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#Decolonise!

Design educators reflecting on the call for the decolonisation of education

Contesting the Decolonisation Narrative: Towards an Entrepreneurship Based Graphic Design Curricula

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Abstract

The waves of decolonisation rhetoric flooding across South Africa's postsecondary education landscape are undeniable. Whilst acknowledging the historical precedents and present day anomalies that fuel these calls, the authors are sceptical of the relevance of decolonisation as an epistemological and philosophical catalyst for reforming and rethinking higher education curricula and practice. Decolonisation, as a term apropos to and derived from the moment of political decolonisation in many African countries during the mid-twentieth century, is both problematic and polarising. Thus, in this paper we contest the decolonisation narrative, especially within the framework of design curricula, instead arguing for the detraditionalisation, recontextualisation and ultimately 21st-centurisation of an African based graphic design university curriculum by, inter alia, enhancing it with appropriate entrepreneurship theories. The need for entrepreneurship infused graphic design education is necessitated by an increasingly challenging and complex contemporary climate where graphic design practitioners are expected to possess skills that extend beyond the realms of design. The paper posits that augmenting entrepreneurship principles to those that presently persist in graphic design education, as opposed to decolonising it, will result in "developing and designing locally and regionally relevant curricula" (Le Grange 2016, p.8) which will equip graduates to respond to and successfully navigate the ever changing demands of contemporary graphic design practice. Some recommendations on how contextually appropriate entrepreneurship theories can be effectively infused into university level graphic design curricula are provided.

Keywords:

Detraditionalisation, graphic design, entrepreneurship, decoloniasation

Introduction

In an illuminating article examining the decolonisation of the South African academy, Achille Mbembe (2016, p.32) ponders on the expediency of the notion of decolonisation for the reformation of higher education:

> The harder I tried to make sense of the idea of 'decolonisation' that has become the rallying cry for those trying to undo the racist legacies of the past, the more I kept asking myself to what extent we might be fighting a complexly mutating entity with concepts inherited from an entirely different age and epoch. Is today's Beast the same as yesterday's or are we confronting an entirely different apparatus, an entirely different rationality – both of which require us to produce radically new concepts?

The authors of this paper also foster parallel concerns in our exposition of the graphic design curriculum at the Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) and how it can be strengthened through the inclusion of appropriate entrepreneurship precepts. Like Mbembe, we are incredulous towards the hyper-usage of the decolonisation term for the transformation of modern day university curriculum. The first part of this paper problematises this historically laden term with the aim of shifting the epistemic and philosophical conversation on curriculum reform beyond decolonisation towards a detraditionalisation and recontextualisation of design education in Africa.

At this point we must highlight that the meaning and resulting implications of decolonisation in South African higher education is highly contested (Jansen 2017; Mgqwashu 2016, Wingfield 2017,). One of the seminal voices on decolonising learning, George Sefa Dei (2010, p.11) posits that decolonised education must be "truly transformative", an ethos echoed by Patty Bode (2014, p. 52) who adds that "to become a decoloniser of curriculum, teachers first need to see the world through a different lens". This transformative agenda is absolutely necessary and this paper affirms this view by arguing for the inclusion of entrepreneurship into design education. However, the enigma of marrying the decolonisation narrative with this ongoing education reform is baffling. This paradox is magnified by Dei (2012, p. 13) who asserts that "in decolonising schooling and education, we may want to look at the question of examinations and insist that assessments have to be age, grade, and subject-specific". Once again, the authors are sympathetic to Dei's sentiment, but does questioning the efficacy of rigid assessment practices need to be hijacked by decolonisation? The reevaluation of mono-modal paper based assessment is a universal educational imperative, but the almost clichéd deployment of decolonisation to describe the realignment of postsecondary pedagogy reduces the concept to a sort of academic fad. Sarah Hunt and Cindy Holmes (2015, p. 157) are critical of this fetishisation of the term and argue that it devalues and often ignores "the immediate context of settler colonialism on the lands where these conversations take place". Put differently, decolonisation should not be abstracted from its original and essential aim of liberating native societies from the clutches of imperial domination.

In thinking about infusing the Graphic Design curriculum at TUT with appropriate entrepreneurship principles, we propose detraditionalisation theory, as opposed to decolonisation, as an alternative conceptual pathway. At the heart of detraditionalisation is the questioning and re-evaluation of established truths and to "critically reflect upon, and lose faith in what the traditional has to offer" (Heelas 1996, p. 4). When appropriated to the educational domain, detraditionalisation induces us to reconsider the normative practices of teaching and learning, towards more agile, responsive and relevant systems of knowledge sharing and production. Later in the paper, we flag the 'traditional' educational imperative of preparing students for design vocations, in favour of contaminating the design curriculum

with the entrepreneurial impulse. The primary thesis of this paper is that we ought to detraditionalise our educational practices and not necessarily decolonise them.

Reframing the decolonisation narrative

Decolonisation was formally institutionalised by the United Nations (UN) with the establishment of the 'UN Special Committee on Decolonisation' in 1961 to acknowledge and support the formally colonised newly independent nation-states in Asia, the Americas and Africa. This political dimension of decolonisation was later thrust into the philosophic and aesthetic domain by the Fanon inspired *Decolonising the mind: the politics of language in African literature* (1981) by Ngugi Wa Thiong'o. A radicalised version of the concept has recently resurfaced in South Africa, exemplified by the *#RhodesMustFall* and *#FeesMustFall* campaigns which invoked decolonisation as the intellectual and moral compass for their praiseworthy causes. Unfortunately, Mary Carmen (2016, p. 235) warns that this revolutionary construct of decolonisation points to "a complete subversion, destruction or deconstruction of colonial attitudes, processes and concepts" and in a country like South Africa, this leads to an erroneous perception that, as revealed by Emmanuel Mgqwashu (2016), "decolonisation equals an attack on white academics by black academics". Although Mgqwashu calls for the "unsettling" of this acrimonious interpretation, decolonisation in a South African context is inherently divisive and polarising, as it operates contra to the Africa-Europe, black-white binaries (Jansen 2017, p. 167). Jonathan Jansen (2017, p. 159) is wary of the risks and unsuspecting snares of this extremist 'hard version' of decolonisation.

In a rare and enlightening assessment of how the concept of decolonisation has been abused by the postcolonial principals in Zimbabwe, Munyaradzi Hwami (2016, p. 27) exposes how this ideal, and its attendant objectives of nationalism, pan-Africanism, Africanisation and indigenisation – political and theoretical movements founded on the premise of decentring colonial supremacy – have themselves become hegemonising forces: "Besides neoliberal globalisation, other dominating discourses such as nationalism, indigenisation, and pan-Africanism have been unmasked as hegemonising practices utilised by elite groups to dominate the majority and in the process appropriating economic and political influence". Although Hwami professes faith in the unpolluted version of Fanonian decolonisation, he bemoans how what is now known as Mugabeism, has perverted the term. Amongst other totalitarian traits, Hwami (2016, pp. 26, 29) notes how Mugabeism decolonisation is "intolerant of criticism" and conveniently dismisses any form of opposition or "democratic and human rights claims as Western machinations to derail the decolonisation process". In Hwami's (2016, p. 34) final analysis "decolonisation is supposed to result in development" but in most African countries, as in Zimbabwe, "the fruits of this progress have been accruing to the rich elite nationalists while the rest of the population swim in unprecedented poverty levels. The indigenous bourgeoisie, as was foreseen by Fanon, demand people to remain patriotic".

This emphasis on Hwami (2016, p. 34) is meant to, in his own words, spotlight the "complexity of any decolonisation agenda in modern times". Drawing on these insights, our concern lies in how decolonisation has become the *de facto* theoretical instrument for revising higher education, and as such could become a kind of hegemonic scholarly force which will be entrenched as the new tradition in education reform. In a pre-emptive caution against this, Mgqwashu (2016) recognises that decolonised learning should have its roots in "African identities and world views", but goes on to highlight that "this doesn't exempt it from critique". We too acknowledge the priority of detraditionalising higher education curricula from its Western heritage, by recontextualising it with the current and future needs of Africa. One of the hallmarks of the decolonial attitude is the motivation to rediscover an intrinsic Africanness by "…resisting colonial education and knowledges" (Dei 2012, p. 105). Dei (2012, p. 103) expresses this mood by emphatically proclaiming that "we must be true

to our *authentic* selves as African subjects of knowing". This call is reinforced by others such as Bagele Chilisa (2012, p. 14) who stresses that a decolonised education requires the "restoration" of African systems that were marginalised by colonisation. Once more, the authors completely abhor the devastation created by the racist and systemic suppression of African societies during colonisation, but wonder if the instinct to rediscover and restore an authentic "nativist" African experience is synchronous with the need to provide our diverse students with locally entrenched, but globally competitive, training (Jansen 2017, p. 167). There is a growing pool of opposition against this decolonial Afrocentric logic such as Post-Africanism which sees Afrocentricism as "an unofficial policy of cultural protectionism" (Ekpo 2005, p. 112). At the core of Post-Africanism is the question: does classical Africa possess the right ideological and practical apparatus to help us navigate Africa's contemporary challenges? The answer remains unknown, but what is certain is that over half a century of decolonisation policies in many African countries has had unsatisfactory and often disappointing outcomes.

Lamenting the poor performance of African countries that appropriated, experimented, and enacted the idyllic notion of decolonisation as captioned by Frantz Fanon, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Cheik Anta Diop, the renowned American economist Thomas Sowell (1998, p. 120) eloquently and quite correctly diagnosed:

> After the soaring rhetoric and optimistic expectations at the beginning of independence were followed by bitter disappointments and painful retrogressions that reached into virtually every aspect of African life, the immediate political response was not so much a re-evaluation of the *assumptions and policies* which lead to such disastrous results, but instead a widespread blaming of the departed imperialists, or racial minorities such as the Indians, or even the United States, which has had relatively little role in African history, for good or ill.

It should be noted that the authors do not champion the neoliberal stance Sowell is writing from, however like Hwami (2016, p. 19) we are sceptical whether it is possible to realise "genuine development outside the dominant neoliberal paradigm".

In the wake of the #RhodesMustFall episode, some have proposed that South African higher education institutions should adopt a 'soft' decolonisation wherein "what changes is the relational position of an African-centred curriculum to the rest of the world" (Jansen 2017, p. 159). This 'soft' decolonisation is echoed by Mary Carmen (2016, p. 236) in her synthesis of Kwasi Wiredu's idea of 'conceptual decolonisation', which "is not aimed at liberating African philosophical thought from *all* influences from the colonial past, only those that are undue". Lesley Le Grande (2016, p. 6) speaks in a similar tone by arguing that the decolonisation of education should be "a process of change that does not necessarily (sic) involve destroying Western knowledge but in decentring it or perhaps deterritorialising it (making it something other than what it is)". This redemptive and conciliatory synthesis is regrettably overlooked in populist decolonisation rhetoric and whilst the authors also subscribe to this 'soft' variant of 'conceptual decolonisation', we remain wary of the delimitations of the term in its entirety, as concluded by Jansen (2017, p. 171):

> While the call for the decolonisation of the curriculum on the part of protesting students might be viewed as a useful wake-up call to accelerate the transformation of universities, *it is fundamentally misguided*. Moreover, when wielded as a crude instrument of black nationalism, the call to decolonise curriculum and society is not only offensive; *it is dangerous* in a country still struggling with racial, gender, and class inequalities of a very present past.

Entrepreneurship infused graphic design curriculum

Having problematised the notion of decolonisation as a conduit for curriculum transformation, we will now focus on the actual mechanics of revising and detraditionalising graphic design curricula[1] towards an entrepreneurship based model. At its most schematised form, entrepreneurship is defined as a process by which individuals pursue opportunities by putting novel ideas into practice which result in economic activity and job creation (Barringer & Ireland 2006). One of the intangibles of entrepreneurship is that it often transcends mere money-making (Rwigema & Venter 2004), as confirmed by Fayolle (2007) who indicates that businesses are not only constrained to monetary advancement, but are also actively engaged in disturbing or detraditionalising conventional social interactions and production strategies. A 2011 Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) report revealed that South African youth, as compared to their counterparts from other emerging economies such as Brazil, had the lowest Total Entrepreneurship Activity (TEA) (Kelley, Singer & Herrington 2011). Analysts observe that, amongst other impediments, Apartheid policies which deliberately excluded large sections of the population from formal economic activity can be imputed for this low level of entrepreneurial activity (Phaho 2008). However, according to another GEM report, the main factor that influences entrepreneurial performance and sustainability is entrepreneurship education; the better the education, the higher the entrepreneur's chances of sustained success (Singer, Amorós & Moska 2015).

But firstly, it is worth citing the significance of global best practice when rethinking curriculum design. Mbembe (2016, p. 41) counsels that South African universities "cannot afford to think exclusively in a South-African-centric way". Brenda Wingfield (2017) echoes this advice by stating that "South African teachers, lecturers and professors must develop curricula that build on the best knowledge skills, values, beliefs and habits from around the world". This move towards internationalising our offerings should not be done at the expense of local wisdom, however Wingfield (2017) qualifies her views by mentioning how the world has benefited from local knowledge and developments, and contends that "we should continue to benefit from their discoveries, too". Sowell (1999, p. 61) reminds us that "much of the story of the human race has been a story of the massive cultural borrowings which have created a modern world technology" and the most important form of this borrowing is the exchange of intellectual resources. In support of this 'cultural borrowing' Mbembe (2016, p.41) proposes a more fluid "globalised talent mobility" amongst African academies in order to "build new diasporic intellectual networks".

In order to detraditionalise graphic design curricula, we espouse that this talent mobility[2] should happen in concert with a 'curriculum mobility'. Curriculum development is largely dependent on the existing body of knowledge within a field and Deirdre Pretorius (2016, p. 47) surmises South African graphic design research as encompassing the following interests: "South African graphics for social justice and human rights, protest and resistance, design language, advertising, comics and cartoons, print media, illustration and murals". It is clear that traditional graphic design academic research does not engage with graphic design entrepreneurship, which inevitably results in a shortage of reliable data and literature to draw from.[3] 'Curriculum mobility' or drawing on appropriate case studies and research from

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[1] Since its inception in 1991 DEFSA has been the premier platform for reimagining South African design education. Pretorius (2016, p.48) confirms that since 2000 the forum "has tended to focus on teaching, learning and programme development issues" where graphic design curriculum reform has been debated at some depth.

[2] Within the context of this paper, talent mobility means inviting successful graphic design entrepreneurs and various experts in business practice to present lectures and block courses to students, which will require open-ended administrative and teaching strategies from the university.

[3] Southoff (2004), Sutherland (2004), Carey (2010), and Giloi and Du Toit (2013) have published articles dealing with design education, assessment and professional practice in South African universities. In their papers, very little is mentioned about entrepreneurship education within graphic design education, particularly in a South African context.

around the world can ameliorate this deficit, but there is a concurrent need to increase local scholarship on graphic design entrepreneurship.

Of interest to us is how this deficiency of graphic design entrepreneurship scholarship can be seen in graphic design curriculum at the Tshwane University of Technology. Below, we present a very brief examination of the existing levels of entrepreneurship training within the Graphic Design Diploma at TUT to highlight this scarcity.

Table 1: List of modules for TUT's Graphic Design Diploma (TUT 2017, p.75)

First year	Credits
Communication Design I	36
Design Techniques I	36
Graphic Design Drawing I	24
History of Art and Design I	12
Professional Graphic Design Practice I	12
Second year	
Communication Design II	48
Design Techniques II	30
Graphic Design Drawing II	18
History and Theory of Graphic Design II	12
Professional Graphic Design Practice II	12
Third year	
Communication Design III	60
Design Techniques III	24
Graphic Design Drawing III	12
History and Theory of Graphic Design III	12
Professional Graphic Design Practice III	12

Table 1 showcases the various modules within the current Graphic Design Diploma at TUT, which, like other programmes both nationally and internationally, mostly focuses on the technical aspects of the discipline where students are equipped, quite effectively, with the necessary skills and tools to be proficient in web design, print design, advertising design, and typography (Hannam 2012). Of significance is that students are only really exposed to entrepreneurship within the Professional Practice (I, II & III) modules, which make up a measly 10% of the overall credit allocation within the diploma. Although some of the content within the Professional Practice module is suited to entrepreneurial activity, in actuality the module schools students with professional behaviour and conduct related to the workplace environment. It does not necessarily offer entrepreneurship training. Writing about the Australian situation, Ruth Bridgstock (2011) confirms that creative courses usually focus on the employability of the graduate, thereby inadvertently relegating the focus on entrepreneurship and business skills. This emphasis on employability is also seen in the

nature of the feedback received from the industry linked advisory board, which provides curriculum related input on an annual basis to the Department of Visual Communication at TUT. Although the comments from the industry insiders are wide ranging, they inevitably gravitate towards ensuring that the curriculum is abreast with the latest industry developments and that the students are adequately prepared for the world of work.

An argument could be made that design is an innately entrepreneurial activity due to its creative and problem-solving attributes. These attributes can be found in all the other practical modules (i.e. Communication Design, Design Techniques, and Graphic Design Drawing) where students are exposed to simulated projects that require them to utilise various entrepreneurial strategies. However, the limitation is that the entrepreneurial dimension is not overtly emphasised, which is problematic since overall success as a design entrepreneur is not solely dependent on the design and creative skills which these practical modules teach. Design entrepreneurs also require other competencies which are not properly covered in the present course. We acknowledge that the current curriculum and its predecessors have kick-started the careers of many graduates who have become successful design entrepreneurs, but posit that, whilst training students to be proficient designers, the programme must also equip them, both psychologically and technically, to be entrepreneurial. Entrepreneurship should not be a welcome by-product as is presently the case.

In a treatise aptly titled *The rise of the design entrepreneur* Anderson (2014, p. 3) argues that to be successful entrepreneurs "graphic designers need to think and act more like traditional entrepreneurs". Anderson (Ibid) further adds that "they need a supplemental business education that is tailored to understanding the full life cycle of how to take a product or service from idea to market". Anderson's statement highlights the necessity for graphic designers to be exposed to entrepreneurial skills and principles, which warrants the reevaluation of graphic design education at local tertiary institutions. The ongoing realignment of university curricula with the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) is a timely blank canvas upon which the nature of graphic design training can be radically reimagined. To this end, the new Integrated Communication Design Diploma[4], which will replace the current National Diploma in Graphic Design at TUT will make significant strides with regards to introducing entrepreneurship training within the curriculum[5].

Some recommendations

Since the Graphic Design curriculum is undergoing an overhaul, most of the recommendations presented here have been considered within the coming Integrated Communication Design programme. One of the major reformations which is due to take place is related to Work Integrated Learning (WIL). At the moment, graphic design students at TUT are required to complete a six week WIL placement at a design or related work environment[6], however, within the new diploma WIL is due to have a credit weighting of 60, split between second and third year. Although this is a welcome improvement, we caution against using this module as a platform for the sole purpose of preparing students to be employable in the industry. Although this remains an essential and important outcome, the WIL module should also introduce students to entrepreneurship by allowing them, amongst other activities, to freelance. Acknowledging the value of internship/WIL programmes as a filler between tertiary education and the industry, Hannam (2012, p. 4) strongly advocates for freelancing, stating that through freelancing "you get to test the waters for a career in

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[4] The Integrated Communication Design diploma will be introduced in 2019.

[5] Although the approval and accreditation processes of the programme and its subject content is ongoing, the authors can confirm that the new Diploma will have a dedicated module on entrepreneurship.

[6] This WIL placement is not formally integrated into the current graphic design curriculum, but the Department of Visual Communication assists all the design students to obtain credible placements.

graphic design, to make a little money, and to fill in the gaps in your education". Put differently, besides exposing them to workplace learning, students must also be prompted to seek out their own income generating opportunities as part of the WIL outcomes.

Hannam (2012) advocates for the introduction of freelancing into university design curriculum as early as the first year because it induces self-directed and self-reflexive learning. The first part of this process would entail workshops or talks from successful design entrepreneurs on themes like professionalism and customer relations. This preparatory phase equips students with the relevant content related to freelancing such as, but not limited to, client engagement, project management, and pricing. The assessment of the projects should also tap into non-traditional modes of evaluating the students' competencies. For example, students can produce a portfolio of evidence of their project which will be demonstrated through oral PowerPoint presentations. The presentation should report on the interactions the student had with their client and must contain a self-assessment of the competencies they gained or missed in the process. An important dimension of the portfolio of evidence is the feedback from the client, which can be validated in the form of voice or video recordings, or the traditional written report.

The freelancing strategy will also expose students to the wealth of opportunities hidden within the country's informal economy. Graphic designers are central to the overall health of the Small, Medium and Micro-sized Enterprises (SMME) sector in South Africa[7] due to the fact that design is a "key strategic activity" that can contribute to a business' value through, amongst other things, corporate identities, branding, and packaging (Gunes 2012, p. 65). Due to these specialised services, graphic designers can sometimes mean the difference between success and failure for SMMEs in the country's highly competitive and globalised business landscape. Amongst other benefits, the advantage of this freelancing approach is that it will ease students into entrepreneurship without the pressure and risks of handling 'big' contracts.

Another spinoff of freelancing will be improved networking. Networking is a necessity when running a business, however, very few design programmes have networking as part of their curriculums (Bridgstock 2011, p. 14). Bridgstock motivates that "creatives should start to practice networking as early in their careers as they can, and to treat networking as an important skill set which can be learned". Thus, besides integrating it into the curriculum, students should be encouraged to network within the campus environment as well. Through networking, students can vastly increase their confidence, communication skills and, mostly importantly, industry contacts.

Lastly, in a seminal article entrepreneurship training in South Africa Amadi-Echendu et al. (2016, p. 31) provide a list of recommendations related to the transformation of higher education towards an entrepreneurial framework. Amongst other suggestions[8], the most critical intervention they advocate for is the introduction of entrepreneurship related block courses in aspects such as financial accounting, developing contracts, human resource management etc. Of importance is that these courses must be contextually relevant to students in the creative industries. Ultimately, all these aforementioned points will foster that intangible "entrepreneurial spirit"[9] within the students (Amadi-Echendu et al. Ibid). Our conviction is that this reformation needs to be precipitated by 'curriculum and talent

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[7] We propose that TUT and other universities with design departments initiate links with the Department of Small Business Development and the National Youth Development Agency in order to access reliable databases of economically active emerging businesses that need the intervention of graphic designers.

[8] Amadi-Echendu et al. (2016, p.31) also suggest the setting up of incubation centres to assist students with the commercialisation of their business ideas.

[9] This entrepreneurial spirit or behaviour can be cultivated through extracurricular activities and teaching methods using both formal and informal learning (Salem, 2014).

mobility' in order to supplement the current lack of entrepreneurship tuition in graphic design programmes.

Conclusion

In a constantly evolving society and economic landscape, graphic design curriculum needs to respond to this context by providing students with responsive content that will skill them to be self-sustainable and engaged citizens. Furthermore, in the present climate of rife unemployment, graphic designers are a key competent and interface that can assist many small businesses to become competitive and viable. Based on the abridged investigation of TUT's graphic design programme, it is apparent that the curriculum is mostly geared towards preparing graduates for employment and does not acutely emphasise entrepreneurship. Therefore, we encourage the consolidation of entrepreneurship theories within local graphic design curricula, but question the elicitation of decolonisation as the driver of this amendment. The authors are wary of the almost hegemonic grip which decolonisation has assumed in university transformation discourse. Although we are sympathetic to the 'soft', 'conceptual decolonisation' which induces "all individuals to explore their own assumptions and beliefs so that they can be open to other ways of knowing, being, and doing" (Sherwood & Edwards 2006, p.188), this important exercise is clouded by the very heritage and DNA of the decolonisation term. Hence, the authors propose that we contemplate going beyond the decolonisation narrative towards a detraditionalisation and recontextualisation of design training, especially during this open window of the HEQSF realignment process. Decolonisation discourse has left a positive mark on humanity and we do not seek to downgrade this contribution, however, perhaps it is time to reconsider its viability for design education reform.

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