholars are actively involved with the communities rather than merely observing and analysing them (Low, 2011). Producing work such as this one extends beyond observation alone; critically documenting and bringing attention to issues such as these constitutes a form of engaged and reflexive involvement (Low, 2011). Putting marginalised voices out there is active and engaged Anthropology (Low, 2011; Makana, 2018; and Knowles, 2021). It was important to employ participant observation, particularly for this study, because the insights presented here were gained through engaging with people and listening to their experiences and stories.

Semi-structured interviews were also employed. Adams (2015) asserts that in semi-structured interviews, a researcher must have guides which contain major questions that are used in the same way in every interview. For this study, I ensured that I followed what Adams suggests when conducting the interviews, and it helped with grounding the conversations that I was having with my participants. Adams (2015) further argues that the sequence of the questions varies similarly to the level of probing for information by the interviewer; in this study, this was determined by how the interviews went and how comfortable the participants were. Semi-structured interviewing is more suitable when the researcher already has some grasp of what is happening concerning the research topic (Adams, 2015). Regarding this study, I spent years doing postgraduate studies in Anthropology and worked part-time in Anthropology-related projects; thus, using semi-structured interviews was productive, and the conversations were grounded because I already had a background regarding the research theme.

Additionally, in semi-structured interviews, the researcher should ensure there is no danger of loss of meaning (Adams, 2015). To ensure this, I had open-ended questions so that the interviewees would not be limited. As already stated, ethnography is another method I employed when I was collecting data; thus, I used this opportunity to build a rapport with my participants, as the semi-structured interviews were a follow-up on my observations.

Blaxter et al., (2010:172) argue that "information from an interview can be

recorded, and recordings can be reviewed several times by the researcher [when necessary] to help produce an accurate interview report." I recorded the interviews that were conducted with the participants [with permission of course]; when doing so, I abided by Anthropology Southern Africa's ethical guidelines to ensure privacy, anonymity and avoiding harm. Lastly, I conducted ten semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample³ technique.

Precisely, purposive sampling was used to intentionally select participants who met the study's criteria: African BIPOC postgraduate students, emerging researchers, and young academics within anthropology departments. This approach ensured that I approached and engaged with individuals whose positionalities and experiences were directly relevant to exploring gatekeeping, academic autonomy, representation, and the ongoing negotiation of belonging, visibility, and originality within academic spaces.

To store the data that I collected during fieldwork, I made use of ATLAS.ti. ATLAS.ti is a digital storage system that provides a structured and secure platform where researchers can store raw data such as interview transcripts, field notes, and other multimedia documents/forms of data (Gupta, 2024). This provided me with a platform for efficient coding and categorisation (Frieze, 2019). ATLAS.ti further assisted with organising, managing, and retrieving large amounts of qualitative data (Frieze, 2019). ATLAS.ti was also helpful towards maintaining sensitive data

³ A purposive sampling is a sampling method where researchers select participants with an intention, depending on specific characteristics, knowledge, activities or experience relevant to the

study. Stratton, S.J., 2024. Purposeful sampling: advantages and pitfalls. *Prehospital and disaster medicine*, 39(2), pp.121.

and assisted with data integrity (Friese, 2019 and Gupta, 2024).

Once all participant observation fieldnotes and interview transcripts were organised and finalised, a thematic analysis was undertaken (Braun and Clarke, 2006). I went through the dataset several times to ensure thorough familiarisation with the recurring themes. For instance, the key themes were as follows: *academic exclusion*; the passive marginalisation of young BIPOC emerging scholars and postgraduate students; race was one of the matters; and tensions between the broader academy and Anthropology's commitments to inclusivity. Attention was given to how these issues appear in everyday institutional practices. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) informed the interpretive aspect of the study, allowing close attention to participants' lived experiences and how they made sense of them (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Furthermore, to ensure that the analysis was thorough, triangulation by comparing findings from participant observation and interviews was employed (Eatough and Smith, 2017). This helped confirm similar and different patterns across different data sets and ensured the fair credibility of the participants' voices and experiences. This intentional triangulation process ensured a context-specific grounded interpretation of the data.

Regarding research ethics, Anthropology Southern Africa's ethical guidelines (2005) state that it is a researcher's responsibility to inform participants about the purpose of the study. I ensured all my participants were comfortable during our interactions. I avoided raising suspicion and fear by making sure that I checked in with my participants more often (Anthropology

Southern Africa's ethical guidelines, 2005). As a researcher, the privacy, dignity and well-being of my participants were my responsibility, as Anthropology Southern Africa's ethical guidelines (2005) ensure that a researcher must do so. Anthropology Southern Africa's ethical guidelines (2005) instruct researchers and/or ethnographers that participants have the right to withdraw or withhold their support for the research at any time. I ensured that my participants knew about this instruction, and I ensured that I provided all these details when I asked for informed consent for their participation (Anthropology Southern Africa's ethical guidelines, 2005). Lastly, Anthropology Southern Africa's ethical guidelines (2005) state that where there are conflicts of interpretation, appropriate action must be taken.² My participants largely spoke SeSotho, SeTswana, IsiXhosa and English because these are the dominant languages in the spaces I conducted my study in. When I transcribed the data, I checked in with the participants, ensuring that my transcripts represented their voices well before I made use of the data.

3.1. Introducing the Participants

As stated in the ethical considerations section, pseudonyms are utilised to refer to all the participants. As noted earlier, the study involved ten African BIPOC postgraduate students, early-career academics (researchers and academic staff members) in anthropology departments, each navigating tensions between their research interests and institutional pressures; negotiating belonging and originality. The first participant is Smartie Cat, who had hoped to research food poisoning in South African township *spaza shops*⁴, however, they were pressured into a

⁴ Spaza shops are the small corner grocery stores and/or supermarkets, predominantly found in South Africa's

Black-populated peri-urban areas or townships.

topic that covers surveillance in a specific South African shopping mall located somewhere in the Western Cape. Another participant, whom we agreed that for the purpose of this paper we will use Mama Samba, intended to explore students' experiences with campus food but shifted to researching insurgent citizenship after they⁵ were informed by a well-respected academic that her topic proved to be not feasible.

Nabucco was drawn to the anthropology of music, particularly the experiences of African BIPOC individuals occupying the classical music space, particularly Opera, and ended up pursuing medical anthropology after she was told, "pursue a degree in Music then." These are the words the participant used when we were engaging. Another participant was redirected towards urban infrastructure research, while one they wanted to theorise the current trends of 'park runs'⁶. One participant said they wanted to look at victim blaming in the context of Gender-Based Violence yet was 'advised' to take on a project that covers heritage preservation. And there is another who was not keen to share what they are passionate about; however, they informed me that when they presented their interest, they were told, "This specific department specialises in cultural anthropology, thus, find something that fits within this space". Proud Mary had hoped to investigate BIPOC hair politics, yet no supervisor was available or willing to support her research, leading her to pursue a

topic in economic anthropology instead. Proud Mary said, the supervisor that was allocated to work with her said, "I have no interest in supervising discourse on hair." It is important to keep in mind that these are all important topics, and all have the potential to educate and raise awareness in the 'worlds' we live in and are exposed to. All these conversations took place through semi-structured interviews.

Lastly, several participants who were in the early stages of their careers in research and as junior academic staff members expressed feeling like *poster children*⁷, diversity hires, and BBEE targets rather than being supported in pursuing their own academic passions and having a voice. I was formally embedded and inserted within these academic spaces, where I engaged as both an active participant and a careful observer employing participant observation as already noted (Field-Springer, 2020). Throughout this process, all required ethical protocols were followed, as previously outlined, ensuring integrity, accountability, and respect for those involved (Field-Springer, 2020). These experiences collectively highlighted gatekeeping, erasure, and the gap between institutional promises of inclusion and the realities of academic practice. In the aftermath of these observations, interviews were employed to follow ambiguities and to get more clarity.

⁵ 'They' is used as a gender pronoun in certain contexts of this paper to respect LGBTQIA+ individuals whose pronouns are they/them.

⁶ Park runs are weekly community events, held on weekends, particularly in the mornings, where participants can walk, jog, and run. This has been trending quite a lot.

⁷ In the context of this paper, a poster child is understood as a person who represents a specified quality. In this case, diversity and some universities are hiring young African BIPOC individuals to meet the BBEE requirements.

4. Findings and Analysis: Is Academic ‘Freedom’ even a ‘thing’?

Most participants’ insights highlighted the main challenges experienced by African BIPOC students and young academics in the anthropology departments I engaged with: first, the persistent Eurocentric tendencies, but with a different font in the post-apartheid era. The key highlight from the participants is that this is taking place even after the conversations of decolonising academia have been going on. The power imbalance in postgraduate research, where being Black influences both access to research topics and academic freedom, is another highlight. One participant felt compelled to abandon their preferred research interest due to gatekeeping, persuaded by supervisors and/or these specific institutions, which raises questions about whether anthropology in general can truly be revolutionary if there are still departments that perpetuate exclusion and limit the autonomy of the emerging BIPOC scholars. Lastly, colonial and apartheid legacies being still apparent in academia was another concern. Where Epistemological Boundaries, Institutional Power Dynamics and gatekeeping of Academic Citizenship manifest. For instance, one participant insisted that they do not feel a sense of belonging in the discipline because of the institution’s approach and the power dynamics between academics and students, including one’s race determining the treatment that one will receive.

While acknowledging anthropology’s “inclusive” history through pioneering scholars such as Zora Neale Hurston, one Participant critiqued the current academic approach in one university for maintaining oppressive and dismissive attitudes toward such contributions (i.e., example provided above, autonomy regarding research topics). This suggests a dissonance between

anthropology’s ideals and the lived realities within academia, where progressive legacies are overshadowed by entrenched Western-centric perspectives and mentalities (Mullings, 2005). The fact that most participants brought up the persistent Eurocentrism is a clear demand for greater recognition and integration of work by Black African anthropologists, which is currently marginalised or invisible (Nyamnjoh, 2019). This omission not only restricts academic diversity but also undermines the representation of African epistemologies and voices, reinforcing systemic marginalisation within the discipline (Ndlovu, 2018 and Nyamnjoh, 2019). Together, these experiences underline the need for further structural changes in order to achieve freedom in the knowledge production and empower Black African scholars to shape the discipline meaningfully.

Central to most participants’ reflections points out a disjuncture Between Promise and Practice. One participant insisted that the contributions of BIPOC anthropologists, though acknowledged in theory, were actively minimised in practice. “In one of the courses I took, the only work of anthropologists of colour that was prescribed was of the well-known black poster children”, said one participant. This concern and tension brought up by these participants illustrates what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) and Ndlovu (2018) refer to as the “coloniality of knowledge,” where claims of inclusivity are being made, yet the persistence of Western epistemic dominance still manifests. In this context, there is a risk of reproducing epistemic violence by presenting itself as revolutionary while structurally limiting BIPOC scholarship. The disjuncture between promise and practice is not incidental but systemic, echoing wider debates in decolonial anthropology about the gap between discourse and transformation (Ndlovu-

Gatsheni, 2013). One participant, being told their proposed research was “not feasible”, forced them into a topic of little interest. This redirection was experienced as a racialised exercise of academic authority, undermining their intellectual autonomy. Such experiences resonate with Harrison’s (1997) critique of anthropology’s internal hierarchies, which reproduce exclusions even as the discipline proclaims openness to multiple perspectives. This then opens opportunities for erasure of African Epistemologies.

One student’s concerns about the absence of African scholars in curricula sharpen Harrison’s critique. “Do they not exist? Or are they not seen?” asked the Participant. The call to “prescribe more African Anthropological work” is more than a curricular demand; it is a refusal of the epistemic erasure that sustains anthropology’s Eurocentric archive. As Mbembe (2016) argues, decolonising the university requires reconstituting the archive so that African intellectual traditions are not peripheral but central to disciplinary knowledge.

5. Discussion and Recommendations: A Call for a South African Anthropology that Sees and Listens Attentively

5.1. *Dismantling the mentality of “Fast-Fashion” in Academic Discourse*

The stories and experiences discussed in this paper are an evident call for further transformation, where BIPOC young academics and students will feel seen and heard. Decolonising knowledge involves a fundamental transformation and practices to dismantle epistemological racism, by providing BIPOC epistemologies and voices addressing the colonial legacies embedded within systems of knowledge production and dissemination (Leonard, 2021). Thus, a

need to broaden debates on decolonising academia is still needed. Bringing back more conversations about decolonising academia will be a huge step, as they are slowly fading away, in my opinion. Fees Must Fall, and Rhodes Must Fall were the key drivers of such conversations. Dismantling what I call ‘Fast Fashion’ is needed in Academia. Academic fast fashion is going with the ‘hot and pressing topic’ of a specific moment, academics publishing on it, organising conferences and colloquiums and then moving on to the next hot topic. For instance, from 2015 to 2019, Decolonising Academia, Fees Must Fall, and Rhodes Must Fall were the biggest conversations. From 2020 to 2022, academic discourse was largely on COVID-19. From 2023 to now, most conversations in Academia are on AI (Artificial Intelligence). Not that there is anything wrong with academic fast fashion; however, new trends must not overpower important ongoing discourse. Balancing academic discourse and not being selective by focusing on new trends needs to be addressed. One way to move forward is to directly address the structural issues discussed in this paper. This paper serves as a conversation starter. These issues shape how visibility, belonging, and originality are negotiated in academia, especially in Anthropology, for African BIPOC scholars. Confronting them is necessary to challenge narrow ideas about who belongs and who is recognised as a legitimate producer of knowledge, not just as a passive consumer of knowledge.

5.2. *Conversations that South African Anthropologists should partake in to shape better Anthropological futures (Hear Me Out Bro)*

Anthropology primarily looks at ways of knowing and of being that exist outside the limiting, familiar, and ‘normalised’ social contexts, binaries and constructs (Faeta, 2021). For instance, it gives researchers,

individuals partaking in a specific study and communities - to name a few - opportunities to look at realities critically (Hurstons, 1935; Geertz, 1973; Faeta, 2021). Examples of such are the following ethnographies: Geertz's (2005) *'Deep play: Notes on the Balinese cockfight'* and Hurston's (1935) *'Mules and men.'* Both these works provide rich realities and contexts about ways of being, living, and/or understanding. By employing descriptive research methods such as participant observation, Anthropology provides more nuances on how humans exist; how the worlds and networks around them play a role in their ways of being and existing. Thus, taking this Anthropological approach/tool and employing it in understanding the experiences of entities who are directly involved in the discipline is one step that can be taken. This is pleading with anthropologists to take action and understand challenges that are happening within Anthropology using anthropological tools.

For instance, drawing from the participants' experiences, who often feel there is gatekeeping and passive yet micromanagement regarding research topic selection, a key recommendation is for Anthropology departments and academia as a whole (in departments and disciplines where this manifests) to establish mentorship programs. Mentorship programs where BIPOC students work with open-minded or advanced peers, providing guidance, resources, and advocacy to help them pursue their chosen research interests. By creating formal support networks, departments can actively reduce barriers, foster academic confidence, and promote equitable access to research opportunities. That way, passion will not be lost nor diminished, and departments will flourish.

Anthropology encourages one to extend one's perspectives beyond those with which

one is familiar. For instance, how culture, language, race, gender, and politics - to name a few - shape what people's actions, how they think and how they organise their social relationships (Faeta, 2021). Employing participant observation also gives ethnographers better insights and a broader understanding of people's experiences and what surrounds them. Thus, Anthropology produces knowledge which understands and narrows down the complexities of being and of existing with first-hand experience (Faeta, 2021). Employing such tools in understanding problems that manifest within anthropology has the potential to achieve a nuanced understanding and the potential tools of dismantle these challenges. With open dialogues, employing anthropological tools, the dismissive and passive-aggressive spaces and environments that one of my participants touched on would be narrowed down. The knowledge produced from such studies will have the potential to disseminate powerful details which can help improve and influence water laws, policies and strategies, as participants would have provided details of what they think would work for them. And less limited ways of knowing water will be avoided.

Lastly, ethnographies play a role in providing authentic representation from matters of race, gender, culture, politics and language amongst other factors (Faeta, 2021). Researchers have an influential audience, and when they get to experience situations firsthand, it helps with the understanding of certain contexts. The knowledge that will be produced and disseminated from that has the potential to change perspectives and shape systems with a better understanding of certain phenomena.

5.3. How can (un)problematic Anthropological futures in a South African context be imagined

Below are texts that I believe should be used to think with in Anthropology to decolonise the discipline further. First text is ‘*Cameroonian bushfalling: Negotiation of identity and belonging in fiction and ethnography*’ by Nyamnjoh (2011), where this scholar notes that Western Anthropology is perceived as talking at, on, and about Africans rather than talking with, hearing what African voices have to say. Having such text to think with will disrupt and contribute towards undoing the Western notion of painting, for instance, Africans, with one brush, which results in stereotypes (a precise example would be treating Africa as a country, that every African knows all other African ways of being). Nyamnjoh (2011:96) further states that “we must all, North and South, learn to look at ourselves, hear others about ourselves and themselves, and above all allow others to speak for themselves.” Producing Anthropological knowledge where South Africans provide their own authentic voices will result in future where awareness of internal anthropological disparities can be easily recognised.

Furthermore, a TED talk titled ‘*The danger of a single story*’ by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) has a potential of shaping Anthropology’s future. South Africa is one of the most diverse countries in the world. For instance, there are many official languages, there are diverse cultures and religions to name a few, there are multiple ethnicities and dialects amongst other factors. Therefore, our ways of existing and knowing as South Africans are different even though we are in the same ‘space’. Thus, employing the approach that this talk emphasises would make it possible to avoid *academic exclusion*. Adichie (2009) emphasises that if we rely on a single story and/or understanding about a certain group, country and/or world, one risks critical misunderstandings. Adichie (2009) further states that the consequences of single

narratives are that they take away dignity. While not an academic text, this ted talk offers profound knowledge and insights on the importance of being open-minded and being keen to learn. It pushes one to have a capacity to understand that one cannot paint people of the same ethnic group or country with the same brush; what you’ve heard and/or witnessed is not the only truth, there are other multiple truths beyond that. This is what these departments have to keep in mind when they are faced with diverse students who hold diverse interests.

To continue shaping South African futures of Anthropology, thinking with texts such as wa Thiong’o’s (2004) ‘*Europhone or African memory*’ intertwined with Nyamnjoh’s (2012) ‘*Potted Plants in Greenhouses*’: *A Critical Reflection on the Resilience of Colonial Education in Africa*’ would play a huge role. wa Thiong’o (2004) and Nyamnjoh (2012) argue that despite our claims to be ‘free’ as Africans, footprints of colonialism still exist in the networks that surround us, and they still shape the societies we live in. For instance, our education system is largely influenced by Western culture (wa Thiong’o, 2004). English is largely used as a medium of instruction in some learning institutions, research, and publications. These scholars therefore, question and critique the global South’s academic dependency on the global north in terms of knowledge production and dissemination. Having such texts in mind within Anthropological education has the potential of preventing and/or limiting the possibilities of conforming to racial and language stereotypes, and limiting ways of learning/knowing which were imposed by colonialism.

Furthermore, in AIME, Latour (2013) insists that we are surrounded by multiple networks (it could be religion, race and language to name a few). Latour (2013) then suggests that these networks do not exist alone; there

are knots in between them which can be easily overlooked, and these knots influence these networks and each other. It is important to understand our ways of existing and of knowing and the networks that exist within them. Latour (2013) then emphasises that rationality must be “woven from more than one thread and each thread is rational or at least none is irrational, none is less fundamental, and the entities associated with each are real” (Latour 2013:491). These texts help one understand that they do not have to exist a certain way and think a certain way to be ‘valuable’, amongst other important factors.

Lastly, as the findings firmly reveal a severe disjuncture between the promises of inclusivity and equity in academic institutions and the lived realities of African BIPOC students, particularly in these three anthropology departments. Gatekeeping practices, whether through restricted research topics, limited academic autonomy, or being a poster child, are problematic and need to be paid attention to. In response, departments should implement concrete measures such as mentorship programs, rethink their approach to inclusivity, and be transparent in research approval processes regarding intended topics by prospective postgraduate students. These interventions have the potential to bridge the gap between institutional promises and practice, actively support students intellectually, and ensure that diverse voices and perspectives are recognised and valued within academic spaces. Similarly, to the emerging researchers and young academic staff members, measures to ensure that multiple voices have a platform and are heard must be taken, from the departments themselves and to the Universities’ capacities as well. The groups of individuals with whom I engaged in this paper and the prospective postgraduate students, including future African BIPOC academics, will feel seen, heard and belonging including originality

not being a humungous issue, if starting to think with these academic pieces suggested above when faced with and addressing the issues that this paper raises.

6. Conclusion

Although there are efforts towards diversity and gaining decolonisation and decoloniality, tokenistic inclusion, where their presence is acknowledged but epistemologies and perspectives remain marginalised and undervalued, South African emerging scholars and students face the challenge of having to justify African Intelligence and epistemologies within academic spaces, they often have to negotiate their inclusion by adapting and/or adjusting aspects of their worldviews to fit dominant Western frameworks. Genuine decolonisation in academia requires moving beyond superficial approaches to embrace structural change that genuinely values and integrates African worldviews into the curriculum and academic discourse. Student voices underscore anthropology’s unresolved contradictions. The field positions itself as inclusive and revolutionary, yet its practices reproduce exclusions that undermine this self-image. Addressing this requires more than rhetorical gestures toward diversity; it demands structural transformations in pedagogy, citation practices, and curricula. If anthropology is to realise its emancipatory potential, it must confront the disjuncture between its inclusive promise and its exclusionary practice.

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