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Recognising religious and superstitious rituals within higher education contexts: A case study of Stellenbosch University, South Africa

Neeske Alexander* and Elmarie Costandius

Department of Visual Arts, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Stellenbosch University, South Africa.

In South Africa the task of decolonising the curriculum in higher education institutions falls upon researchers and lecturers. Within the case study of the Visual Communication Design curriculum at Stellenbosch University we noticed that students' superstitious and religious beliefs and rituals surfaced in their responses to the coursework even though there was an attempt to steer away from traditional religious education. Students' experiences included engagement with African religious rituals, the effects of omens, the use of rituals for academic success and the rejections of superstitious and religious beliefs. These experiences were interpreted from a post-colonial perspective. Critical citizenship education and appreciation of worldview diversity is suggested as tools for transformation toward decolonising the curriculum by recognising and legitimising different experiences and actions related to superstitious and religious beliefs in higher education classrooms.

Key words: Superstition, higher education, belief, South Africa, post-colonial.

INTRODUCTION

South Africa is a nation where everyone is directly or indirectly influenced by Western science and philosophy as well as African and Christian worldviews (Malcolm and Alant, 2004). Superstitious rituals play a crucial role in the social fabric of South African society where unexplainable events are attributed to the supernatural even if this seems scientifically irrational (Tenkorang et al., 2011). Religious rituals are practised in South Africa and reflect the diverse beliefs present in the country. Superstition, African indigenous religion, Christian beliefs, and Islamic beliefs play a role in the everyday lives of South Africans,

including, for example, taxi drivers' perceptions of road traffic accidents (Peltzer and Renner, 2003) and individuals' decisions regarding HIV and AIDS (Tenkorang et al., 2011). Superstitious and religious beliefs and rituals by extension also exist in the higher education context of South Africa.

During community interaction projects within the Visual Communication Design (VCD) module at Stellenbosch University, elements of superstitious rituals and religious rituals surfaced. The focus of the module was critical citizenship education and there was an effort to steer

*Corresponding author. E-mail: neeskealexander@gmail.com.

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away from focussing on superstitious and religious beliefs. However, some students revealed the impact that their beliefs and rituals have on their studies and their lives. Some students pray before examinations, some rely on the influence of their ancestors and others recognise lucky or unlucky omens. As lecturers and educators, it is important to try to understand how beliefs and rituals can affect students in positive and negative ways.

In higher education, there is a serious call for transformation and decolonising of the curriculum. As white South African researchers with personal histories entwined with Afrikaans Christian rituals, we naturally find other beliefs and rituals strange and surprising. However, we would like to create a space in higher education where students' religious and superstitious beliefs and rituals are recognised and acknowledged as legitimate. One of the possible obstacles to transformation and the decolonisation of the curriculum is the lack of understanding of and space for variations of belief systems and rituals based on differing worldviews. The appearance of superstitious and religious rituals in higher education has not been well researched within the current context of higher education institutions in South Africa. This could be due to the complexity and deeply personal nature of beliefs and rituals.

THEORY AND CONTEXT

In order to situate this research in a theoretical context, it is necessary to give an overview of the key concepts: worldview, belief, superstition and religion. A post-colonial perspective is used to understand knowledge, superstition, African religions, higher educational institutions and education practices.

An overview of concepts

A person's worldview consists of ideas about who they are, what the meaning and purpose of their life is, their responsibilities and obligations, recognising 'right' and 'wrong', and their hopes for the future (Valk, 2009). We learn and build a worldview based on our experiences but also on cultural traditions of knowledge, which allow us to gather information beyond our own experiences (Beck and Forstmeier, 2007). It is important to realise our own perceptions of the world, our beliefs and values as well as the contexts which influence them (Valk, 2009). When our scientific worldview offers no prediction on the individual case, we are prone to turn to superstitious or religious belief and ritual to help predict the outcome. We use these beliefs and rituals as a hedge against uncertainty (Vyse, 1997).

Beck and Forstmeier (2007) suggest that it is often necessary for us to create unproven constructs that explain a causal link between our observations. These unproven constructs are called beliefs (Beck and Forstmeier, 2007). They help to create consistency in our worldviews by providing reasons for otherwise inexplicable observations. Both religion and science rely on constructs such as beliefs.

Beck and Forstmeier (2007) define superstition as an incorrect idea about an external reality. This definition applies regardless of whether superstition is self-created, culturally transmitted or genetically inherited (Beck and Forstmeier, 2007). Superstition is defined in Oxford Dictionaries (2016) as excessively credulous belief in and reverence for the supernatural. It refers to a widely held but irrational belief in supernatural influences, especially as leading to good or bad luck, or a practice based on such a belief (Oxford Dictionaries, 2016). This practice based in superstitious belief is what we refer to as a ritual.

Some academics find the definition of religion complex and question whether it can truly be defined (Ferré, 1970; Lease, 2000). Religion as ideology, religion as politics, religion as distributor of power or religion as violence are all different perspectives of defining religion (Lease, 2000). For the purpose of this article, we adopted the flexible definition of religion as an intensive comprehensive valuing of a set of beliefs and practices (Ferré, 1970) that is deeply bound with culture (Lease, 2000). Religion is an important source of identity for many people and legitimises the actions they support or oppose in their personal and societal life (Wilson, 2006).

In this article we adopt a pluralistic notion of these concepts, where what we believe affects our emotions and actions regardless of how we or others label it. Our aim is not to discuss the various definitions of worldview, belief, superstition and religion or to find where one starts and the other ends. Our goal is to present instances where superstitious and/or religious belief has led students to participate in rituals within the higher education context and to consider how we might respond to such instances while aiming to decolonise higher education curricula.

A post-colonial perspective

Superstitious and religious beliefs have a long history and they are present within all cultures and societies. Colonial histories affect the way in which religious and superstitious beliefs and rituals are practised, controlled and defined. We view knowledge, superstition, African religions, higher educational institutions and education practices through the lens of post-colonial theory, which takes into account issues of power, dominance, and race.

Knowledge and knowledge-production are largely controlled by dominant Western powers. Santos (2006) asks how the universal validity of scientific truth relates to other truths that cannot be established according to scientific methods – such as superstitions or religious

beliefs. He suggests an invisible line that separates accepted knowledge (science, philosophy, theology) from unrecognised knowledges (beliefs, opinions, intuition). Western imperial knowledge legitimised Christian theology, secular philosophy and science as the limits of knowledge-making beyond which all other knowledge is lacking: folklore, myth, and traditional knowledge (Mignolo, 2009).

Superstitious beliefs are marginal to dominant knowledge systems. Superstitious and religious beliefs are often rejected and marginalised by scientific culture. Anthropologists have difficulty placing the origins of superstition while distinguishing it from religion and science (Vyse, 1997). But who decides which beliefs are superstitious and which beliefs are religious? Superstition is present in both Western and African thought (Nakusera, 2004). Western societies have a high incidence of superstitious ideas on topics such as gambling, sports and personal fate (Beck and Forstmeier, 2007). Many believe that carrying good-luck charms or knocking on wood will either ward off bad fortune or bring good fortune (Vyse, 1997). African societies hold superstitious ideas, including perceptions about witchcraft, the Tokoloshe (an evil, hairy being) and seeing an owl as a bad omen (Peltzer and Renner, 2003). It seems that superstition has to do with the 'other', the marginalised acts and beliefs contrary to the dominant belief system. Superstition and religion are intertwined and become difficult to separate when one considers the power differences and the different perspectives that are always present. From a post-colonial perspective, it is clear that African religions are often devalued and classified as superstition.

African indigenous religions are devalued by both Western scholars and Christian missionaries. From the Western scholarly perspective, African indigenous religions are assumed to be false due to the presence of supernatural activities and from a Christian perspective belief in and communication with ancestors is seen as sin. The subjugation of black African people by white colonists resulted in the devaluing of black African culture, including its thinking, beliefs, rituals and knowledge. According to Mignolo (2009) European hegemonic knowledge does not consider the experiences of those who fall outside the European, white hegemony – those whose lived experiences are/were shaped by the racial matrix of the colonised/colonial world and the inferior place that Christianity gives/gave to blackness (Mignolo, 2009). The lived experience of the black person, then, is always translated through the gaze of the white (Mignolo, 2009). The message implicit in 'black theology' is to do away with spiritual poverty of the black people. It seeks to demonstrate the absurdity of the assumption by white people that 'ancestor worship' (Showing great respect for and consulting ancestors is part of African indigenous religious activity) is necessarily a superstition and that Christianity is a scientific religion (Biko, 1987:31).

Higher educational institutions in South African have been shaped by the country's colonial past. We should be concerned with the invisible dynamics of colonialism, as it influences learning in higher educational institutions by setting up colonial perspectives as knowledge, research, data and findings while simultaneously rationalising and maintaining the unjust social structures of colonisation (Tuck and Wayne, 2012). During 2015 and 2016, there was an outcry from students to decolonise the curriculum at universities in South Africa. The concern regarding curriculum content is that it is dominated by white, male, Western, capitalist, heterosexual, European worldviews (Shay, 2016). This content underrepresents and undervalues the perspectives, experiences and epistemologies of those who fall outside of these categories (Shay, 2016). A-Magid (2011) notes that the Western domination of knowledge and the marginalisation of African belief systems call for comprehensive evaluation, rigorous planning and watchful implementation of decolonising strategies. Decolonised curricula should give indigenous African knowledge systems an equal and valid place among the array of knowledge systems in the world (Higgs, 2016). Within the VCD curriculum, the recognition of different worldviews including superstitious and religious rituals could be a step toward decolonising visual arts education at Stellenbosch University. Critical citizenship education is the method we suggest for this purpose.

Education practices should, from a post-colonial point of view, promote critical citizenship and appreciation of worldview diversity. Critical citizenship is based on the promotion of a common set of shared values such as tolerance, diversity, human rights and democracy. As an educational pedagogy, it encourages critical reflection on the past and the imagining of a possible future shaped by social justice, in order to prepare people to live together in harmony in diverse societies (Johnson and Morris, 2010). It should be noted that critical citizenship can be seen as a western concept and has been compared to African concepts such as *ubuntu/ bumuntu/ omuluabi* (Costandius and Odiboh, under review). According to these African concepts, diversity is understood in relation to tolerance (tolerance for individual and group differences), corruption and lack of freedom of speech is identified as violations of human rights, and democracy is sometimes seen as in conflict with African traditions (Costandius and Odiboh, under review). In order to maintain links to previous research, we continue to use the term 'critical citizenship', but we reflect critically on the similarities and differences between western and African concepts thereof.

Critical reflection generally refers to higher-order thinking that questions assumptions or facilitates a willingness to look from different perspectives (Costandius and Bitzer, 2015). Critical thinking includes an ability to think holistically - to see different worldviews

Table 1. Participants and data collection.

Technique	Participants	Time	Duration	ID Coding
4 Individual interviews	3 Black students (2nd and 4th year) 1 Coloured student (4th year)	October – November 2009 Before the CC projects	1-1.5 h per session	Students 1-4
6 Individual interviews	3rd- and 4th-year students 2 Black 3 Coloured 1 White	October 2011 During the CC projects	45 min – 1 h per session	Students 5-10
1 Group interview	3rd- and 4th-year students 2 Black 5 White	February 2012 During the CC projects	1 h	Students 11-17
3 Individual interviews	Postgraduate students 1 Coloured (student 8) 1 Black (student 11) 1 White (student 15)	March 2015 During their postgraduate studies	40 min - 1 h per session	Students 8, 11 and 15

in perspective. Dialogue with others who are different, who have different worldviews, helps us see things from different perspectives and to contextualize our own worldview (Paul 1982 as cited in Mason 2008). Hoosain and Salili (2006), Williams et al. (2008) and Valk and Tosun (2016) argue that it is vital for educators to promote awareness of worldview diversity and to counter stereotypes linked to certain belief systems. Students should be encouraged to look at reality through the eyes of others (Selçuk and Valk, 2012). This can be done by creating safe opportunities for learners to experience other forms of seeing, thinking, being, and relating to each other (Andreotti, 2006). Kunzman (2006) argues that understanding of others' beliefs would allow the outsider to appreciate the sacred importance of something apparently insignificant. This does not mean that the outsider will agree with this importance, but it provides the opportunity to gain insight into what gives meaning to the lives of others in society. Exposing students to religious and secular worldviews, opens up a new and inclusive space where there is openness, plurality and critical thinking (Valk and Tosun, 2016). Critical Citizenship Education including appreciation of worldview diversity can therefore be used as a means of decolonising curricula, because it breaks down dominant, established ways of seeing by thinking critically and by collaboratively recognising new and previously silenced voices and experiences.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

We followed an interpretive approach and a case study research design that aimed at exploring superstitious and religious rituals that emerged during the Critical Citizenship projects in the VCD module. The main strategies for promoting critical citizenship were: community interactions, dialogue (including dialogue with those

who are different), reflective writings and art and design as a medium for learning. Written reflections were used as a source of data and semi-structured interviews were conducted with students from Stellenbosch University who came from South Africa, Zimbabwe and Botswana.

The data were collected from 2009 to 2015. During 2009, before the Critical Citizenship projects were presented, individual interviews were conducted with four students as part of a Ph.D. study on Critical Citizenship. From 2011 to 2015, all students in the VCD module who participated in the Critical Citizenship projects wrote reflections on their experiences during the projects. These reflections were not formally structured by specific questions – students could choose what they wanted to reflect on. From this data, 17 participants were selected who wrote about the topic of superstitious and religious beliefs and rituals. Refer to Table 1 for more information about the participants and the data collection. These 17 students took part in audio-recorded, semi-structured individual and/or group interviews.

Inductive content analysis was used. All data were investigated and only data that mentioned superstitious or religious rituals were extracted for further analysis. Limitations to the study included small sample size and researcher bias. Our positionality as white, Afrikaans women from Christian backgrounds influenced our reading of the data. To compensate for this, a black colleague was asked to act as an independent reviewer of some of the data. We also reflected on the way in which the research was conducted, on our knowledge of critical racial perspectives and on our own views, perceptions and biases (Milner, 2007). The aim of the study inevitably was not to generalise, but to provide an in-depth exploration of the phenomena that became visible during the investigation. Ethical clearance for this research was obtained from the Departmental Ethics Screening Committee of Stellenbosch University.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

By investigating literature about superstitious and religious beliefs and rituals we have gained a deeper understanding of the topic. This can help us foster tolerance for religious and superstitious diversity –

resulting in the ability to facilitate dialogue with students regarding these issues. Below follows a presentation and discussion of the beliefs and ritual practices that surfaced in participants' written reflections and during interviews. Themes that emerged were: The engagement with African religious beliefs and rituals, the effects of omens, the use of rituals for academic success, the rejection of superstitious and religious beliefs.

The engagement with African religious beliefs and rituals

Students engaged with African religious beliefs and rituals on a personal level. Student 12 told of how he became ill when he was young. Doctors could not help him and eventually a prophet told his mother that he needed to appease the ancestors. He then went to KwaZulu-Natal, where his father slaughtered a goat to introduce him to the ancestors. After that he became healthy and he started believing in the ancestors. In one of the VCD projects titled *Design for Healing*, a student felt that building a 3D module of clay depicting a distressing moment could violate the ancestors. These experiences influence students and also affect their studies. Student 13 had the following to say: Spiritually plays a big role in my studies – more than I realised. I consider myself a Christian, however, when nothing is going right, I go back to my roots. I have and still believe that out there my ancestors are looking out for me.

In some cases, dominant belief systems were viewed as religion, while African belief systems were seen as 'traditions', 'superstitions' or merely 'cultural elements'. The following quote shows how Christianity is viewed as 'religion', while the amaHlubi belief system is viewed as 'tradition' and 'culture'. AmaHlubi refers to the Hlubi people originating from South East Africa. Their tribe is closely linked to the amaSwazi and Sotho tribes. For at least two centuries they have been a part of the Nguni, Mbo or Lala nation and live primarily in the KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape and Northwest provinces of South Africa (AmaHlubi.org, 2016). Student 15 spoke about her interaction with a learner during one of the Critical Citizenship projects. [The learner] turned to her church and Christianity about a year ago. Although her family is not very religious, [the learner] has become a devout Christian and many of her traditional Hlubi traditions have been replaced by religious practice. This is a very interesting aspect to look at because one has to wonder what kind of impact the acceptance of another religion has on cultural diversity. Perhaps certain traditional aspects are lost whilst new religious ones are gained and perhaps these new practices will merely became a part of her culture.

The effects of omens

The students considered certain animals and dreams as either good or bad omens. These omens affected their experiences. Student 13 told of the way in which dreams affected her: No matter how much I did not understand a brief, if I dreamt of grandmother telling me to shower or sending me to sit under a green tree, I knew that would be a good sign of my passing. I did have instances when I would see her in my dream and she would not be happy or not talk to me; this always meant something terrible would happen. And it always did; it would either be a situation at home or just an emotionally challenging situation I would face on campus. My mother always called at the most awkward times if she had a dream about anything that she would attach to me.

Animals were a key part of the students' beliefs. Student 10 said that she knows the day will be blessed if she hears a robin singing. In contrast, most of the students' experiences with animals as omens were negative. Owls were an especially bad omen, but squirrels and cats were also included. The following extracts show what impact the presence of certain animals has on students:

> *Student 13: A squirrel in my culture – if it crosses your path – means something bad is going to happen. My first year was the hardest because squirrels kept crossing my path and I would [get] very agitated because I would be expecting the worst to happen to me, if not at home, to my children. I spent a lot of money on airtime calling my mother every time a squirrel crossed my path.* The following comment from Student 12 shows how different students have differing beliefs about owls.
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> *Student 12: [Name of other student] said an owl symbolises wisdom. I was kind of surprised, but I had to understand that she comes from a different background. I told her where I'm from an owl symbolises evil things. She told me she had heard of that. When I was doing my first year, I used to work a lot in the studio, by the time I finish it would be dark. I would see owls and cats on my way home; I was so scared I thought I was going to see a zombie... My housemate told me that the evil spirit is chasing him; he said it is using owls to get him. He said back in [the] Eastern Cape, owls used to make noises every time he was studying for exams. He said we needed to pray so that we can chase away the evil spirit... Sometimes I would see an owl in the parking lot, and I would use another route, because I did not want to get close to an owl. Some of the black students felt the same way; they also did not want to get closer to an owl. There was a black student who tried to chase the owl away, but then other students stopped him.* It is important for students to be exposed to and to try to understand the ways in which certain animals/omens affect other students and to recognise the very negative impact that the

presence of owls can have on some students' experience.

Student 13: In my third year for a month I would not drive to the library or studio in the evenings because I had seen an owl on the roof of the building opposite the studio...I sporadically went to class and did not go out after dark. The last time I had seen an owl was in 1997 on the 21st of June, the same day my father died. My seeing that owl [on the roof] was not the best of things,I couldn't tell my mother because that would send her into hospital because she truly believes in all the superstitious beliefs. I do, but sometimes I would shake some of the issues – not the owl. It took a toll on me, so much that for a month I was afraid to drive in case I'm involved in [an] accident or something. What made it worse was the stray cats that would cry like human babies – something that is associated with funerals at home.

It is clear that the presence of the owl had a very negative effect on Student 13 even though she could sometimes 'shake some of the [superstitious] issues'. It is possible that this student experienced conflict between her own negative westernised perspective of superstition and her intuitive superstitious belief. From a pluralistic viewpoint, superstitious belief can exist with westernised perspectives and from a post-colonial perspective, we could question why her beliefs about owls are labelled as 'superstitious' (even by herself).

The impact of animals on the experiences of students can affect their studies. The example that Student 13 gave of missing class due to the presence of owls is something that would likely not be understood by white lecturers unless there was a discussion and an awareness of the beliefs associated with owls as bad omens. These beliefs are held by some black students, who are in the minority at Stellenbosch University. How are their beliefs and sometimes extremely negative experiences ignored by the dominant white western culture in higher educational institutions? How can awareness and sensitivity to black students' beliefs be achieved without viewing these beliefs through a white gaze as strange, exotic and primitive?

The use of rituals for academic success

Some superstitious and religious rituals are personal and rely on performing certain actions before or during an important event, such as writing an examination. Damisch et al. (2010) found that participants in their study showed better performance when a good-luck-associated superstition was activated (such a wearing a lucky shirt), because it increased participants' belief in their own ability to succeed at a given task. According to Vyse (1997), students use superstitious and religious rituals to

cope with examinations. We found that studies and examinations were prominent areas where students' beliefs resulted in actions to improve their chances of achieving success.

Student 2 mentioned habits and rituals to help him focus on his work, such as listening to specific music. Student 4 also commented on the use of music: 'Before an exam I always play music, silence before an exam for me is worrying'. Student 13 relied on her ancestor: 'I still hope and pray that my grandmother pulls through for me, especially in my studies now'.

Students also made use of religious symbols and rituals to help them cope with examinations. Student 11 mentioned that in Islam there is a specific prayer to improve learning and retaining information when studying for examinations. Student 7 spoke about an app on her phone that provides daily verses from the Bible. She said that these verses give her hope and courage during the examinations. Student 6 used a Bible in the following way: I carry a small Bible with me and before I write an exam I open it on a random place and the first word or sentence I take as a message for my exam.

As with the case of Damisch et al. (2010), where participants showed better performance when a good-luck-associated superstition was activated, students' superstitious and religious rituals may increase their belief in their ability to succeed at examinations. Opportunity and space should therefore be created for students to perform these rituals.

The rejection of superstitious and religious beliefs

Some students rejected certain beliefs and rituals. Reasons for this varied from personal preference, previous negative experiences and ideas about critical thinking. Student 1 mentioned: 'I think superstition is silly and irrational, I do not believe in anything. I am an atheist'. According to Student 3, religion is a hindrance to the art department. Student 9 mentioned the lack of critical thinking associated with religious rituals by referring to a specific popular church on campus: There are also students who grew up without religion and then join a church like [name of church]. They judge others that do not believe. [Name of church] have just one way, against critical thinking. That could also be a problem.

Student 16 spoke of how she felt '*brainwashed'* by the religion of her parents (Afrikaans Dutch Reformed) and how she sees herself as more objective now. Student 14 also had a negative experience with a church, which she explained as follows: My past experience with religion played a major role in my spirituality as well and was the experience which pushed me away from religion and a dependence on people, and drove me towards a dependence on nature...This very experience has been a topic of one of my practicals, and was the seed of my current topic – the control of people through the

construction of religion.

Students should be free to reject superstitious and religious beliefs and rituals on a personal level. However, they should not devalue others' beliefs and rituals or prevent them from practising their beliefs and rituals. The appreciation of diverse worldviews is important - where each student can choose her beliefs without fear of oppression and ridicule.

Conclusion

According to Malcolm and Alant (2004), students respond positively when their beliefs are admitted in educational contexts. Differences in beliefs and rituals surfaced in the conversations with students. What are we doing practically with difference; are we accepting each other's differences? Or are we trying to find a place where we can agree on basic values and norms?

In the Critical Citizenship module, the concepts of tolerance, diversity, democracy, human rights and social justice are emphasised, but what does tolerance for diversity mean in practice? How do we handle issues such as in the case of Student 15 who referred to the learner who told about her mother's face being cut open to release bad spirits and Student 13 who missed lectures due to a fear of the presence of owls?

Are evil spirits, miracles and good luck testable in research? If considered as pre-modern, it could suggest that these beliefs are primitive. This could then be seen as discriminatory towards people who practise such beliefs. Becoming aware of these sensitivities in critical citizenship education is crucial for lecturers. Separating beliefs and rituals from critical citizenship education would not always be possible and this is an area that we believe requires further in-depth research within a Critical Citizenship Educational environment. Because of the sensitivity of issues such as belief and rituals, discussing it critically is often avoided and therefore hardly ever shared in conversations in the higher education context. A colleague who assisted in analysing the data mentioned that students could feel guilty because, even though many of them convert to Christianity, they often go back to their ancestral beliefs when in need. Students could, for instance, feel that they reveal their differences when talking about their superstitious and religious beliefs and rituals. Stellenbosch University describes the institution's values as promoting "human dignity through a culture and behaviour that are respectful – self-respect, respect for other people, and respect for the physical environment" (Stellenbosch University 2015: 8). It continues by saying that respect and tolerance for differences would create a suitable environment for teaching, learning and research (Stellenbosch University, 2015). In an art and design environment, difference is crucial for creativity and for that reason we will always encourage various cultures and ideas to interact.

However, there is also an emotional aspect to difference that stems from the segregated and unequal past that interferes with a spontaneous creative interaction.

Therefore, Critical Citizenship Education in a multicultural society in South Africa should take into consideration the socio-political, historical and cultural contexts, and address ethnicity, race, culture, class, gender and sexuality in relation to issues such as discrimination, social justice and power relations. Students' superstitious and religious beliefs and rituals form part of their worldviews and should also be addressed. Previously devalued beliefs such as African indigenous religion should be discussed in a respectful manner. Towards this goal, students and lecturers could foster an accepting view of differing beliefs and rituals. The unifying goal for critical citizenship education is to create a socially just education system for diverse students through social transformation (Phillion, 2010). There are few guidelines to aid higher education practitioners in reaching this goal. We suggest a balance between knowledge-centred and student-centred approaches to education, an increase in knowledge of students' cultures and languages, application of critical citizenship practices and empathy for diversity. A socially just presentation of knowledge together with social transformation is key to the process of decolonising the curriculum in higher educational contexts. We realise that facilitating the critical citizenship projects in practice and treating differences among participants equally could be complex because of our own limited knowledge and limited experience of other beliefs and rituals. We recognise that, even though we take on a post-colonial perspective and incorporate BCI authors in our literature, our research is a translation of the lived experiences of black students through our own white gaze (Mignolo, 2009). The exploration of superstitious and religious beliefs and rituals in higher educational institutions by BCI researchers and/or in educational contexts where BCI students are in the majority, may yield different findings and may serve the decolonisation project better than our attempts.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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