



Revista Brasileira de
Política Internacional

ISSN 1983-3121

<http://www.scielo.br/rbpi>

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Making the invisible, visible: challenging the knowledge structures inherent in International Relations Theory in order to create knowledge plural curricula

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1590/0034-7329201700122>

Rev. Bras. Polít. Int., 60(1): e021, 2017

Abstract

This article problematizes the lack of plurality of knowledges in International Relations theory curricula. The increase in knowledges and scholarship from the South has not seemingly filtered into International Relations theory curricula significantly. Thus Western knowledges still dominates the narrative. It investigates how knowledge structures inherent in the discipline coupled with Western centric ontology and epistemology function to exclude or marginalize knowledge that does not conform to specific criteria. I demonstrate how the third year IR theory curriculum at Wits University, has engaged with discipline's knowledge structures as well as its ontology and epistemology to develop a knowledge plural curricula.

Keywords: Knowledge structures, Epistemologies of the south, International relations theory curricula, Knowledge plurality.

Received: February 15, 2017;

Accepted: August 5, 2017

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to identify, analyse, and reflect on the complex range of ideas, interests, structures, and decisions that must be navigated in order to develop and deliver a coherent knowledge-plural International Relations (IR) theory curriculum at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits). It is particularly aimed at investigating how the knowledge structures embedded in the field of IR theory have privileged a very exclusive narrative as to what constitutes “valid knowledge”. These mechanisms operate to elevate knowledge emanating from the West over that of the South. Consequently, Western derived knowledge features almost exclusively in IR theory curricula. One only has to consult the numerous IR theory textbooks published for this to become evident. The problem is not the inclusion of Western centric IR

theory knowledge per se; it is that it cannot be presented as if it were universally valid. If our goal is to achieve knowledge-plurality in an IR theory curriculum, we need to challenge these exclusive Western accounts of what constitutes “valid knowledge”. In this regard, I have found the work of the sociologists Basil Bernstein and Boaventura de Sousa Santos, as well as philosopher Walter Mignolo, extremely helpful in conceiving how knowledge structures can be challenged and re-conceived to attain more knowledge-diverse IR theory curricula.

In the first section of the article, I outline the ideas and concepts of these scholars. I then use these as a scaffold to demonstrate how they can assist in the development of greater knowledge plurality within a curriculum. I then proceed to examine my attempts at constructing a more knowledge inclusive International Relations Theory curriculum that is relevant to the particular South African and African context of my students and the related innovation, challenges, and opportunities this entails. In particular, it discusses the incorporation of the Southern African concept of “Ubuntu” into the curricula for the purpose of expanding the ideals and utility of normative theory beyond the knowledge confines of the West. Although the case study draws on my own experience as a lecturer of International Relations theory at Wits, it forms part of a growing global counter-movement which demands a more globally inclusive discourse for IR. Nevertheless, despite the substantial increase of academic literature dealing with subjugation of Southern IR theory scholarship, very little of it considers how this impacts IR curricula.

Within the current milieu of South African higher education there is increased pressure by government, academics, and students for de-colonized curricula in all subjects. This has been a prominent feature of the 2015 and 2016 ‘Fees Must Fall’ campaign. The call is often a radical one with students demanding the excising of all Western-based knowledge from curricula. The militancy of these demands is evidenced by the defacing or destruction of artwork deemed to be colonial as well as attempts to burn libraries believed to contain colonial knowledge at certain higher education institutions. Should we proceed on this trajectory, there is the real threat of the epistemicide of American and European based knowledge from our curricula. Thus, the creation of a knowledge IR theory curriculum in the current South African context is politically, as well as ideologically, sensitive.

Nevertheless, it is vital that informed decisions are made on the basis of sound pedagogic curriculum practice that will allow for a multitude of voices, instead of privileging selective or popular ones. It is essential that at the tertiary level, the curriculum does not merely indoctrinate but becomes a space for critical thought and development. Students of IR should be exposed to a plurality of knowledges in order to be fully-rounded in their education. Since classical Western IR theoretical discourse is a reality of the field and contains many important and foundational concepts, it cannot simply be excised from the curriculum. Instead, theoretical discourses from the South need to be recognised as constituting valid forms of knowledge, even if their ontology and epistemology stances diverge from those of the United States and Europe. It is also important to acknowledge that there is no single theoretical discourse from either the West or the South,

but rather a variety of different local knowledges that are influenced by a country or a region's unique history and context. Acknowledging these facts and including relevant knowledges beyond that of the West should foster greater curriculum diversity within the field. I also recognize the stereotypical and neo-colonial connotations attached to the terms West and South, as well as the concept of indigenous knowledge, however, for the sake of expedience and due to the fact that these are the terms used by most scholars whose work this article engages with, these are the terms I will be employing.

Engaging with the Knowledge Structures of International Relations Theory for the Purpose of Creating a Knowledge Plural Curriculum

Constructing knowledge-plural IR theory curricula involves more than including a smattering of Southern scholarship or knowledges together with a few local examples or case studies. This approach neither challenges the discipline's skewed perception of what constitutes knowledge, nor does it re-orientate or redefine these permanently to embrace ontological and epistemological diversity. To do the latter entails engaging with relevant literature on curricula design in general; the role of knowledge structures within a curriculum and, finally, the ways of re-orientating disciplinary perception as to what constitutes valid knowledge.

My attempt to create a knowledge-diverse IR theory curriculum at Wits necessitated having a clear understanding of what constitutes a curriculum. A curriculum is not merely the content of a course. It is a "contextualised course of study aimed at enabling students to learn or master particular knowledge and practices. It brings context, students, and 'that which is to be learned' into a relationship" (Slonimsky and Shalem 2006). Moreover, a curriculum is a site of interaction not only between teachers and learners, but also a place where other forces such as institutional and social-cultural contexts weigh in (Lattuca 2007). Thus, an IR theory curriculum is not a neutral, passive space; rather, it is one where competing ontological and epistemological perspectives vie for supremacy.

To achieve a knowledge-diverse IR theory curriculum entails more than just challenging the dominance of the Western discourse in establishing the ontological and epistemological boundaries in the realm of knowledge production (academic scholarships). As this dominance cascades into the realm of pedagogy in the form of content selection, the current knowledge structures of the discipline need to be transformed to establish a more equitable knowledge spectrum. The knowledge structures within IR theory elevate particular kinds of knowledge (usually of Western origin) over others that do not conform to dominant Western ontological and epistemological standards. As a result of their presence, not all knowledge has an equal chance of being selected for an IR theory curriculum. Thus, it is vital that one develops an awareness of the influence of these structures on the curriculum in order to achieve the objective of knowledge plurality in the curriculum. This is where I have found the work of educational sociologist Bernstein, who specializes in the

sociology of knowledge within curricula together with Santos and Mignolo, who specifically focus on the underlying structural knowledge disparities between the West and the South, invaluable.

Bernstein's Concept of Knowledge Structures

Bernstein states that curriculum defines what counts as valid knowledge (Shay 2015). The knowledge structures of a discipline need to be defined and understood in order to attain a nuanced understanding of the factors contributing to decisions regarding the selection of knowledge content. Bernstein's "pedagogic device" renders the knowledge structures within specific academic disciplines visible. This is a useful framework of analysis to employ when creating a knowledge-plural curriculum as it not only reveals that each academic discourse is characterized by its own unique knowledge structure but also discloses how these structures favour certain types of knowledge over others.

Bernstein draws the distinction between horizontal discourse (everyday or common sense knowledge) and vertical discourse (scholarly or intellectual knowledge) (Singh 2002). This distinction immediately prejudices the inclusion of horizontal discourses in curricula. The knowledge structures inherent in a discipline actively contribute to decisions made with regards to the selection of knowledge. Bernstein's pedagogic device is focused on the arena of vertical discourse. It charts the movement of knowledge from the field of knowledge production where it is birthed, usually in the form of academic scholarship, to the field of knowledge recontextualisation where it is adapted and integrated into the content of a curriculum; and then finally to the field of knowledge reproduction, where it is delivered to the learner (Lockett 2009; Shay 2015; Singh 2009).

The forces that influence the research, as well as the ontological and epistemological agendas in the field of knowledge production, shape the field of knowledge recontextualization. The recontextualization of knowledge is not neutral. It does not simply involve the mechanical editing and repackaging of the requisite information into bite-sized chunks that are deemed to be most suitable for intellectual ingestion by students. Further learning not only involves the acquisition of knowledge but also concomitant skills, values, and personal characteristics that allow the knowledge to be of practical use to the individual student and the rest of society.

Bernstein identifies the two pedagogic discourses which emerge from the process of recontextualization: instructional and regulative discourses. Instructional discourse refers to specialised knowledge and content skills, while regulative discourse refers to considerations pertaining to social and moral order (Lockett 2009). Within instructional discourse, knowledge structures inform the range of choices available in the selection of knowledge. It is within the instructional discourse that contestation over what constitutes valid IR theoretical knowledge occurs. Regulative discourse often informs debates on the aim and purpose of the curriculum. This introduces questions regarding the aim and purpose of studying IR theory, as well as what would constitute the "ideal IR knower" in this academic field. The process of the relocation and

reassembly of knowledge from its purest form to a form which is suitable to be taught also results in a discursive gap. The discursive gap allows for the personal interpretations, values, and beliefs of the curriculum designer to influence which elements, encapsulated in the instructional and regulative discourses, are included in a curriculum as well as the form they should take.

Unfortunately, Bernstein does not explicitly address the issue of how the inherent Western-based bias within knowledge structures may render indigenous forms of knowledge invisible. Moreover, Bernstein's distinction between horizontal and vertical discourse may render local or alternative knowledges invisible due to its marginalization under colonial and neo-colonial practices, thereby preventing it from being viewed as legitimate and included in academic canon. Thus, in developing a knowledge-plural curriculum, it is necessary to take this factor into account. It is to these ends that the works of Santos and Mignolo, which focus on the decolonization and re-establishment of epistemologies of the South, is instructive.

Santos and Epistemologies of the South

Santos (2007; 2009; 2012) introduces the concept of the abyssal line between the West and the South which he argues determines the primacy of knowledge. For him, the global South is not simply a geographical space but also a metaphysical space of inequality, exclusion, and invisibility which also defines certain communities and spaces within what is geographically designated as the West (Santos 2012). According to Santos, primacy is afforded to knowledge of Western origin based on its perceived superior scientific rigor while knowledge emerging from the South is marginalized, seen as primitive, unscientific, and thus inferior. This ideologically-based binary has profound implications for knowledge production in terms of what is regarded as researchable. This in turn determines the knowledge that is judged worthy of inclusion in an academic curriculum. At its heart, the abyssal divide is driven by ideology. This is especially true of a social science like IR.

The dominance of Western forms of knowledge coincides with colonial and post-colonial influences on the South. A strong component of this knowledge realignment was to establish and maintain the inferior position of countries within the South so as to perpetuate the ever-evolving capitalist world system (Santos 2012). Part of this process was the marginalization or denigration of the indigenous or local knowledges of the South. Santos (2009; 2012) calls this the epistemocide of knowledges of the South, whereby the systems of colonialism and neo-colonialism eclipsed their validity. Significantly, Santos (2009) points out that epistemocide did not only occur among Southern knowledges that did not conform to those dominant in the West; even Western-based knowledge that challenged capitalism and colonialism was also suppressed.

The most fundamental problem with the West's attempt to establish ontology and epistemological homogeneity is that it limits our ability to investigate and understand our world. It also limits creativity in terms of providing solutions for pressing global problems, particularly

those wrought by the capitalist world system, such as the 2008 global financial crisis and climate change. Indigenous knowledge from the South is often better at identifying and dealing with these countries' issues. Facilitating epistemological diversity would allow more voices to give input in important global conversation (Santos 2009; 2012). It could also foster an environment of greater cultural understanding and tolerance, ameliorating intolerance-related conflict within society and facilitating greater cooperation.

Santos (2009; 2012) advocates for the re-establishment and revitalization of indigenous knowledge among peoples whose cultures were subjugated by colonisers. Colonialism was detrimental to indigenous knowledge in that it caused these to be unlearned (Santos 2009). For example, communal identity and land distribution were replaced with capitalist individualism and individual land rights. However, this new knowledge did not necessarily improve life for the population; often, it led to social dysfunction and poverty. The challenge now is for the knowledges to be relearned and placed among the academic canon. What makes epistemologies of the South valuable for Santos is that they provide practical solutions for everyday problems encountered by communities. Significantly, Santos (2012) does not advocate that the rise of indigenous knowledge should automatically extinguish Western forms of knowledge in the South. Rather, the place knowledge holds within society is determined by the benefits that a particular society derives from it. Knowledge from the West can also be adapted and used in innovative ways to offer a bespoke fit for a specific situation. For Santos (2012), different kinds of knowledge can co-exist as each can be suitable for different purposes. The hybrid use of knowledge is acceptable as long as it does not result in the cannibalization of the knowledges being mixed and matched.

Mignolo and Decolonizing Knowledge

Like Bernstein and Santos, Mignolo (2009) also considers how ontological and epistemological control is established. Similarly to Santos, his vantage point extends beyond the domain of knowledge structures within academic disciplines to consider how Western knowledge has endeavoured to subvert all knowledge located beyond its geopolitical space. Colonization by Europe extended beyond merely the geographic conquest of the South to intellectual conquest as well. The West-South divide also represented an intellectual divide created by the West that still exists. Colonial powers classified Western knowledges as modern, scientific, intellectually rigorous, and universally applicable and, therefore, superior in contrast to their perception of knowledge from the South as primitive, unscientific, and culturally-based. This bias toward Western knowledges structures implicitly entitled these scholars to speak on behalf of the South. This has allowed the West to define the characteristics of the South – underdeveloped, unproductive, and primitive – as well as entrenching Western knowledges as the best solution to what ails countries in the South (Mignolo 2009; Said 1978; Santos 2012; Spivak 1988). The sole contribution that the West concedes to the South is that it is a site of quaint cultural values that have little relevance to the modern world.

To alter this dominant discourse, Mignolo (2009) advocates a concerted policy by the South of political and epistemic distance from Western colonial and neo-colonial forms of knowledge as well as the political and economic ideologies they promote. He refers to the adoption of a stance of epistemic disobedience, where states and scholars from the South are free to reject Western-based forms of knowledge in favour of indigenous knowledge that more appropriately and effectively identifies and addresses issues of importance to them. This empowers countries from the South to explore and record their own histories and establish political, social, and economic systems more pertinent to their realities.

Analysis

The first two levels of Bernstein's pedagogic devices, namely the fields of knowledge production and the field of knowledge recontextualization, draw attention to how knowledge structures operate to exclude or relegate knowledge from the South. However, the discursive gap, if purposefully embraced, provides a way to fundamentally redress knowledge inequity in curricula. The arguments and ideas of Mignolo and Santos add substance to the curriculum design framework created by the pedagogic device. At a meta-theoretical level, they add greater understanding and analysis of the prejudice towards knowledge from the South, and also provide practical ideas on how to shift ontological and epistemological control away from the West.

Western scholarship dominates both the ontology and epistemology of IR theory. In terms of ontology, the fact that Western academy lays claim to the framing of the origins of the subject and the construction of its dominant theories gives it positional advantage. Thus, its origins are ascribed to the international quest for peace due to the outbreak of World War One and not the European imperial incursion and systematic division of much of the world among themselves through formal negotiated consensus (Blaney and Tickner 2017a). However, countries from the South, if given the opportunity, may ascribe the latter far more significance in shaping both their domestic and international relations than the former.

As the majority of formal academic IR institutions in the South only arose in the post-colonial period, the West has had almost forty years to stamp its ideological and philosophical imprint on the IR discipline and this has been transferred into the content of IR curricula. By the time scholars from Southern countries joined the discourse, many foundational concepts, such as the pivotal role of the state and the idea of state sovereignty, had already achieved the status of hallowed law. The international relations of the South, it seemed, had to fit in within this established framework. Here the interests and ideological preferences of the US, and to a lesser extent Europe, enjoy unfettered privilege as evidenced by themes presented at international IR conferences and the subject matter of the field's leading publications (Aydinli and Mathews 2000; Tickner 2013). The dominant IR theories of Neoliberalism and Realism expounded by American

academia also coalesce with the US' strategic, political, and economic objectives. These reinforce a Western-driven disciplinary status quo.

Despite the substantial growth of scholarship from the South that presents alternative knowledge, it is still not as prolific nor ascribed the same gravitas as that of the West (Tickner 2013; Waever 1998). This situation is problematic, not because the knowledge emerges from a Western perspective of IR; it is that it assumes a universal ontology and epistemology for the field. As a result, the perceived superiority of the scholarship is taken as entitlement to set the agenda and speak for the South (Mignolo 2009). Although referred to in the collective forms as West/North/South, scholarship needs to be cognizant that these regions contain different countries and cultures. To engage and theorize in this reality negates the explanatory abilities of a narrow range of knowledges.

IR, especially in the United States, has a strong preference for positivist epistemology. Positivism premises that objective knowledge of the social world is possible. Thus, scholars are able to detach themselves from the object of study, thereby producing objective knowledge. Positivism favors empiricism, logic, and deductive reasoning (Lamont 2015). Here, the problem is not positivism itself but the fact that often in US scholarship only knowledge produced via this method is deemed to be valid. IR theories derived from the South are often rejected from inclusion in the mainstream theoretical canon because they deviate from norms and standards set for Western scholarship (Blaney and Inayatullah, 2008; Tickner 2003b). Dependency Theory is a good example of this. It sought to explain and propose alternative, non-Western solutions for under-development in the global South. The response of North American scholars was to brand Dependency Theory as invalid knowledge as it did not comply with the rationalist, positivist criteria which they had established. (Blaney and Inayatullah 2008).

As expounded in Mignolo and Santos arguments above, the Western ontological and epistemology foundations of IR theory constitute significant obstacles to the inclusion of knowledge possessing alternative ontological and epistemological stances. As knowledge production is intrinsically linked to knowledge selection for curricula purposes the proliferation of Western centric research gives this knowledge the advantage of sheer quantity which has allowed it to dominate the disciplinary discourse. Moreover, Western-based knowledge is pervasive in the IR curricula of universities in the South because many of their academics were either educated at Western universities or are the students of such academics (Tickner 2003b). Consequently, even though there is local scholarship to draw from, educators in the South reinforce the dominant Western theoretical discourses in their teaching as they are replicating the curricula that they were taught (Tickner 2003b). This makes it harder for alternative knowledge and ideas originating from the South to find traction and acceptance in mainstream IR discourse.

Tickner (2003b), in a study of the content of IR theory curricula at Latin American universities, noted that 68.5 percent of texts included were classical Western interpretations. This inequality is not only detrimental to students from the South but also those from the West. In IR curricula, if the field of knowledge reproduction is overrepresented by one particular type of scholarship,

it risks being parochial. Blaney (2002) and Hovey (2004) found that the result of such curricula was that US students, having studied IR, remained largely ignorant in their knowledge of the rest of the world. The adoption of IR knowledge based on Western criteria of knowledge validity may lack relevance for Southern students and contexts; it provides inappropriate and limited analytical tools and ultimately reinforces Western intellectual dominance over the South. Tickner (2003b) notes that many Western IR theories do not travel well to the South. In other words, they do not elucidate issues relevant to the South. This correlates with the arguments of educational constructivists and social constructivists, particularly Piaget (1971) and Vygotsky (1962), who emphasize the importance of context, culture, and language in facilitating learning. Students' minds are not blank slates. Rather, students' experiences, cultures, socio-economic status, even their exposure to ideologies or the *Zeitgeist* of a particular society influence how they engage with and make sense of an academic subject. Learning is the active process of taking new information and either adapting it so that it fits into and adds to the knowledge already possessed, or the discarding of beliefs or ideas in favour of new knowledge that has greater value and explanatory abilities (Tokuhama-Espinosa 2010). Student engagement with a curriculum wanes substantially when it does not resonate with their realities.

The work of Mignolo and Santos helps to reference Western domination of IR theory's ontology and epistemology as a latent form of colonialism. This could be construed as continuation of stereotypes imposed by European colonizers to establish their intellectual and cultural superiority over the colonized. Stereotyped euphemisms for former colonies may have changed over time from third world to under-developed or developing states, or the South, but the same dichotomies in terms of the modern, scientific West versus the primitive, traditional, culturally dominate South are still prevalent. Moreover, this discourse serves to subjugate knowledge and scholarship from the South because it does not conform to Western scientific criteria.

Though geographic colonization may have receded, intellectual colonization and subservience is still being maintained. However, Mignolo and Santos are solution-orientated. They both advocate for conscious challenging and restructuring how knowledge validity is conceived. Mignolo specifically calls for the practice of epistemic disobedience whereby Southern scholarship no longer subscribes to Western knowledge standards. Santos urges scholars from the South to rediscover and utilize relevant local knowledge to address local concerns more effectively as they speak to local realities and experiences. Santos calls for societies to embrace epistemological diversity. Mignolo encourages scholars from the South to write and to record their own histories and knowledges. As scholars take up these challenges, an increase in knowledge plurality should occur within the field of IR theory in the form of publication. Translated to the field of knowledge reproduction, this should allow for a greater plurality of knowledges to choose from. However, this is where the discursive gap makes a critical contribution to the process as it is the curriculum designer who stands as the ultimate gatekeeper regarding the knowledges that are incorporated in a theory curriculum. Unless theory lecturers are convinced of the importance of knowledge-plurality and design their curricula to facilitate this, knowledge exclusive curricula will continue to dominate.

Creating a Knowledge Plural IR Theory Curriculum for Third Year Students at the University of the Witwatersrand

In the late 1990s South Africa's former President Thabo Mbeki revived the ideal of an African Renaissance where the continent would re-embrace local wisdoms and use these as the basis to construct context-specific solutions for African states. Although this ideal remains largely unrealized, it gave impetus for International Relations at Wits in 1999 to reconceptualize the study of IR by making it more contextually relevant of South African and Africa students who constitute the majority of our student body at both post-graduate and under-graduate level. Although this move rectified the geographical marginalization of Africa, it did not tackle the issue of knowledge-plurality. Thus, one of our major objectives in the 2012 curriculum revision was to make knowledge plurality a key feature of the curriculum.

Many staff members argued that the curriculum was limited in its ontological and epistemology diversity with positivist approaches and Western-based theories featuring predominantly. The new curriculum introduced a third year theory and methods course at third year level; a research methodology course at 4th year level (which at South African Universities is considered post-graduate level) and an advanced theory course at Masters level. The introductory theory component for first year remained. The theory component of our curriculum stretches over five years. Each theory course subsequent to the first year builds incrementally on the previous one in terms of content and academic skills sophistication as well as knowledge diversity. Both the Structure of Observed Learning Outcomes (SOLO) and Bloom's taxonomy helped us to make decisions on curriculum content, learning activities, and assessments to ensure that these would be at the appropriate cognitive levels. Each ascending level in these taxonomies demands that students interact with the subject material in more cognitively sophisticated ways.

In terms of the SOLO taxonomy, we designed the theory curriculum with the purpose of moving students away from the prestructural level onto the unistructural and multistructural and then ultimately to the Relational level. This entails students moving beyond just having knowledge of the course content and progressing to comprehension; application and analysis; evaluation, and ultimately synthesis which correlates with Bloom's taxonomy (Biggs 1996; Bloom et al. 1956). In its entirety, the components of our new theory curricula endeavour to expose students to knowledge from diverse perspectives and geographic locations. We see this process as not just replacing one set of voices with another, but as one that expands the range of voices, dialogues, and interactions, thereby making this a truly international curriculum.

What follows below is a discussion of my attempt to realize a knowledge-plural curriculum in the third year IR theory curriculum which I designed and teach. I wish to make clear from the outset that my attempt at creating a knowledge plural IR theory curriculum is a continual work in progress. Research, reflection, and engagement with students necessitate alterations to improve both knowledge diversity and my teaching practice.

When selecting knowledge for inclusion in a curriculum (instructional discourse) it is important to consider its relevance in terms of the aim and purpose (regulative discourse) of the curriculum, as well as its suitability for the context in which it is taught. As my overarching aim was to have a knowledge plural IR theory course, I needed to ensure that the instructional discourse did not contradict or hinder this aspect of the regulative discourse. Thus, the discursive gap presented an opportunity for me to be critical of the knowledges I selected and the way to develop an IR theory curriculum that has relevance for students in a South African context. It involved not conforming to content presented in ubiquitous Western orientated theory textbooks or seminal texts. I exercised a certain amount of epistemic disobedience by including knowledge from the South as well as focusing on theories subscribing to post-positivism. To prevent the curriculum becoming parochial, it was important to be as inclusive of as many voices from as many different contexts as possible. Western knowledge was not ostracized, as it has a part to play in theoretical discourse. Instead, being mindful of its dominance in the field of knowledge production, I used it selectively. Overall, the course provided a smorgasbord of knowledges and epistemologies for students to sample. Students were encouraged to experiment with how different theories can be used innovatively to investigate a particular issue, and how each theory will bring a different nuance to the issue studied.

To devote more time to other theories, I omitted the two largest Western-centric theories: namely Realism and Liberalism, as students already had adequate exposure to their tenets and usage in the first and second year. Marxism, Normative Theory, Feminism, Social Constructivism, Post-Structuralism and Post-Colonialism were included as themes in the course. However, we focused on their effectiveness in studying and understanding issues in the South. This would correlate with Santos (2009) suggestion of shaping the application of theory to elucidate specific contexts outside of those for which it was created. Moreover, this approach provides contextual relevance for the student and increases their engagement with the course. Although the quantity of knowledge produced that is relevant to the South may be lower than that of the West, there is enough scholarship which hybridizes Western derived theory with local knowledges and contexts that can be incorporated into a theory curriculum. Theoretical knowledge based exclusively on local content that is relevant to IR, on the other hand, is less prolific. It also does take more time and effort to collate readings that represent both Western and African perspectives on a particular theory. What is a further hindrance to this process are the high copyright costs which limit the amounts of readings that can be made available.

In dealing with the epistemological diversity among different theoretical schools, I chose to expose students to a variety of approaches. I found it important to de-link these approaches from any value judgments attached to them in terms of which one produces better scholarships as advocated by Mignolo (2009). Instead I adopted a fit-for-task approach, where the aim and rationale of the study being undertaken narrows the range of epistemologies available. Epistemology should be divorced from ideology. This approach adds diversity to how knowledge can be explored as well as judged as valid.

In my reading of Santos (2012) and Mignolo (2009) it became apparent that an important feature of incorporating epistemologies of the South into the course would be to interrogate the practical application of the theories we studied. They both opine that what distinguishes the indigenous or local knowledges of the global South from the West is that they seek to provide practical solutions to real problems faced by local communities. Santos (2009) states further that, although Western knowledges may not be relevant to the context of the South, some can be reshaped or re-tooled to make it applicable. Thus to embrace the ethos of epistemologies of the South, the course could not focus exclusively on developing the academic knowledge of IR theory but include practical application. It had to equip students in selecting and using theories as analytical tools to address pressing challenges relevant to South Africa and Africa. By making the application and evaluation of theory an integral component of the course, it was necessary to create opportunities for students to develop and refine their skills of analysis, evaluation, and critical thinking. On the Bloom's scale these extend from 3 to 5 levels: namely analysis, evaluation, and creation. On the SOLO scale they span the relational and extended abstract levels. The advanced nature of the skills required also informed the decision to place the course in the final undergraduate year.

Developing students' skills to critically analyze the efficacy of the IR theories studied for the context of the South also enables them to critically engage with the debate on what the de-colonization of knowledge should entail. Is it eradicating all Western knowledges and substituting it with indigenous knowledges? Is it expanding the range of theoretical options beyond the narrow ambit of Western knowledges, which is akin to Santos' approach? How should indigenous knowledge be investigated and recorded? We considered Spivak's (1988) question: can those who are not part of a community accurately capture indigenous knowledge without interpreting it through their own world view? Building around the regulative discourse, I incorporated current social, moral, institutional, and political contestations from South Africa, especially the debates around access to higher education and decolonizing the curriculum to measure different theories' fitness and utility in assisting us in understanding and solving pressing local issues. Developing critical analytical skills in students should ultimately produce scholars who, after being exposed to this curriculum, do not adopt Western-based IR theory as a default setting when conducting research, especially research located in the South. Instead, they should be able to change dominant theoretical discourses in the field of knowledge production by providing new or innovative perspectives to the field.

An example of one of my attempts in this course to include knowledge originating from Southern African knowledge was to integrate the concept of Ubuntu into the curriculum. Ubuntu is a term used mainly by people in Southern Africa to refer to humanness (Bell and Metz 2011). Ubuntu is encapsulated in the Xhosa, Zulu, or Ndebele expression, "Umuntu ugumuntu ngabantu" – I am because we are. Ubuntu entails a moral ideal which requires that a person achieves full humanity, a process which can only be accomplished by continually deepening the relationship with one's community (Metz and Gaie 2010). This requires more

than just participation in the community, but also drawing one's identity from it. Ubuntu also places a duty on one to help others, not for one's own benefit but out of sympathy and solidarity for the other. The strong normative aspect embodied in this concept allowed me to incorporate it into the classes on Normative Theory. It was presented as an alternative to the Western philosophical views of Bentham, Kant, and Rawls with regards the divide between communitarianism and cosmopolitanism which consider whether, and on what basis, states have an obligation to assist other states or peoples in times of crisis. What makes the concept of Ubuntu particularly relevant in a South African IR context is that the African National Congress has used it as a foundational principle, especially in relation to other African states when creating a post-apartheid foreign policy (see www.DIRCO.gov.za).

The course used this indigenous knowledge to critically examine South Africa's foreign policy stance relating to its role in Africa in terms of economic development, conflict resolution, and humanitarian assistance. Ubuntu served as a tool to analyze the positive and negative aspects of the policy together with its effectiveness. The classes on Normative Theory compared and contrasted the idea of Ubuntu with the Western concepts of cosmopolitanism and communitarianism to ascertain whether these concepts complemented or added to their individual explanatory power. This created the possibility for the integration of different types of knowledge that can transcend and challenge the knowledge structures of the discipline. Ultimately, the knowledge and analytical skills developed in these classes were required to be synthesized to develop an argument for the term paper.

Student Responses to a More Knowledge Plural Third Year IR Theory Course

To gauge how students related to my attempt to create a de-Westernised IR theory curriculum, I conducted a survey at the end of the 2016 course. When asked whether the Wits IR theory curriculum should make the incorporation of indigenous philosophy (such as Ubuntu) a priority for the Wits IR Department, 84% of students agreed that it should. This definitely reflects the strength of the regulative discourse at Wits with regards to the desire on the part of students for a de-Westernised IR theory curriculum. Thus, this could initiate further discussion on how to incorporate indigenous knowledge in other IR courses.

Asked if the third year IR Theory course should focus exclusively on theories and concepts that are more suited to explaining and analysing the international relations of the global South, and not mainstream theories such as Realism and Liberalism, there was a tie between the "yes" and the "no" responses. The response may also reflect the ideological division of students around the issue of decolonising curricula and whether this should be a knowledge exclusive or inclusive process. As stated previously, my preference is for knowledge-plurality in the theory curricula. When asked whether they found the concept of Ubuntu a helpful tool for explaining and analysing South African foreign policy, the responses were the following:

- “Yes, I did especially considering that South Africa is/was an emerging democratic nation. It managed to incept a strong diplomacy and hopeful one like that.”
- “Yes, it helped to unpack the reasoning behind SA’s foreign policy.”
- “Yes, our foreign policy is arguably rooted in that concept.”
- “No. This is because when I spoke from first-hand experience of what is Ubuntu, I was penalised. Ubuntu is one concept that is complex and cannot be simply explained with restrictive academic information. It is open-ended concept, hence the West cannot entirely approve it because to them it as absurd.”
- “Yes absolutely. It is very helpful to contextualise the African experience.”
- “To a certain degree yes, however traditional theories are also needed.”
- “Most definitely. It put a lot of South African IR relations in perspective.”
- “Not really, as there was not enough literature on the subject within an international relations or political studies approach.”
- “Yes, Ubuntu was an excellent theory to use when analysing South African foreign policy, however it was difficult to find IR theories on a broader scale”
- “Yes I did, as its more a communitarianism based society”
- In some ways it was helpful however it seemed to be such a small section. The essay could have made sense without the discussion of Ubuntu, which demonstrates that it is not as important or integral to this subject, as Western theories are.”
- “Yes, however we need to be taught more African theories/concepts.”
- “Yes, I thought it was informative in terms of an African mind-set and understanding the value system surrounding this and how it translated into policy.”
- “Yes, made it easier to understand why certain alliances are made based on mutual interest.”

The majority of student responses to this question were affirmative. I was rather surprised by this because the amount of literature available of the concept of ubuntu, particularly as to how it pertains to South African foreign policy, is rather limited. However, a few respondents did list this as a problem. The limited number of articles on the concept is due to the fact that it has been recorded via oral tradition and only recently scholars have started to formalise this knowledge in the form of academic scholarship. This supports Santos’ argument for the need to increase the formalization of these knowledges so that they can be utilised more widely. The majority of respondents found value in using ubuntu as an analytical tool for investigating South African foreign policy. Many noted that despite claiming to follow a foreign policy grounded in the principle of Ubuntu, this ideal was often discarded in favour of pursuing policies based on strategic self-interest. The majority of respondents stated that they did not find the essay challenging because it deviated from the standard Western explanatory tools which are dominant in the discipline. This may indicates that situating learning within a context familiar to students creates an effective environment for the development of higher order skills. It also shows that the way the classes and essays were carefully scaffolded develops not only the mastery of content, but also academic skills.

At present IR theory textbooks that are knowledge-plural are almost non-existent. In addition, when showing the utility of a particular theory the examples are often related to the interests of students in the West. When examples are set in the context of the South they usually reinforce stereotypical depictions of countries. Surveyed students strongly supported the publication of an IR theory textbook that was inclusive of theories from both the West and South. This further demonstrates strong student support for a knowledge-plural IR theory curriculum at Wits.

Space does not permit a full discussion of all the student's suggestions to the development of a knowledge plural IR Theory curriculum, however, below I have listed a few thought-provoking comments;

- “I believe that the more theories we know, the better our understanding of these concepts will be. As such I feel that the addition of other aspects and theories of IR will help in broadening our horizons.”
- “We want a complete decolonization of the IR curriculum which means that it must be African and black centred. ”
- “I would like to suggest the utilization of the work of African novelist Chinua Achebe as analytical frameworks the IR course can treat to traditional International Relations theory. For instance, Achebe's ‘Things Fall Apart’, explores notions of realism, interstate conflicts and hegemonic influence from an Afrocentric experience. ”
- “De-colonialization of IR theory at Wits (a school in Africa) would be a massive step towards liberating the minds of African scholars.”
- “Using material and theories from both the global South and the global North will lead to a better understanding of the global South and an outstanding learning outcome.”
- “I personally think the study of Africa should be prioritised in IR because currently, it is marginal. We should not only learn about Africa's interaction with the North for example; more theories should be developed which will broaden the scope of African studies/literature”.
- I believe that it is integral to continue to add indigenous theories, however this should not be the main focus of the course. As mentioned above, the Western concepts are integral in exploring the global system as it is today. For one's studies, and possible career in this discipline, it is more important to understand the Western concepts. It could be viable to introduce a course in Postgraduate studies, which would deal with indigenous concepts and theories; however that should be optional to people who want to focus more on Southern aspects of the global system. It is my opinion, that Western concepts are more important in understanding the current state of the international system, and should remain as the dominant component or discourse within IR.”
- “IR as a field originated in the West so to exclude it would be wrong because it wouldn't provide an accurate view of the course.”
- “I did not relate at all with the text book we used (...) it was more western-centric to the extent that it was hard to find a voice or viewpoint as an African student”.

Overall the curriculum survey revealed that making the theory course inclusive of African knowledge and context was strongly supported by most students. However, there is disagreement

among the student body over the degree to which knowledge-plurality should be a feature of the theory curriculum. This reflects the larger debate within the South African academy over what it means to de-colonize a curriculum. To some, de-colonization means the total exclusion of knowledge originating from outside Africa. Extreme voices even extend this into the realm of science. It is doubtful that this approach is feasible, given South Africa's cultural diversity and the extent to which our cultures have embraced a multitude of knowledges and identities from the rest of the world. Western culture continues to play a significant role in South Africa's cultural milieu because of the influence of the broadcasting and internet-based media. The error in the extremist approach to de-colonization lies in its populist reductionism. Knowledge deconstruction or exclusion entices its proponents with what seems the least complicated route to achieving their objectives. However, the ideal of creating a plurality of knowledges within a curriculum demands far more intellectual and pedagogical consideration and effort. It demands the re-conceptualization of the origins, aims, objectives, and the applications of the discipline within the field of knowledge production and purposely translating these into curricula. It necessitates broadening ontological and epistemological boundaries.

Conclusion

To be truly "international", IR theory must embrace knowledge plurality within the fields of knowledge production and reproduction. It is disingenuous to claim Western theoretical narratives as universally applicable. However, achieving knowledge plurality may not be an easy task as it would entail Western theoretical relinquishing of its hegemony over the discipline. It also means confronting the colonial stereotypes that are still present in how the countries in the South are represented, as well as the ideologically laden terminology that flows from these. As the process seeks not to extinguish Western theoretical knowledge, but to expand the knowledges available, this opens up new ways of understanding and interacting with our world which would benefit IR students everywhere.

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