

PREPARING CRITICAL STUDENTS FOR THE POST-TRUTH ERA – KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

SRHE
*Society for Research
into Higher Education*

Keynote panel:

Dr Ibrar Bhatt, Queens University Belfast
Dr Foluke Adebisi, University of Bristol
Dr Elizabeth Hauke, Imperial College
London
Dr Kathy Lockett, University of Cape
Town

Chair: Dr Neil Harrison, University of
Oxford



PANEL FORMAT

- Introduction from the chair (5 minutes)
- Initial contributions from the panel (8 minutes each)
 - **Dr Ibrar Bhatt** – *The mechanics of trust in online practice*
 - **Dr Foluke Adebisi** – *Decolonising decolonisation: disrupting the co-optation of decolonial language within the neoliberal university*
 - **Dr Elizabeth Hauke** – *Critical tensions: is STEM education stuck in a 'truth era'?*
- Questions and answers from the floor (20 minutes)
- Concluding thoughts (8 minutes)
 - **Dr Kathy Lockett** – *Truth and truthfulness in a post-truth society*

EXPERTISE UNDER ATTACK



- Former Education Secretary Michael Gove: 'people in this country have had enough of experts' (Gove, 2016)
- Erosion of traditional role of experts as creators and mediators of knowledge in society
- Higher education as a 'producer' of experts and expertise in the form of its graduates
- Shift to an information-led society where most people have almost endless information freely available
- A "'bargain with modernity" governed by specific admixtures of deference and scepticism' (Giddens, 1991, p. 22)

THE POST-TRUTH WORLD

- Conflicting hegemonic and emancipatory outcomes from the internet age:
 - New or rediscovered voices fighting to be heard
 - Growth of deliberate misinformation and manipulation
 - Retrenchment into echo chambers and identity politics
- The quest ‘to *emancipate* the public from prematurely naturalised, objectified facts’ has backfired to become ‘an excessive *distrust* of good matters of fact disguised as bad



PREPARING OUR STUDENTS

It is 'presentation, personal persuasive power, contacts, access to the media or the like which will provide the "individual finding" with the social attribute of "knowledge"'

- Traditional concepts of graduate knowledge:
 - Membership of an epistemic community and intergenerational reproduction
 - Epistemic authority within society
- Shifting patterns:
 - Knowledge through acclamation
 - Increasing expectations of knowledge creation
 - Engagement with multiple concepts of 'truth'
 - Erosion of epistemic authority

THE CRITICAL GRADUATE

How do we find information and who controls what we find?

Which voices are heard and silenced - and by what processes?

How do we build interdisciplinary forms of knowledge and understanding?

How is knowledge constructed and truth asserted?

Criticality



The mechanics of trust in online practice

Avoiding lies, bullshit and fake news

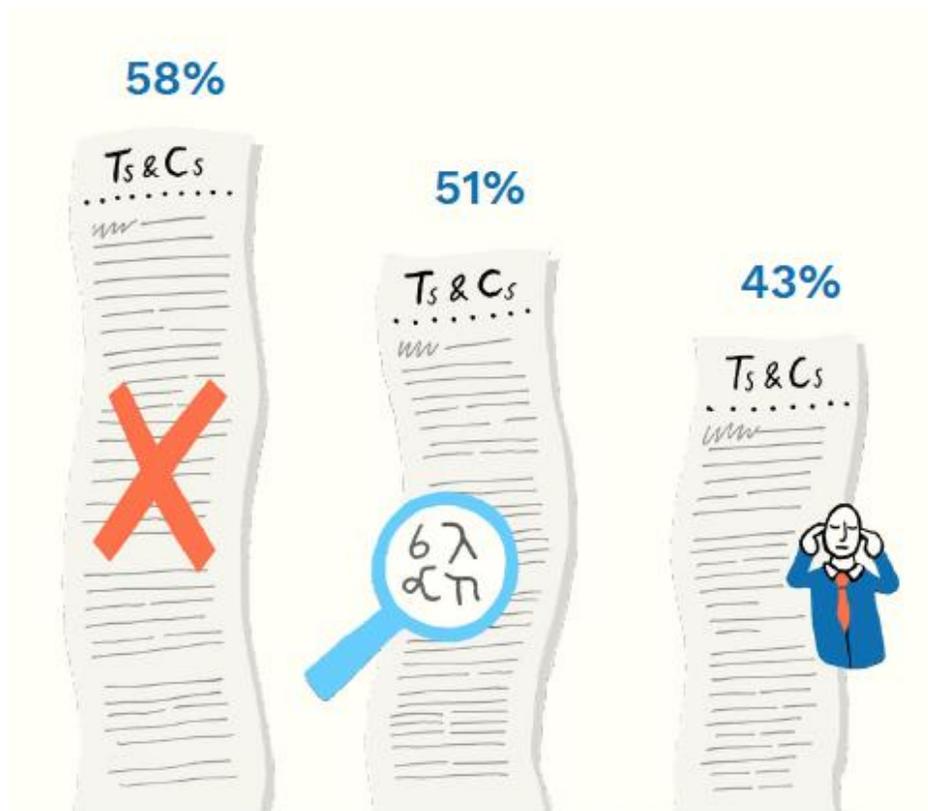
SRHE, December 2019

Ibrar Bhatt ([@ibrar_bhatt](https://twitter.com/ibrar_bhatt))

School of Social Sciences, Education & Social Work
Queen's University Belfast



Digital Ignorance



17% believe information other people share about them is collected

58% sign up to social media sites without reading T&Cs;
51% without understanding

43% say there's no point reading T&Cs because companies do what they want anyway

24% said they don't know at all how online services make money

(Source: [People, Power and Technology: The 2018 Digital Attitudes Report](#))

Also see [Bhatt & Mackenzie](#) (2019) on *ignorance*



A commitment from the academic community to preserving truth in scholarly work and in public voice

In lecture halls and seminar rooms, in meetings, conferences, and in the public sphere



Decolonising Decolonisation

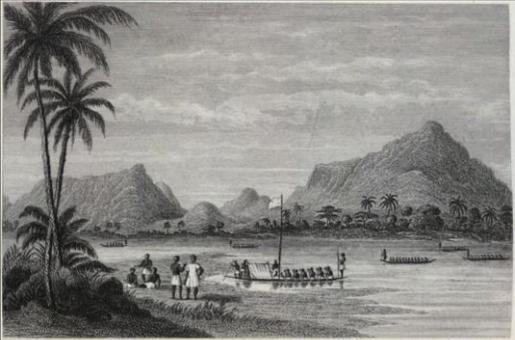
Disrupting the co-optation of decolonial language within the neoliberal university

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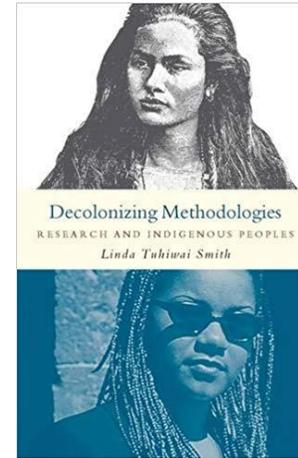
Decolonisation isn't/is...



- Misunderstanding decolonisation – ahistoricism and racial illiteracy
- Conflation with diversity: focus on inclusion/diversity stats for e.g. not exclusionary structures
- Not a metaphor. Decolonising is undoing colonisation. Nothing else. Must have political effect, must understand colonisation's effect, contextually. **E Tuck & KW Yang**
- Always a disruptive phenomenon (**Madlingozi**); Always a violent process (**Fanon**)
- *'Decolonising methodology must begin with unmasking the modern world system and the global order as the broader context from which research and methodology are cascading and are influenced. It also means acknowledging and recognising its dirtiness... entails unmasking its role and purpose in re-search. Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni*
- It should *'address the global class, gender, racial, sexual, and regional asymmetries produced by the hierarchical structures of the modern/colonial capitalist world-system'* **R Grosfoguel & AM Cervantes-Rodríguez**

Neoliberal Universities

- History of universities - epistemic and racial violence
- Colonial knowledge *power* hierarchies & coloniality in curricular content/structure, research questions, methods, and processes (ever-present histories) **Linda Tuhiwai Smith**
- Gatekeeping — admission criteria, professional standards migratory regulations, finance
- Academic career progression, commodification, marketization & rankings: REF/TEF/KEF/NSS
- Dislocation from external movements
- Will to *power*. Can the subaltern speak?





Ultimately, who is knowledge produced for?

*Critical tensions: is STEM education
stuck in a 'truth era'?*

Elizabeth Hauke
Imperial College London

CRITICAL TENSIONS: STEM AND TRUTH

Knowledge

Method

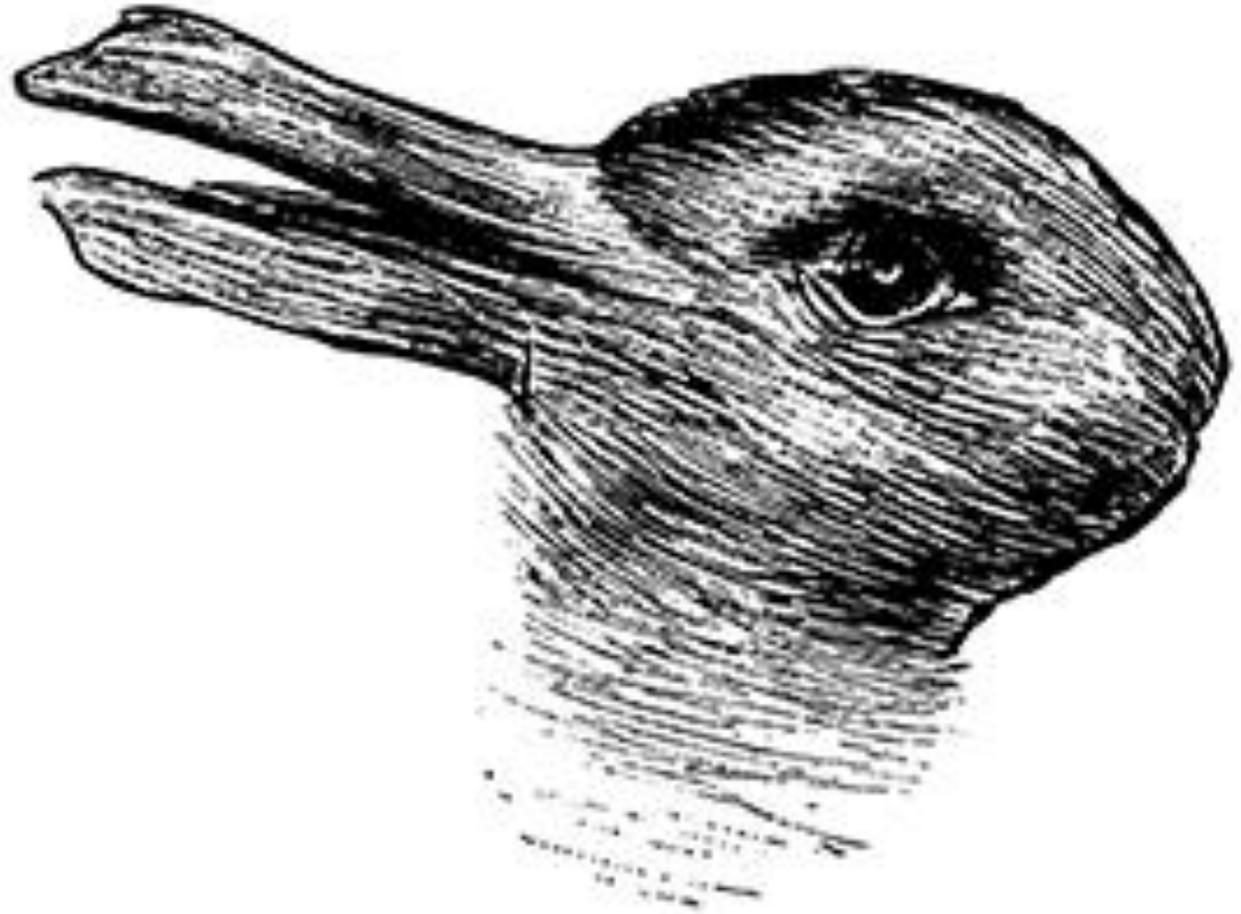
Truth

Belief

Expertise

CRITICAL TENSIONS: STEM AND TRUTH

- 'Seeing' ~ 'truth'
- 'Seeing as' ~
perspective



CRITICAL TENSIONS: STEM AND TRUTH

‘Although [higher education] can justifiably take pride in its capacity to develop the students’ ability to manipulate the material world [...], it has paid relatively little attention to the students’ “inner” development, the sphere of values and beliefs, emotional maturity, moral development, spirituality and self-understanding’

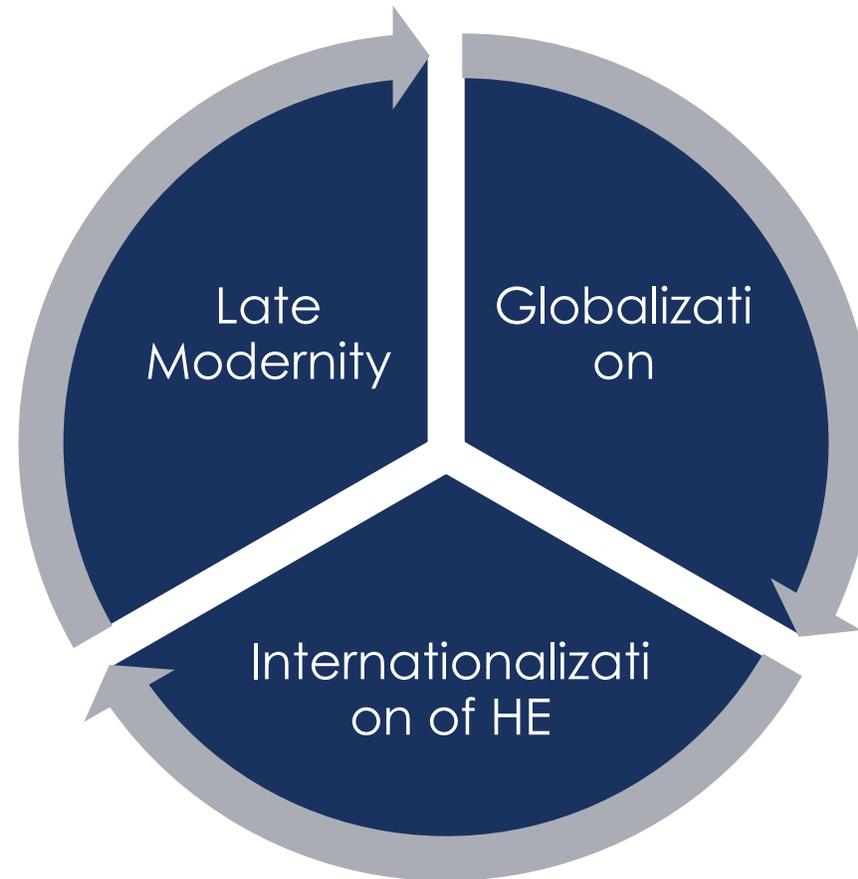
(Astin and Astin 2006)

TRUTH & TRUTHFULNESS IN A POST-TRUTH SOCIETY

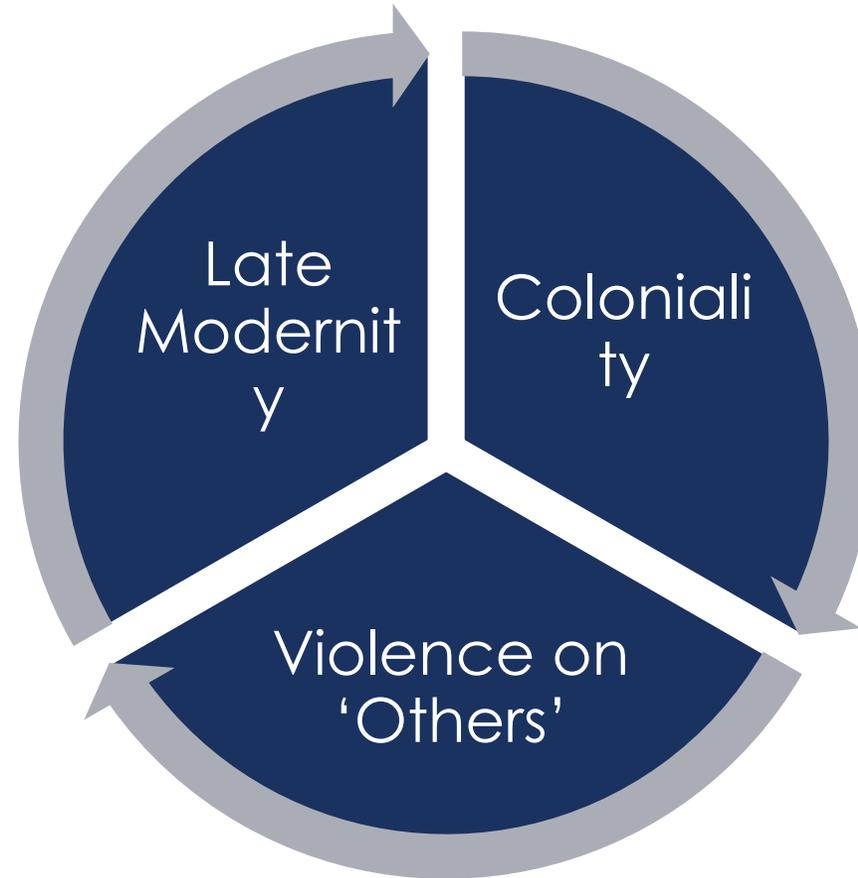
Kathy Lockett, University of Cape Town

CONTEXT: POLITICAL-ECONOMY OF THE 4TH IR

NEO-LIBERAL LENS



CONTEXT: POLITICAL-ECONOMY OF THE 4TH IR DECOLONIAL LENS



MODERNIST CONCEPTIONS OF TRUTH

- Reason = essential human attribute
- A universal, sovereign, autonomous knowing subject who could access the truth of an object, irrespective of his bodily, affective, historical or cultural context



THE 'DARKER SIDE' OF MODERNITY

- Ideology of race - misrecognition of rationalities of colonized peoples - sub-human status
- Legitimation of violence and degradation performed on bodies and persons of 'others'



CONTEXT: IN THE NORTH



- Collapse of old liberal, humanist grand narratives
- Demise of supposedly democratic institutions of civil society, including universities

TRADITIONAL MODELS OF TRUTH SUPPORTING MODERN EPISTEMOLOGIES

- Correspondence theory
- Coherence theory
- Pragmatism
- Consensus theory

All based on 'truth as warranted belief' - critical scrutiny via procedures endorsed by expert communities (the disciplines)

CRITICAL & POST- EPISTEMOLOGIES

We (in the Humanities) let the genie (the critique of modernist reasoning) out of the epistemic bottle
It is neither possible nor desirable to put it back in

...

- **Critical Theory**
- **Foucauldian studies**
- **Critical Realism**
- **Feminist Epistemologies**
- **Postcolonial Epistemologies**
- **Decolonial Epistemologies**
- **Post-humanism**
-



FROM LOGOS TO *ETHOS*

Truth

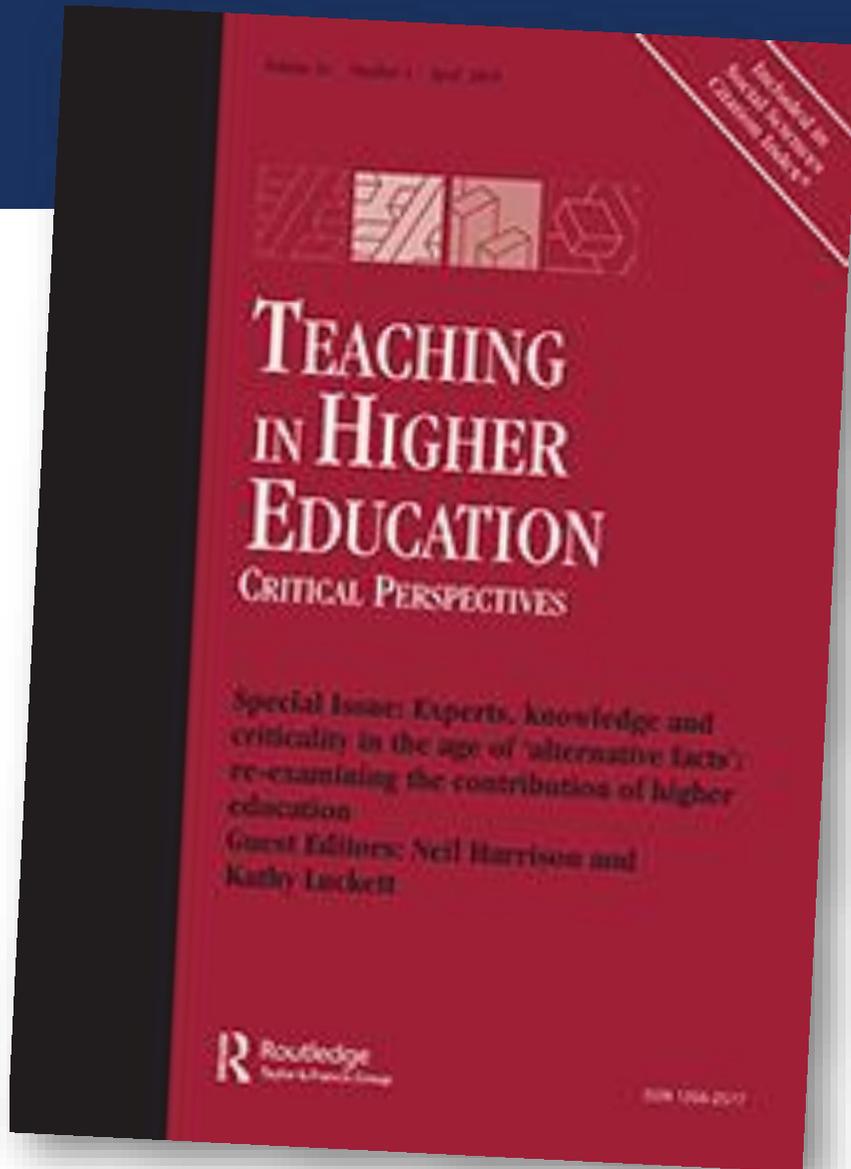
- Embrace epistemic pluralism
- Concepts & procedures – fallible, contingent

Truthfulness

- Scholars still rely on public forms of reasoning to justify their beliefs
- Epistemic norms - explicit and negotiated

TRUTHFULNESS AS ETHICAL PRACTICE

- *Do we model dispositions, habits & practices of epistemic humility?*
- *Can we broaden what counts as knowledge? Giving space and recognition to subaltern knowledge producers*
- *Can we preserve institutional conditions - to teach practices of truthfulness based on the public use of reason
....*
- *... in ways that are inclusive, dialogical, open-ended and provisional?*
- *Can we develop new models of relational, collaborative research - not captured by disciplinary rules or market values?*



- Special issue: *Experts, knowledge and criticality in the age of 'alternative facts': re-examining the contribution of higher education*
- Published Spring 2019 in *Teaching in Higher Education*
- 'Meet the Editors' drop-in – today at 3.30pm in Beaumaris 2