

Decolonisation, single stories and samurai: Propositions for a first-year course in literature at a South African university

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The decolonial turn at South African universities constitutes a response to the persistence of asymmetric and oppressive power relations that have proved recalcitrant enough to survive the official demise of colonialism and apartheid, and indeed to flourish in new guises. Many of the foundational epistemological traditions and ontological assumptions on which South Africa's universities operate can trace their genesis to these historic hierarchies, even while these structures appear neutral and natural to those who benefit from them. The effects of these arrangements on everyday life has propelled student and academic activists into the forms of resistance epitomised by #RhodesMustFall, #FeesMustFall, and the ongoing Fallist movement birthed by those initial acts of resistance. Two themes that have emerged from these calls for the decolonisation of South African universities revolve around the inclusion of marginalised, non-Western voices in the curricula, as well as changes to the pedagogic practices through which curricula are delivered, such that those who continue to experience marginalisation can see themselves reflected in the learning experience. This talk explores these two themes in more detail, before offering thoughts on the decolonisation of a single first-year course on young adult literature and film studies at the University of the Free State's Department of English. It pays particular attention to a concept introduced by Nigerian author Chimamanda Adichie (the dangers of a single story), and its potential for involving first-year students in some of the debates emanating from the decolonial turn in academia, as exemplified in an analysis of the Hollywood film *The Last Samurai*.