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### Decolonising (Through) Inclusive Education?

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#### Abstract


Inclusive education seeks to reduce exclusion from and within schools, and to secure participation and learning success for all. Its origins are in countries of the Global North, and countries of the Global South, like South Africa, have been relatively late to introduce inclusive education. Inclusive education has been critiqued as constituting a neocolonial project and an unwelcome imposition on countries of the Global South. It can be seen as a form of coloniality because the knowledge from Euro-American countries dominates the field. Furthermore, countries are expected to fund a model of inclusion developed in the resource-rich North, and current schooling perpetuates colonial hierarchies. Responding to this critique, this article presents an Afrocentric model of inclusive education, citing scholars who claim that inclusive education is congruent with traditional African culture and community and resonates with ubuntu. It is then shown that this argument is not unassailable. An alternative is that inclusive education might be harnessed to further the decolonial project, and that aspects of inclusive education can resist the coloniality of knowledge, of power, and of being. This position may also be problematic because it could represent what has been termed *settler innocence*. Finally, implications for research and teaching are suggested.

**Keywords:** inclusive education, decolonisation, ubuntu, coloniality, Africanisation, settler innocence

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#### Introduction

Conversations among South African university lecturers in response to the call for decolonising education have become increasingly urgent, not least among teacher educators. One of the fields of teacher education is inclusive education, a field which has been given prominence by legislation that requires that teachers are knowledgeable about inclusive education and are able to teach in classes with diverse learners. It is a nascent field in South Africa, and one that has relied heavily on scholarship emanating from countries where inclusive education is more established. As inclusive education is

being sedimented into university courses, policy prescriptions, and research projects, so is it simultaneously being questioned in scholarly conversations, particularly as it relates to decolonisation. In considering these conversations, the problem emerges that there is little systematic conceptual engagement with inclusive education and decoloniality in the scholarly literature. This article aims to address this problem by asking the question, “What are the implications of the decolonial turn (Grosfoguel, 2007) for inclusive education as a field, and for teacher education for inclusive teaching?”

In exploring possible answers to this question, I attempt to bring decolonisation and inclusive education into conversation with one another, first by outlining ways in which inclusive education can be critiqued from a decolonial perspective. After considering the possibility of an Afrocentric inclusive education as part of the decolonisation project, I then argue (with some caveats) that inclusive education, if cast as a critical education project, may be harnessed in the pursuit of decolonising education. The article ends with some thoughts about the implications of the issues discussed for research and teaching of inclusive education in South African higher education. The article is deliberately devoid of a conclusion, which signals an ongoing epistemic journey rather than a destination, and it is hoped that this work will spark further conversations on this important topic.

## Setting the Scene: Inclusive Education in International and South African Contexts

Inclusive education traces its origins to parental activism in the Nordic countries in the 1960s and 1970s (Dyson & Forlin, 1999). Parents of children with disabilities were dissatisfied with the segregated education that their children received in special education settings. Drawing on human rights discourses that developed in the wake of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948), parents and other activists demanded the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream settings so that these children could enjoy equal educational opportunities. The idea(l) of inclusive education was taken up in other countries of the Global North through various policy mandates. Canada was the first country to use the term *inclusive education* (Thomas & Vaughn, 2004), and this appellation is generally preferred to terms like *integration* and *mainstreaming*. The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994, p. viii) endorsed inclusive education, saying that “those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within a child-centred pedagogy capable of meeting these needs.”

In many countries of the Global North, inclusive education has developed from a foundation of well-established special education systems. In addition, these countries have implemented inclusive education in contexts where quality basic education was widely available, and out-of-school populations were relatively small. The advance of inclusive education has been enabled by financial and technical resources, legislative frameworks, skilled teachers and allied professionals, and traditions of parent advocacy. The growth of inclusive education has also been accompanied by the rapid expansion of scholarship in the field, which has focused on its conceptualisation and implementation. Scholars working in countries in the Global North have seen their work privileged, and become seminal work in the field. So, for example, Booth and Ainscow’s 1998 edited volume, *From Them to Us: An International Study of Inclusion in Education*, only looks at European countries, the USA, Australia, and New Zealand. The current members of the editorial advisory board of the *International Journal of Inclusive Education* are exclusively from countries in the Global North. Emanating predominantly from the Global North, books, articles, websites, and workshops, which could be said to reflect the practice language (Collins, 2011) of inclusive education, present a view of how it might be realised in the classroom. Included in this practice language are strategies like curriculum and instructional differentiation and cooperative learning, teaching arrangements like co-teaching, working with teacher aides and other specialist personnel, and ways of ensuring access for individuals who have difficulties through assistive devices and the design of individual education plans

(IEPs). Other requirements for the successful implementation of inclusive education in this literature are teacher education, time, willingness and ability to collaborate, and smaller class size.

Following the publication of the Salamanca Statement, a “second generation” (Kozleski, Artiles, & Waitoller, 2011, p. 4) of countries has begun to adopt inclusive education. These countries are mostly in the “developing” world, and they are grappling with the implications of implementing inclusive education in contexts of underdevelopment, and with colonial legacies. South Africa is one such country. Following the democratic elections of 1994, the Constitution (1996) of the country laid the groundwork of an inclusive education system through establishing the right of all citizens to basic education (section 29.1), affirming equality and human dignity (section 1a), and outlawing discrimination (section 9.4). The South African Schools Act (1996) legislated the possibility of inclusive schooling by asserting that where it is “reasonably practicable,” learners with “special education needs” should be served in the mainstream and relevant support should be provided for these learners (section 12.4). In 1996, The National Committee for Education Support Services and National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training (NCESS/NCSNET) were appointed by the minister of education and the Department of Education (DoE) to investigate and make recommendations about special needs and support in education in South Africa. The NCESS/NCSNET report recommended that the separate special and ordinary education systems be integrated (DoE, 1997). Some of the ways that the committee envisioned this being realised, like building modifications, curriculum development, staff training and intersectoral collaboration, would be included in the *Education White Paper Six: Special Needs Education*, which was published in 2001 (DoE).

*Education White Paper 6* (DoE, 2001) acknowledged a large number of children and young people out of school, most of whom are disabled, and addressed extrinsic and intrinsic barriers to learning, with a focus on ways in which the education system may itself be a barrier to learning. It detailed a framework for establishing an inclusive education and training system through building capacity and expanding provision and access in all education sectors. Following *White Paper 6*, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) has issued various guideline documents that provide details of how an inclusive education system should be realised in South African schools.

Tracking the genesis and historical trajectory of inclusive education is easier than settling on its definition and establishing what it is. Meanings have been contested as the discursive community shifts between emphases and nuances (Walton, 2016). Inclusive education can be described as a rights-based approach to education that seeks social justice by resisting exclusion within and from school communities and promoting the access, participation, and achievement of all learners. One contestation about its meaning involves whether inclusive education should be restricted to a concern with including children with special needs or disabilities (a narrow view) or in a broad view, whether it should be about all children vulnerable to marginalisation based on any characteristic or identity (Ainscow, Booth, & Dyson, 2006). Another debate concerns placement, and whether separate education settings for some children can be justified within an inclusive education system. Contextual differences also lead to locally developed understandings of inclusive education (Kozleski et al., 2011). Over the years, there have been many fields and disciplines that have contributed to inclusive education (Slee, 2011), and it has taken on different forms. As a result, inclusive education may be understood to be a goal or vision, an ideology, a practice, a policy, a field of knowledge production, and a pedagogic discourse. There have been various criticisms levelled against inclusive education, including that it is theoretically flimsy (Armstrong, Armstrong, & Spandagou, 2011), that it lacks empirical evidence for its efficacy (Kavale & Forness, 2000), and that it compromises the specialist support to which disabled children are entitled (Corbett, 2001). This article engages specifically with those who critique inclusive education from a decolonial perspective.

## Inclusive Education Critiqued as a Neocolonial Project

As inclusive education has gained traction, concerns have been raised about the extent to which it may represent a neocolonial project, imposed on the developing world by countries of the Global North and by multinationals like the United Nations. Armstrong et al. (2011, p. 33) likened its expanding influence to the spreading of an “evangelical belief” in the inclusion of diversity by aid agencies and donors from the Global North who exhort “countries to adopt inclusive education as a policy prescription to address system failure and individual disadvantage.” The pressure to adopt inclusive education comes with scant recognition of ways in which the history of colonialism and underdevelopment in countries of the Global South compound the problems of educational exclusion. In countries struggling to guarantee access to quality basic education in the face of system failure rooted in historic, global, and structural disadvantage, inclusive education may be seen as idealistic (Armstrong et al., 2011). These arguments can be heard in South Africa, particularly as calls for the decolonisation of education have gained momentum in the wake of the #Feesmustfall movement in higher education. There are at least three critiques of inclusive education that could be made from a decolonial perspective, and these can be linked with the notions of the coloniality of knowledge, of power, and of being.

Decoloniality begins with the recognition of “existential realities of suffering, oppression, repression, domination and exclusion” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013, p. 15). From this recognition, the work of decoloniality is to dismantle the

*relations of power and conceptions of knowledge that foment the reproduction of racial, gender, and geo-political hierarchies that came into being or found new and more powerful forms of expression in the modern/colonial world. (Maldonado-Torres, 2011, p. 1)*

Decoloniality addresses the *coloniality of knowledge*, the *coloniality of power*, and the *coloniality of being* (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). These colonialities are imbricated, are mutually reinforcing, and together produce the experience of coloniality, which should be distinguished from colonialism. The latter refers to the situation where the sovereignty of one nation or people rests with another nation or people. Coloniality outlasts colonialism and perpetuates patterns of power in social, economic, cultural, and educational relations that were established as a result of colonialism (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). The *coloniality of knowledge* is represented by the hegemony of Eurocentric and Western philosophies. This has carried assumptions of universality and objectivity, and presents Western knowledge as “the only one capable of achieving a universal consciousness, and [dismisses] non-Western knowledge as particularistic and, thus, unable to achieve universality” (Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 214). The task of decoloniality is to shift the geography of reason from the West to ex-colonised epistemic sites (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013) and advance the legitimacy of what Grosfoguel (2007, p. 213) called “subaltern epistemic perspectives.”

The *coloniality of power* is what Mignolo (2007, p. 159) called the “darker side of modernity and the global reach of imperial capitalism.” With its origins in the impetus to invade, conquer, and colonise, the *coloniality of power* concerns the exertion of hegemonic power and oppression. This has resulted in the current asymmetrical global power structure (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013) that centres the countries of the Global North. Their domination of the postcolonial world, particularly through control of finance and markets, ensures ongoing exploitation. Colonial power relations, according to Maldonado-Torres (2007, p. 242), have not only marked “the areas of authority, sexuality, knowledge and the economy,” but also “the general understanding of being.” The *coloniality of being* refers to “the effects of coloniality in lived experience” (Maldonado-Torres 2007, p. 242). The colonial invader assumed the inhumanity of colonised people through denying their rationality. As Maldonado-Torres (2007, p. 253)

expressed it, “Misanthropic scepticism and racism work together with ontological exclusion.” Maldonado-Torres (2007) explained that the *coloniality of being* creates ontological colonial difference, which renders colonised people as dispensable.

This brief account of decoloniality is acknowledged to be superficial, and is intended to give the reader just enough background to follow the decolonial critiques of inclusive education presented below.

### **Inclusive Education as a Form of the *Coloniality of Knowledge***

As inclusive education has been taken up as a policy prescription for the education system in South Africa, concern has been expressed about it being a Western ideology, dominated by Western scholars, and uncritically taken up in South Africa. Support for this claim can be found in the Department of Basic Education’s *Guidelines for Responding to Learner Diversity in the Classroom* (Department of Basic Education, 2011), which relied almost exclusively on Western scholarship, including the now discredited ideas of multiple intelligences and learning styles. Similarly, the “Resources and Further Reading” provided in the *Guidelines for Inclusive Teaching and Learning* (Department of Basic Education, 2010) provided mainly Western texts. Whole-school approaches to inclusive education from the West, like the *Index for Inclusion* (Booth & Ainscow, 2002) and positive behaviour support have been trialled in South African schools (see Engelbrecht, Oswald, & Forlin, 2006; Moodley, 2016). Scholarship in inclusive education has drawn extensively on theory emanating from the West, particularly that of Bronfenbrenner (as cited in, for example, Geldenhuys & Weavers, 2013).

Many higher education institutions in South Africa now offer courses in inclusive education in initial teacher education and at postgraduate levels. This has been accompanied by the production of textbooks for use by students and in-service teachers. Here the preeminence of theories and literature from the Global North is again evident. This includes the uncritical acceptance of Western diagnostic categories for learners, particularly with respect to emotional, behavioural, and mental health labels (see, for example, Moletsane, 2013, on attention deficit hyperactivity disorder). While it could readily be claimed that this reliance on and deference to the knowledge of the West was an inevitable result of being a second-generation inclusive education country, it can equally be seen as an instance of the *coloniality of knowledge*. In policy and scholarship, local, indigenous, and culturally relevant knowledge has been minimised, if not ignored. In its place, the knowledge of inclusive education forged amidst the wealth and privilege of education systems in the Global North has been given primacy. Knowledge and power are not unrelated in coloniality, and the dominance of inclusive education knowledge from the Global North has financial implications when imposed on countries of the Global South.

### **Inclusive Education as a Form of the *Coloniality of Power***

The failure of inclusive education has been said to be a result of “a combination of limited resources and the external manipulation of educational policy by external funding agencies pursuing agendas arising in the developed world” (Armstrong et al., 2011, p. 32). The *coloniality of power* can be observed in the prescription of education policies, like inclusive education, which emanate from the Global North by international agencies (like UNESCO), their consultants, and funding agencies. Not only are these policies potentially incompatible with the contextual realities of certain countries, they also pose a financial burden on them. Writing from the context of Cambodia, Kalyanpur lamented:

*The international standards for inclusive education policy and practice, such as the Salamanca Framework or the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, emerge from a predominantly western-centric, resource-rich model of service provision that is often incompatible with the lived realities of people with disabilities in non-western contexts. (2016, p. 16)*

The argument presented here is that the financial and human resource demands of inclusive education are seen to be unsupportable in countries already buckling under financial constraints (which are linked to the legacy of colonialism and apartheid). Perversely, it is the very conditions of coloniality that have resulted in the financial precariousness of many countries in the Global South. And the history of colonialism and underdevelopment in these countries compound the problems of educational exclusion. The *Salamanca Statement* (UNESCO, 1994) does say that inclusive education is a cost-effective way of addressing the need to bring the millions of out-of-school children and youth into schools. Instead of building additional special schools to meet the needs of those out of school because of disabilities, the statement maintains that equipping current schools to meet these needs is preferable. Despite this, inclusive education as envisaged by the *Salamanca Statement* and Western notions of what inclusive education entails is not cost free. *White Paper 6* (DoE, 2001) noted the human and financial resource implications of building an inclusive education system, and said that a funding strategy would be developed. Six years after the publication of *White Paper 6*, Wildeman and Nomdo (2007) reported that funding for inclusive education had not yet been prioritised by the provincial departments of education in South Africa. By 2015, a Human Rights Watch report showed that nearly half a million disabled children with disabilities remained out of school, and stated that “segregation and lack of inclusion permeates all levels of South Africa’s education system” (Human Rights Watch, 2015, p. 3). Inadequate funding for inclusive education was found to be one of the reasons for this exclusion.

### **Inclusive Education as a Form of the *Coloniality of Being***

The third argument questions the good of inclusive education if it is premised on the inclusion of children and young people in schools characterised by colonialism and coloniality. In South Africa, it is easy to see the legacy of colonialism in many schools. Symbols like school uniforms, buildings, and ceremonies bear (not so faint) traces of colonial and apartheid education. Western epistemologies dominate curricula, and indigenous knowledge is rarely promoted. Perhaps more insidious is the way in which schools and the wider education system reinforce coloniality, particularly by creating and entrenching the distinctions or *abyssal lines* (de Sousa Santos, 2007) between those who are visible, valued and valorised and those who are not. This is echoed in Slee’s (2011, p. 42) comment that some learners are “smiled upon” by the system, from the point of enrolment to ultimate graduation in a display of the maxim that “Privilege begets privilege.” These smiled-upon learners see their image in the schools they attend, and hear familiar voices that hail them (Bernstein, 2000). Competitive school cultures in neoliberal, marketised, school systems present success as scarce. Discourses of meritocracy in school achievement obscure the impact of historical, social, and economic advantage and disadvantage. As a result, some ways of being, along with some identities, are cast as inferior and undesirable in school communities, and some children and young people routinely experience oppression, symbolic violence, marginalisation, and exclusion.

“Inclusion into what?” was Allan’s (2007, p. 48) question to the inclusive education community, and it forces recognition of the practices and cultures of schools that result in marginalisation and exclusion. In the South African context, the bimodal schooling system (Fleisch, 2007) ensures that a learner’s life chances are determined by the end of Grade 3 (van der Berg, 2015, p. 41). So while children and young people might be “included” in schools and the schooling system, many remain what Slee (2011) called tenants on the margins of unchanging institutions. Their presence is tolerated, their stay is precarious, and their outcomes are uncertain. This argument challenges renditions of inclusive education that are merely concerned with access to existing schooling structures without addressing the “architecture of inequality and exclusion” on which education is built (Slee, 2011, p. 84).

There are, thus, three aspects of decoloniality that encompass concerns about inclusive education—the *coloniality of knowledge*, the *coloniality of power*, and the *coloniality of being*. The decolonial

critique of inclusive education exposes some of its problematic conceptualisations and instantiations. But simply cataloguing critique does not take the field forward. In this second part of the article, I will take two turns in suggesting a way forward. The first is to engage with the important work that inclusive education scholars in Africa are doing to develop an African orientation to inclusive education through linking it with traditional African values, including that of *ubuntu*. The second is to discuss whether inclusive education could be harnessed to decolonise education.

## Where to Now for Inclusive Education?

As far back as 1998, Kisanji (1998) suggested that indigenous practices and attitudes of people in, what he called, the non-Western world are highly congruent with inclusive education. The work of Phasha (2016), Mahlo (2017), Phasha, Mahlo, and Dei (2017), and others, will be presented here as examples of resistance to the coloniality of inclusive education knowledge described above. Some concerns with this approach will then be noted. The second turn is to suggest that inclusive education has a conceptual reservoir that could be used in the service of decolonising education. I will propose that instead of finding grounds to decolonise inclusive education, perhaps a more fruitful avenue for scholarship and practice would be to harness the ideas of inclusive education to resist coloniality.

## Afrocentric Inclusive Education

Scholars working to develop an African orientation to inclusive education believe a return to the central tenets of African values, community, and education would secure more inclusive education. The essence of this argument is that there is much in the indigenous knowledge and culture of African communities that is congruent with inclusive education, and that this knowledge should be foregrounded in promoting inclusive education in African contexts. Phasha et al. (2017, p. 5) asserted that “traditional African communities are about inclusion,” and that “inclusion is taken as meaning we all belong and a responsibility of every citizen is to ensure that mutual interdependence is respected as an ideal and a virtue.” Mahlo (2017, p. 107) maintained that “inclusive schooling cannot be detached from the African way of living.”

### Inclusive education in the African context.

Calls for contextually appropriate understandings of inclusive education have been made for many years. One of the maxims of inclusive education has been that it needs to be contextually determined (Booth & Ainscow, 1998). This has been taken up by inclusive education scholars in Africa who make a case for inclusivity being central to traditional African ways of being. Phasha et al. (2017, p. 5) suggested that rethinking African schooling requires going “back to our roots” and examining “our histories and cultural traditions.” In so doing, scholars pointed to instances of the inclusion, participation, and valuing of people with disabilities (Kisanji, 1998; Mpofu, Kasayira, Mhaka, Chireshe, & Maunganidze, 2007). Mpofu et al. (2007, p. 71), for example, said that in Zimbabwe, “from an indigenous-traditionalist perspective, participation in inclusive settings is assumed for all.” These authors also pointed to “inclusive community practices” being highly regarded in the Ndebele language, and “inclusiveness at the core of humanness” in Shona culture (2007, p. 71). In this literature, inclusive education is seen to have resonance with the African philosophy of *ubuntu*.

### Inclusive education and *ubuntu*.

*Ubuntu*, said Phasha, “is founded on collectivism which is consistent with the agenda of inclusive education” (2016, p. 15). Various definitions of the isiZulu term *ubuntu* can be found, and it is a word that has equivalences in other African languages, such as *batho* in Setswana. Metz (2007, p. 323) gave its meaning as:

*humanness, and it often figures into the maxim that “a person is a person through other persons.” This maxim has descriptive senses to the effect that one’s identity as a human being causally and even metaphysically depends on a community. It also has prescriptive senses to the effect that one ought to be a mensch, in other words, morally should support the community in certain ways.*

Three values of ubuntu are highlighted by Phasha (2016, pp. 16–18) as particularly resonant with inclusive education. These are humanness, interdependence, and communalism. *Humanness* relates to the inherent dignity of each human being, who should be respected and afforded care and compassion. Exclusion on any grounds is inherently disrespectful of individual humanness, and thus humanness is important for building strong communities. Phasha argued that humanness means acknowledging diversity, securing equal treatment, and catering for differences in schools and communities. *Interdependence* is the recognition of the need of people to be mutually supportive in relationships of connectedness. Phasha noted this as being relevant to the provision of “needs-responsive support services” (p. 17) for all learners in an inclusive education system. The principle of mutual responsibility is taught to African children who learn of their right to protection, care, and equal treatment. This, argued Phasha, is congruent with inclusive education’s emphasis on the right to education without discrimination on the grounds of difference. *Communalism* emphasises the community, and the collective and intersubjective nature of humanness. Phasha linked this to the need in inclusive education for collaboration among all stakeholders, and the importance of recognising the role of the community in education. In this regard, Phasha et al. (2017, p. 5) said, “We have to return to the days when the separation of school and community was non-existent.”

### **Concerns and caveats.**

There are limits to the extent to which inclusive education can be said to be embedded in African culture and philosophy. These limits, in turn, constrain the potential that Africanising inclusive education might have to decolonise inclusive education. First, while there may be evidence for positive attitudes towards disabled children and people in some traditional African cultures, there is also evidence that disability is not always well accepted in these communities. Musengi (2014) has examined proverbs relating to disability in Shona culture and found negative connotations of disability. Among traditional Zimbabweans, disability may be believed to be the result of witchcraft, the displeasure of ancestors, or the promiscuity of a pregnant woman. There is shame associated with having a disabled child, and disability is often believed to be contagious (Chataika, 2012; Mpofu et al., 2007). Negative views of disability in African culture were acknowledged by Phasha (2016) as being incompatible with the humanness dimension of ubuntu, and Chataika (2012) said this negative aspect of traditional culture should be discarded.

One of the challenges facing inclusive education is to resolve the dilemma of responding simultaneously to “differences and commonalities between learners” (Dyson & Howes, 2009, p. 156). This requires attention to individual learning needs, while not stigmatising or marginalising anyone. It is in this task that the application of ubuntu to inclusive education may be found wanting. Phasha (2016) acknowledged that ubuntu tends towards conformity, whereas in inclusive education, children’s individuality is respected. This links to the debates about the position of the individual within ubuntu, which are beyond the scope of this article. For my purposes, it is sufficient to note Enslin and Horsthemke’s (2016) concerns about an overemphasis on communitarianism in an African philosophy of education based on ubuntu. As much as communities may value interdependence, deliberation, and inclusion, Enslin and Horsthemke remind their readers that communities may equally be oppressive, exploitative, and indeed exclusionary. Communitarianism may not fully serve as a moral foundation for inclusive education if the good of the community is prioritised above the good of the individual. This potentially leads to exclusionary practices. For example, anecdotal evidence from a site selection process for a research project revealed a South African rural school excluding learners with albinism



because of prevalent negative parental cultural beliefs. In this case, individual learners were excluded to serve the wishes of the collective. Some parents have also expressed concern that the inclusion of disabled learners in their children's classes dilutes the pedagogical attention available, and have argued against inclusion (Walton, 2016). In other words, a communitarian ethic may be used to justify the exclusion of a few for the perceived benefit of the many.

Finally, in responding to the efforts of scholars to make a case for the alignment of inclusive education with ubuntu, notice must be taken of the critique of ubuntu presented by Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013). These authors argued that since the advent of democracy, there has been an effort by an African elite to revive and promote the notion of ubuntu to further an Africanist agenda. These authors also claimed (p. 198) that ubuntu has been promoted as a "narrative of return" whereby Africans' dignity and identities are restored by the return of perceived traditional values. They argued that notions of ubuntu work well in situations where there are small communities in which the individuals are not very different, but questioned its value in a modern and highly differentiated society such as South Africa. They suggested that the average individual does not take the notion of ubuntu seriously as a guide for correct moral actions in modern South Africa. Metz (2014) contested this position, and Matolino (2015) responded, critiquing Metz's brand of ubuntu as promoting utopian social and economic arrangements and seeking to minimise difference in the pursuit of a collective identity. These concerns are relevant to inclusive education, where the values of ubuntu among teachers and communities may be more imagined than actual, and where an overreach of certain notions of ubuntu may diminish the right to an individually relevant, inclusive education.

To decolonise inclusive education, I have shown compelling grounds for an Afrocentric conceptualisation of inclusive education based in traditional African ways of being, and in the African philosophy of ubuntu, which emphasises humanness, interdependence, and communalism. There are concerns with such an approach that must be acknowledged, including some traditional negative beliefs about disability, and the conceptual limitations of aspects of ubuntu. Given these concerns, I now consider a different approach to thinking about decoloniality and inclusive education.

## **Harnessing Inclusive Education to Decolonise Education**

Inclusive education has been identified by Slee (2011, p. 64) as an example of Edward Said's travelling theories. Said (2000, cited in Slee, 2011, p. 64) observed the "degradation of political theories" as they move across time and place, losing "some of their original power and rebelliousness." Inclusive education can be said to have been tamed (Walton, 2017) when it is presented merely as a set of classroom prescriptions for "accommodating" learners who might need additional support in unreconstructed ordinary classrooms. In other words, inclusive education can be said to have lost some of its original insurrectionary impetus because it has been diluted to enable its assimilation into existing and dominant educational discourses. Cast as a critical education project, though, inclusive education may be seen to have the conceptual potential to engage critically with the conditions of coloniality in education. Decoloniality is, after all, a type of critical theory (Mignolo, 2007).

Inclusive education, when framed as a tactic for reducing exclusion through recognising structural disadvantage and injustice, and redistributing resources (Slee, 2011), may be recruited as an ally in the decolonial project. While aspects of inclusive education may be critiqued when viewed through a decolonial lens, a case can also be made for the discourses of inclusive education being harnessed to further social justice, or providing "opportunities for advancing a progressive educational agenda" (Armstrong et al., 2011, p. 33). This, I would suggest, could include decolonisation. In the section that follows, I offer ways in which inclusive education might resist the *coloniality of knowledge, of power, and of being*. In so doing, I am not rebutting the specific critiques discussed earlier in the article, but posing some conceptual possibilities.

To resist the *coloniality of knowledge*, inclusive education offers two valuable emphases. The first emphasis, as noted previously, is its tradition of acknowledging the contextual variation in its expression. If inclusive education is made to begin with identifying and addressing exclusionary practices and pressures in schools and education systems (Booth & Ainscow, 1998), then it will find exclusion operating along different fault lines in different contexts. Local knowledge of the histories and geographies of educational exclusion must necessarily shape the focus and expression of inclusion efforts. So, for example, in South Africa, the apartheid legacy of racial segregation and white privilege has resulted in context specific challenges for the implementation of inclusive education and, hence, the need for local knowledge and expertise. These challenges include the fact that special schools are mostly located in previous “white areas” in the bigger cities, and access to special schools is hampered by distance and transport costs (Human Rights Watch, 2015). The apartheid policies also affected teacher education and teaching learners with disabilities or other support needs was not offered in the “black” universities (Skuy & Partington, 1990). Inclusive education also forces a confrontation and disruption of the knowledge of the universal child (usually urban, Western, middle class, able, and male) as it considers the intersectionality of identities of children and young people, and how this impacts learning.

The second emphasis is that inclusive education is increasingly concerned with heeding the voices of those who the system neglects or silences. These are the voices of children and young people (and their parents) who are excluded from access and participation in schools (Walton, 2016) and who may be “devalued and rendered marginal” (Slee, 2011, p. 107) in education. The lived experiences of young schooling mothers (Kimani, 2014), international students (Naidoo, 2017) and learners (Sookrajh, Gopal, & Maharaj, 2005), learners with Tourette Syndrome (Dolowitz, 2014), and learners from poor households who attend affluent schools (Geyer & Walton, 2015) have all been given attention by South African researchers. By privileging these voices, inclusive education challenges the hegemony of powerful professional and other knowledge, which claim expertise about others’ lives and experiences (Slee, 2011).

Inclusive education, said Slee (2011, p. 39), “commences with the recognition of the unequal social relations that produce exclusion” and, thus, may be taken up in the quest to dismantle the *coloniality of power*. Educational exclusion is perpetuated in the service of power and the maintenance of the status quo, and inclusive education aims to expose the ways in which power works to exclude. Inclusive education challenges the vested interests of the powerful in the preservation of their privilege in schools and education systems. These vested interests use exclusion to preserve a monopoly over resources and, as such, exclusion “arises from the interplay of class, status and political power and serves the interests of the included” (Silver, 1994, p. 543). One does not need to look far to see this operating in schools in South Africa, as they set fees (which exclude poor, mostly black learners), language policies (which exclude black learners or force them to learn in the language of the coloniser), expectations to assimilate into dominant cultural forms (usually white and western), and academic standards (often ableist, privileging those with Western cultural capital). The practice and rationalisation of educational exclusion is evident at all levels of education systems, from individual classrooms and schools, to national education systems, and to the international educational arena. Space does not permit an examination of powerful forces like privatisation, marketisation, and globalisation on education, but all result in forms of educational exclusion and are implicated in the *coloniality of power*.

Inclusive education is often associated with the education of disabled children and young people, arguably the most marginalised group in schools and societies (Miles & Singal, 2009). The educational marginalisation of children and young people with other identity markers disprivileged in various contexts has also caught the attention of inclusive education. The field has not only concerned itself with pedagogical responses to difference, but has sought to resist the grounds on which “normal” and

“deviant” are constructed. Part of this work has been to challenge the diagnostic and other categories that are assigned to some children and young people. Often, these categories are used to explain why some do not experience learning success, and to rationalise segregation and exclusion. Inclusive education, in research and practice, should be exposing the colonial power/knowledge matrices that cast these learners into the educational periphery. The *coloniality of being* does not stop at the school gates, but is likely to be entrenched by educational practices, which are often premised on coloniality. Inclusive education could be harnessed to identify, resist, and ultimately dismantle these practices.

The argument presented thus far is that there are aspects and emphases found in the discourses of inclusive education that could be seen directly to confront the *coloniality of knowledge, of power, and of being*. As such, inclusive education could be seen to have conceptual resources that could be harnessed in the decolonisation endeavour. But there are concerns and caveats to this position that cannot be avoided.

### Concerns and caveats

The extent to which inclusive education might be co-opted in the decolonisation endeavour will be determined by the ways in which inclusive education is conceptualised. If it is a counter hegemonic, “organic ideology” (Gramsci, 1971/1999, p. 707), then there may be a potential for an alliance. This means that inclusive education must concern itself with resisting coloniality in education and promoting emancipatory and socially just ways of being. BUT (capitals intended), this position is not unassailable. In their article “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,” Tuck and Yang (2012) made a strong case for the incommensurability of decolonisation with other social justice projects. They noted that “the language of decolonization has been superficially adopted into education and other social sciences, supplanting prior ways of talking about social justice” (p. 2). These authors were adamant that decolonisation is not a “swappable” term and that parts of the decolonisation project are not “easily absorbed by human rights . . . based approaches to educational equity” (p. 3). Inclusive education could be viewed as one such human rights-based approach to educational equity. Land was the central concern of decolonisation for Tuck and Yang (2012), who wrote in the context of the United States. The only goal of decolonisation for these authors was the elimination of settler property rights (p. 26), and any appropriation of the discourse of decolonisation for other ends was seen by them as a move to “settler innocence.” Their challenge to me, as a white settler scholar in South Africa is expressed as follows:

*The absorption of decolonization by settler social justice frameworks is one way the settler, disturbed by her own settler status, tries to escape or contain the unbearable searchlight of complicity, of having harmed others just by being one’s self. The desire to reconcile is just as relentless as the desire to disappear the Native; it is a desire to not have to deal with this (Indian) problem anymore. (p. 9)*

This challenge forces me to consider whether, by appropriating the conceptual tools of decolonisation to further an educational enterprise, I am making a settler move to innocence through what Tuck and Yang (2012, p. 17) called “colonial equivocation.” This involves “the homogenizing of various expressions of oppression as colonization,” creating “a convenient ambiguity between decolonization and social justice work” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 10). In other words, not only may I not use decolonisation in the context of inclusive education, but in doing so, I am attempting to relieve my settler guilt without relinquishing my land, power and privilege.

The question mark in the title of this article reflects my hesitation in the face of the challenge posed above. Perhaps, if decoloniality is cast as a critical theory rather than a project, it has the potential to allow for Foucault’s (1991, p. 76) “eventualization.” This requires the complication of our

understanding of events (Biesta, Allan, & Edwards, 2014) and involves a “polymorphism,” first of elements brought into relation, then of the relations described, and then of the domains of reference (Foucault, 1991, p. 76). As elements of inclusive education (disability, schooling, marginalisation, exclusion) are brought into relation, these relations can be described in terms of technical models (like general and special education), tactics (pedagogical strategies, marketisation of education), and theoretical schemas (disability studies, theories of learning, critical theories). Could decoloniality be a polymorphic domain of reference that enables an analysis of the *coloniality of power, knowledge, and being* at work in schooling? The affordance of decolonial theory then provides “different and alternative descriptions of educational processes and practices” (Biesta et al., 2014, p. 5), and makes the familiar strange. In this process, though, it seems important that a hierarchy is clear—inclusive education should serve the broader decolonial project, it should not subsume the tenets of decoloniality to its own ends.

## Implications for Research and Teaching

Resisting the *coloniality of knowledge, of power, and of being* would need to be the focus of inclusive education research if it is to contribute to the decolonial project. This means not only valuing but centring local culture and knowledge in educational research. It also means privileging the voices and experiences of those who are consigned to the periphery (Slee, 2011). Research in inclusive education also must prioritise identifying and understanding “the destructive workings of power, privilege, disadvantage and exclusion in education” (Slee, 2011, p. 158), not averting a gaze from ways in which coloniality engenders, enables, and sustains these workings of power. Inclusive education research also has a responsibility to the communities it researches by partnering with them in formulating research projects, involving them in the processes and dissemination of research, and ensuring that research findings have transformative intent (Mertens, 2009).

I have heard students call for 90% African content in their course readings to decolonise and Africanise the curriculum. In the case of inclusive education, there is certainly a place for curricula, policy guidelines, and textbooks to absorb and promote the wealth of local scholarship. My caution, though, is expressed through Grosfoguel’s (2007, p. 213) concern with the locus of enunciation. In this, he distinguished the *epistemic location* from the *social location*. A scholar who is socially located on the side of the oppressed may be epistemically located on the side of the powerful, rather than espousing a subaltern epistemic perspective. Subaltern epistemic perspectives are “knowledge coming from below that produces a critical perspective of hegemonic knowledge in the power relations involved” (Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 213). So teacher educators, as recontextualising agents (Bernstein, 2000), might need to consider not only the social but the epistemic location of the scholarship they select in producing a pedagogic discourse of inclusive education. They also could consider inculcating a critical perspective of hegemonic knowledge in the field of inclusive education, and promoting engagement with a range of relevant subaltern and indigenous scholars whose ideas might be recruited in the pursuit of dismantling educational exclusion.

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