Exploring Global Decolonising Projects and English Studies in the 21st Century: A Thematic Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Decolonisation projects have proliferated with the increasing awareness of the hegemony that comes with globalisation. Decolonising English studies (both language and literature) is nothing new and often manifested at the implementation levels with the use of local literary texts and localised Englishes in the classroom. What collective voice has decolonising English studies achieved in relation to other decolonising projects, however, has not been fully scrutinised. The aim of this paper is to review past studies on some areas affected by the decolonising project and to try establishing its relationship to English studies itself. The overarching concern is expressed by these research questions: 1) What are some examples of decolonisation projects that can be found?; 2) What are the common themes of past studies on decolonisation projects?; And 3) How are these past studies contributing to the decolonisation of English studies? To achieve this, the review of literature is organised thematically to create links and synthesis. This paper adopts the definitions of decolonisation by Meera Ashar (2015) and Shahjahan et al. (2022). The thematic analysis reveals three main themes which are privileging indigenous knowledge, a re-evaluation of the curriculum, and the questioning of the epistemology of knowledge itself, with the first two themes bookending the last theme. We conclude that English studies should be coded as a tool of cultural-political literacy that is useful in helping us make sense of how inequalities are being reproduced via literary texts and the English language. This finding contributes toward an alternative understanding of the evolution in pedagogy and the innovative approaches in English studies so that its cultural imperialism is eliminated while providing a vanguard of possible retheorisation.

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INTRODUCTION

Rule Britannia! Britannia, Rules the wave!
Britons never, never, never, shall be slaves

We would like to start this paper by contextualising and problematising our research using a few main local examples or anecdotes in an effort to illustrate how colonial ideology keeps reproducing itself in different and varied manifestations. The use of anecdotes to provide context is not new in humanities and social sciences research, with scholars like Shaitanov (1996) pointing to its ability to provide "a way of thinking specific to that era" (p. 33). For starters, when Malaysian Airlines (MAS) was facing a financial crisis, a new CEO, Christoph Mueller was appointed in 2015. He peremptorily sacked 6000 members of staff - deadpan - in the name of crisis management. He did not manage to bring MAS back to its former glory and instead, wending south-bound, resigned and his place was taken by Peter Bellew at the end of 2015 (2017, straitstimes.com). Unfortunately, the venerated white CEO also quit the job before his term ended. In another case involving a government-linked company, the Malaysian Postal Service also experienced a financial crisis, and recently in 2021, Charles Brewer was been appointed as the new CEO. The result of his expensive appointment has not been clearly recorded. Ostensibly, these are white men who are seen as capable of saving Malaysian government-linked national conglomerates. Their "western knowledge" is often obsequiously prioritized by Malaysians whose mainstream education, legal and political systems are modelled after their own colonial master - the British. This is a characteristic of a colonised and seized mentality that finds contemporary resonance in the neoliberal marketplace. Indeed, Britannia is now ruling a different type of wave, i.e., neo-imperialism embodied in the discourse of globalization.

Another relevant vignette that is closer to us as academics, to our mind, is that in education when some Chinese students from mainland China come to study in Malaysia, they would introduce themselves with their English names as assigned by their native English - usually White - teachers at home instead of their Chinese names. The reason is that it is easier for the English teacher to call them; and perhaps, by changing their Chinese names into "Christian" ones, the students will also mimic - not the subversive kind of mimicry proposed by Bhabha (1994) - not only English as their language but also their perception of their new identity. The first is often manifested by their gregariously improvised English or Americanized accent, while the latter is usually manifested by their affinity with Western culture. What is problematic about this teaching approach is the promotion of English and its cultural traits as the standard to aspire to, or according to Buzan, the "standard of civilisation" (2014, p. 577) that is rooted in the binary opposition of the West as civilised and the rest of the world as barbaric. This is a common example of how English as a subject and its pedagogy have colonised many into linking whiteness to superiority or even modernisation while denying learners opportunities to express themselves from their own experience of the world. It is also evidence of how Euro-centrism perpetually continues to position itself as invincible: "metropolitan centres of knowledge and production, while allocating others to the periphery" (Shahjahan et al. 2022, p. 76).

Consequently, English becomes a yardstick to measure the students' standard by, a salient vestige of imperialism. This echoes Fanon's contention that "to speak a language is to take on a world, a culture" (1967, p. 38), revealing the structure of power and domination within a language. In the case of the English language, according to Collis-Buthelezi, then, it becomes "an apparatus of social control over indigenous population" (2016, p. 74). Decolonising English and English

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language studies is nothing new as often evident with the use of local literary texts and localized English in the classroom; however, the link between English as the language of our colonial master and its power to prioritise whiteness persists as illustrated by earlier examples. This persistence carries the essence of neo-imperialism beyond the need of the imperialists to create a physical settlement.

The above argument does not mean that we are ignoring the fact that each country that was colonised experienced imperialism differently. We are cognizant of this diversity. Harrison (2003) points out that one criticism of postcolonial studies is its tendency "to lump cultures that are highly diverse in numerous ways, including in their relation to colonialism" (p. 8). Nonetheless, we would concur with Ashar's argument that as colonialism has a strong "normalizing tendency", postcolonial society has to play the catching up game in emulating the colonial "normative ideal" (2015, p. 259). As a matter of fact, we take this impetus as the point of departure of our exploration of the different decolonising projects focusing on ways English studies (which include both literary and language studies) decolonise their systematic colonial experiences. In the context of this study, both English literature and English language studies are subsumed under English studies as most research we explored did not make a clear distinction between English language studies and English literary studies. This, generally, is due to the small size of English departments that both are seen as complementing each other. Our positioning, furthermore, is rooted deeply in Said's powerful statement:

> Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles.
>
> (1978, 1995, p. 2)

Said's articulation resonates well with Chawla and Rodriguez's contention that "natives and locals continue to internalize and functionalize the colonizing cosmology and ideology [... resulting in] the spread of a hegemonic orientation" (2011, p. 82). In this regard, our exploration covers some aspects listed by Said as well as that of Chawla and Rodriguez's that reflect a deep-seated systematic operation of imperialism that cuts across cultures. While we recognize decolonisation projects as vastly categorised, our inquiry's central concern emerges from a long-held notion that the English language is a site of ideological struggles. Our interests were galvanised by Meighan's (2019, p.2) calls for an immediate effort to "decolonize English Language instruction, implement pedagogical change and inspire radical paradigm shift to fully embrace and validate alternative worldviews and ways of knowing and being". Indeed, this comes as a no-brainer as, according to Shajahan et al. (2022, p. 74), the decolonisation project has a great affinity with "Global North and South student movements, academic collectively, and national policy initiatives".

In short, the aim of this paper is to review some articles related to some areas affected by the decolonising project and to try establishing its relationship to English studies itself. The overarching concern is expressed by these research questions: 1) What are some examples of decolonisation projects that can be found?; 2) What are the common themes of past studies on decolonisation projects?; And 3) How are these past studies contributing to the decolonisation of English studies? This paper adopts the definition of decolonisation by Meera Ashar (2015, p. 255) who defines it as a process of transfer - "the transfer of control over institutions and forms of governance that were part of the imperial cultural context" to the postcolonial context and Shahjahan et al.'s (2022, p. 83) conception of decolonisation as "undoing colonial processes and

logic". This essentially means that the decolonisation project identifies how imperialist culture in which power is embedded monolithically foregrounds western hegemony while occluding, and in some examples, erasing local episteme. By the same token, inevitably, this paper argues that due to colonial epistemicide, decolonisation can be seen as opening alternative windows to leaving colonial shibboleths behind.

Indeed, much has been said about decolonising English studies, but rarely that the effect that this has on other areas that are directly related to this project or vice versa has been systematically explored. To achieve this, a review of literature is organised thematically to create links and synthesis. As this is an exploration, it focuses on the themes constructed through the literature review. It is hoped that this thematic analysis will reveal innovative ways in which English studies can be used as a critical tool that charts a powerful way of locating other areas within the discourse of decolonisation. This contributes toward a further understanding of the evolution in pedagogy and the innovative approaches in English language studies so that its cultural imperialism is attenuated, eliminated, or at least managed. In short, this paper explores some past studies on the decolonisation project globally to illuminate some themes that may help the changing constitutions of English studies.

A BRIEF CONCEPTION OF DECOLONIZATION

The history of decolonisation is varied. Generally, the popular belief is that the decolonisation project is said to have rooted in the postcolonial theory made popular by Edward Said's ground-breaking book *Orientalism* in the late 1970s. In discussing decolonisation in the African context, Chaka et al. (2017) note that the term can be traced back to the 1960s, influenced by Frank Fanon's 1961 seminal work *The Wretched of the Earth.* As decolonisation can mean differently due to each country's different temporal "separation" and severance experiences from its colony, this leads to Ashar's definition of decolonisation as "refer[ring] to the attainment of political sovereignty" (2015, p. 254). Shahjahan et al. (2022), however, aver that decolonisation as a concept grew in momentum after 1945 and referred to the "independence of nation-states from their former colonial empires, most pronounced after World War II" (p. 81). This in short shows that the history of decolonisation is traceable in different historical moments.

The decolonisation project concerns itself with research epistemology. In some cases, decolonisation has been treated as a conceptual framework and a theoretical framework (Chaka et a. 2017). Likewise, decolonisation scholars have often called for "examining research methodological acts" (Beeman-Cadwallader et al., 2011, p. 3) as a way of unravelling the deep-seated mechanism and legacy of colonialism. This mechanism and legacy are best explained by Ashar (2015) who argues that the decolonisation project is critical because it permits us to "know ourselves" by unveiling the deliberate "experience-occluding" of the colonial "good practices" (p. 257). A few years earlier than Ashar, Chawla and Rogriguez in 2011 observed this mechanism that leaves "other ways of viewing and being in the world remain unacknowledged (p. 77), which is the kind of projection that has resulted in a "continuing epistemological dominance of Eurocentric paradigm and interpretive frames" (Sandwith et al. 2020, p. 123).

By the same token, the main aim of the decolonisation project centres on the idea of reimagining the world through language. One such view is expressed by Ndmande (2018) who argues for the centrality of language in "embracing decolonizing epistemologies in research" (p. 384). This, for him, can result in the recognition and celebration of one's national identity, preservation, and ultimately the promotion of it. Perhaps a more lucid suggestion comes from Meighan. Meighan (2020) for instance suggests three ways to decolonise: 1) Decolonising the

mind by questioning the existing framework of viewing the world; 2) Decolonising English with new narratives to live by and 3) Moving towards a more proactive interaction with the world (p. 2). Moreover, Rashwan (2021) argues that "comparative linguistics is significantly suffering from various side effects rooted in modernism and Eurocentrism [...] that it provides a one-sided broken mirror for their Euro-American readers" (p. 185). This calls for a rethinking of the world and sense-making that is not tied to the limit of colonial language in understanding and explaining local knowledge.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper presents a literature review of past research being done on decolonising projects. A distinction is not made between English Studies (often known as English Literary Studies) and English Language Studies. As this is an exploration, such a distinction is not needed, but a cursory reference of the differences is made when necessary. Furthermore, as the purpose of this study is to explore decolonisation projects, its intention is to explore the ways these projects can contribute to English studies. Employing a qualitative approach, a thematic analysis of past studies on decolonisation as its main methodology has been carried out. As this is not a systematic review, it does not limit its data collection procedure to a specific time frame or other stringent categories. Indeed, for this study, data were collected by using three keywords which are "Decolonisation/decolonising", "English Studies" and "English". This search generated over 150 articles; however, 27 articles were sifted through for relevancy. This selection process is done by skimming and scanning for key ideas in the abstract (if any), thesis statements, topic sentences, and the conclusion. However, this number of articles is further reduced for relevancy.

For the analysis procedure, thematic analysis is used in determining some focus in the decolonisation efforts. It is a method for assessing qualitative data that has become widely employed in the fields of psychology, social sciences, and health sciences (Terry et al, 2017). Thematic analysis, as defined by Clarke and Braun (2017), is a method for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning, or 'themes,' within qualitative data that may be applied across a variety of theoretical viewpoints. It goes beyond summarising data to interpreting it, and as a result, it necessitates a greater level of involvement from the researcher, including intellectual contribution (Staller, 2015).

The thematic analysis provides a very flexible approach. This flexibility facilitates the possibility of change based on the demands of numerous investigations, delivering a rich and detailed, yet complex description of data because of its theoretical freedom (King, 2004; Braun & Clarke, 2006). King (2004) and Braun & Clarke (2006) further argued that it is a useful method for examining the perspectives of different research participants, highlighting similarities and differences, and generating unanticipated insights. A myriad of qualitative papers designates the phrase thematic analysis to organising data into recurring themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Maquire & Delahunt, 2017). This signifies constructing common themes derived from a data set that answer the research questions. This research will take on this definition of the term for its data analysis.

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REVIEW OF PAST STUDIES

This section presents the review of literature done to achieve the objectives of this study. Past studies are reviewed and organised based on the themes derived. Apart from structuring the analysis thematically, past studies are also presented in chronological order to evince the development within the theme constructed. They, however, are not organised based on the order of importance. There are three main themes found from past studies, and each is discussed in detail below.

The first theme is privileging indigenous knowledge. There is a growing body of work that focuses on privileging indigenous knowledge as the main effort in a decolonisation project. Several of such projects proliferate by putting knowledge under a specific microscope to reveal the obfuscation strategy of colonial structure. For example, a study on colonised content and structure of public speaking courses that have been seen as providing universally acceptable structure by Chawla and Rodriguez. Chawla and Rodriguez (2011), in offering a critique of a university public speaking course, argue that the course is "an example of a type of colonial discourse that perpetuates a 'hegemony of speaking', wherein other ways of viewing and being in the world remain unacknowledged" (p. 77). Here, they posit that despite a globalised trend in education, knowledge of public speaking still panders to Western or Euro-centric constructs. Admitting to the idea that epistemology is itself "deficient"; they nonetheless aver that this very notion "makes epistemologies heuristic and why cultivating diverse epistemologies is important to the development of communication studies (and other disciplines)" (2011, p. 80). Crucial to Chawla and Rodriguez's contention is that a new way of looking should produce "new kinds of theory, a new way of doing and embodying theory [...] to historicize theory" (p.80). Their research takes stock of global adoption of public speaking skills and logic as producing a "rejection of indigenous theories of communication" (p.83). As this rejection of indigenous knowledge has to do with language, public speaking skills become the embodiment of hegemony, which this research criticises.

Conterminous with the research that focuses on a globalised trend set by Western-centric power play, there is a growing trend to scrutinise the role of the English language as a global language in order to pursue a decolonisation project. Indeed, there has been a growing concern over the influence of the English language as a global language having an obfuscating effect on indigenous knowledge. Meighan (2019), for instance, raises such concern regarding the English language abilities for cultural appropriation; resulting in a body of knowledge that is Eurocentric. Meighan's study focuses on utilising the English language to interpret local knowledge on the climate crisis by revealing the problematics of interpretation. Indeed, Meighan (2020) further argues for the need to explore and use "alternative, sustainable ways of knowing and being [that] have been contributing factors to the current climate change crisis "(p.1). Meighan's research proposes that unlearning how the English language has shaped our worldview forms the basis of our understanding of how our surroundings affect us and our reaction towards them.

Another example of the call for privileging indigenous knowledge comes from a literary project. Indeed, the notion of and call for privileging indigenous knowledge becomes the central concern of LongStorySHORT, a Pretoria-based literacy project. According to Sandwith et al., (2020, p. 122), this project "uses digital technology to make books more widely available and to circumvent a publishing context which is skewed towards writers in the US and the UK". They argue that this is an example of how technology disrupts the "context of production and reception" (p. 123), liberating African literature from the shackle of the neo-imperialist structure of

domination. Indeed, the discourse of decoloniality facilitated by such technologies helps to challenge the problem of "black (in)visibility and the continuing epistemological dominance of Eurocentric paradigms and interpretive frames" (p. 123). This project helps promote African writers' works and consequently prioritises indigenous knowledge and experiences that the people can relate to.

In another research done by Rashwan (2021) on Ancient Egyptian and Arabic poetry, the question posed reflects the trend toward prioritising indigenous knowledge and away from Western hegemony. Rashwan problematises the research by questioning the Euro-centric tools used in literary studies that speak to their own audience (2021). This, she argues, is done by systematically obfuscating Egyptian language and Arabic and Egyptian writers that have their linguistic features and tools that are crucial to their literary works. She concludes that "[t]he deployment of analytical approaches from Arabic literary tradition may help to decolonize the overwhelming illogical divorce between linguistic and literary studies" (2021, p. 191). Central to this effort to privilege indigenous knowledge is the question of the role of English as a *lingua franca* in the academic world. Suzina (2021) argues that the use of English as a *lingua franca* within the academic world has proven problematic. She believes that the demand for "eloquence" in the English language by Western-centric journal editors is often taken as rigid, and not academic rigour; thus, furtively hindering diversity of knowledge.

In conclusion, the first theme derived from the literature review highlights the significance of foregrounding indigenous knowledge. In this context, several past studies suggest that one way towards this "undoing" of western hegemony is through the recognition of the power that language, particularly English, has in shaping the mentality and perception not only of the world but the value that it is used to attaching to local knowledge. The decolonisation project helps to mitigate and attenuate this conflict that is genealogically traceable in the English language itself.

The second theme derived from past studies on decolonisation projects is a re-evaluation of the curriculum. Harrison (2003) argues that due to allegations of Eurocentricity within the English department require "the very definition of literature, and of what is appropriate to study in the literature department, is necessarily called into question: [...] it usually means that those devising literary syllabuses today see reasons to include writers from former European colonies" (p. 4). By including World Literature in the curriculum, Harrison's argument only provides one side of the argument. While more works outside of White Middle-class Male canons have been established and recognised, such as works by Chinua Achebe and Tony Morrison, the criticisms have been about the Western canonical standard that is applied to them. This, nonetheless, only further reinforces Fanon's contention when he states that "Nothing is more astonishing than to hear a black man expressing himself properly, for then in truth he is appropriating the white world" (1967, p. 36).

This idea of a black man wearing a white mask finds greater resonance in the context of neo-imperialism. Walder (2007) argues that the popularity of postcolonial theory in the 1980s has helped to "create what has since become a global cultural industry, promoting a greater awareness of the experiences and reflections of peoples formerly invisible to mainstream western literary curricula" (p. 189). The postcolonial approach, he further argues, puts global inequalities under the critical microscope. Meanwhile, Schulze-Cleven et al. (2017) argue that "[t]he political economy of higher education is increasingly defined by intensified marketization, measurement, and stratification, as universities around the world find themselves pressured to mimic the oligopoly of the elite, Western academic institutions" (in Kamola, I. 2020, p. 261). Nonetheless, efforts have been made by universities, for instance, when in 1968, young African academics at

the Department of English, the University of Nairobi, "outright rejected the coloniality of English literature". They demanded the creation of a new discipline - one defined by the needs of "their particular world" (Kamola, 2020, p. 263).

The resistance to colonialism in academia as exemplified by the University of Nairobi has reverberated throughout the world, for example, the introduction of Malaysian Literature in English, which takes the focus away from the Western canons. Nonetheless, the introduction of local literature in English as part of the curriculum seems to breed a new criticism related to the notions like Africanization and Malaysianisation that take away the central concern of decolonisation itself. In some cases, the Malaysianisation of the literary curriculum has turned into tokenism, with texts selected are still based on a Eurocentric framework and methodology. This concern is expressed by Kamola who proposes that "political struggles to decolonize the university are fundamentally concerned with interrogating how academic knowledge is produced, what is valued, and who participates in its production" (2020, p. 268-269). Nonetheless, the socio-political aspect of decolonisation is emphasised here to feign Kamola's central structure of analysis which is economics. This economic structure and framework mendaciously continue to produce a spatial conflict as it is the very tool that apotheosised Eurocentrism.

For that reason, curriculum or knowledge structure has become a tenacious site of ideological contestation. In their systematic review of decolonisation of knowledge, Chaka et al. (2017) frame the term decolonisation "within a parochialisation of knowledge and a null curriculum" (p. 214). They cited Le Grange's (2016, p. 7 in Chaka et al, p. 214) in defining a null curriculum as "what universities leave out - what is not taught and learnt in a university". This point of departure intensifies curriculum or knowledge structure as a site of ideological contestation, highlighting the urgent need for an epistemic shift. By the same token, Hattori (2018, p. 178), for example, argues that "in the case of colonized societies, the matter is even more problematic since curriculum invariably becomes 'a site of contestation' between imported and indigenous knowledge" (Ismailova, 2004, p. 251). In this context, colonialism keeps reproducing itself and homogenises the curriculum in the process.

According to Tao Zhang (2020), her own experience of being the racialised Other in an American academic setting is magnified and marked by her "accented" English. She argues that her racial Otherness as an international graduate teaching assistant (IGTA) is constructed around her accent that consequently affects her teacher-student relationship. Employing the decolonial perspective, she declares univocally the intersection of accent and English hegemony as the main elements that shape the American curriculum and its delivery as racially inequitable. She concludes her article by emphasising the need to challenge the existing power structure at the level of pedagogy.

The most recent study found on decolonisation curriculum and pedagogy is a critical review done by Shahjahan et al. (2022). This study identifies three themes which are decolonising meaning, actualisation, and challenges of actualising. The critical review concludes that while there are "similarities within the literature, ultimately the meanings, actualizations, and challenges of DCP (Decolonizing Curriculum and Pedagogy) are contextual, which has political and epistemological consequences" (2022, p. 76). As context plays a germinal role in decolonising the curriculum, the problem of the interpretive framework takes a center stage.

In short, re-evaluating the curriculum is inevitably an important theme in the decolonisation project. Scholars who focus on this theme understand the role of the educational institution as a bastion of colonial ideology. As educational institutions are part of what Louis Althusser argues as "ideological state apparatuses" (1971) that "*function "as ideologies*" [original italic] (p. 80),

they disguise their impulse and colonialised system in the name of achieving the "universal standard" in education. Besides, educationists and curriculum developers trained within tacit Western construct are often ideologically interpellated already; and this proxy to colonial mastermind often mendaciously exonerates the curriculum design from allegations of Eurocentrism.

The third theme found in past studies on decolonisation projects points to the epistemology of knowledge itself. Indeed, central to the decolonisation project is intense scrutiny of its epistemology. This parallels Fanon's second stage of "resistance literature" that reflects "the native intellectual's rediscovery of his heritage" (Al-Ma'amari, Md. Yusof and Vengadasamy, 2014, p.128). The most frequent place for decolonisation and postcolonial scholars to start is the epistemological dimension of their research. In her 1999 seminal book, Linda Tuhiwai Smith univocally describes "research" as "one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world's vocabulary" due to its link with "European imperialism and colonialism" (1999/2021, p. 1). The expression, she admits in the third edition of the book's Introduction to the Third Edition, becomes a buzzword. Writing from the perspective of the colonised, Smith's main contention is that "research is a significant site of struggle between the interests and ways of resisting of the Other", thus foregrounding decolonisation as a research practice of telling an "alternative story" (2021, p. 2). Meanwhile, Beeman-Cadwaller et al. (2011) scrutinise their research method by focusing on the processes or "*the doing* [original italic]" (p.4) that take place in their research instead of the data of the indigenous educational work. Employing reflective analysis as part of enacting a decolonising methodological approach, they point out that the approach relies heavily on "the intent and mindfulness" (2011, p.7) when applying the methods and not on any specific method. The problem with Beeman-Cadwaller et al. 's (2011) work, we would argue, is their eventual emphasis on the students' making connections between their indigenous knowledge with that of Western modern science. Needless to say, this places Western knowledge back on the pedestal while reaffirming the notion that local knowledge needs to pivot around and to hew to Western standards. This is the kind of trap that Ashar (2015, p.263) argues about, that is, the decolonisation project, despite its subversive and transgressive nature, "continues to be undertaken in the language of coloniality".

Interestingly, a study done by Julian Go (2013) goes deeper into the sociologist, i.e. Pierre Bourdieu's experience of colonialism in the French colony - Algeria - to explore the idea of the "empire/knowledge complex" (p. 51). Go argues that Bourdieu's work should be seen as part of the tradition of social sciences research done by the French empire that privileges French policy over the colonies; this produces knowledge that is about the empire and its practices. He, as Go argues, "was part of the colonial apparatus and its knowledge complex" (p.54). Go's study is essential in understanding that colonialism is embedded in the knowledge that it produces about the colonial and the colonised. As Go's research recontextualises historical context to produce new meaning, Ashar's work coheres further into questions about the normalisation of history or historicism as a colonial tool. By the same token, Ashar (2015, p. 260) succinctly states that "to understand one's past is to become the subject of history, and yet the only sovereign subject of history is Europe". This epistemic privilege frequently pushes the colonised knowledge to the margin while universalising Euro-centric hegemony; this forms a continuous trap faced by decolonial pursuits that ossify its epistemological hesitation.

For that reason, there is a call among scholars to decolonise knowledge via its research method (Sandoval et al., 2016 and Ndimande, 2018). Sandoval et al. (2016, p. 19) argue that there is an urgent need for "a paradigm shift that pre-empts canonical research methodologies as tightly

knotted colonial practices based *only* [original italic] on dominant Western Eurocentric views". Sandoval et al.'s research using Ancestral Knowledge Systems (AKS) as a framework for understanding local indigenous knowledge finds that in many cases, native languages "have been killed off by colonial practices in schools" (2016, p.22). Meanwhile, Ndimande (2018, p. 384) focuses on "the importance of decolonizing methodologies in the contexts of research conducted with and for indigenous and other marginalized communities". He argues that language plays a central role in decolonisation practices. As local knowledge has been influenced by the colonial construct, it is at the level of epistemology that this needs to be dealt with.

In short, the attention to the epistemology of knowledge is the third common theme in this review of the literature. It highlights the importance of challenging the unbridled enthusiasm for decolonisation projects that may ironically conjure up the silhouette in the spectrum of colonialism itself. Past studies on this foreground the importance of critically scrutinising deep-seated assumptions derived from the colonial methodology that often inveigles itself back into decolonial projects.

CONCLUSION

There are a few examples of decolonisation projects that can be found in past studies. This is the first research question to be addressed. To do this an example of a project from each theme is cited. One example of the decolonisation project that relates to the first theme of privileging indigenous knowledge is LongStorySHORT, a Pretoria-based literacy project. This project is a literacy and literary project that is successful at debunking the myth that Africans do not read as well as foregrounding the importance of local literary works produced in diverse African languages. For the re-evaluation of the curriculum, the project carried out by the University of Nairobi that re-evaluates its literature curriculum while foregrounding local writers has been exemplary. Lastly, an example of a decolonisation project that questions colonial epistemology is the one done by using the Ancestral Knowledge System (AKS) which helps to create a systematic interpretation of indigenous knowledge.

Past studies on decolonisation projects all around the world center around three main themes. The first theme is privileging indigenous knowledge. Studies that focus on such a theme are done by Chawla and Rodriguez (2011), Meighan (2019), Meighan (2020), Sandwith et al., (2020, p. 122), Rashwan (2021), and Suzina (2021). As such studies critically selected here are very recently published, this evinces the idea that the decolonisation project's central concern of privileging indigenous knowledge is very much the in-thing. The second theme identified from past studies on decolonisation projects is a re-evaluation of the curriculum. Works of scholars like Harrison (2003), Ismailova (2004), Walder (2007), Chaka et al. (2017), Hattori (2018), Kamola (2020), Zhang (2020), and Shahjahan et al. (2022) all stress on the importance of revisiting and renewing the curriculum to include decolonisation as a new perspective. The third theme found in past studies on decolonisation projects points to the epistemology of knowledge itself. This is evident in research done by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), Beeman-Cadwaller et al. (2011), Ashar (2015), Go (2013), Sandoval et al. (2016), and Ndimande (2018). We found that the first two themes seem to bookend the third theme. In short, these three examples answer the third question regarding the common themes found.

The review of past studies reveals some contributions that the decolonisation projects have on English studies. The three themes revealed can help reanimate and politicise English studies so that it would reverberate beyond national boundaries while promoting critical thinking skills. In

addition, the varied understanding of decolonisation liberates English studies from the Eurocentric framework that is shackling the celebration of indigenous knowledge - not as a token, but as a valid and evocative way to view the world. English studies, then, should be coded as a tool of cultural-political literacy that is useful in helping us make sense of how inequalities are being reproduced via English literature and the English language.

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