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Portugal's challenge of decolonising the university curriculum: insights from a semi-systematic literature review

Keywords: curriculum; decolonisation; higher education; literature review

Since the 2015/2016 *#RhodesMustFall* and *#FeesMustFall* student protests in South Africa, higher education decolonisation has become a rapidly growing field of study and practice worldwide. In this, university curriculum decolonising (UCD) assumes a central role, as *one* (and only one) strategic moment in these intersectional (class, gender, race) struggles for social and epistemic justice, inclusiveness and liberation, for decolonising the university, academia, and knowledge at large (Guzmán-Valenzuela, 2021; Morreira et al., 2020; Shahjahan et al., 2022). Framed by critical sociology of education (Gewirtz & Cribb, 2009), this presentation reports findings from my 'semi-systematic' review (Snyder, 2019) of the global UCD literature, conducted between February 2023 and May 2024 as part of a larger research project funded by the Portuguese FCT. The Electronic Library Online (SciELO), Scopus and Web of Science databases were searched using an English/Portuguese search string. This systematic search yielded 463 unique journal articles and book chapters published up to 2022 inclusive and was complemented by purposive search. While universities worldwide engage with UCD, no evidence of visible engagement with UCD in Portugal's university sector emerged. This does not necessarily mean non-engagement. However, this finding is surprising considering Portugal's coloniser history and ongoing neo-colonial engagement via, for example, the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP) as a pool for international student recruitment (MADR/MEC, 2014; Sá et al., 2021). On this basis, this presentation speaks to the need for engaging with UCD in Portugal. With the explicit aims of conscientising and provoking critical dialogue and decolonial action for democratising Portugal's higher education, key findings generated through thematic analysis are presented: (i) theoretico-conceptual framings of UCD ('decolonisation'; 'decoloniality'; 'coloniality of power'); (ii) the politics of UCD, especially the 'add-on', 'institutional-transformist' and 'systemic' approaches; and (iii) methodological challenges in empirical decolonial university curriculum analysis (quantitative proxy indicators vs qualitative thematic analysis).

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