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Madondo, Nkosinathi and Meredith, Margaret (2024) Rural Students and Science in South Africa: Curricular Justice, Epistemic Justice and Epistemic Freedom. In: BERA Conference 2024, 8-12th September, University of Manchester. (Unpublished)

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Rural Students and Science in South Africa: Curricular Justice, Epistemic Justice and Epistemic Freedom

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Two questions

1. How can we conceptualise epistemic justice in higher education?
2. How might academics work in practice towards knowledge justice in their curriculum and teaching?

1. Conceptualising epistemic justice



Social justice - recognition of equal difference

Epistemic injustice

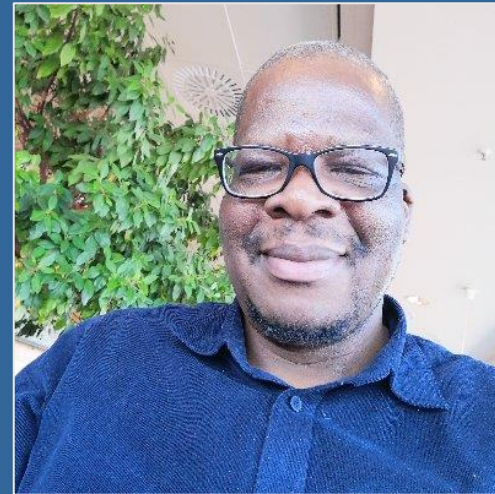
*People wronged in their
capacity as knowers*

Miranda Fricker



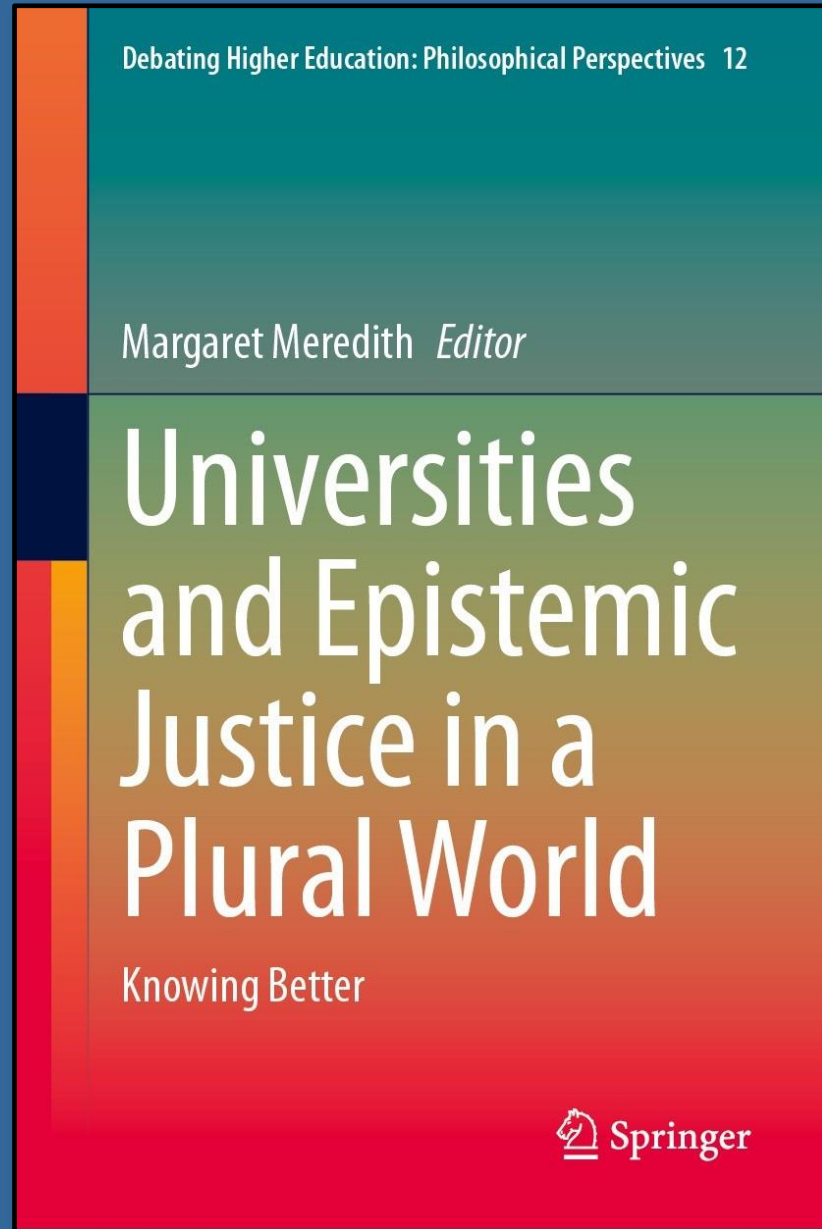
*Systems of knowledge are part
of systems of power*

Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni



Epistemic justice

1. Epistemic power is challenged.
2. People are recognised in their capacity as knowers.



3. Equal difference

(Meredith, 2024)

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Nkosinathi Madondo

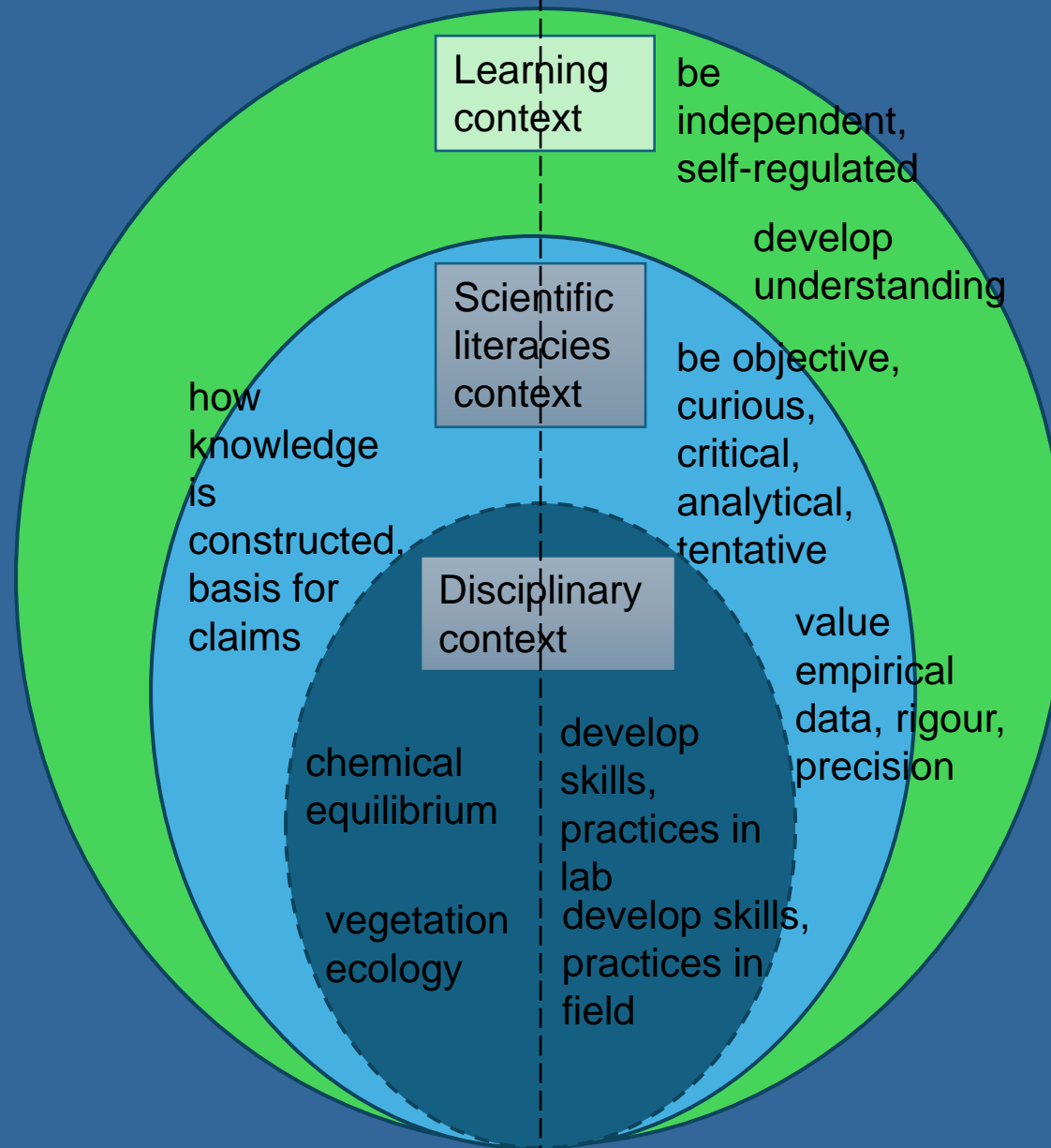
(Mangosuthu University of Technology, South Africa)

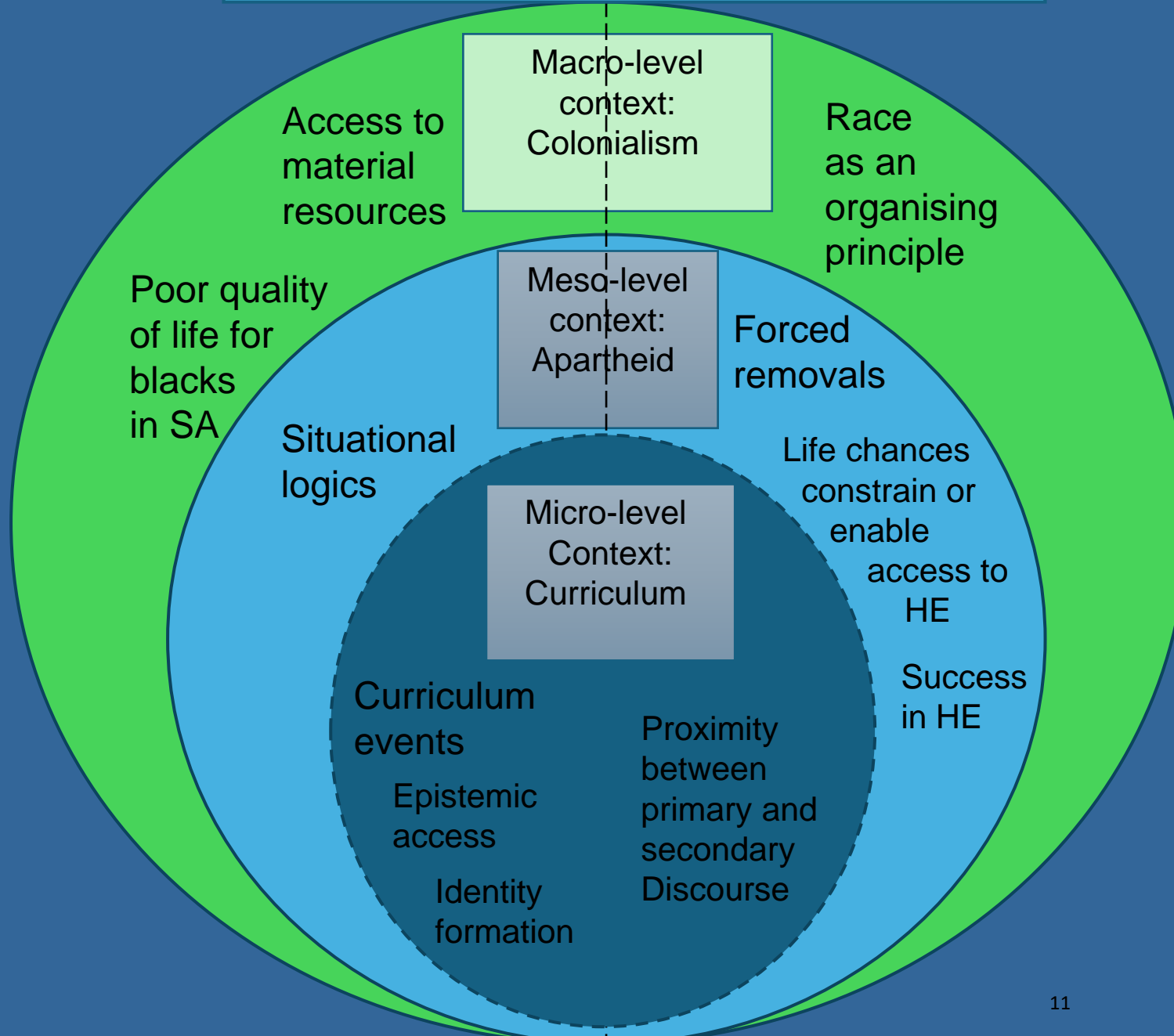
Coloniality must not be confused with colonialism. It survived the end of direct colonialism. In post colonies it continues to affect the lives of people, long after direct colonialism and administrative apartheid have been dethroned.

What, therefore, needs to be understood is not just the “not yet uhuru” postcolonial experience, but the invisible vampirism of technologies of imperialism and colonial matrices of power that continue to exist in the minds, lives, languages, dreams, imaginations, and epistemologies of modern subjects in Africa and the entire Global South.

(Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013).

What is **legitimated** in science curricula?
(Ellery, 2016; Maton, 2014b)





Misrecognition of difference

- Rurality – emerged from Apartheid
- Structural matter – a political displacement
- Primary Discourse and Secondary Discourse (Gee, 2012)

How did I address these issues?

- Development of scientific concepts from students' perspectives.
- Business meeting – Diagnostic assessment – assessment for learning before assessment of learning (Mgqwashu, 2019a).
- Improved participation (Fraser, 2008; 2009) and conceptualization of abstract concepts.

Findings

- *There is little interaction in the lectures at university because of the language of communication. Sometimes you don't get the terminology, but when things are expressed in your language that's when you understand better.*
- *When it is your first time attending class, you are afraid of asking questions because you think your peers will laugh at you, as you not confident enough when speaking English.*
- *When you are herding cows, you'll find that a young boy who has not learned to count yet will learn to associate the patterns of the cows [...] (Student focus group discussions, cited in Madondo, 2020).*

Lessons learned and way forward

- Reconceptualisation of curriculum events – not just a selection of topics
- Not designed by curriculum angels in heaven (Connell, 2009)

Concluding remarks

- University space – profoundly political, historical, social and cultural, including teaching and learning (and science teaching and learning, and learning and teaching) (Madondo, 2024).
- Can no longer be assumed to be ‘neutral’.

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