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### #Decolonise!

Design educators reflecting on the call for the decolonisation of education

## Research Sleeping Dogs in Fashion Design Departments of South African Universities: A Decolonisation Obstacle?

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### Abstract

South African universities are exploring strategies to decolonise higher education in response to student's calls. This manuscript investigates research sleeping dogs in fashion design departments of South African universities. Research sleeping dogs are defined as academic staff who do not have a doctorate qualification, resulting in their inability to fully perform research related activities. Through 2015 data sets sourced from CHET (2017) and Mbatha & Mastamet-Mason (n/d), a benchmark was done of the academic qualifications of staff in fashion design departments of South African universities against national academic qualifications of staff. Using the NDP Vision 2030's functions for universities, this study determines if research sleeping dogs found in the manuscript will be an obstacle in decolonising higher education.

The study found 54% of staff are research sleeping dogs at national level, while fashion design departments of South African universities have a 93% rate of staff who are considered research sleeping dogs. Using the above findings and NDP Vision 2030's functions for universities, this study argues that academic staff in fashion design departments of South African universities have inadequate manpower to: (i) produce new knowledge; (ii) identify existing knowledge and find new applications for it and; (iii) validate new knowledge through curricula.

The manuscript concludes that fashion design departments of South African universities have inadequate research skills and an under-qualified staff complement to decolonise the fashion design discipline. The manuscript makes a strategic and policy contribution by linking decolonisation and NDP Vision 2030, in an effort to awaken research sleeping dogs in fashion design departments of South African universities.

**Keywords:** *Fashion Design curricula, Decolonisation, NDP Vision 2030, Doctorate shortage, South African higher education.*

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## Introduction

The South African higher education landscape has been characterised by protests covering a range of issues that are perceived to impact negatively on the country's skills development agenda. Anecdotal evidence suggests that while these protests have attracted interest from government, they have not managed to attract interest from the elite South African universities known not to engage in protests. However, protests held in 2015 and linked to decolonisation of higher education have attracted interest from even the elite universities, as well as society in general (Heleta 2016). Heleta (2016, p. 1) further explains why it is important to decolonise the South African higher education arena:

Since the end of the oppressive and racist apartheid system in 1994, epistemologies and knowledge systems at most South African universities have not considerably changed; they remain rooted in colonial, apartheid and Western worldviews and epistemological traditions. The curriculum remains largely Eurocentric and continues to reinforce white and Western dominance and privilege.

Evans (2016) explains that decolonisation of higher education means rethinking and reframing South African higher education curricula and “reconstructing the African continent from various perspectives”. Evans adds that the decolonisation of higher education has found interest in other African countries, including Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Ghana. The low throughput rate that is negatively impacting on the South African government's revenue indicates that the current state of South African higher education curricula demands immediate attention (Ramrathan 2016). As a leader in knowledge production on the African continent, the pursuit by South African universities to decolonise higher education carries potential new knowledge that other African countries could use to model their own decolonisation of higher education projects. This emphasises the importance of contributing to the literature on decolonisation.

Evans (2016) profiles a UCT student's view on what the call for the decolonisation of higher education entails. In his response, the student touched on the need to change curricula that focus on “advancing Eurocentric interest” to the detriment of the African interest. In support of the later, Mamdani (1998) argues that one of the UCT courses creates a view that “... this Africa has no intelligentsia with writings worth reading ...” The student further posited that “Eurocentrism does not serve our interests culturally, socially, economically. It does not resolve the issues of Africa”. Ramrathan (2016) argues that in order for curricula transformation to take place, South African higher education should move from number counting to a focus on curricula transformation. Due to the countrywide interest shown in the protests to promote decolonising South African higher education, one can conclude that students from other universities share the same views as the UCT student. I argue that while the students have brought the decolonisation of higher education to the forefront, as facilitators of curricula delivery, academic staff in South African higher education institutions are better positioned to decolonise South African higher education.

Sheppard (2015) defines academic staff as “employees who spend at least 50% of their office time on duty teaching and/ or on research activities”. Evans (2016) points out that some academics in South African higher education are of the view that decolonising higher education would mean a return to the Stone Age and the isolation of South African universities from the world. Blade Nzimande (2015), the South African Higher Education and Training Minister, dismissed the latter view in his speech at the Higher Education Summit 2015, by stating:

Building African universities does not mean creating universities that are globally disengaged. They should be globally engaged, but not only by being consumers of global knowledge. They should be producers of knowledge as well - knowledge that is of relevance locally, continentally, in the South and globally. We must reject the old idea that is still being recycled in some quarters that the African continent must exclusively focus on primary education to the exclusion of higher education. This means the North must continue to be the producer of knowledge and Africa and the South continue to be consumers of such knowledge. This would be a continuation of our colonization well into the 21st century.

It is the researcher's view that even though inconclusively stated, the call to decolonise the South African higher education system can be linked to the NDP Vision 2030's function of universities. As explained above, decolonisation of higher education means changing curricula to reflect the African content. On the other hand, the NDP Vision 2030 frames the main functions of a university as follows: (i) Produce new knowledge and find new application for existing knowledge; (ii) Validate new knowledge through curricula; (iii) Produce human capital for labour demand (Cloete & Bunting 2013; Cloete & Maassen 2013). The researcher argues that the human capital produced largely ends up adding to the unemployment statistics of South Africa, mainly due to the perceived Eurocentric outlook of South African higher education curricula. The new knowledge produced is perceived to be based on Eurocentric models designed while solving Eurocentric research problems, thus they are perceived to have a limited socio-economic impact in South Africa. The validation of this new knowledge through curricula is perceived to have resulted in the reinforcement of the Eurocentric outlook in South African curricula, due to its Eurocentric outlook of the new knowledge produced. This highlights a link between decolonisation of higher education curricula and the NDP Vision 2030. For decolonisation to be realised, I argue that it should be viewed through the lens of NDP Vision 2030's main functions for universities. This means that as academic staff pursue the NDP Vision 2030 functions of a university, the focus should not only be curriculum change but also on the knowledge produced, used to rearticulate and transferred to South Africans. For this to be possible, South African academia must also answer a question posed by Ngugi (1981): Are they ready to decolonise their minds?

### ***South African Universities' content transformation***

Heleta (2016) posits that South African universities have all adopted various policies linked to transformation. CHET (2012) provides a brief overview of South African higher education's curriculum transformation. These policies have resulted in the massification and diversification of South African universities. While the numbers of students of colour increased at all qualification levels, Heleta (2016) contends that the curriculum changes were also Eurocentric in nature and thus unable to largely decolonise the South African university curriculum. Chalmers (2017) asserts that universities produce knowledge based on their relationship with knowledge. This supports the view that due to South African universities' Eurocentric outlook, the knowledge produced also becomes Eurocentric (Daniel, 2011). This accounts for the decolonisation challenges characterizing South African universities.

Khupe and Keane (2017) highlight decolonisation strides made in the research methodology discipline. She states that, through research, South Africa has managed to produce new knowledge in the indigenous knowledge space, and that such knowledge has been validated through the production of new teaching material. Furthermore, her study proposes new research methods based on a South African context. Such decolonising approaches to research are encouraged by Chalmers (2017). While this exemplifies decolonisation of higher

education, it also exemplifies the interconnectedness of the decolonisation process and the NDP Vision 2030's view of how a university should function. Such pioneering studies are required in the fashion design departments of South African universities if we are to decolonise. Without academic staff with doctorate qualifications, decolonisation of the fashion design departments of South African universities will take place at a snail's pace. Below we briefly explore the importance of a doctorate qualification in decolonisation and achieving the NDP Vision 2030 objectives emphasized in this manuscript.

### ***Importance of a Doctorate in Decolonising the South African Higher Education Arena***

To produce new knowledge, academics should be in possession of a doctorate qualification, which is viewed as a requirement for university academic staff (Herman 2011). A doctorate qualification is defined as a degree in which a student has to produce new knowledge as a primary requirement (Sheppard 2015). While academic staff that have a masters' qualifications may engage in research, their degree places less emphasis on the production of new knowledge, according to Sheppard (2015). Louw and Muller (2014) acknowledge that the interest in a doctorate qualification is associated with the continuous supply of researchers and the employment of graduates. For the continuous supply of researchers (people with doctorates), departments must have academic staff with the ability to supervise doctorates, which Herman (2011) argues is an obstacle in South African higher education. This manuscript argues that the perceived lack of academics with doctorates in fashion design departments at South African universities may be an obstacle to the decolonisation of higher education.

The skills gained through the acquisition of a doctorate afford academics the ability to find new applications for existing knowledge. These skills also enable academic staff to transform the new knowledge produced into curricula, thus validating the new knowledge produced. Academic staff without a doctorate will thus fall into a category of academics called "research sleeping dogs". For the purpose of this manuscript, research sleeping dogs are defined as academic staff with untapped research potential, due to their lack of a doctorate qualification. Attainment of a doctorate qualification is critical for the potential of research sleeping dogs to be realised. Furthermore, the identification and reduction of research sleeping dogs is critical if the Department of Science and Technology is to achieve its aim of increasing doctorate graduation five-fold by 2018 (Herman 2012).

In light of the above, a doctorate qualification is viewed as a critical ingredient for the pursuit and achievement of decolonisation of higher education. Therefore, the researcher contends that departments with more academic staff with doctorate qualifications would be better positioned to decolonise their curriculum and universities at large. Furthermore, departments with less academic staff who have a doctorate qualification would face obstacles in decolonising the curriculum of their discipline and that of their university. In light of the above, the manuscript focuses on the qualifications of academic staff in fashion design departments of South African universities, as an indicator of the ability to decolonise the curriculum of the fashion design discipline. To do this, the manuscript uses data from the HEMIS database as a benchmark, which indicates the number of South African higher education qualifications held by academic staff (CHET 2017). The data is compared to Mbatha and Mastamet-Mason's (n/d) data on the qualifications of academic staff in fashion design departments of South African universities department to answer the research questions presented later in the manuscript. While Macfarlane (2011) highlights that the South African academic staff with Doctorate qualifications are low compared to one of its BRICKS partners, the researcher viewed this comparison as valid and credible enough to make the argument whether research sleeping dogs will be an obstacle in the decolonisation of the fashion design

departments of South African universities curriculum. This manuscript is important as it will determine if academic staff in the fashion design departments of South African universities department have the right qualification to pursue the decolonisation of the fashion design curriculum. This manuscript also present leaders of the decolonisation, fashion design departments of South African universities and their universities with an introspect feasibility of the decolonisation project and implement changes necessary to realise the decolonisation of the South African higher education.

The manuscript posed the following research questions: (i) What is the percentage of research sleeping dogs in the fashion design departments of South African universities compared to academic staff at national level?; (ii) Are research sleeping dogs an obstacle to decolonisation of fashion design departments of South African universities? In pursuit of its research questions, the study employed desktop research in an effort to present valid data to respond to the research questions in the manuscript. This process resulted in the use of 2015 secondary data from the CHET database being compared (CHET 2017) to the secondary data of Mbatha and Mastamet-Mason (2016), which they used in their study of fashion design departments of South African universities and this issue being one source of a lack of competitive advantage in the apparel manufacturing industry in South Africa (Mbatha & Mastamet-Mason 2016).

The data on fashion design departments of South African universities includes data from seven of the eight universities. Table 1 provides an analysis of the data gathered from both secondary sources. It indicates that South African universities have 8136 academic staff with doctorate qualifications, 6550 academic staff with masters' qualifications, and 3881 academic staff with qualifications below masters' level.

**Table 1: Academic qualification data of national and fashion design departments (CHET 2017; Mbatha & Mastamet-Mason n/d)**

Source of Data	Doctors	Masters	Other	Totals
Qualifications of South African academic staff	8136	6550	3881	18567
Qualifications of academic staff in fashion design departments of South African universities Departments	4	24	33	61

Table 1 shows that fashion design departments of South African universities have four academic staff with doctoral qualifications, 24 academic staff with masters' qualifications and 33 academic staff with qualifications below masters' level. While the data for the two variables may appear disparate, percentages should be used to interpret the data in Table 1.

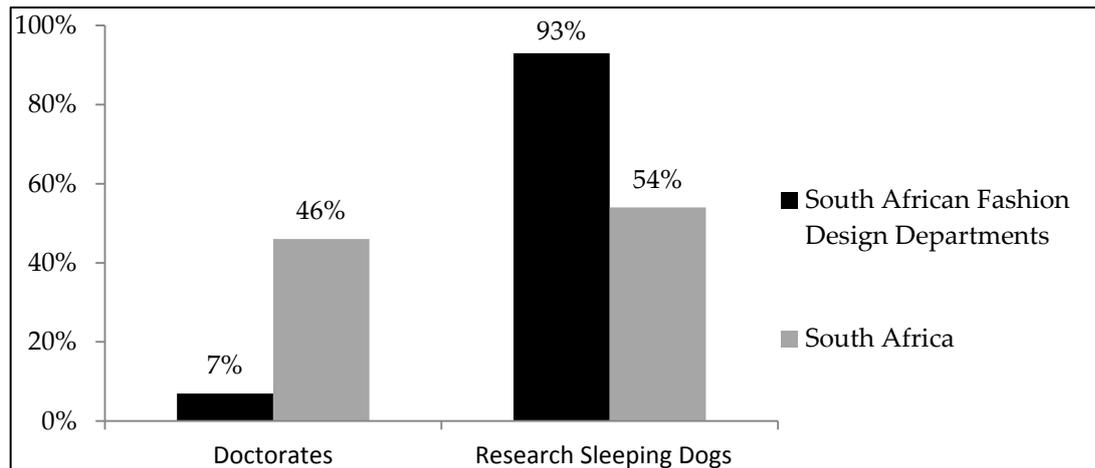
## Findings and Discussion

In an effort to respond to research question one (What is the percentage of research sleeping dogs in fashion design departments of South African universities compared to the national level?), the manuscript transformed the data in Table 1 into a graph to illustrate the comparison of doctoral qualifications of academic staff at national level and those in fashion design departments of South African universities, and the percentage of academic staff classified as research sleeping dogs. For this to be possible, data about master's qualifications (24) and other qualifications (33) were combined, as per the research sleeping dogs

definition given earlier. These findings pave the way for the manuscript to determine whether or not research sleeping dogs are an obstacle to decolonising higher education.

#### *Research Sleeping Dogs in Fashion Design Departments of South African Universities*

Figure 1 indicates that, at a national level, 46% of academic staff have doctorate qualifications; therefore, the percentage of research sleeping dogs at national level is 54%. Fashion design departments of South African universities have 7% of academic staff with doctorate qualifications; therefore, the percentage of research sleeping dogs in fashion design departments of South African universities is 93%.



**Figure 1: Research Sleeping Dogs**

The findings show that the fashion design departments of South African universities have 39% more research sleeping dogs compared to academic staff qualification at national level, this presents the decolonisation of higher education with a number of obstacle discussed in the next section as the manuscript attempts to answer the second research question (are research sleeping dogs an obstacle to the decolonisation project?).

#### ***Research Sleeping Dogs in Fashion Design Departments of South African Universities: A Decolonisation Obstacle***

In response to the second research question, the study used the above research findings to present an argument to show that research sleeping dogs in fashion design departments of South African universities are an obstacle to the decolonisation of these departments at South African universities. The argument is based on the main functions of universities indicated by the NDP vision 2030, as indicated earlier in this paper.

For fashion design departments of South African universities to decolonise their curricula, they have to find new applications for existing South African, African and South knowledge. With research sleeping dogs in fashion design departments of South African universities at 93%, their ability to find existing credible knowledge and find new application for it may be questionable, since they do not have doctorate qualifications - as argued by Sheppard (2015). This results in inadequate research skills as a decolonisation obstacle. Only the 7% of academic staff with a doctorate in fashion design departments of South African universities have the research skills that are critical to finding existing knowledge and developing new applications for it. The under skilled nature of the South African apparel manufacturing industry (Mbatha 2014) is also found in fashion design departments of South African

universities. Therefore, fashion design departments of South African universities that have more staff with a doctorate may find it easier to decolonise compared to those that have fewer academic staff with a doctoral qualification.

If existing knowledge is insufficient, the academic staff of fashion design departments of South African universities will have to produce the new knowledge required to decolonise the curricula of fashion design departments of South African universities, in line with the NDP Vision 2030's functions of universities, in order to reconstruct the African continent from various perspectives, as argued by Evans (2016). Sheppard (2015) advised that producing new knowledge is a competency gained from a doctorate qualification. This puts a heavier burden on the 7% who have this qualification to produce the new knowledge required to decolonise the curricula of fashion design departments of South African universities, given that 93% of the academic staff lack this competency. This indicates that the fashion design departments of South African universities lack the required manpower, which is an obstacle, since the new knowledge production capacity is marginal. As a result of the lack of manpower, fashion design departments of South African universities are unable to use their post-graduate students to accelerate the production of new knowledge, due to a lack of supervisors for doctoral programmes (Mbatha & Mastamet-Mason n/d).

I argue that the validation of new knowledge through curricula also requires research related activities as part of the validation process. Once a new curriculum is in place, further research will be required to understand the perception of students and employers about the new curriculum, in order to determine that the new curriculum does what it was designed it to do. Without adequate research skills and sufficient manpower to handle these research related activities, the decolonisation obstacles mentioned above will also negatively impact on the validity of the decolonised curriculum.

What presents the main decolonisation obstacle for academic staff in fashion design departments of South African universities is the answers they provide to Ngugi's (1981) question: Are they ready to decolonise their minds? Optimistically speaking, they should answer "yes", to guard against the continuation of our colonization well into the 21st century, as stated by minister Blade Nzimande (2015). For the 7% with doctoral qualifications, this will entail unlearning their Eurocentric theories and methodologies and learning, for example, the research methods advocated by Khupe (2017) and Chalmers (2017). The research skills gained through doing a doctorate may be critical in seeing them through the process of decolonising their minds. The 93% research sleeping dogs found in fashion design departments of South African universities are well positioned to acquire a doctorate through research that decolonises their minds, as well as the fashion design departments of South African universities. However, the yes answer given should also find expression in the policies and strategic documents of fashion design departments of South African universities.

## Conclusions

The manuscript endeavored to answer two research questions: (i) What is the percentage of research sleeping dogs in the fashion design departments of South African universities compared to academic staff at national level?; (ii) Are research sleeping dogs an obstacle to decolonisation of fashion design departments of South African universities? Through benchmarking the national academic staff qualification level against that of academic staff in fashion design departments of South African universities, the study found that fashion design departments of South African universities have a higher percentage of research sleeping dogs (93%) than at the national level (54%). The manuscript concludes that this high

percentage of research sleeping dogs will prove an obstacle to decolonising fashion design departments of South African universities. The study concludes that decolonisation will only be achieved in pockets of South Africa fashion departments, where there is a lower percentage of research sleeping dogs.

**This study faced the following limitations.**

Firstly, the data used to arrive at the findings is based on 2015 data. While these are the latest data, anecdotal evidence indicates that there might have been slight changes to qualifications, both at national level and in fashion design departments of South African universities. Nevertheless, the study argues that the number of academic staff with a doctoral qualification in fashion design departments of South African universities is still too low, resulting in the above stated obstacle still being in effect.

Secondly, the manuscript acknowledges that universities have teaching and learning support departments that will be critical as decolonisation takes place. However, the discipline knowledge required to model the decolonised curricula will still require the expertise of academic staff in fashion design departments of South African universities. The high percentage of research sleeping dogs found in the study persuades one to believe that the existence of teaching and learning departments will not overturn the obstacles presented in this manuscript.

Thirdly, the study did not afford academic staff in fashion design departments of South African universities an opportunity to answer the question of whether they are ready to decolonise their minds or not. In light of the conference theme, the manuscript took an optimistic answer aiding the manuscript to provide possible strategies to aid the decolonisation project of Fashion design departments of South African universities departments.

The manuscript proposes that further studies should be done on the curriculum changes initiated and completed since 2015, in order to determine if fashion design departments of South African universities have been taking steps to achieve decolonisation in the fashion design discipline. Furthermore, a review of the strategic plans of fashion design departments of South African universities should be done to determine if decolonisation has been adopted as a strategy; evaluation of the actions plans should also be done. Lastly, the manuscript proposes that further studies should also look at the perception of decolonisation amongst fashion design departments of South African universities and the action academics take to achieve decolonisation in their discipline.

In conclusion, this study brings to the fore the importance of a doctoral qualification as a critical component for driving decolonisation of fashion design departments of South African universities. This studies determined a link between the aspirations of students (decolonisation) and the NDP Vision 2030 functions for universities and found the two to be inter-dependent. This study argues that the decolonisation activities by students should redirect academic staff to dedicate some of their research endeavours into curriculum transformation, which is critical for the South African, African and South knowledge to have a voice in the Western dominated knowledge world. Lastly, this manuscript contributes to the importance of policy alignment as we engage in decolonisation talks that may result in further policy development. Such policies should not be far from the NDP Vision 2030 goals, which put doctorate qualifications at the core of South Africa's development agenda.

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