

What does an (South) African economics look like?

Seán Mfundza Muller, School of Economics, University of Johannesburg

IESE 10th Anniversary Conference, Maputo

21 September 2017



Some introductory remarks

❑ The presentation is based on a paper, which is available online:

➤ In conference proceedings: http://www.sotlinthesouth.co.za/images/SoTL_FullProceedings.pdf

❑ The approach is a little presumptuous in blurring the South African – African distinction, but on various dimensions I can defend that

❑ I will continue to present from the South African perspective, but would welcome:

➤ Comments on similarities or differences in the Mozambican case

➤ Views from the perspective of faculty *and* students



A brief background to recent events (in pictures)



'Rhodes Must Fall'

9 March 2015



Chumani Maxwele throws human excrement at Cecil John Rhodes's statue on the UCT campus. Picture: David Ritchie



9 April 2015



Photo credit: Desmond Bowles



It's all very well protesting for the removal of symbols of apartheid and colonialism, but what then? What of students who continue to be discriminated against or made to feel unwelcome on campus because of their race? What about syllabi that continue to prioritise Western thought and world views over the scholarship of our continent? How will removing symbols achieve real change? Whether the statue comes down or not, the dialogue about transformation at UCT has a long way to go.

Cartoon and words: Nathi Ngubane (3rd year DUT student), DailyVox, 19 March 2015.

'Fees Must Fall'

October 2015








Photo credits: Wits Media Studies (?)



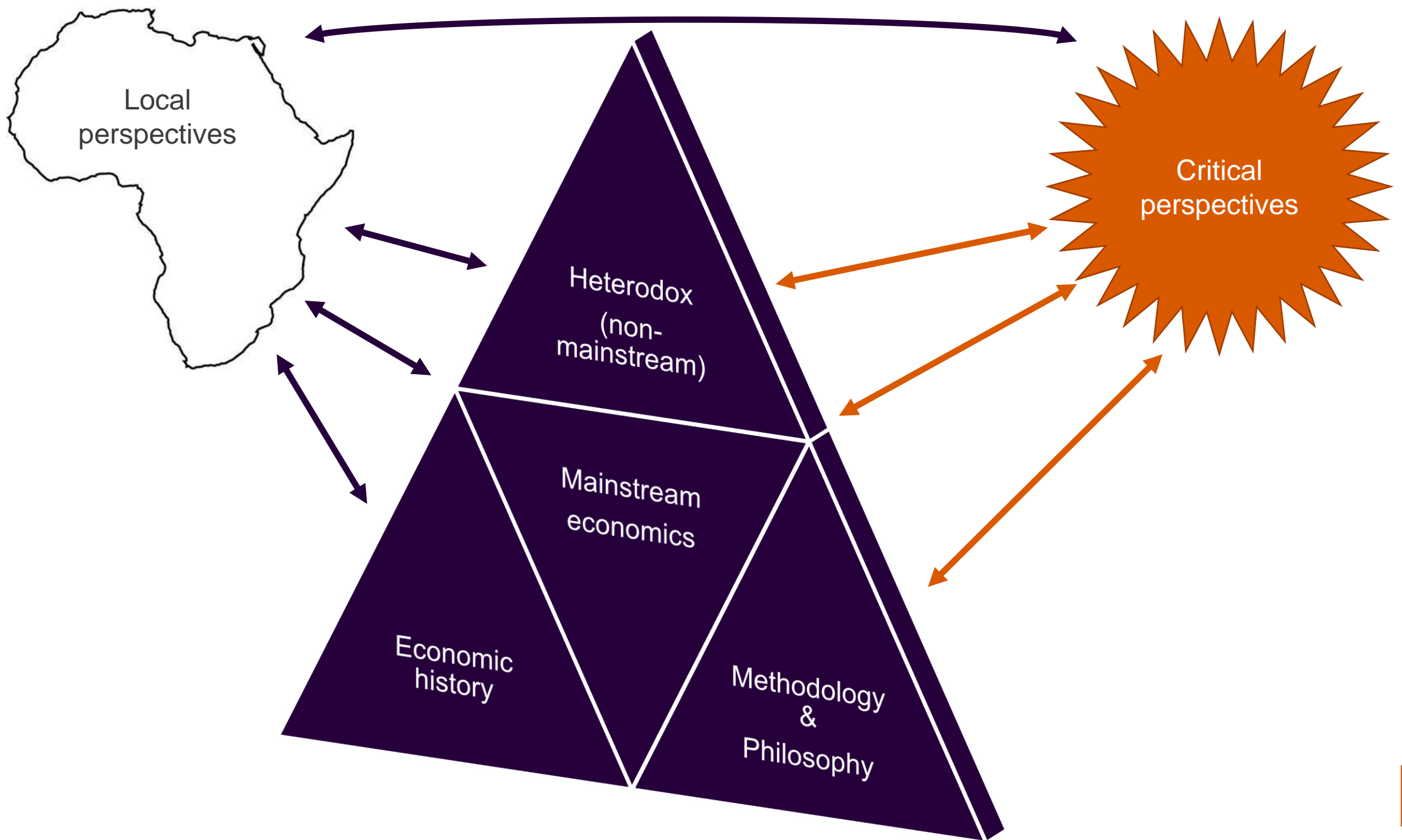
Five dimensions of decolonisation in relation to curricula

Fundamental issues raised by 'decolonisation' for curricula

CONTENT	FRAMING	CONTEXTUALISATION	RELEVANCE	ACCESS(IBILITY)
 <p>Minimum wage example</p> <p>Historical origins of modern problems (slavery, colonialism, apartheid)</p> <p>Racial discrimination in the job market</p> <p>Etc.</p>	 <p>How do we interpret African countries' low GDP/capita?</p> <p>Recipient of min wage as isolated individual?</p> <p>Slavery and colonialism as fair/beneficial??</p> <p>[Beware: content alone is not enough]</p>	 <p>Is unemployment discussed without considering migrant labour system?</p> <p>I.e. are local factors and perspectives reflected in theory and empirical work?</p>	 <p>Does this help students understand their world(s)?</p> <p>Is it relevant to current affairs <i>and</i> our country's history?</p> <p>[And: are we okay with students going into real institutions with this foundation?]</p>	 <p>Demographic composition of faculty</p> <p>Pedagogical approaches</p> <p>[All 4 other factors contribute to this]</p>



Sketch of an ideal curriculum (and what it is not)



The realities of (South) African economics



Confronting the harsh realities of the 'local academy'

- Awkward reality: majority of South African and African economists not well-placed to produce or deliver this kind of curriculum. Problems/limitations:
 - **Curriculum:** macroeconomics, microeconomics mostly imitative of 'Western neoclassical' curriculum but *more* conservative/homogenous
 - **Composition of faculty:** demographics not representative but *ideological outlook* and quality of training (e.g quantitative methods) is also a problem
 - **Research:** the gulf between RSA and the 'core' (Luiz, 2003, 2009; Yu, Kasongo&Moses, 2017)



Envisioning feasible decolonization



Aside: most economics students in South Africa never see this

- Everyone here know who this is?
- Sir Arthur Lewis, joint winner of 1979 Nobel Memorial Prize in Economics... for work on development and growth
- First black winner of economics Nobel, from St Lucia in the Caribbean



Where to from here...?

1. Understand what it is we're doing
 - Engage with calls for decolonisation and interpret for our discipline [this paper's objective]
2. Reach some consensus on an ideal alternative curriculum
 - The broader the consensus the better, but shouldn't be limited by this...
3. Consider constraints and identify feasible changes that can be made: I suggest that certain topics and references can be added quite easily
 - Will vary across institutions and level of study
 - Necessarily involves staged approach, which shouldn't be mistaken for/mixed with efforts to engage in window dressing ('maintain the status quo')

Note: changing disciplinary content and orientation will take generations...no shortcuts!



Questions, comments, suggestions welcome!

seanm@uj.ac.za



