Framing an Onto–Epistemological Paradigm for the Decolonisation of Student Development Practice in Higher Education

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Abstract: The thesis of this paper argues that the out of class student development programmes in post-colonial universities and colleges in the Global South have remained Eurocentric and therefore are largely irrelevant to the needs of the indigenous people. Despite attempts to embed African indigenous knowledge into student development practice, the essentials particularly student clubs and societies have remained to a greater extent anchored on a Eurocentricepistemology that subalternises African knowledges and values. This has resulted in the moulding of graduates who shun their languages, knowledge, culture and belief systems. Further, Eurocentric knowledge systems are highly individualised leading to the production of graduates who are very individualistic ad selfish. These attributes are at cross-purposes with the African moral ethic of *hunhu/ubuntu*. It is against this backdrop that this paper calls for the decolonisation of student development programmes in higher education by incorporating indigenous African epistemologies and values.

KeyWords: Student development, decolonisation, coloniality, decoloniality, indigenous African epistemologies, Eurocentrism, *hunhu/ubuntu*.

I. Introduction

This study is premised on the standpoint that in spite of efforts to transform higher education and make it relevant to the needs of indigenous people of the Global South, the hegemonic influence of Eurocentrism has remained deeply entrenched. Eurocentrism views the world from a Western lens that favours European epistemologies and values while marginalising African ways of knowing and cultural traditions(Mazodze, Mapara & Tsvere, 2021). Based on this reflection this study adopted decolonial theory as a tool for decolonising student development. Decoloniality, as propounded by African theorists who *inter-alia* includeMampane, Omidire, and Aluko (2018); Mbembe(2016); Mungwini (2017); Ndlovu-Gatsheni(2020, 2021); Odora Hoppers (2009); Wa Thiong'o(1997) will guide the theoretical discussion of this paper. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021) advocates for the disentanglement of Africa from the European hegemony over knowledge production and validation which the author called the 'coloniality of power, being and knowledge'. Coloniality refers to the political control that the West continues to exert on the former colonies, well after the end of formal colonialism. It is an enduring invisible form of control by the West which some scholars have termed a metaphysical empire (Mazodze, Mapara and Tsvere, 2021; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020). However, it is critical to note that although decoloniality aims to extricate student development in the Global South from Western

epistemological gaze, it does not translate to a total rejection of Western ways of knowing. It rests on claiming space for indigenous epistemologies to be treated on equal footing with Eurocentric epistemologies thereby creating an 'ecology of knowledges' (Santos, 2014) or 'epistemic coyotismo' (Maldonado-Torres in Suárez-Krabbe, 2012).

It is important at the onset to define the term decolonisation and set the parameters of how it would be used in this paper. The term decolonisation denotes the existence of colonialism in the first place, where colonial powers exerted their political, socio-economic and legal control over territories they had subjugated in the Global South. Within this perspective decolonisation entails the end of political and judicial control of the colonial powers. However, in the context of this study decolonisation does not refer to the colonial political and legal control but rather to the enduring legacy of colonialism also known as coloniality (Mazodze, et.al 2021; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018, 2020, 2021). Therefore, decolonising student developmententails the undoing of Eurocentric ontological, epistemic and cultural hegemony that is still prevalent in student development praxis higher education system in the Global South. Some scholars view decolonisation as economic and cultural emancipation from an enduring legacy of Western hegemony (Mbembe, 2016; Wa Thiong'o, 1997). These conceptualisations of decolonisation address the onto-epistemic and cultural coloniality that has maintained its grip on student development in higher education decades after the end of European colonialism. This understanding of decolonisation has been adopted to guide the theoretical framework of this paper.

II.   Historical origins of student development in higher education

The origin of student development is rooted in the emergence of modern formation of universities in the 19th century, focusing on generation and transmission of ideology, selection and formation of dominant elites, production and application of knowledge and training the bureaucracy(Castells, 2010). Komives, Mainella, Longerbeam, Osteen and Owen, (2006)expound that the origins of student development is rooted in the realization by university principals that they needed help in regulating student behavior. In this framework, the need to manage student conduct and behavior was central to the essence of establishing student affairs structures that oversee character formation. In the purview of Long(2012b), the first two decades of the 20th century marked the embryonic period in which personnel now known as Student Affairs were recruited to implement the goals of student development. This assertion points to the modern conceptualisation of student development as it is understood today. Prior to this student development and support was immersed throughout university administration and faculty (Long, 2012a).

Universities in most sub-Saharan African countries were introduced by the colonial powers as affiliates of universities in the West. Subsequently, university structures, the disciplines and co-curricular activities were fashion +ned using models from the West (Mazodze, Mapara and Tsvere, 2021). The co-curricular activities were structured and co-ordinated in a similar approach by the Student Affairs departments. Universities were introduced to train African elites who would support the colonial administration as junior officers. Therefore, the academic curriculum and student development programmes were designed in a way that promoted Eurocentrism at the expense of African cultures and indigenous knowledges(Mandew, 2003). This resulted in the death of African cultures, epistemologies, values and identities. This trend has continued after the gaining of political independence due to neo-colonialism and globalisation. Culture is the medium through which a people's moral, ethical and aestheticbeliefs while values are the embodiment of a people's consciousness as a community(Mapara, 2009; wa Thiong'o, 1992). Therefore, student development programming in the Global South needs to be decolonised because it has remained rooted in Western epistemologies and values. Decolonising student development is important in order to produce well-rounded graduates who are conscious and relevant to the needs of Global South communities. The fact that student development in most universities in sub-Saharan Africa has continued to rely onWestern models that implemented through clubs, societies and student governance structures that promote Eurocentrism should be a great cause for concern. This is so because such student developmentprogramming is psychologically harmful as it perpetuates the epistemicides,

valuecides and identicides through the prioritisation of Eurocentrism at the expense of indigenous knowledges and cultures. This has seen the continuation of the colonial agenda of destroying indigenous languages and cultures leading to the production of graduates who shun their African identity, cultures, values and languages.

Decolonisation has to be understood in the context of misrecognition of African ontologies in the academy and institutional cultures of the universities (Magoqwana, 2018; Mazodze,et.al. 2021). Higher education in the Global South should delink itself from global epistemic coloniality by imbuing indigenous knowledges to enhance its value and purpose in society. In the same breadth,(Grosfoguel, 2013:5)submits that universities in the Global South are "producing natives of nowhere" because they are churning out graduates who are elitist, egoistic and who do not fit in their communities. This proves that the university in the Global South is struggling to define its own identity which is different from the one which was bestowed to it by colonialism. According toMagoqwana(2018) this set-up gave rise to the emergence of the 'Rhodes Must Fall' protest movement in South Africa which advocated for the decolonisation of the University of Cape Town's iconography. One of the best remembered demand of the 'Rhodes Must Fall' movement was the removal of the statue of Cecil John Rhodes from the University of Cape Town (Magoqwana, 2018). They argued that its presence induced into them a sense of shame because it was a constant reminder to them of an image of a person who harassed and tortured what 'Blackness' stands for while he was alive (Mbembe, 2016). This scenario at the University of Cape Town mirrors the prevailing situation in most African universities and this is the context in which student development in Zimbabwean higher education occurs. If the 'Rhodes Must Fall' movement clamoured for the decolonisation of buildings and the campus environment, then the call to decolonise student development in the Global South is not a frivolous matter. This is mainly because student development shapes the students' character, subjectivities, values and identity consciousness. As already alluded to, student development in most universities in the Global South is a reproduction of that of Europe and America and this has prompted the call for its decolonisation as a serious matter.

An analysis of student developmentdocuments gleaned from the websites of some African universities shows that they are generally moulded from a hybrid of American and British models which advance the neo-colonial interests of the former colonial power. Mazodze et.al. 2021posit that lip service is being paid to educational reforms aimed at making student development Afrocentric while seriously indulging in the promotion of European culture through student clubs funded by agents of neo-liberalism. It is therefore not surprising that student development programmes in various African universities and others in the Global South have continued to be modelled along the clubs format with clubs such as Debate, Toastmasters, Lions, Rotary, Enactus and Global Leaders Forum dominating (Mazodze et.al, 2021). From an experiential position the researcher has noted that clubs like Toastmasters and Debate have perpetuated the linguicides, valuecides and epistemicides that started during the colonial period through grooming students to be models in speaking the 'Queen's language' which is English and exhibiting Western values (Mazodze, et.ai. 2021). These clubs promote British middle class culture because Toastmasters serves to perfect the speaking of the Queen's language while in Debate the British parliamentary system is the model that is used. Sitwala(2018:38) quotes Wa Thiong'o (1997) arguing for the adoption of indigenous African languages in education thus;

> '*Can you really re-member Africa in the images, symbols and languages of the master? Can you really dream the dreams of liberation in the language of the oppressors? Just as you cannot bring down the master's house using the master's weapon, so you cannot re-member Africa using the master's language. Yes, indeed, you can even better the language of the master, sing songs of liberation in the language of the master, condemn and protest against the master in his language. Yes, indeed, you can do all that and do it so beautifully that the master awards you Pulitzer and Nobel Prizes. Your great contribution, though, remains a contribution to enrich English, French, or Portuguese literature and language. And you remain rooted in the Europhile elite. You may even represent the masses, and talk to the master for the masses,*

> *in his language, but you cannot be one of the masses because you do not speak, write, think and dream in the people's language.'*

This observation is important as it advances the pursuit of decolonisation of student development programming in higher education in the Global South because indigenous languages have continued to be inferiorised.

This paper notes with great concern that student developmenttheoriesthat are mainly used in universities in the Global South for example in Zimbabwe, are based on Western normative theories such as virtue theories, deontological theories and teleological theories at the exclusion of indigenous African theories.These theories were developed with white college students in mind but they are presented as if they hold universal truths for students of different racial background (Komives, Mainella, Longerbeam, Osteen, and Owen, 2006). The assumption that these theories and models hold universal utility value is hegemonic and it inferiorises epistemologies and cultural values of the indigenous people. Citing the case of South Africa Shizha(2015:3) expounds that

> *"South Africa possesses a colonial European education system which is in nature different from the cultural capital of the majority of students, this creates identity problems, emotional distress and educational failure"*

This situation is also prevalent in most African higher education context both in the academic and co-curriculum.The researcher concurs with Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018:113) who contends that the dismantling of direct colonisation brought about a false sense of independence,

> *'This is because the domains of culture, the psyche, the mind, language, aesthetics, religion and many others have remained colonised'.*

The persistent destruction of students' cultures, languages and identities has resulted in a subtle form of genocide called identicide (Meharg, 2019). Therefore, decolonisation of the formal and informal curriculum is therefore imperative in order to reverse the cognitive injustices imposed by the West through coloniality. Student developmentin the Global South cannot continue to be the carrier of European epistemologies at the expense of indigenous knowledges.

III.   Epistemic decolonial praxis for student development in higher education

Higher education in the Global South including Zimbabweis still dominated by Eurocentric epistemologies and structures of power and hierarchy that the West continues to use to exclude marginalised indigenous voices(Mazodze et.al, 2021). These structures of power and hierarchies determine the parameters of what can be included or excluded in student development practice. Some of the hierarchies that are related to this study include epistemic hierarchies that privilege Western knowledge, a linguistic pyramid that privileges European languages such as English and French and an ethnic hierarchy that privileges European and North American people (Dietz, Negron-Muntaner and Grosfoguel, 2006; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021). Maldonado-Torres(2017) concurs with this view stating that Eurocentric hierarchies go beyond the domains of politics and economics to include language, logic and cultures since the oppressed people are viewed and presented as lesser versions of European modernity. These diverse dynamics of coloniality have been described by Mignolo(2011) as the colonial matrix of power. Epistemic decolonisation seeks to deconstruct this Eurocentric culture and epistemology by creating space for indigenous cultures, languages and epistemologies in student development.

According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018, 2021), the decolonisation of knowledge implies the 'deprovincialisation' of Europe and conversely the 'reprovincialisation' of Africa in order to achieve epistemic freedom. He adds that the 'de-reprovincialisation' involves the rise of the descendants of the colonised in the academies of the world asserting the validity and legitimacy of their knowledge systems. In the same breath 'provincialisation' of

Europe is an epistemic struggle meant to confront the over-representation of European thought in knowledge, social theory and education. This implies that Africans have the freedom to think, theorise, interpret the world and develop their own methodologies unfettered by Eurocentrism. With this development Africa could then become the centre for understanding itself, in co-existence with European epistemologies that are relevant to the African situation (Mungwini, 2017). In relation to student development practice it means that student affairs practitioners will have to model programmes guided by indigenous African ways of knowing, cultures and languages. Decolonisation of knowledge in student developmentshould therefore reinvigorate theoretical perspectives from theorists of the Global South in order to create what Grosfoguel (2007) describes as a pluriversal world. Knowledge from the Global South should be given access in student development theory building so as to counter hegemonic Eurocentrism and this would achieve cognitive justice for indigenous peoples in the Global South(Odora Hoppers, 2007; Santos, 2014).

The realm of knowledge production and legitimation has always been 'situated'. This denotes that it has always originated from the geographical boundaries, spaces and places that are situated in a particular zone which in this case is within the Euro-American zone. Decolonisation of student development entails shifting its geography and body politics from Europe and North America to Africa and other countries of the Global South and promote them from the 'zone of non-being' to the 'zone of being'. Decoloniality also involves liberating student development theory from its embeddedness in the colonial matrix of power that conceals its racism, gender bias and sexism. Delinking student development theory from the geo-political and body political locations situated in the West exposes the myth that Western knowledge is universal and as such it is not situated in any particular location (Grosfoguel, 2007 Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Eurocentrism is racist in because it peddles the unproven lie that African and other indigenous knowledges are particularistic and are not capable of reaching the same universalism as Eurocentric knowledge .It is this lie that has led to the hierarchisation of Western knowledge as superior to African indigenous knowledge and therefore created the notion that Eurocentric knowledge can be packaged and exported to African countries in order to modernise them according to Western standards (Mignolo, 2011, Ndlovu-Gtsheni, 2020, Mazodze, et.al 2021).

The logic for decolonising student development must be to interrogate the current status of its knowledge, guiding its development and practice. Such evaluation should lead to the posing of questions such as those that seek to uncover how knowledge in student development is produced. It should ask questions such as: '*By whom?''For whom?''Who validates it?''For what purpose?'*This evaluation helps in comprehending why Eurocentric epistemologies are always accepted as valid while African knowledges are delegitimised. The delegitimation of African indigenous knowledges and the labelling of their places of origin as economically under-developed creates what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018:23) quoting Quijano terms a 'colonial wound'. The healing of the 'colonial wound' requires the application of a decolonial mind that conceptualises knowledge and ways of knowing beyond the Eurocentric canon and the adoption of inter-epistemic dialogue between the indigenous African and Eurocentric epistemologies to create a pluriversal epistemology (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021). In support of this epistemological viewpoint, it is important to bring into focus Mignolo's (2009:50) call for the need to repudiate the West's claim to epistemological exceptionalism through 'epistemic disobedience'. What Mignolo (2009) refers to as epistemic disobedience is epistemic delinking from the entrapping of coloniality such as languages, categories of thought, belief systems and subjectivity. Engaging in the delinking project leads to the cutting of the umbilical cord that links theory making to Eurocentrism. This results in the creation for new sites of knowledge production and reproduction in the Global South.

One of the reasons for the enduring persistence of coloniality in student development in Zimbabwean universities is the failure to change the theoretical and philosophical framework underpinning it. Decolonisation should lead to the promotion of the ideology of pluriversalism as opposed to Western universalism. This will create conditions necessary for true cultural and epistemological liberation in student development. The embedding of indigenous ways of knowing in student development'*constitutes the drive for a restorative epistemic agenda and process that simultaneously addresses ontological and epistemological issues haunting*

Africa' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018:16). There is need to recognise the epistemological diversity by acknowledging and promoting indigenous African epistemologies in SD in Zimbabwean universities. From this perspective and as a complimentary to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021)Mazodze et.al (2021) explicate that decolonisation is a necessary project towards the liberation of knowledge from the perspective of coloniality so as to produce a multi-civilisation world system. This new inter-epistemic world system will no longer be based on 'civilised-savage' paradigm as such epistemologies from the Global South will no longer be subalternised or 'othered' (Mazodze et.al 2021). This process will involve the recognition and inclusion of indigenous epistemologies that were previously suppressed by Eurocentrism.

In the 21st century, student development should be aimed to capacitate students to self-reflect on their identity as well as to empower them to engage in inter and intra-civilizational dialogue (Mazodze,et.al. 2021). However, dialogue can only take place when coloniality is destroyed and when the mono-epistemic position of Eurocentrism is no longer enforced as universally binding. Santos (2008) articultes that ecologies of knowledge strategy can be used to bring together multiple different civilisations, epistemologies and cultures. Student development practitioners may design their programmes to equip students with multicultural and diversity skills at local and global level. The point of departure of the decolonial theorists is that different human societies produce different forms of observing the world ,such that student development theoretical design requires more than Eurocentric epistemologies. This shows that student development models based on Western knowledge systems cannot claim universal applicability because they are partial, situational and incomplete. From this perspective pluriversalism demands that epistemologies from the Global South can no longer be considered as inferior, uncivilised and not pat of the canon of thought.

The analysis outlined above exposes student development as being tied to the project of reproducing the matrix of coloniality not only through the reproduction of particular orientations, biases and identities among students, but also a question of the compulsive reiteration of the ethical and epistemological order of Eurocentrism. In line with the decolonial project advocated by theorists such as Dussel, Mignolo, Maldonado-Torres, Grosfoguel, Santos and Ndlovu-Gatsheni to mention just a few, this treatise articulates the need to reinvigorate the indigenous epistemologies in student development in order to decolonise the structure of knowledge in the Westernised universities in the Global South. Decolonising student development practiceinvolves the foregrounding of indigenous epistemologies into the students' learning experiences which have been dominated by Eurocentrism for centuries (Mazodze,et.al 2021). This denotes bringing epistemic diversity into student development theory making so as to create a pluriverse of meaning and concepts.

IV.   Decolonisation criteria for student development in higher education

The key criteria for the development of a decolonial approach for this paper derives from an analysis of several intellectual writings on decoloniality which *inter alia* include the works of Grosfoguel(2003, 2007); Mbembe(2016); Mamdani(2016); Mazodze,et.al,2021, Mignolo(2009); Ndlovu-Gatsheni(2018, 2020, 2021); Odora Hoppers(2007, 2009); Smith(2019), Ngugi (1992.1986). A critical analysis of their work provides key benchmarks that can be referenced to as points of departure in evaluating student development practice in Zimbabwean higher education. An application of these standards and norms would help in determining the extent to which decolonial approaches have been used in student development practice. The theorists mentioned above have provided benchmarks for decolonisation by clearly articulating the tenets of decoloniality which among others include the need to recognise the absence of non-European epistemologies in the academic and co-curriculum. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020) argues that colonisation has resulted in the subalternisation of non-Western epistemologies that need to be reinvigorated and compared to Eurocentric knowledges and the failure to consider these epistemologies will lead to the maintenance of epistemological coloniality. Maldonado-Torres (2017) posits that Eurocentric knowledges need tempering through the inclusion of indigenous epistemologies from the Global South. In concurring with this viewpoint, Ngugi (1992) emphasizes the need to debate which social identities are afforded voice and authority in higher education. Similarly this research also questions the

continuation of Eurocentric hegemony in student development in higher education. This thesis takes the debate to another level by amplifying the need to engage indigenous African epistemologies in higher education.

Coloniality has ingrained Euro-American epistemologies in student development theory at the expense of non-Eurocentric ways of knowing and the latter need to be re-invented and used in comparison to those of Western origin. Failure to bring indigenous knowledges and belief systems on board will be akin to abetting continuance of epistemicides and culturecides of other indigenous and African theories of knowledge in student development. The hegemonic dominance of Eurocentrism in student development theory making and practice needs to be tempered with through the inclusion of discourses and knowledges that emerge from the subaltern (Grosfoguel, 2007; Mazodze,et.al 2021). Similar articulations on how to engage a decolonising methodology have been proffered by several decolonial theorists like Aldama, Quiñonez (2002); Keane (2017) and Tuhiwai-Smith (1999). These scholars have developed criteria for defining decolonial methodology which can be applied to research and student development theory and practice. Their criteria interrogate the origin or source of beliefs and culture informing a programme, who the intended beneficiaries are, how they would benefit and any negative impact on the beneficiaries. In the same perspective student development practitioners should be concerned with how students are benefiting from or being disadvantaged by the way student development is framed and practised. This research is premised on the decolonial belief that student development theories that fail to take into consideration the epistemicides that have occurred over the years will not accurately embody the interests of indigenous people of the Global South. Sitwala (2018) contends that it is necessary to analyse and understand how the effects of colonialism have been concretised by indigenous petit bourgeoisie. Within this context, Ngugi (1992) postulates that designers of curricular context and instruction must develop a decolonial consciousness that empowers students with analytical skills for social transformation.

This critical approach provides for the development of an epistemic perspective that requires that knowledge as a concept be extended beyond the Eurocentric canon and hegemonic tendencies with regard to the subaltern epistemologies. Europeans are not being marginalised in this assessment because culturally, linguistically and epistemologically they are historically privileged because of colonialism and neo-liberalism. Considering this historical background, the writers contend that student development has the capacity to influence the building of a shared identity among the people of the Global South. Student affairs practitioners in the Global South for example Zimbabwe could mould an identity around *hunhu/ubuntu* epistemology that is common among its citizens.

V. *Hunhu/Ubuntu* as a humanising epistemology of decolonising student development.

Advocating for humanisation philosophy as a decolonial tool Smith(2019) argues it has the capacity of awakening indigenous people on how degrading their conditions are, and how such inhuman conditions prohibit them from becoming fully human. The implication of such an insight for student development practitioners is that learners need to be involved in critical thinking through liberatory education. To enhance student development transformation and achieve humanisation, indigenous epistemologies such as *hunhu/ubuntu*must be brought to the fore to enhance solidarity which is ideal for community wellness.*Hunhu/ubuntu* theories emphasize on the importance of the community in defining humanity. This view is well captured by the Shona idiom which says '*munhu munhu navanhu*'literally translated as 'a person is a person through other people' (Mapara, 2009).*Hunhu/ubuntu* theories should guide student development in sub-Saharan higher education. Through embedding *hunhu/ubuntu*epistemologyinto student development programmes the individual, the community, the environment and the society can be transformed unlike Eurocentric paradigms which put greater emphasis on the individual only (Keane, Khupe and Muza, 2016; Smith, 2019). *Hunhu/Ubuntu* epistemology imparts humane values that mould the students into responsible and dignified citizens in the community (Mapara, 2013). It emphasises on good behaviour and deeds such as caring, empathy, humility and respect. Decolonising student development programming entails prioritising indigenous knowledges such as *hunhu/ubuntu* that instil good behaviour and deeds that build responsible citizens for the society

VI.   Conscientisation as criteria for decolonisation

Building on the definition by Paulo Freire, Smith(2019) defines conscientisation as a process of discovering relationships of domination and oppression and moving towards critical consciousness. The subalternisation of indigenous ways of knowing and the racist privileging of Eurocentric epistemologies need to be interrogated through robust co-curricular activities like song, dance and poetry. Another form of a decolonising programme could be through theadoption of the *dare/magkotla* model where learners gather together for story-telling. This approach is based on long standing practice among the Bantu of sub-Saharan Africa where the young would gather around a fire in the evenings to listen to folktales. According to Mapara (2013)*ngano*/folktales are a major vehicle to impart virtues and values to the younger generations among the Bantus of Africa. These co-curricular activities must expose the structures of domination that maintain and promote culturecides, linguicides and identicides that are inherent in Eurocentric models (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). In the purview of Friere (2005) education should help learners to think dialectically denoting that education should help raise the critical consciousness of the learner. Applying this approach to student development, critical consciousness acts as a vehicle for cultural and epistemological emancipation that liberates the learner from the monologue of Eurocentrism. Student development activities must lead students into a re-awakening to the fact that they live in a poly-epistemic world. This should lead them into an inter-epistemic re-awakening process which Fanon describes as a critical reflection and action leading to praxis (Maldonado-Torres, 2017; Sefa Dei, 2010).

VII.   Conclusion

This paper has highlighted that the birth and growth of student development inhigher education in the Global South has colonial Eurocentric linkages. This is clear in the knowledge and discourse formalised on university campuses that are aimed at advancing the coloniality of power matrices of racism and the destruction of indigenous knowledges, cultures, languages, identities and histories. It has been observed that student development was designed to promote and impose a world view that was alien to African contexts and its theoretical frames have continued to subalternise African ways of knowing. More importantly, this paper has noted that epistemic coloniality embedded in the theories and ideologies of the discipline must be unearthed to enable the development of a poly-epistemic Afro-centred student development theoretical framework. To enable decolonisation and achieve a holistic and transformative student development model there is need to embrace inter-epistemic dialogue between Afrocentric and Eurocentric theories and models. Therefore, student development in sub-Saharan higher education should be decolonised to create space for it to be guided by a blend of Western normative theories and *hunhu/ubuntu*theories which are rooted in indigenous people's culture and belief systems.

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