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Publishing (mal)practices and their (re)colonising effects: Double affiliations in academic publishing

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Abstract

This article is dedicated to one of the less-researched flaws in the South African subsidy system (SASS), namely, the issue of doubly affiliated appointees. The authors review the case of an undisclosed organisational entity at a South African university, and analyse the role doubly affiliated appointees (specifically, extraordinary professors and research fellows) played in the research output generated over six years, that is, from 2016 to 2021. The authors couch their findings within decolonial theories and conclude the following: the recruitment of doubly affiliated appointees to boost the research output of tertiary educational centres constitutes a practice that violates the principles of SASS and contributes to the epistemic recolonisation of academy.

Keywords: publication subsidy, double/multiple affiliation, research output, de-/re-colonisation, tertiary education, South Africa

Introduction

The South African subsidy system (SASS), which was created to enhance research done by and at South African academic institutions, has been a controversial issue since its origin. Despite yielding positive results, SASS has attracted criticism and several problems—either inherent to the system or resulting from its abuse and exploitation by human actors—have been identified and discussed in scholarship (see next section). The present article contributes to this evaluation of SASS; it considers whether the recruitment of doubly affiliated appointees to boost the research output of tertiary educational institutions may be abused and, in some instances, constitutes an unethical practice that violates the principles of SASS. To respond to this question, we examine the research output generated by an undisclosed organisational entity (OE) at a South African tertiary educational institution over the last six years (i.e. from 2016 to 2021) and locate our critique within decolonial theories.[1]

The article is structured as follows: first, we present the background of our study. We describe the structure of SASS and discuss its reception in scholarly literature; then we review literature dedicated to the problematic nature of double (or multiple) affiliations observed recently in the global research ecosystem. Next, we familiarise the reader with the method of data collection and the conceptual framework that underlies and guides our research. After that, we introduce our original evidence, which is subsequently evaluated within the adopted framework. We conclude the paper with a few recommendations.

The South African subsidy system and its scholarly critique

The current South African subsidy system (SASS) was established in 2004. It replaced an earlier system that had operated between 1997 and 2003. SASS stipulates that research outputs, having the form of an accredited article, book chapter, book, master's thesis, or doctoral dissertation will generate various numbers of funding units per output type from the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). The value of such units varies year on year due to fluctuations in the ministerial budget and the number of publications to be funded but is approximately 120,000 ZAR (DHET, 2015; Ministry of Education, 2003; Tomaselli, 2018; Wild, 2020). Each article that is published in a journal appearing on any of the DHET accredited lists generates one unit. Since 2016, a book chapter in an edited volume, which had previously generated a respective portion of the units allocated to a book, also equals one unit. The value of monographs is greater than that of articles and chapters. Since 2016, a book may generate a maximum of 10 units (DHET, 2015; Ministry of Education, 2003; Tomaselli, 2018; Garrison & Vaughan, 2008) dependent on the number of pages, which is arguably an inefficient measure of research impact. Monographs and volumes are reviewed every year by special panels because they are not included in the DHET accreditation lists. The subsidy is usually allocated to the institution, for example, a university or research centre, which then decides whether or not a portion of it should be given to the author and the way in which these funds may be spent (Woodiwiss, 2012), despite the DHET (2015) having cautioned against such incentivising. Importantly, only authors who are affiliated to South African institutions recognised by the DHET may generate and receive subsidies (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008; Woodiwiss, 2012).

The aim of SASS was noble and its intentions, in our view, laudable. By incentivising the research done at South African institutions, the system was designed to counteract decreasing research output and its fall by 20% between 1997 and 2003 (Wild, 2020; Woodiwiss, 2012).

1 We use the broad term "organizational entity"—that is, an institutional structure of any type—rather than more specific labels such as "(research) centre," "(university) department," or "(teaching) unit" to avoid potential identification of the space, the research output, and behaviour that we examine.

More broadly, the system aimed to curb the imbalance that exists between research done in the Global North versus the Global South, and thus contribute to the reduction of epistemic inequality in scholarship.

On paper, SASS seemed to have worked. Quantitatively, the system generated positive results (Tomaselli, 2018; Woodiwiss, 2012): South African research grew from 4,063 articles in 2005 to 25,371 in 2018 (Wild, 2020) or from 7,230 research units in 2005 to 18,872 in 2015 (Muthama & McKenna, 2020). This translates into a more than 500% increase in articles and a 160% increase in research units in the respective time spans. The above-mentioned decreasing tendency in research output observed at the end of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st was thus not only stopped but effectively reversed (Woodiwiss, 2012).

However, concurrently with these positive quantitative effects, several negative phenomena that could be encompassed under the umbrella of "unethical practices" have gradually emerged and caught the attention of scholars. All such problems have either been attributed to the corrupt (i.e. gaming, perverse, or abusive) behaviour exhibited by subsidy receivers (institutions and, in many cases, academics) or to design flaws inherent in the system itself (Tomaselli, 2018). The following types of unethical behaviours have been reported: "salami slicing," that is, the division of a single study into an excessively large number of articles (Woodiwiss, 2012, p. 424; see also Muthama & McKenna, 2020; Wild, 2020); manipulating authorship by adding illegitimate authors (Wild, 2020); and submitting articles to journals in which it is easier to publish—this includes publishing in lower-ranked journals (Muthama & McKenna, 2020; Tomaselli, 2018; Woodiwiss, 2012), in-house journals, journals on the editorial boards of which the potential author sits (Woodiwiss, 2012), and, in extreme cases, predatory journals (Muthama & McKenna, 2020; Tomaselli, 2018). Indeed, predatory journals, which most often do not conduct quality checks despite charging a fee, resulted in the payment of government subsidies up to 300 million ZAR in 2017 (Wild, 2020). Further problems associated with SASS that have been identified in scholarly literature include the following undesirable phenomena: academics tend to focus more on "the incentive attached to measurement systems, rather than the incentive of impacting the discipline/s" (Tomaselli, 2018, p. 1); the system has created and sustained an incomplete value chain—it does not "feed" all the links in the chain but instead leaves "editorial, peer review, production and publishing processes" (2018, p. 2) un-resourced and thus allows for the exploitation of some people involved in them; some journals have become excessively dependent on publications written by members of a single university or centre (Tomaselli, 2018); and the system of paying incentives to individuals has in some cases led to resentment among fellow academics (Muthama & McKenna, 2020). Overall, nearly 20 years after the introduction of SASS, South Africa has plunged into a culture of *publication performativity pressure*, which is neither cooperative nor competitive and ultimately results in publication fatigue (Inamdar & Kirloskar, 2021). Many institutions and academics have "become rent-seeking, or at minimum, engage in the pursuit of perverse incentives"—a behaviour that essentially contradicts the intended aims of the system (Tomaselli, 2018, p. 1).

Certain practices that have only recently been suggested as potentially problematic concern double and foreign affiliations (the topic of our article)—that is, academics who work at foreign universities or centres may also be affiliated with a South African institution and, given this secondary (sometimes even tertiary) affiliation, generate and receive subsidies. At a workshop organised before the annual Southern African Research & Innovation Management Association's conference in 2021, Johann Mouton from the Centre of Excellence in Scientometrics and Science, Technology and Innovation Policy at Stellenbosch University flagged some problems related to doubly attributed authors such as the (increasing) omission of their foreign affiliations in publications submitted for SASS (see a short news report written by Nordling, 2021). The DHET (2015, p. 34) had been even more explicit and flagged the practice of "appointing individuals, who are based elsewhere as honorary employees, for the purpose of claiming subsidy for the publications produced by these individuals" as "counter-productive."

Double affiliation: An emerging problem

Double affiliation is not a South African phenomenon only. On the contrary, double affiliation has become common practice in research around the globe. The number of researchers with multiple affiliations has risen worldwide, across countries and fields, from 10% in 1996 to 16% in 2019 (Hottenrott et al., 2021; de Mesnard, 2012). Despite this remarkable trend, double affiliation and its impact on research and publication-related behaviour, and, in particular, a systematic assessment of problems of which this practice may have been the manifestation have been studied very little—a fact that is deplored in nearly all articles published recently (Bachelet et al., 2019; Hottenrott & Lawson, 2017; Yegros-Yegros et al., 2021).

Multiple affiliations may certainly have several positive effects on research, scholars, and academy in general. Nevertheless, there has been a growing body of evidence suggesting that this practice—and especially its noteworthy proliferation—is related to, or even a manifestation of, serious problems and potential abuses (Bachelet et al., 2019; de Mesnard 2012; Hottenrott & Lawson, 2017; Hottenrott et al., 2021; Yegros-Yegros et al., 2021).

It seems that most problems are related to so-called "double counting" whereby the same author's output can be calculated twice (or more times) for each institution that submits it for any type of assessment (de Mesnard, 2012, p. 497). In this way, the institution at which the author is affiliated in a secondary or tertiary rank shares the entire output recognition with the primary home of an academic. It thus entertains an equal status to the researcher's main institution (Hottenrott et al., 2021). This, in turn, allows the institutions that offer their affiliations to such scholars to improve their own position in international rankings, perform better in a range of institutional assessments, and eventually have access to more (public) funding (Hottenrott & Lawson, 2017; Hottenrott et al., 2021). Conversely, the need to ascend in rankings and assessments, where research output plays a pivotal role, and linking research output more or less directly to potential (public and statal) funding, drives universities and research centres to expand the number of their affiliated members and include especially those who are prolific and already affiliated elsewhere (Bachelet et al., 2019). In this manner, the increase in research productivity experienced by a university or a research centre (i.e. output number and citation impact) runs the risk of being primarily propelled by co-affiliated researchers (Yegros-Yegros et al., 2021).

The problem is that the above manner of counting publications and the equal inclusion of all listed affiliations in research metrics "distort . . . institutional performance measures and rankings" (Hottenrott et al., 2021, p. 18). Accordingly, some universities and research centres "game the . . . system . . . by spuriously pumping up their productivity" through the co-affiliation route and thus the misrepresentation of the actual institutional affiliations (Bachelet et al., 2019, p. 2). This type of behaviour has been viewed as misconduct. The practice not only, as explained above, distorts rankings, but also, and perhaps more importantly, "violat[es] public trust" and leads to the "misappropriation of public funds" given that this inflated output is reflected in the state funding that the university receives (Bachelet et al., 2019, p. 2). The clearest examples of the "research integrity breach" accompanying double affiliations are seen in the so-called "non-legitimate" multiple affiliations, namely, cases where "the affiliation is not reflecting a real or substantial contribution by the [co-affiliated] institution to the study" (Bachelet et al., 2019, p. 2). In other words, although the output of such co-affiliated researchers is added to the centre's performance, these researchers contribute very little to that institution's research culture (Yegros-Yegros et al., 2021). All of this makes it significantly more difficult to assign research funds to well-deserving universities because funds may go to institutions whose performance has been largely inflated or misrepresented (Hottenrott et al., 2021, p. 18).

Method

Our study emerges from these potential flaws related to the presence of doubly affiliated scholars in SASS, and the concerns raised with regards to the role of double affiliation in the global research ecosystem. We respond to Yegros-Yegros et al.'s (2021, p. 14) plea for more "research that goes . . . in-depth into the salient phenomenon of multiple affiliations in contemporary research systems." We also echo Bachelet et al.'s (2019, p. 6) hope that studies such as ours, "will contribute to raise awareness and guide key stakeholders in developing standards for reporting institutional affiliations."

To be exact, our article offers a detailed case study that provides the first empirically based assessment of possible abuses of the role of doubly affiliated academics for SASS purposes. With this aim, we review the research output of an undisclosed but, in our view, exemplary OE located at a South African tertiary educational institution. We do not name the particular centre because we do not wish to target it or shame it. Rather, we want to draw attention to an issue that could be, and indeed, probably is more systemic. We have also decided not to disclose the identity of this institution in order to avoid potential legal or social ramifications, following the suggestions of a number of experienced researchers and editors, and again, because we suspect such issues to be more widespread than this particular institution.

Because our research is a case study, we did not use any randomised sampling mechanism to select the OE. This selection was primarily motivated by our impressionistic observations, which had made us aware of some problematic practices that this OE was engaged in. It was because of these preliminary, yet carefully documented observations that we decided to study the role of double affiliations in the research output of the OE in more detail. Such an approach constitutes common practice in case studies across disciplines and fields (Yin, 1993), including education (cf. Corcoran et al., 2004; Nath, 2005). This purposeful choice of OE allowed us to include certain qualitative elements in our analysis. We were able to focus on the OE and examine the provenance of double affiliated scholars, the titles of their papers, and the journals in which they published, as well as more generally their relation to the OE.

The quantitative and qualitative data presented in our article were extracted from the material available on the institutional and OE websites. While our conclusions may raise important ethical questions and point to very problematic practices, and thus concern sensitive topics, none of the documents consulted could be considered sensitive or confidential. In fact, the information related to extraordinary professors and research fellows is widely accessible and is publicly disclosed by all universities in South Africa through various online platforms.

That said, because we did not have access to the internal reports related to the quantity of subsidies awarded to the OE by DHET, we focus on publication numbers (i.e. the number of articles, chapters, and books) rather than the number of research units. However, the outputs included in our analysis *have been awarded* subsidies and *have been declared* as such—not only by the OE but also by the larger institution to which this OE belongs. Following the rules of SASS, when discussing the total output declared by the OE (i.e. articles, chapters, and books), we ascribe to books a value greater than the value of articles and chapters (given their respective weights in SASS). We have decided to count a book as five subsidy units, that is, a median of the 1–10 units available to monographs.

Conceptual framework: Decoloniality

To tackle the issue of the role doubly affiliated academics play in SASS, we make use of decolonial theories. The choice of this paradigm as our conceptual pillar bestows us with a theoretical lens that is, in our view, the most critical with and unforgiving towards systems that shape the behaviour of academics in the modern world. Furthermore, these theories are fully compatible with—if not specifically designed for—our local (South) African context.

The backbone of our approach is the idea of epistemic (de)coloniality—one of the four domains of (de)coloniality distinguished by scholars, the three others being personal, relational, and structural (Kessi et al., 2020). Epistemic coloniality distorts the way in which human knowledge is created in the world. Knowledges developed in the Global North are centred and universalised, while knowledges developed in other places, in particular in the Global South, are viewed as peripheral and contextual (Kessi et al., 2020). Northern epistemes are glorified, humanised, and exported all over the planet, while Southern epistemes are erased, dehumanised, or have their relevance minimised (Kessi et al., 2020; see also Cakata & Segalo, 2017; du Preez et al., 2018; le Grange, 2014, 2016, 2018; Mheta et al., 2018; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). This is reflected in the division of work permeating scholarship: the South is reduced to providing manual force or raw material (i.e. data and data collection), which the North then uses to produce theories (see Hountondji, 1990; Shefer et al., 2015). In other words, "research capital both literally and figuratively accrues to Western principal investigators and institutions, which invariably host grants (taking overheads) because of institutional and funder requirements" (Kessi et al., 2020, p. 273). This perpetuates colonial power structures given that the Global North mainly includes "White/European/Euro-American societies such as Western Europe, Canada, Australia and the United States," whereas the Global South corresponds to the zones inhabited by "previously colonised non-European people" (Grosfoguel, 2011, p. 16).

To undo the epistemic imbalance described above, decolonial scholars argue for epistemic decoloniality whereby all knowledge is viewed as subjective and contextual and thus necessitating plurality of perspective rather than a single, falsely universal perspective. Instead of such "a monologic, monotopic, imperial, [and] global knowledge," which is always developed in the Global North, decolonial scholars propose a "pluri-versal" spectrum of knowledges (Grosfoguel, 2013, p. 89). This pluri-versality can be achieved by embracing a "decolonial epistemic turn" (Maldonado-Torres, 2016, p. 24) in academy; the voices that have historically been ignored, minimised, or banned are given prominence and "worldviews and theories and ways of knowing that are not rooted in, nor oriented around Euro-American theory" are redeemed, centred, and promoted (Kessi et al., 2020, p. 274). Given the context of South African universities, this epistemic reversal implies the centring, rather than exploitation, of Black, African, and Afro-diasporic epistemes (Asante, 2010; see also du Preez et al., 2018; le Grange, 2014, 2016, 2018; Mheta et al., 2018; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015).

Indeed, five centuries of colonisation forced non-Europeans to "Christianise," then to "civilize" and "develop," and now, following (late) capitalism, to "neoliberalize" (Grosfoguel, 2011, p. 29). Accordingly, the Global North has provided a naturalised "universal blueprint" for the lives, relationships, and behaviours of society and individuals in the South, often resulting in the repression and co-opting of alternative local perspectives, or the colonial exploitation of the people themselves (Stein & de Oliveira Andreotti, 2016, p. 1; see also du Preez et al., 2018; Grosfoguel, 2011, 2013; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). This blueprint is "extractivist" (Fabricant & Postero, 2018, p. 139): it "manifest[s itself] in the extraction of surplus value and the ceaseless accumulation of capital" (Grosfoguel, 2011, p. 9), all of which eventually force one to "consume, compete, and win at any cost" (DeLeon, 2006, p. 85) and thus "brings out the selfish . . . side of people's nature" (Suisa, 2019, p. 520).

This greedy reality is particularly true in higher education. The devotion to this North-centred socio-economic system embraced by tertiary-education institutions is visible through a number of phenomena: commodification of knowledge and monetarisation of non-monetarised skills (Suissa, 2019; Swanick, 2012), corporatisation of non-corporative relationships (du Preez et al., 2018; Suissa, 2019; Swanick, 2012), quantification of qualities and activities that are unquantifiable (Armaline, 2009), privatisation of public services (Stein

& de Oliveira Andreotti, 2016), and standardisation, normalisation, and regimentation (Armaline, 2009; DeLeon, 2008; Swanick, 2012). As a result, the success of education (including at universities) and the benefits of knowledge for society are primarily measured in quantitative production-related terms, thus valuing their financial contribution rather than many other non-quantifiable benefits (Stein & de Oliveira Andreotti, 2016).

Overall, knowledge has changed its purpose from being intrinsically advantageous for a field of science or arts and learning in general, into something that can be traded for monetary or social gain and thus be profitable (Knoche, 2020). Knowledge has become a trade commodity in the modern global market (Collyer, 2016; Knoche, 2020). This makes knowledge vulnerable to exploitation and the individuals and organisations that produce it susceptible to corruption (cf. Corruption Watch, 2022; Transparency International, 2022). Actors partaking in knowledge production may abuse (i.e. misuse or mistreat) entrusted power—namely, the power granted "on the premise that they act with integrity to advance the public good"—for private and/or personal gain, that is, "financial, material . . . or social" capital that benefits "individuals or specific interest groups at the expense of society at large" (Bullock & Jenkins, 2020, p. 2). In terms related to the scope of the present article, the people responsible for, and benefitting from, the publication of research units may misrepresent the process in order to receive extra benefits from the outcome of any given publication. Such corrupt practices "violate one's duty towards one's principal resulting in harm to the interest of another party and in financial benefit for the perpetrator" (Rossouw et al., 2000, p. 887; see also Open Government Partnership, 2015; van Schalkwyk, 2017).

One of the most palpable effects of colonial knowledge economy on education is a "tremendous institutional pressure to produce peer-reviewed publications," which largely stems from the need to keep up with Northern measures of success and productivity (Ratele et al., 2018, p. 9; see also du Preez et al., 2018; Inamdar & Kirloskar, 2021). This pressure to produce exposes all publication systems to manipulation and generates a wide spectrum of corrupt behaviours. Publication systems adopted in the Global South are especially vulnerable because, in this manufacturing of publications, Global South universities are expected to quickly reach the level of institutions in the Global North (Inamdar & Kirloskar, 2021).

Findings

As explained in the introductory section, our evidence concerns the research output produced at an undisclosed OE at a South African tertiary educational institute over a period of six years, namely, 2016 to 2021.

In this OE, most double affiliations come from the so-called extraordinary appointments (specifically, extraordinary professors) and research fellows. According to the institutional policy—which has been anonymised—extraordinary appointments, whether those at the post of professor, associate professor, senior lecturer, or lecturer, are offered to scholars who enjoy professional or scholarly prestige, and are not concurrently employed in any position at the institution granting this secondary affiliation. The aim is to involve these appointees in teaching- and supervision-related activities and academic programmes developed at the OE. Research fellows also tend to work at external institutions although they may be affiliated with another department or unit of the same institution as the OE. Similar to extraordinary appointees, research fellows should have demonstrated considerable specialist skills. Although research fellows enjoy academic freedom, their research is expected to contribute to the discipline studied in the OE and thus be coordinated with research done in that environment. Additionally, research fellows should be physically present in the OE for at least two months a year and interact with students. Both extraordinary appointees and research fellows can be nominated for the (renewable) period of one to three years. They are not remunerated, although they may receive some honorarium.

If one considers the 6-year research output presented in the form of journal articles and chapters in edited volumes, which all equal one subsidy unit, the following picture emerges. The publications authored by extraordinary professors and research fellows constituted 49/50% of all articles and chapters declared as the research output of the OE (49 indicates the percentage of the publications attributed exclusively to extraordinary professors and research fellows and 50 indicates the percentage of the papers co-authored with staff and the members of other groups (e.g. students, post-doctoral fellows, and emeriti).[2] To be exact, extraordinary professors and research fellows produced 58% of articles and chapters in 2016, 41%/43% in 2017, 44% in 2018, 58% in 2019, 39%/40% in 2020, and 51%/53% in 2021. This radically contrasts with the quantity of publications written by the staff members, who only contributed to 20%/23% of the OE’s output over the six years. The remaining contributors (i.e. students, postdoctoral fellows, and emeriti to whom we refer as OE non-staff) created 27%/29% of the articles and chapters. Overall, despite oscillating between 40% and nearly 60% in a specific year, the research output of extraordinary professors and research fellows seems to be relatively stable in the analysed time period. Indeed, if the 6-year period is divided into two triennia, 2016–2018 and 2019–2021, the contribution of these authors increased only minimally—from 49% to 51%. Table 1 below provides raw data related to journal articles and volume chapters declared by the OE as its research output.

2 This notation will be used for the remainder of this discussion. That is, two digits separated by a slash (e.g. 7/8) should be read as follows: the first number indicates the number (or percentage) of the publications attributed exclusively to one of the three groups (e.g. publications only authored by staff), and the second number indicates the number (or percentage) of the papers attributed to the participial group including the publications that were co-authored with members of the two remaining groups (e.g. publication authored by staff together with non-staff and extraordinary appointees).

Table 1
Research output in the OE: Journal articles and chapters in volumes

Year	Quantity of publications produced by members of the OE		Doubly affiliated extraordinary professors and research fellows	Total subsidised publications per annum
	Staff	Non-staff		
2016	21 total		29	50
	7/8	13/14		
2017	22/23 total		16/17	39
	11/13	10/11		
2018	24 total		19	43
	11	13		
2019	29 total		41	70
	13/14	15/16		
2020	37/38 total		24/25	62
	14/18	20/23		
2021	22/23 total		24/25	47
	7/9	14/15		

With regard to books, to each of which we have ascribed five subsidy units—a median of the one to 10 units available to a monograph—the imbalance between the doubly affiliated appointees (extraordinary professors and research fellows) and the OE's combined staff and non-staff was even more drastic. Books published by double appointees in the six years, all of them being extraordinary professors, constituted 91% of all monographs. The contribution of the staff amounted to 9% (see Table 2 below). Given the very limited number of monographs declared in the OE's output (11 in total), it is difficult to propose any generalisations with regard to trends over time. However, monographs authored by extraordinary appointees more than doubled in the second triennium if compared to the first triennium, with three publications in 2016–2018, and seven in 2019–2021.

Table 2
Research output in the OE: Monographs

Year	Quantity of publications produced by members of the OE		Doubly affiliated extraordinary professors and research fellows	Total subsidised publications per annum
	Staff	Non-staff		
2016	0 total		0	0
	0	0		
2017	1 total		3	4
	1	0		
2018	0 total		0	0
	0	0		
2019	0 total		2	2
	0	0		
2020	0 total		4	4
	0	0		
2021	0 total		1	1
	0	0		

If all the research output is combined and thus articles, chapters and monographs are counted jointly (with each book being equivalent to five units), the disproportion between the output created by extraordinary professors and research fellows on the one hand, and the authors only affiliated with the OE (especially the staff) is patent.[3] Overall, doubly affiliated scholars created 54%/55% of the entire research output, specifically: 48% in 2016, 53%/54% in 2017, 44% in 2018, 64% in 2019, 54%/55% in 2020, and 56%/58% in 2021. This again contrasts sharply with the research generated by the permanent staff, who only contributed 16%/21% and students, postdoctoral fellows, and emeriti contributing 23%/24%. There is a visible increase of at least 20 points or 42% in the contribution of doubly affiliated appointees if one compares the first triennium (48% in 2016–2018) with the second triennium (58%/59% in 2019–2021). The main factor behind this increase was books authored by extraordinary professors (see the paragraph above). Table 3 below captures the raw data with regard to all types of research output presented by the OE and puts into perspective the scale of the exploit across all research unit forms.

3 It is likely that these books received more units. Therefore, the contribution of the extraordinary professors and research fellows could even be greater.

Table 3
Research output in the OE: Articles, chapters, and monographs combined.

Year	Quantity of publications produced by members of the OE		Doubly affiliated extraordinary professors and research fellows	Total subsidised publications per annum
	Staff	Non-staff		
2016	21 total		29	60
	7/8	13/14		
2017	27/28 total		31/32	59
	16/18	10/11		
2018	24 total		19	43
	11	13		
2019	29 total		51	80
	13/14	15/16		
2020	37/38 total		44/45	82
	14/18	20/23		
2021	22/23 total		29/30	52
	7/9	14/15		

It should be noted that out of the total of 156 papers authored by extraordinary professors and research fellows over the six years, only three involved collaborations with a permanent staff member of the OE, specifically, one in 2017, one in 2020, and one in 2021. This means that, in 2016, 2018, and 2019, no collaborative publication was developed despite the high number of articles and chapters that were written by extraordinary professors and research fellows in these years and subsequently claimed by the OE as its own output. Overall, collaborative articles and chapters constituted less than 2% of the extraordinary professors' and research fellows' publications captured for the purpose of SASS. No book was co-authored by an extraordinary professor or research fellow with a staff member.

It is noteworthy that some articles or chapters authored by extraordinary professors or research fellows are on issues that seemingly have nothing in common with research done in the OE in question. The most instructive cases are four articles (published in 2016, 2017, 2019, and 2020) that have no thematic, conceptual, or theoretical relationship with the research conducted in the OE and instead, concern entirely different areas of research (cf. Bachelet et al., 2019; Yegros-Yegros et al., 2021).[4]

4 Unfortunately, in order to preserve the anonymity of the OE, we cannot disclose the titles or themes of these publications.

The vast majority of doubly affiliated appointees, specifically, 16 out of the total of 21 academics, were located in the Global North. Their primary affiliations are universities or centres in Europe, North America, and Australia. Significantly, all of the Europe-based extraordinary professors and research fellows came from an Anglo-Saxon cultural sphere, and thus economically aggressive and essentially (post)colonial countries, for example, Germany, Netherlands, and United Kingdom. In contrast, there were only five appointees working in the Global South. Of those, three were placed outside South Africa, each from a different country.[5] Only two appointees conducted their research within South Africa. These South African appointees contributed eight articles/chapters to the research of the OE, which constitutes only 2% of the total research output.[6]

The vast majority (96%) of the output generated by the extraordinary professors and research fellows appeared in Northern journals and publishing houses. Only slightly above 2% was published in South Africa, and less than 2% in another country in the Global South. Importantly, with the exception of one article, only the appointees based in the Global South published in the Global South at all. This means that extraordinary professors and research fellows whose primary affiliation institutions are located in the Global North, almost never collaborate with Southern publishers (cf. du Preez et al., 2018).

Out of the 21 extraordinary professors and research fellows affiliated with the OE, only 11 (52%) mentioned their affiliation to the OE on external websites including other higher education institutions as well as profile pages such as those on academia.edu, LinkedIn, and ResearchGate.[7] Inversely, approximately half of the doubly affiliated members of the OE made no mention of their affiliation with the OE on online institutional or professional platforms.

Finally, in the last two years investigated, that is, 2020 and 2021, a significant contribution to the output generated by the single-affiliated non-staff members was attributed to the inclusion of authors who were affiliated with other OEs of that same institution: five such papers were included in 2020, and six papers in 2021. Although the primary or unique affiliation of these authors was internal rather than external, and thus they do not qualify as double affiliated in the same sense the extraordinary professors and research fellows discussed in this article do, these academics were not officially affiliated with the OE in question in any way. Nevertheless, their research was included in this OE's output and thus contributed to its increase.

Discussion

The evidence provided in the previous section suggests that doubly affiliated appointees may be misused for SASS purposes. First, while SASS was created to stimulate research done at South African institutions, by researchers who are based in the country and actively

5 We do not disclose these countries because they could reveal the identity of OE.
6 Out of the 21 appointees located in the Global North, only two scholars originate from the South. Out of the five appointees working in the Global South, one was a Global North scholar.
7 Three of these academics did not have accessible web pages.

contribute to its academic and scientific life, nearly all the doubly affiliated appointees resided and worked outside of South Africa and primarily contributed to the scholarly life of their respective countries. The scarcity of publications that were co-authored with the OE staff members, and thus the lack of any sizable positive impact of doubly affiliated appointees on researchers residing in South Africa, and the fact that the South African affiliation of these extraordinary professors and research fellows was rarely acknowledged on the authors' institutional or professional websites, clearly indicate that doubly affiliated appointees are primarily, if not almost entirely, concerned with their own (i.e. foreign) academic reality.

Second, and related to the above, the practice of declaring the publications done by extraordinary professors and research fellows allows for the outsourcing of research that should, in principle, be done by the permanent staff of the OE to other centres. The quantitative comparison of the output produced by doubly affiliated appointees with the output produced by the staff illustrates this sharply. It seems as if the OE were trying to co-opt scholars from other institutions and "seize" their publications in an attempt to counterbalance problems with generating its own output.[8] Overall, the practice disincentivises academics based in the OE from excelling in or contributing to research because perceived research production is at an acceptable level. Even highly productive researchers who might contribute with several articles in top international journals per year would appear insignificant given that they can, at any time, be replaced by two or three doubly affiliated appointees. There is no need for the OE to encourage its own researchers—the research output can simply be found elsewhere.

Third, the practice described in this article contravenes the aims of the appointments of extraordinary professors and research fellows. According to the institution's policy, extraordinary professors should primarily be involved in teaching- and supervision-related activities carried out by the OE. Notably, students had little to no knowledge of the existence of these extraordinary professors and the highest degree of contact occurred during the occasional guest-lecture in the course of a module, which happened once a year at most. In contrast, the contribution of extraordinary professors to the research of an OE is not considered by the same policy. Research fellows, in turn, are expected to conduct their research in the areas that would be coordinated with and enrich research done in an OE. They should not conduct entirely unrelated research that has no association in terms of field or faculty and does not enrich the research activities of that centre. They should also be physically present in the OE for at least two months—which did not happen.

Fourth, the use of the output generated by doubly affiliated appointees for SASS purposes constitutes, in our view, a case of "double counting" (de Mesnard, 2012, p. 497). That is, extraordinary professors and research fellows recycle the work that has been submitted (or will be submitted) whether for subsidy or evaluation at their home foreign-country

8 The co-opting of the research output produced by academics affiliated with other OEs of the same intuition as the OE in question—which intensified in the last two years—is another example of a "fishing for publications" tactic. While this would not result in additional funding to the university, it would constitute gaming SASS at an OE level.

institutions and declare it as the original research output of another (co-affiliated) institution in another country. The same output written by the same author is thus credited twice: it first benefits the primary affiliation of the academic and subsequently, their secondary affiliation. Accordingly, a South African institution enables a foreign researcher to potentially benefit twice from the same publication (for instance, the funds are used to pay for their trips to South Africa and stays at hotels). One thus deals with duplicate submission for credit, subsidies, recognition, and eventually, direct or indirect financial gain.

Fifth, related to the above, the practice inflates the global picture of knowledge production, suggesting that there is more knowledge being generated than there actually is. Primary home institutions declare themselves as knowledge producers and the institution of the secondary affiliation of an academic does the same. It seems that twice the number of articles, chapters, and books have been produced (cf. Bachelet et al., 2019; de Mesnard, 2012; Hottenrott et al., 2021).

Sixth, the practice of outsourcing research to doubly affiliated appointees and linking it directly to SASS results in epistemic recolonisation, at least as far as the OE is concerned. Instead of nurturing research in the Global South and reducing the epistemic imbalance between South and North, as originally aimed by SASS, the outsourcing of research to other centres—predominantly located in Western Europe, the United States, and Australia (cf. Grosfoguel, 2011)—contributes to the further increase in this disproportion. The knowledge of the Global North is centred and universalised even further. This makes the knowledge of the Global South increasingly more peripheral. Euro-American epistemes are again exported, while the relevance of African epistemes is minimised (cf. du Preez et al., 2018; Kessi et al., 2020). Consequently, the infamous division of scholarly work, with the South providing manual labour or raw material and with the North developing theories (Hountondji, 1990; Shefer et al., 2015), becomes even more bizarre. In the OE studied in this article, the South uses its own financial capital to recruit the North to do research in its stead and publish it in the North as well. Almost perversely, Northern institutions, researchers, and publishers are incentivised to produce research and export it and ultimately dominate a Southern institution and its researchers, as well as Southern publishers (cf. du Preez et al., 2018; Inamdar & Kirloskar, 2021; Kessi et al., 2020). This eventually solidifies the colonial power structures of the colonisers over the previously colonised (cf. Grosfoguel, 2011) and blatantly violates the goals and ideals of SASS, reinforcing—even at a micro scale—the epistemic coloniality in Southern systems of education.

Even though South African students and a number of academics have persistently argued for the decolonisation of tertiary education (Heleta, 2016)—in particular, the reduction of an imbalance in knowledge production and the dominion of Northern epistemes inherited from the 20th century (du Preez et al., 2018; le Grange, 2014, 2016, 2018; le Grange et al., 2020; Mheta et al., 2018; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015) and thus the development of epistemic pluriversity, the practice adopted and expanded by the OE effectively hampers the decolonial turn in education. Knowledges that originate and centre the Black, African, and Afro-Diasporic episteme, are neither "redeemed, centred, [nor] promoted" (Kessi et al., 2020, p. 274).

Instead, the practice reinforces the "monologic, monotopic, imperial [and Northern] knowledge" (Grosfoguel, 2013, p. 89). The few (i.e. Euro-Americans) continue defining for the rest, South Africans included.

The epistemic re-colonisation explained above (i.e. self-inflicted and developed to obtain material gains)—perhaps consequential rather than voluntary—is even more troubling because the vast majority of the staff members of the OE have been and continue to be white. The majority of the extraordinary professors and research fellows who have become affiliated with the OE are also white. This may be a source of the ongoing recolonisation of the OE as it continues to centre whiteness in the knowledge produced.

In light of the behaviours described above, it is possible to argue that, at least since 2016, the OE has engaged in practices that abuse SASS, contravene its goals, and violate its essence. Although the practice is certainly not illegal in the current system, it does seem to directly contravene the DHET (2015) policy and comply, to a considerable extent, with the definitions of corruption developed by Transparency International (Bullock & Jenkins, 2020; Corruption Watch, 2022; Transparency International, 2022). That is, by presenting research done by others as its own and, at times, thereby claiming a considerable sum of money from DHET as well as the accolades and clout associated with publication output, the OE seems to have exploited entrusted power for its own (more or less direct) reputational and eventually financial gain. Compare with a similar assessment of the problematic cases of double affiliation by Bachelet et al. (2019, p. 2) who noted that this practice "violat[es] public trust" and leads to the "misappropriation of public funds."

The quantitative significance of doubly affiliated scholars to the research output submitted for subsidies to DHET by the OE (and thus the scale with which the research output of extraordinary professors and research fellows has consistently surpassed, year after year, the research output generated by the staff itself), and the increase of the research output claimed over the years, suggest the profoundness and entrenchment of this malpractice at the OE. The minimal incorporation of the doubly affiliated appointees into the scholarly life of the OE and, inversely, those scholars' lack of interest in South African and Southern academic reality (whether teaching, research, or publishing) further suggest that the aforementioned problematic effects of the practice are not some epiphonema of essentially appropriate activities and could thus be only attributed to the design flaws inherent to the system. Rather, the sources of this problematic behaviour are subsidy receivers: institutions and academics who, through this unethical behaviour and misconduct (Bachelet et al., 2019; Hottenrott et al., 2021), reinforce the epistemic recolonisation of knowledge in the Global South, whether wittingly or unwittingly.

While recolonisation is the ultimate and, in our view, most tragic result of perverting SASS through the doubly affiliated appointees scheme by the OE, we propose that the fundaments of this practice reside in institutional greed for either reputation or reward. As the value of academic centres is increasingly reflected not in the knowledge they formulate but in the monetary gain and renown they produce (Knoche, 2020; Tomaselli, 2018), it seems that the OE imagines its own contribution to academy in mainly production-oriented terms—

quantifiable parameters that benefit the (collective of) individuals within the system (Stein & de Oliveira Andreotti, 2016). Since currently this knowledge production is directly linked to research output, and the publication of articles, chapters, and books is understood as currency to be traded for money, favour, and prestige rather than as a means of solving a problem (Muthama & McKenna, 2020; Tomaselli, 2018), it might be argued that the OE's main focus is on producing research units regardless of the implications of their publication.

The problem with such approaches is that the main (if not the sole) concern is the number of publication units that is reflected immediately. It does not consider the long-term value of a publication for the relevant institution or entity: what it is about, who does it, or where it is published. One such manipulation—probably the most effective one—is the practice of appointing foreign extraordinary professors and research fellows (as well as any other academics who are not staff, students, or contract workers) and declaring their output as the output done by the entity itself. This practice is highly profitable within the blueprint that applies pressure to generate income for the institution or entity, to improve the entity's (and indeed the entire institution's) position in a variety of rankings, and eventually, to ensure job security that pushes academics to seek potential publications everywhere and anywhere (cf. Inamdar & Kirloskar, 2021). Therefore, the colonial commodification of knowledge, education, and publishing for financial and social profit is the principal force that drives, promotes, and recompenses the problematic practices that foment and reinforce the recolonisation of academy.

In summary, the results of our study corroborate the maladies associated with double affiliation that have recently been identified in scholarship. Because of double counting, the research done by scholars whose primary institutional home is located elsewhere can be captured and recognised in its totality at co-affiliated centres (de Mesnard, 2012; Hottenrott et al., 2021). This allows these co-affiliated centres to eventually generate more (public) funding, namely, governmental subsidies (Hottenrott & Lawson, 2017; Hottenrott et al., 2021). The practice is problematic because of its extent (Yegros-Yegros et al., 2021)—indeed, in our case, most output was created by co-affiliated researchers. Accordingly, through doubly affiliated scholars, centres are able to artificially inflate their productivity and misrepresent the actual state of research activities conducted in situ (Bachelet et al., 2019). This in turn distorts internal and external performance assessments or rankings (Hottenrott et al., 2021), violates public trust, and allows the co-affiliated centres to access more public funds than they could have on their own (Bachelet et al., 2019). We agree with previous scholarship that such behaviour is an ethical misconduct and "research integrity breach" (Bachelet et al., 2019, p. 2).

Conclusion

The above case study demonstrates that the recruitment of doubly affiliated foreign appointees to boost the research output of tertiary educational institutions can be abused and constitute an unethical practice that violates the principles of SASS. Although we have only analysed one OE, we suspect that this practice is not limited to that centre. There is a persistent narrative promoting the capture of externally affiliated scholars and the constant addition of yet another extraordinary professor or research fellow appointed. More importantly, given the ease with which foreign affiliations can be captured and their minimal cost in contrast to the considerable financial gains generated, this practice seems ideal to quickly boost the research output of any OE or institution. It does not require much funds, infrastructure, or planning. Since the North still dominates knowledge production, and establishing links with the South has become a social currency, it is very likely that the majority of the captured appointees will come from the North and contribute to the recolonisation of the South.[9]

Overall, we worry that the practice conducted by the OE and the resultant recolonisation that we described may be much more widespread and perhaps prevalent at many tertiary centres and institutions in South Africa. Certainly, we need large-scale systematic research in this area looking at more OEs and their publishing practices so that a more informed generalisation can be made. In our view, however, double foreign affiliations constitute a perfect loophole in the system—easily exploited by many more centres.

Therefore, we believe that South African tertiary education institutions should further address the issue of secondary foreign affiliations (cf. DHET, 2015) and, continuing the tradition of constant reviews of SASS, curb the problematic practice presented in our study. This also means that South African research institutions themselves, including the OE considered in this paper, should take the aim of SASS to heart: they should incentivise the research done by their own academics and contribute to the recentring of knowledge production in the country's research and educational spaces.

To fight the misconduct, exploitation, and distortion that involves doubly affiliated foreign appointees, both universities and the DHET have a number of measures they can implement, well known from literature. These include, for instance, "undermine the motivation for [abuse]" by disconnecting the doubly affiliated extraordinary professors and research fellows from SASS, "restrict the opportunities for committing [abuse]" by monitoring and publicly disclosing the affiliations of all authors, "ensure that feelings of guilt will be invoked in those who commit [abuse]" (Rossouw et al. 2000, p. 888), define this practice as incompatible with the ethical code of conduct (cf. Costantino et al., 2019), and, more generally, promote quality of research rather than its quantity (Woodiwiss, 2012). In order to eradicate this practice, structural solutions are required (Tomaselli, 2018) and these depend considerably on the willingness of leadership (van Schalkwyk, 2017).

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9 This type of research output distortion and unethical behaviour would not be isolated, neither in the educative system nor in South Africa nor the South more widely. In South Africa, the system's exploitation for any type of gain is not only pervasive but perhaps also systemic (Merchant, 2016; van Schalkwyk, 2017). It is endemic to both public and private sectors and no single sector seems to be abuse free or particularly exploitation prone (van Schalkwyk, 2017). However, the education sector is hit by abusive and exploitative practices heavily and scores highly among all these sectors (Corruption Watch, 2015; van Schalkwyk, 2017). This is, in turn, congruent with the trends observed in other countries where education, including tertiary education, research centres, and research output, are common loci of highly problematic behaviours (Hallak & Poisson, 2007; Heyneman, 2004), for example, in India (Aulakh, 2016), Bolivia (Costantino et al., 2019), Europe (Hallak & Poisson, 2007), and the United States of America (Woshburn, 2005).

To conclude, we would like to state clearly that we are not against doubly affiliated foreign scholars, including extraordinary professors and research fellows. They can indeed enhance the value of our institutions and our own research. However, to avoid any room for problematic, exploitative, and unethical practices, we propose to disconnect their research output from SASS so that research conducted in, at, and through South African institutions can be incentivised, thereby contributing to the knowledge generated by the Global South without added pressure from the Global North. This would hopefully contribute to the reduction of epistemic imbalance between the Global South and North. We hope that the case study discussed in this paper highlighted the issue and will allow the system to be adjusted, by "avoid[ing] the mistakes made by some and follow[ing] the successful examples of others" (Woodiwiss, 2012, p. 426).

Nevertheless, we are afraid that as long as education is the hostage of colonial practices, and as long as knowledge is commodified, monetarised, and deconstructed into numerical quantities, understood as beneficial only if economically or socially profitable, other forms of abuse—after this one is eliminated—will continue to emerge.

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