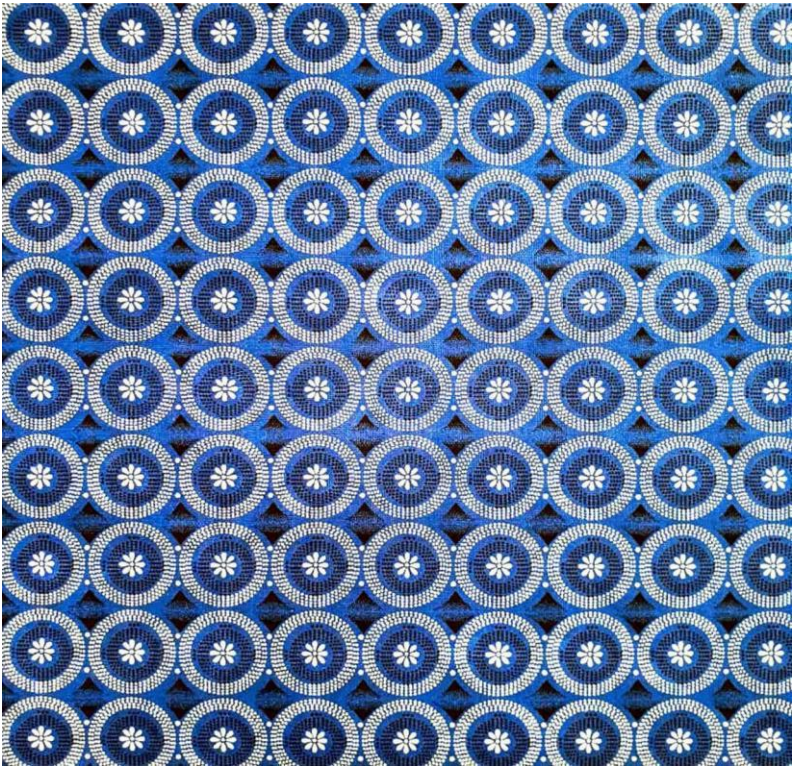


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Alternation

**Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of the
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**Decoloniality and Decolonial Education:
South Africa and the World
Volume II**

**Guest Editor
*Rozena Maart***

2020

**CSSALL
Durban**

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South Africa, International Law and ‘Decolonisation’

Christopher Gevers

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Abstract

Despite the ongoing calls to ‘decolonise’ the University and its curricula, including those of its Law Schools, international law continues to be taught in South Africa with little or no reference to African international legal scholarship, or ‘Third World Approaches to International Law’ more generally. That these were absent from law school curriculums during apartheid is hardly surprising, but their continued omission since 1994 demands an explanation, and calls for introspection on the part of South Africa’s international legal academy. This article will argue that, rather than being a simple omission, this silence is ‘co-produced’ by the myth actively propagated by South African international lawyers since 1994 that ‘from 1948 to 1990, South Africa was in conflict with both the international community and international law’ (Dugard 1997: 77). As the first part of the article will demonstrate, the opposition of the so-called ‘international community’ (generally figured to represent ‘the West’) to apartheid was late, partial and contingent (if not reactionary). More importantly, the claim that international law as a whole was opposed to apartheid is simply wrong. At best, the latter relies on the conflation of ‘international law’ with ‘international human rights law’, and even then it requires significant qualification and differentiation. After deconstructing this ‘international law myth’, the second part of the article will sketch out the ‘contributionist’ and ‘critical’ streams of African international legal scholarship that have emerged since the 1960s - focusing on the work of TO Elias and U. Oji Umzurike as archetypes thereof. In doing so, it will read the work of Elias and Umzurike through their literary counterparts - specifically Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong’o - in order to highlight the importance of bringing context (political and intellectual) to the reading of this scholarship, while acknowledging the role (and limitations) of international law as a discipline and as a vocabulary of emancipation.

Keywords: Third World Approaches to International Law, South Africa, Decolonisation, African History, African Literature.

Introduction

In January 1962 Kwame Nkrumah, in a speech at the opening of Ghana's first Law School, set out the types of lawyers that the institution (and those in other 'developing states') should produce, noting: 'The lawyers needed in a developing state are, in the first place, those trained to assist the ordinary man and woman in his everyday legal problems'; able to offer 'inexpensive but good advice [to] the ordinary man and woman so that they are not put at a disadvantage in dealing with a wealthy trading or commercial firm' (Nkrumah 1962: 107). This was necessary – Nkrumah continued – as 'the lawyer of colonial days who lived in the big towns ... spent most of his time in court or chambers dealing with a very restricted class of client', and therefore 'was very liable to become an exponent of the views of the colonial economic interests' (ibid). We might say that, in 1962, Nkrumah was calling for the Law School to produce lawyers that were 'decolonised' in the contemporary, colloquial use of the term. This much is hardly surprising, although it is worth noting that Nkrumah's vision of an ideal, decolonised lawyer is a far cry from that envisioned by the current South African LLB curriculum, which continues to prioritise 'the mass production of efficient and effective participants in the market' (Modiri 2014: 18).

What is surprising, is Nkrumah's next demand of 'decolonised' law schools, which he said was 'perhaps most important of all', namely: to produce lawyers 'to deal with treaties and commercial agreements *and with questions of private and public international law*' (Nkrumah 1962: 107). That Nkrumah was concerned about matters 'international' in itself is not remarkable. Ghana's first Prime Minister was an 'internationalist', who embraced 'a more globalised politics that emphasised supranational goals over national interest' (White 2003: 99), and at the time was working towards the establishment of a continent-wide *political* union (a 'United States of Africa'). Rather, it is Nkrumah's reference to *international law* that is intriguing, given the role that the discipline had played in colonialism (see generally Grovogui 1996; Anghie 2005; Pahuja 2011). One is left wondering what role Nkrumah envisaged for international lawyers in the continent's future, and indeed what type of 'international law' he had in mind. Unfortunately, unlike in the case

of their domestic counterparts, Nkrumah did not take up the opportunity to spell out precisely how international lawyers might be ‘decolonised’ (so that, unlike the ‘lawyer[s] of colonial days’, they did not become ‘exponent[s] of the views of the colonial economic [and other] interests’).

One explanation for Nkrumah’s failure to do so is that he was simply unconcerned about the long shadow cast by colonialism over international law and believed that with the formal ‘*de-colonisation*’ of Africa, international law had become truly universal and, as such, there was nothing (or very little) that needed to be changed. At the time there were international legal scholars on the continent who held this benevolent view of international law as having been ‘decolonised’ by the formal demise of colonies, and who understood ‘decolonisation’ as ‘fundamentally a matter of politics (in the most conventional sense), state sovereignty, and the transformation of colonies into independent nation-states’ (Wenzel 2017: 450). On this basis, these scholars who would later become known as the ‘contributionist’ stream of African international lawyers (see Gathii 1998; 2012), embraced the United Nations (UN) and the post-1945 international institutional order, and proceeded to go to considerable lengths to shore up the ‘universality’ of international law historically by revealing its pre-colonial origins (see especially Elias 1972).

However, there is much to suggest that Nkrumah was unlikely to share a benign view of international law in 1962 (or, if he did, it did not last long). In 1960, Nkrumah had already warned the UN General Assembly that, in the ongoing crisis in the Congo, he saw the emergence of ‘neo-colonialism, the process of handing independence over to the African people with one hand only to take it away with the other hand’ (Nkrumah 1960: 5). On *this* version, so-called ‘decolonisation’ only granted African states ‘clientele-sovereignty, or fake independence, ... a sort of independence [granted] by the metropolitan power, with the concealed intention of making the liberated country a client-state and controlling it effectively by means other than political ones’ (Nkrumah 1960: 5). As such, Nkrumah had called on the UN to ‘face up to its responsibilities’ to reign in those ‘who would bury their heads like the proverbial ostrich in their imperialist sands’ amidst continuing ‘colonialism and imperialism, exploitation and degradation’, warning that, ‘[t]he UN will be judged by the success or failure of its handling of [the] Congo situation’¹.

¹ United Nations General Assembly, Fifteenth Session, *Official Records*, 869th Plenary Meeting (23 September 1960).

By 1962 it was clear that the UN had failed that test, as under its watch Nkrumah's protégé, Patrice Lumumba was over-thrown and then assassinated in 1961, which was followed by Belgian and American military intervention in the Congo. This episode gave newly independent African states 'their first and altogether disagreeable taste of foreign intervention and of the cold war', according to Mohan, and also helped Nkrumah to expound the 'manoeuvres and machinations' of neo-colonialism 'before Africa and the world at large' (Mohan 1969: 369-370). Given the considerable (and unwarranted)² faith and resources³ Nkrumah had already placed in the UN's mission in the Congo, it is likely to have also dampened any optimism he harboured for the institution or international law more generally. Nkrumah's ideal 'decolonised' *international* lawyer, then, is more likely to have embraced a critical disposition towards the discipline such as those who have emerged from Africa and the 'Third World' since the 1960s, and have set out the longstanding and intimate relationship between international law and colonialism, and its implication in the present, often using Nkrumah's very notion of 'neo-colonialism' (see Umozurike 1979: 128; Anghie 2005: 118). These scholars – loosely grouped under the banner of 'Third World Approaches to International Law' or TWAIL – have insisted that, '[t]he construction and universalisation of international law were essential to the imperial expansion that subordinated non-European peoples and societies to European conquest and domination', and that international law today remains 'a predatory system that legitimises, reproduces and sustains the plunder and subordination of the Third World by the West' (Matua 2000: 31).

Remarkably, despite the calls to *decolonise* 'the University' and its curricula, including those of its Law Schools (see Dladla 2012; Modiri 2016a), international law continues to be taught in South Africa with little or no reference to *either one* of these 'streams' of African international legal scholarship (i.e. 'contributionist' and 'critical'), or 'Third World Approaches to International Law' more generally (see Gevers 2015; Fagbayibo 2019). That

² Mohan describes Nkrumah's decision to, 'look upon the UN as an instrument or ally in the African anti-imperialist struggle' as a 'grievous misjudgement', noting that '[t]here was little warrant indeed for this view, in the light both the history and of the structure and procedures of the UN'. (Mohan 1969: 403-4).

³ Ghana contributed 8 800 of the 19 929 troops that made up the UN Mission in the Congo (Asante 2019: 9). See further (Mohan 1969: 375).

these were absent from law school curricula during apartheid is hardly surprising, but their continued omission since 1994 demands an explanation and calls for introspection on the part of South African's international lawyers. In fact, one might be surprised to learn that, while South Africa's first international law textbook (Booyesen's 1980 *Volkereg: 'n Inleiding*, an account 'invariably' sympathetic to the apartheid government (Dugard 1983: 335)) included a section on 'The African state's view of international law' (Booyesen 1980: 21), none of the international law textbooks published since 1994 do. Rather, post-1994 international law textbooks generally adopt a 'universal' (read Euro-centric) approach to their subject, both historically and theoretically (see Gevers 2015).

This article will argue that, rather than being a simple omission, this silence is 'co-produced' (in the sense that it is both the cause and effect of) by a myth actively propagated by most South African international lawyers since 1994: namely that 'from 1948 to 1990, South Africa was in conflict with both the international community and international law' (Dugard 1997: 77). As the first part of the article will demonstrate, the opposition of the so-called 'international community' (generally figured to represent 'the West') to apartheid was late, partial and contingent (if not reactionary); and, more importantly, the claim that international law *as a whole* was opposed to apartheid is simply wrong. *At best*, the latter claim relies on the conflation of 'international law' with 'international *human rights* law', and even then, it requires significant qualification and differentiation. After deconstructing this 'international law myth', the second part of the article will sketch out the 'contributionist' and 'critical' streams of African international legal scholarship that have emerged since the 1960s – focusing on the work of T.O. Elias and U. Oji Umzurike as archetypes thereof. In doing so, it will read the work of Elias and Umzurike through their literary counterparts – specifically Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o – in order to highlight the importance of bringing context (political and intellectual) to the reading of this scholarship, while still recognising the particular nature (and limitations) of international law. It will end by situating international law within the context of the so-called 'decolonial' turn in the South African academy more broadly, and the emerging critiques thereof (see Ramose 2020: 271-307).

Deconstructing the 'International Law Myth' in South Africa

In 1997, John Dugard, South Africa's pre-eminent international lawyer, intro-

duced the new South African Constitution to readers of the *European Journal of International Law* as follows:

For over forty years, from 1948 to 1990, South Africa was in conflict with both the international community and international law. Apartheid, premised on race discrimination and the denial of human rights, was contrary both to the law of the UN Charter and to the norms of human rights, non-discrimination and self-determination generated by the post-World War II order. Although South Africa's foreign policy during this period was highly legalistic, it was the old law of state sovereignty and absolute respect for domestic jurisdiction that guided and shaped it. So it was that South Africa became a pariah state within the international community; a delinquent state in the context of the 'new' international law of human rights (Dugard 1997: 77).

In doing so, Dugard set out what has become the central myth of international lawyers in post-1994 South Africa, neatly captured by the claim by another prominent South African scholar that '[i]nternational law was seen as the progressive 'other' of Apartheid: the adequate, *civilised*, and principled response to all the illegalities and indignities that resulted from systemic racial discrimination' (De Wet 2004: 1532; see further Dugard 1995: 241; Botha & Olivier 2004: 29).

In the years following the adoption of the 'Final' Constitution in 1996, this myth was commonly employed by South African international lawyers and courts to justify the 'special place'⁴ that international law enjoyed under the new Constitutional order; in more recent times it has been used to bemoan the latter's imminent collapse (see van der Vyver 2015: 578). The 'international law opposed apartheid' assertion performs a double erasure. First, by beginning in 1948, the myth occludes the longer relationship between apartheid and international law; namely the origins of apartheid in early 20th century policy of 'racial segregation' – 'the ideological and political framework out of which apartheid was constructed and refined' (Dubow 1989: 1) – which was enabled if not encouraged by the White supremacist international order, without which first settler colonialism, then minority rule,

⁴ *Glenister v President of the Republic of South Africa and Others* 2011 (3) SA 347 (CC), para. 97.

would not have been possible (see Mills 1997). The relationship was exemplified by the prominent role of Jan Smuts in the establishment of both apartheid and this international order (see Dubow 1989; Mazower 2009; Reynolds 2012); in fact, Smuts himself argued in 1929 that the ‘new policy’ of segregation that would later become apartheid was itself ‘enshrined in the Covenant of the League of Nations’ (Smuts 1930: 88). Notably, this understanding of apartheid as the *continuation* of colonialism was adopted by African states and international legal scholars alike, who understood the struggle against apartheid as ‘related to, and animated by, the wider anti-colonial struggle for self-determination’ (Black 2009: 81, see further Klotz 1995: 46). As Reynolds notes (2012: 205), following the admission of Third World states, the UN General Assembly’s resolutions ‘began to employ the language of self-determination and emphasised apartheid as an inherent violation thereof, equating the rights of those subject to a regime of racial domination with those subject to colonialism and foreign occupation’.

By foreshortening the relationship between apartheid and international law, this myth also forecloses a more complex account of the relationship between colonialism and international law more generally, and the ‘discourse *on the other*’, ‘premised on European cultural supremacy and a presumed racial superiority’ (Grovgui 1996: 25; see further Anghie 2005, Gevers 2020, and generally Orford 2006) that animated all three (the very same discourse that de Wet employs unironically when she described international law as ‘the progressive ‘other’ of Apartheid’ (2004: 1532)). Notably, as TWAIL scholars have consistently pointed out, the production and management of ‘others’ by international law (as ‘savages’, ‘barbarians’, ‘non-Europeans’) did not end with formal decolonisation, but continues today in the guise of ‘development’ (see Pahuja 2011), combatting terrorism (see Anghie 2005), humanitarian intervention (Orford 2003) and so on. In its exclusive focus on apartheid *post*-1948, the ‘international law myth’ draws on and reinforces another misconception that operates at the domestic level. As Ramose points out, the ‘international’ campaign against apartheid, especially in the West, had the ‘infelicitous effect of misleading the gullible into the belief that apartheid in South Africa *was the fundamental problem*’, and that once it was abolished ‘all shall be fine’ (Ramose 2007: 320). This, he argues, had the effect of reducing ‘the question of freedom’ in South Africa *domestically* ‘to the problem of the constitutional recognition of the ‘civil rights’ of the conquered peoples of South Africa’, through an ‘an all-inclusive constitution’ (Ramose 2007: 320).

The result was a 'formal vacuous justice' that not only 'did not restore full, integral, and comprehensive and unencumbered sovereignty to the indigenous peoples conquered in the unjust wars of colonisation', but left intact the 'morality', and political legitimacy of the 'right of conquest' of the colonisers and their 'successors in title' (Ramose 2007: 319f).

The 'international law myth' not only draws on this 'spectacularisation' of apartheid (and concomitant erasure of colonialism) that Ramose identifies; as discussed below, it also further reinforces the ongoing reduction of the 'question of freedom' domestically by misrepresenting the broad-based and ideologically multifaceted *international* struggle against apartheid to one for 'civil and political rights' (and downplaying its more radical social and economic demands). All the while the intimate role of international law in the 'unjust wars of colonisation' falls further from view. The second erasure that this 'international law myth' performs is more complex, but equally significant: the claim that *from 1948 onwards* South Africa 'was in conflict with both the international community and international law' *at best* oversimplifies the opposition of the 'international community' to apartheid, and more importantly understates the continued role of international law and institutions in its maintenance. To the extent that the 'international community' is simply shorthand for 'the West' (as it often is) the claim requires considerable qualification to be plausible, as the West's opposition to apartheid was late, partial, and contingent (if not reactionary). As Black notes:

Leading Western governments were latter-day converts to the anti-apartheid cause and were motivated as much by the desire to protect their economic and strategic interests as they were by a concern for the basic human rights of the South African majority. Moreover, their intervention, through sanctions, helped to structure a moderate, liberal transition which aided in securing civil and political rights for all South Africans, but effectively reduced the emphasis on addressing their social and economic rights through a more radical political and economic transformation (Black 2009: 106).

More importantly, the claim that international law as a law was opposed to apartheid is simply wrong. For one, what Dugard labelled the '*old law of state sovereignty*' continued to be international law's central operating principle throughout, and even at its peak 'pariah status' South Africa enjoyed

its sovereignty in the fullest sense, in a way that formerly colonised states did not, and arguably still do not (as Anghie has shown, these states enjoy a distinctive ‘Third World sovereignty ... manufactured by the colonial world to serve its own interests’ (Anghie 2005: 215). Moreover, as of 1945 and for some time thereafter, apartheid was not ‘contrary to the law of the UN Charter’ (nor was colonialism for that matter (Reynolds 2012: 200)), and when it did become recognised as such, it was at the prompting of Third World states (see below). In fact, much of the efforts at the UN level against apartheid were undertaken, if anything, in spite of the provisions of the UN Charter, which preserved the anti-democratic political prerogatives of the Great Powers (and still do). As Klotz notes (1995: 53),

Third World pressure succeeded in organisational settings where majority voting prevailed [such as the General Assembly], but not in the Security Council, where Western permanent members vetoed comprehensive mandatory sanctions.

Even in the International Court of Justice, South Africa was able to avoid effective sanction despite the considerable efforts of African states, most controversially in the 1966 *South West Africa* case when the Court reversed its earlier decision and dismissed African states’ claim on procedural grounds (a reversal which, we now know, was made possible by the extra-curial duplicity of the Australian Judge President Percy Spender (see Kattan 2015: 344). Finally, much of the success that was achieved by the UN’s Special Committee on Apartheid involved the circumvention of the ‘international legal order’ by appealing directly to domestic civil society groups and constituencies in order to pressure their governments *from below*, as it were (see Stultz 1991: 13; Black 2009: 95; Klotz 1995: Chapter 6). All the while in the international economic sphere, whose governance Western powers had separated from the UN’s *political* structure in 1945 and placed under the even less democratic ‘Bretton Woods Institutions’ (see Pahuja 2011: 18–22), South Africa’s allies ensured its continued ‘access to international loans through the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund’, institutions which were both institutionally dominated by Western governments, and ‘insisted on established financial standards of membership’ which meant that ‘countries could be excluded only if they had not fulfilled their financial obligations’ (Klotz 1995: 49). In fact, in the 1970s, while the states and international

lawyers of the Third World were trying (and failing) to restructure the global international economic order – in order to ‘re-fashion, or ‘revolutionise’, the [international] laws which lead to the reproduction of the relations of domination and exploitation’ (Bedjaoui 1979: 255) – apartheid South Africa was enjoying its ‘golden years’, with the economy growing faster ‘than almost any other capitalist country, [and] white living standards [going] ... through a veritable revolution’ (O’Meara 1996: 116). This was in the context of continued ‘capital infusions’ from the West, in spite of the ‘political upheaval in the 1960s and 1970s’ (Klotz 1995: 8). The most generous reading of this ‘international law myth’ would be that it idealistically conflates ‘international law’ with ‘international *human rights* law’, crediting the former with the efforts of the latter, insofar as opposing apartheid is concerned. However, even this generous reading demands significant qualification and differentiation. For one, the opposition of international *human rights* law to apartheid did not begin in 1945, after all the references to human rights in the UN Charter’s Preamble were at the hand of none other than Jan Smuts (Dubow 2008: 54 - 56).

While few histories of international human rights mention Smuts’ role in introducing them into the UN Charter in 1945, just about all of them are likely to include Hersch Lauterpacht’s *An International Bill of the Rights of Man*, published in the same year – the ‘ambitious and revolutionary text’ which served as the ‘inspiration’ for the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and a model for future human rights instruments (Sands 2013: vii). However, in 1945 (and subsequent editions) of the *International Bill of Rights*, Lauterpacht deliberately made the right to self-government subject to ‘the law of the State’ with the denial of this right to Black South Africans in mind, so as not to make their treatment ‘a matter of direct and immediate international concern’ (Lauterpacht (1945) 2013: 137–138). According to Lauterpacht, ‘[t]he position in South Africa [was] *sui generis* (unique), and it would be fatal to adapt fully the fundamental purpose of the Bill of Rights to exceptional situations of this nature’ (ibid. 140). So, the opposition of international human rights law to apartheid does not begin in 1945, or 1948, but quite a bit later; in fact, it was only in 1971 that the International Court of Justice declared (in an Advisory Opinion in respect of South West Africa) that apartheid ‘constitute[d] a denial of fundamental human rights’ and was ‘a flagrant violation of the purposes and principles of the Charter’ (para. 131). Moreover, while much of the credit for the eventual ‘development’ of the prohibition of apartheid into an international human rights norm belongs to the global ‘anti-apartheid

movement', this too requires further specification. Firstly, the opposition to apartheid was driven by Third World states and non-state actors (see Klotz 1995: 9; Stultz 1991: 5–7). From the moment of their admission into the UN, African states consistently opposed apartheid (see Table of 'Sanctions against South Africa, 1960–1989' in Klotz 1995: 5). Over time they were joined in their efforts by other states and non-state actors – including 'traditional' human rights advocates based in the West' – to form the broad-based, transnational 'movement', but it remained largely spearheaded by 'Third World' states and non-state actors' (Black 2009: 80f). In fact, prior to the admission of African states to the UN in the 1960s, opposition to apartheid in the Western-dominated General Assembly was on the decline (Stultz 1991: 3f).

In 1958 South Africa, who had downgraded its presence in the General Assembly two years prior, 'restored its full participation in the UN due to a softening of the approach taken by the Assembly' (Reynolds 2012: 205). However, by 1964, when African states were trying to convince the International Court of Justice that there was 'significant evidence of the general acceptance of a legal norm of non-discrimination or separation on the basis of race [i.e. apartheid]', they could cite 33 General Assembly Resolutions in support thereof since 1945, over half of them had been passed since 1960⁵. Notably, African states opposed apartheid at considerable political, economic and human cost⁶, but their contribution is often side-lined in contemporary narratives (Klotz 1995: 10), including by proponents of the 'international law myth' who credit an undifferentiated 'anti-apartheid movement' (or the 'international community'). Secondly, and more importantly, while the opposition to apartheid (particularly in the General Assembly) was often expressed in the language of human rights, it cannot be reduced to that (on the tendency of the international human rights movement to side-line other 'emancipatory vocabularies', see Kennedy 2006: 133). According to Black (2009: 79),

⁵ ICJ, *South West Africa Cases* (Ethiopia v South Africa/ Liberia v South Africa), 'Reply of the Government of Ethiopia and Liberia', (20 June 1964), pp. 502–503.

⁶ According to Klotz (1995: 82f), 'SADCC's first comprehensive estimates of the damage from South African destabilization for the period 1980–1984 totalled \$10 billion, ... others estimated the annual price of destabilization at \$4 billion per year'.

to understand the ultimate success of anti-apartheid mobilisation, one needs to understand its roots in the norms of anti-racism and anti-colonial self-determination, as well as the support it derived from states and groups with more radical – indeed revolutionary – goals.

In fact, Black argues that ‘most groups in the anti-apartheid movement had an expansive socioeconomic conception of the post-apartheid transformation’ (Black 2009: 103), and were concerned ‘less with human rights writ large than with the narrower principle of anti-racism or the ideological priority of socialism’ (Black 2009: 106). However, at the time of the transition, ‘motivated as much by the desire to protect their economic and strategic interests as they were by a concern for ... basic human rights’, Western governments intervened to ‘structure a moderate, liberal transition which aided in securing civil and political rights for all South Africans, but effectively reduced the emphasis on addressing their social and economic rights through a more radical political and economic transformation’ (Black 2009: 106). By conflating the ‘anti-apartheid movement’ with international human rights law, the ‘international law myth’ not only erases the movement’s more radical elements, it glosses over how Western governments pushed a moderate, liberal (narrowly construed) ‘human rights’ agenda that came to structure the ‘transformation’ of South Africa. Ultimately, the reduction of ‘the question of freedom’ in South Africa’s ‘transitions’ was as much a matter of design as it was ‘infelicitous’ (Ramose 2007: 320), and proponents of the ‘international law myth’ – gullible or otherwise – play an important role in its continuation. Much of this important detail is lost when ‘the role of international law in the struggle for liberation in South Africa’ is reduced to the post-1948 story of ‘the international community, principally acting through *the United Nations*, to persuade or compel South Africa to abandon its racial policies’ (Dugard 1991: 85 own emphasis). In the final analysis, the claim that international law opposed apartheid, or even that international *human rights* law opposed apartheid, obscures more than it reveals.

African International Legal Scholarship: An Overview

In the same year that Nkrumah opened Ghana’s first Law School, the present and future African *literati* – including Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Es’kia Mphahlele and Ngugi wa Thiong’o – met at Makerere College in Kampala for

the ‘first get-together of African authors writing in English anywhere in the world’⁷. Aside from its historic significance, the gathering would be remembered for the debate that emerged amongst participants regarding whether ‘African literature’ could and should be written in colonial languages, a debate that would be revisited time and again over the following decades.

The conclusion reached at Makarere, despite continued resistance from some, was that it was both possible and desirable to continue writing in English, albeit with irreverence (see Mphahlele 1962). The position was summed up in a 1964 essay by Chinua Achebe, the ‘Father of African literature’, in which he called on his fellow writers to accept the universal status of English brought about by colonialism (Achebe 1975). Six months prior, African international lawyers had assembled in Lagos for their own ‘Makarere’ meeting, of sorts – arranged by the American Bar Association as part of a global project on ‘World Peace Through Law’ – to ‘consider ways in which lawyers could work together globally to strengthen international law and legal institutions’ (Rhyne 1962: 1001). One prominent attendee was Taslim O. Elias – Africa’s most successful international lawyer to date and the first President of the International Court of Justice from the continent – who gave a keynote speech in which ‘support for the international rule of law was strongly advocated’ (Reid & Sams 1962: 650). In the end, the international lawyers at Lagos unanimously endorsed the universality of international law – as ‘[embodying] fundamental concepts of justice and morality common to civilised societies’ – and committed themselves to ‘working toward world-wide acceptance and application of the rule of law in all international relations’ (Rhyne 1962: 1004f). This approach taken to international law in Lagos in 1962 has since come to be known as the ‘contributionist’ stream of African international legal scholarship (see generally Gathii 1998; 2012). According to Gathii (1998: 189), this scholarship ‘is largely complimentary of the liberatory claims of principles such as self-determination as uncompromising tenets of world peace and indicators of the rejection of the colonial experience’, and ‘uncritically endorses the United Nations agenda in areas such as human rights and the right to development as having potential and being of continuing

⁷ The Conference was organised by the ‘Mbari Writers’ and Artists’ Club of Ibadan’, and was attended by 45 participants (writers, editors, literary critics and publishers). *Conference of African Writers of English Expression*, Makarere University College, 11-17 June 1962 (on file with author).

benefit to the formerly colonised countries'. Central to this scholarship is a 'contributionist' historiography, which '[re-writes] international legal history to assail Eurocentricity and accommodate African participation', while backgrounding 'the imperial and mercantilist character of international law' (Gathii 2012: 412).

The writings of T.O. Elias – a considerable body of work spanning four decades – are emblematic of this stream of African international law scholarship: colonialism, apartheid and the Third World attempts to reform or revolutionise international law receive little attention, and when considered, are placed within a progress narrative of 'universal' international law generally, and the rise of the UN in particular (see, for example, Elias 1972: v). In his seminal *Africa and the Development of International Law* (1972), Elias declares the UN 'the best forum for the airing of grievances about decolonisation, apartheid, racial discrimination and colonialism'; then, having highlighted its founding principles and commitment to sovereign equality amongst states, says that 'there is little else that the new African states, jealous of their newly won independence, could wish or hope for' (Elias 1972: 24). Similarly, the South West Africa cases are discussed as part of the development of the International Court of Justice, and not the project of decolonisation (see Elias 1983: 350); while the project to create a New International Economic Order (NIEO) – the flagship project of Third World international lawyers during the 1970s – was notably absent from Elias' scholarship until the 1980s. These 'contributionist' international lawyers would most likely have been undeterred by Nkrumah's 'failure' in 1962 to explicitly call for the 'decolonisation' of international law or specify what that might entail (as he had done for the teaching of domestic law). For these international lawyers, 'decolonisation' was equated with formal 'independence and self-government' (Elias 1972: 32). Elias, for example, refers to 'the process of decolonisation [which] ... goes on apace until all [dependent and non-self-governing territories] become free and equal independent States' (Elias 1972: 47).

Contrary to how it is used today, for these international lawyers 'decolonisation' meant, quite literally, *de*-colonisation a 'stubborn etymological literalness' in which 'colonies are what get decolonised' and 'decolonisation is fundamentally a matter of politics (in the most conventional sense), state sovereignty, and the transformation of colonies into independent nation-states' (Wenzel 2017: 450). As such, Elias was not only apparently unconcerned by international law's role in the broader impacts of colonialism,

and its 'postcolonial' political, economic and cultural afterlives; he was even derisive of the then Organisation of African Unity's (OAU) attempts to combat economic 'neocolonialism' (Elias 1972: 128). In this 'thin' account of 'decolonisation', colonial *forms* – be they the novel written in English or international law – were neutral, *if not natural*; they were to be embraced, either pragmatically or even emphatically in order to be 'turned back' against the centre. It was this understanding of 'decolonisation' that underpinned the confidence with which both African writers and international lawyers embraced their respective colonial forms in the 1960s, confident that they could make the English language and international law 'their own' without residual colonial influences.

In a 1964 essay, Achebe set out his reasoning as to why African writers should accept the 'inevitability' of the use of English as a 'world language', albeit it one 'which history has forced down [Africa's] throat' (Achebe 1975: 59). His argument was largely pragmatic, noting (1975: 57f) that 'there is no other choice', given both 'the reality of present-day Africa' as a result of colonialism and 'the continent's size and diversity'. Notably, Achebe specifically dismissed the suggestion that *as a form*, literature written in English (or other colonial languages) might be inextricable from the project of colonialism, arguing that while 'it came as part of a package deal which included many other items of doubtful value and the positive atrocity of racial arrogance and prejudice which may yet set the world on fire', there was no need 'in rejecting the evil [to] throw out the good with it' (Achebe 1975: 58). On this basis, Achebe was confident about both African writers' ability to use English strategically, and English's capacity to be 'Africanised' to 'carry the weight of ... African experience' in the process (Achebe 1975: 59 - 62). African writers, he argued (1975: 61), should 'aim to use English which is at once universal and able to carry out [their] peculiar experience'.

Reading the scholarship of Elias through Achebe's 1964 essay reveals a number of similar assumptions regarding their respective colonial forms. First, like Achebe's *communicative* understanding of colonial languages, Elias' understanding of international law was pragmatic and instrumental; both argued that their 'inherited' colonial forms were potentially, if not already, universal. Second, and related to this, neither Achebe or Elias considered whether these colonial forms might contain structural biases that required 'decolonising' themselves, both were confident that these forms could be re-purposed, and that their relationship to colonialism was in the past.

The general agreeability amongst African writers at Makerere in 1962 would soon fade, and over the decades that followed they returned critically to the questions that animated their inaugural gathering. This shift amongst some African writers was dramatically illustrated by the 'about-turn' by Kenyan novelist and playwright Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the heir-apparent to Achebe. As part of the younger generation of writers present at Makerere in 1962, Ngugi was amongst those who accepted the necessity of writing in English (see Ngugi 1986: 20). However, in 1979, Ngugi gave a speech at the Kenya Press Club in which he called for the abandonment of colonial languages by African writers, labelling their continued use 'neocolonialism' (Ngugi 1981a: 65). In that same year, U. Oji Umzurike published *International Law and Colonialism in Africa* (1979), which became a seminal text of the 'critical' stream of African international legal scholarship; that focuses on the 'role of economic, political, social and cultural superiority/inferiority in the historical relationship of colonised and colonising countries in the past and present', and 'expresses [its] desire for self-determination and autonomy from all forms of external or neo-colonial controls' (Gathii 1998: 187). Crucially, this stream of scholarship is underpinned by a critical historiography that focuses on 'the imperial and mercantilist character of international law' (Gathii 2012: 412), and 'examines Africa's subordination in its international relations as a legacy that is traceable to international law' (Gathii 2012: 407).

The scholarship of Umzurike during the 1970s is emblematic of this 'critical' stream. In 1970 he published an article on '*International Law and Colonialism in Africa: A Critique*' that told a very different story of international law, past and present to that of Elias (see Umzurike 1970a). Umzurike was centrally concerned with the anti-colonial struggles of the time – including apartheid – adopting a critical disposition towards the present international order and arguing that colonialism, racism and political economy (or 'neo-colonialism') continued to shape its contours. In his 1972 book, *Self-Determination in International Law*, he argued (contra Elias) that the South West Africa cases 'demonstrate the close relations between international law and international politics' and the 'crudity and inequality that still persists in aspects of the international relations of black and white states' (Umzurike 1972: 220). Moreover, he took an early interest in the (New International Economic Order) project, arguing (1970b: 90f) for the right of newly independent states to nationalise foreign owned property under the principle of economic self-determination (without compensation in certain circumstances),

and insisting that '[p]olitical self-determination is ... incomplete without economic self-determination' (Umozurike 1970b: 99). Later, in *International and Colonialism in Africa* he noted (1979: 128) that '[t]he call for a New International Economic Order is directed towards negating neo-colonialism.'

This critical stream tells a markedly different story of the history of international law, that of the 'contributionists', one that focuses at length on its relationship to colonialism in particular. For example, Umozurike's extended history of the discipline – set out in detail in *International Law and Colonialism in Africa* (1979) – begins with the slave trade and colonialism as '[t]wo of the foremost experiences Africans had from contact with the Europeans' (Umozurike 1979: 1), and proceeds to discuss international law's role in both. He locates international law's origins in 16th century Europe 'when the African slave trade was growing roots' (Umozurike 1979: 7), noting that international law not only facilitated it but encouraged it. He proceeds to demonstrate (1979: 22–24) how African sovereignty was ignored or denied during colonialism (through settlement, annexation, Treaties of Cession, and so on), arguing that, not only was international law a 'handy instrument in the hands of the colonialists' up until 1918 (Umozurike 1979: 34), but that colonialism was *intensified and consolidated* under the League of Nations through the Mandates system and the unchallenged annexation of Abyssinia by Italy (Umozurike 1979: 51).

Throughout the remainder of the text, Umozurike refers back to the role of international law in slavery and colonialism⁸, its underlying racism and imperialism, and its persistence in the present, including through apartheid. For example, in his opening discussion of 'International Law and the African Slave Trade', Umozurike notes succinctly:

⁸ Umozurike's history also differs from Elias in that it includes efforts of and by Africans, and those of African descent as well, to resist colonialism. He discusses the early 20th century history, includes a section on 'Pan-Africanism and Colonialism', and at various points he refers to these efforts (such as W.E.B. Du Bois' efforts at Versailles and the 1945 Pan-African Congress in Manchester). While acknowledging that these efforts lay outside of international law, Umozurike nevertheless suggests that 'the resolutions of the unofficial conferences had some influence, however small' (Umozurike 1979: 56).

Europe gained immensely from the trade in African slaves at the expense of Africa. The prosperity of Western Europe and [the] U.S.A is partly based on the capital accumulated from the slave trade. The business encouraged in the Western World a feeling of racial and cultural superiority over the blacks. The South African apartheid policy originates in the Dutch contempt for his African slave (Umozurike 1979: 4).

In its critical approach to international law as a colonial form, Umozurike's scholarship and that of the critical stream more generally resembles the struggle that Ngugi set out in his relationship to writing novels in English. Ngugi elaborated on this struggle in *Decolonising the Mind* (1986), where he 'returned' to Makerere to ask: 'What was the route from the Berlin of 1884 via the Makerere of 1962 to what is still the prevailing and dominant logic a hundred years later?' (Ngugi 1986: 9). The answer, for Ngugi, lay partly in language's 'dual character' – as '*both* a means of communication and a carrier of culture' (Ngugi 1986: 13) – and the failure at Makerere to consider the ongoing effects of the imposition of colonial languages as a form of cultural imperialism, which had led to their acceptance of the 'fatalistic logic of the unassailable position of English in [African] literature'; a logic, he added, 'embodied deep in imperialism' (Ngugi 1986: 20). For these and other reasons, Ngugi argued, the continued use of colonial languages was simply neocolonialism: there was essentially no 'difference between a politician who says Africa cannot do without imperialism and the writer who says Africa cannot do without European languages' (Ngugi 1986: 26). The colonial form could not, as Achebe would have it, be redeemed through 'Africanisation', nor could its effects be downplayed on pragmatic grounds.

The title of Ngugi's *Decolonising the Mind* usefully records the shift from a 'literal' construction of decolonisation *as an event*, towards a thicker account in which there are 'objects that are to be *decolonised*' (Wenzel 2017: 458), or abandoned: including African literature and, perhaps, international law. This understanding of decolonisation as *action* (rather than event), something that gets done *to* colonial forms (colonial languages, statutes, curricula, and so on) is what prevails today. The beginnings of this shift can be seen in Umozurike's *International Law and Colonialism in Africa*. To start, Umozurike explicitly abandons Elias' 'literal' conception of *de-colonisation*, refusing to conflate decolonisation with formal independence (Umozurike

1979: 126). Umozurike's aim to 'show ... the proper role of the international community in decolonisation' (Umozurike 1979: x), proceeded from a capacious definition of colonialism (centred on economic, cultural and political exploitation), and the understanding that 'neo-colonialism' was ongoing (despite formal independence) and that full sovereignty was not yet 'a reality' for African states (Umozurike 1979: 126).

While Umozurike did not go as far as Ngugi in calling for abandoning international law as a colonial form altogether, as I have argued in detail elsewhere (Gevers 2019), Umozurike's struggle with the inevitable limitations of using 'techniques and a language borrowed from the occupier' (Fanon 1961: 159) plays out in the ambivalences, contradictions, unevenness and lapses in genre throughout *International Law and Colonialism in Africa*, which are symptomatic of Umozurike's battle with the form of international law itself. To employ Wenzel's characterisation of Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, Umozurike's is a text where 'the poetry of utopian possibility ... jostles with the prose of postcolonial disillusion' (Wenzel 2017: 458). In this sense, the most appropriate analogous Ngugi text is his 1977 novel *Petals of Blood* – his final novel written in English – in which many critics suggested Ngugi's battle with his 'borrowed' *colonial* form and its limitations was similarly evident in the text itself. As such, Chileshe's characterisation of *Petals of Blood* as a text that betrays an author's 'struggle against imperialist hegemony ... waged from *within* imperialist hegemonic structures', where 'even the weapons used [are] largely inherited from the culture at which the struggle is directed' (Chileshe 1980: 134), might be applied to Umozurike's *International Law and Colonialism in Africa*. Notably, as Pahuja and Eslava point out, this ambivalent approach to international law – a 'duality of engagement with international law – of resistance and reform' – is itself characteristic of TWAIL approaches to international law more generally (Pahuja & Eslava 2012: 199).

The engagement with both of these 'streams' of African international legal scholarship, long overdue, is central to any attempt to 'decolonise' the teaching (and practice) of international law in South Africa. As this article has tried to demonstrate, albeit in outline, reading this scholarship through and alongside African literature is one way to situate it within a broader understanding of African intellectual history. In particular, the analogy to literature (and its limitations) is productive in two respects. First, it reveals the importance of context – both political and intellectual. The political context of the early 1960s, when the conversations at Makerere and Lagos took place,

was very different from that of a decade later: a time of 'Independence, opposition politics, coups d'état, military government, one-party government; acres of poverty sprinkled with a few castles of wealth' (Mphahlele 1972: 54). It was a change in political context that brought about not only a 'new mood in African Literature' (Mphahlele 1972: 54), but in African international legal scholarship as well, as the 'contributionist' scholarship of Elias (written predominantly in the 1960s) came under fire from the 'critical' scholarship of Umozurike in the 1970s.

Equally significant was the different *intellectual* contexts within which Elias and Umozurike wrote: the different 'epistemological conditions' that made their scholarship 'both thinkable and feasible' (Mudimbe 1988: 195). For example, Walter Rodney wrote *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* while he and Umozurike were both at the University of Dar-es-Salaam (see Rodney 1982: vii), and Rodney's influence on Umozurike's scholarship is hard to miss (and is acknowledged in the Preface to *International Law and Colonialism in Africa* (Umozurike 1979: x))⁹. So too is Fanon's, to whom Umozurike was much more likely to have been exposed during his time in Dar-es-Salaam than in his native Nigeria, particularly at the Law School where Fanon's work was compulsory reading (see Mazrui 2017; Batchelor 2017).

Beyond individual texts, changes in the broader intellectual contexts between the 1960s and 1970s inflected the work of writers and international law as well, as evidenced by the role of 'history' in their work. Elias' 'contributionist' history was written during the 'first stage of decolonising African history', when African historians 'were mainly concerned to beat back the assertion that Africa had no history...[by pointing] to kingdoms and large empires that did indeed have a political history that read like early aspects of European history' (Curtin 1981: 64; see further Ogot 1978: 29–33). Similarly, for Achebe the task of the African novelist, as he understood it *at the time*, was to write 'enabling stories' that centred on the pre-colonial past, even if, as in *Things Fall Apart*, such 'gentle re-creations of the past' (Achebe 2012: 115) glossed over 'the darker, more violent, and tragic aspects of the African experience' (Ogot 1978: 30).

⁹ Rodney's influence can also be seen in Umozurike's reading; Rodney's 'Brief Guides to Reading' in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972) include the works of W.E.B. Du Bois, George Padmore, and Eric Williams, which feature prominently in Umozurike's *International Law and Colonialism in Africa*.

By the time Umozurike wrote his extended, critical history of international law in the 1970s, African historiography had changed considerably. According to Ogot (1978: 30), the ‘honeymoon period’ that ‘dwelt rather nostalgically upon what was appealing or virtuous in the African past’ was over, and African historians turned towards Marxist-inspired ‘economic history’ in order to address ‘the present economic and political malaise in Africa’ (notably, Ogot cites Walter Rodney’s work as emblematic of this turn). Similarly, African writers were called upon to turn their attention to the present, and the narration of ‘usable histories’ that confronted its problems.

In 1972 Ngugi, drawing on Fanon, warned his fellow writers against ‘becoming too fascinated by the yesterday of his people and forgetting the present’ (Ngugi 1972: 44), a critique echoed by his protagonist in *Petals of Blood*, who criticises his professors for taking him ‘to pre-colonial times ...[to] wander purposelessly from Egypt, or Ethiopia, or Sudan’ (Ngugi 1977: 199) and instead calls for the study of the past ‘critically, without illusions, [to] see what lessons we can draw from it in today’s battlefield of the future and the present’ (Ngugi 1977: 323). Like Ngugi’s *Petals of Blood*, Umozurike’s history of international law is directed at the ‘battlefield of the future and the present’, with consistent parallels being drawn between the racial and imperial aspects of ‘colonial international law’ and apartheid and neo-colonialism.

Reading African international legal scholarship through literature, then, renders a more complete account thereof, and in the case of *early* ‘contributionist’ scholarship, a more sympathetic one in particular (see further Gevers 2019). As Fanon counsels:

[W]e must shed the habit of decrying the efforts of our forefathers or feigning incomprehension at their silence or passiveness. They fought as best they could with the weapons they possessed at the time, and if their struggle did not reverberate throughout the international arena, the reason should be attributed not so much to a lack of heroism but to a fundamentally different international situation (Fanon 1961: 145-146).

The comparison with African literature cuts both ways, however, revealing marked and troubling *differences* between the overall trajectory of these African international lawyers and writers over time. When Achebe *actually* returned to Makerere in 1968 it was as an envoy for the ‘Republic of

Biafra' that was attempting to secede from Nigeria, and the continent's first large-scale 'postcolonial' conflict formed the substance of his address, titled 'The African Writer and the Biafran cause' (see Achebe 1975: 78 - 84). It began with a history of Africa that was quite different to the 'gentle re-creations of the past' that typified his earlier works¹⁰. Rather, like Umozurike's *International Law and Colonialism in Africa*, Achebe's history now centred on the slave trade and colonialism, to which he added a third: decolonisation. According to Achebe, the Biafran war had demonstrated that 'decolonisation' was a farce: 'independence ... was totally without content' and '[t]he old white master was still in charge' (Achebe 1975: 82). This echoed Fanon's demands that the 'colonised intellectuals' must 'take part in the action and commit himself body and soul to the national struggle' (Fanon 1961: 167). Achebe argued that the role of African writers was to be part of 'the revolutionary struggle of their people for justice and *true* independence' (Achebe 1975:84). The following year he invoked Fanon's critique explicitly, noting that 'while the African intellectual was busy displaying the past culture of Africa, the troubled peoples of Africa were already creating new revolutionary cultures which took into account their present conditions'; and, as a result, African writers had been 'left behind' (Lindfors 1972: 5). The new task of the African writer was therefore 'to hurry and catch up with [the people] – to borrow the beautiful expression of Fanon – in that zone of occult instability where the people dwell' (Lindfors 1972: 6).

By the 1970s both Achebe and Ngugi had taken up Fanon's challenge to the 'colonised writer', to varying degrees: Achebe took up the Biafran struggle for self-determination (see generally Achebe 2012), while Ngugi's 'combat literature' aimed at the 'post-colonial' Kenyan state resulted in his detention and exile (see Ngugi 1981b). In fact, despite their generational differences, Achebe and Ngugi ended up in similar places; Achebe came to question the literal understanding of 'decolonisation as independence' and, although he did not give up on the *colonial form* altogether, his experiences in Biafra shook his faith in it (while he had been writing prolifically before the war, after it he did not write another novel for almost two decades).

¹⁰ After the success of *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *No Longer at Ease* (1960) and *Arrow of God* (1964), the postcolonial anxiety had already begun to set in for Achebe in *A Man of the People* (1966).

The interests of international lawyers fared quite differently during the same period. For one, the Biafran War did not have a corresponding effect on Elias' scholarship. In March 1970 he delivered a speech to the 'Nigerian Society of International Law' where he exonerated Nigeria of all allegations of violating international law (unsurprisingly, given his position as Nigeria's Attorney-General during the war). However, it was the issues Elias chose to focus on that dramatically demonstrated the distance between him and the emerging postcolonial critiques of Achebe: such as the effect of the conflict on the proper payment of oil royalties and the legality of 'mineral and other' concessions made by the 'so-called Republic of Biafra' to foreign companies (Elias 1971: 16f).

Ultimately, and not incidentally, Biafra turned out to also be significant professionally for Elias: his path to becoming a judge of the International Court of Justice was cleared when his compatriot Louis Mbanefo – who had already sat as a judge on that court before the war – sided with the fledgling Biafran Republic, and against Nigeria. In fact, in a symbolic act worthy of the poetic order, at the end of the Biafran war, Mbanefo – Nigeria's first ICJ judge – was part of the delegation that surrendered to (amongst others) Elias, its most successful to date.

That Achebe's writings changed while Elias' scholarship did not, is perhaps not *that* surprising, particularly in light of Elias' professional trajectory and his consistently orthodox approach to international law more generally. What is more difficult to explain away is the conservative shift in Umozurike's scholarship from the 1980s onwards – such that it ended up being indistinguishable from Elias'. In his final book, *Introduction to International Law* (1993), Umozurike recanted his critical approach in *International Law and Colonialism in Africa* altogether (see Umozurike 1993: 7). In particular, the history of international law he told in 1993 made no mention of the slave trade and spent less than a paragraph on colonialism (the two pillars of his previous critical history of international law); rather it recapitulated Elias' 'contributionist' history of 20 years prior (Umozurike 1993: 7–8). In fact, the first text on Umozurike's 'Suggestions for Further Reading' list for his introductory text was Elias' *Africa and the Development of International Law*¹¹.

¹¹ It is followed by Elias' *New Horizons in International Law* (1980). Umozurike's own *International Law and Colonialism in Africa* is number 10

Therefore, while the comparison between these African international legal scholars and their literary counterparts is productive insofar as particular texts are concerned (and the political and intellectual contexts of their production), the longer political and intellectual arc of the two appears to diverge dramatically. Somewhat oversimplified, the international lawyers bend towards moderation if not conservatism, while the writers tend towards critique if not radicalism. More specifically, both Achebe and Ngugi became or remained sceptical of their 'borrowed' colonial form and ultimately rejected the thin understanding of 'decolonisation' as formal, *political* independence. Whereas, both Elias and Umozurike came to accept (or at least advance) the orthodox, Eurocentric account of international law and its relationship to colonialism, and rejected a thicker account of 'decolonisation' where – formal political independence notwithstanding – the Third World remains politically, economically and culturally subordinated by the West, in part through international law.

This suggests that 'decolonising' critiques that were thinkable (or perhaps say-able) in the 1970s were less so by the early 1990s, for international lawyers but not for writers (who continued to do so at a considerable cost). More importantly for present purposes, these 'decolonising' critiques of international law that were *teachable* in the 1970s were less so by the 1990s (certainly if Umozurike was doing the teaching) and may be even *less* so today. This can in part be explained by a disciplinary trend towards conservatism in international law; as Kennedy notes (1999 - 2000: 460), 'frame breakers' are often 'interpolated back into the disciplinary vocabulary' of international law, while Golder has shown how even the most critical international lawyers (like Kennedy) are susceptible to a 'redemptive' tendency in their scholarship (Golder 2014: 77). However, if Fagbayibo is correct in his recent assessment that '[t]he teaching of public international law in Africa remains unresponsive to the imperative of decolonisation', and the critical approaches such as TWAIL 'remain marginal or non-existent' in curricula across the continent (Fagbayibo 2019: 172), then perhaps international lawyers on the continent are particularly resistant to critical approaches to international law.

Fagbayibo offers four explanations why this might be the case:

on the list (of 17 titles). Needless to say, Rodney and Fanon do not make the list.

- (1) ‘the colonial heritage of legal education in Africa’;
- (2) a theoretically ‘conservative posture that considers law in isolation’;
- (3) the ‘triumph of neo-liberalism’ within universities around the world; and
- (4) ‘chronic underfunding for research ... in many African universities [which] has ensured that the priority of advancing robust and critical pedagogical approaches remain at the bottom of the priority list’ (Fagbayibo 2019: 182f).

The bad news is that, while these go some way to explaining the overall conservatism of African international legal scholarship in comparison to that in the ‘Global North’, they are less able to explain the apparent discrepancy amongst South African international lawyers in relation to the approach to teaching international law in the rest of the ‘Third World’. The good news is that, to the extent that the challenges are resource-related (such as ‘chronic underfunding for research’), South African universities enjoy a comparative advantage over many in the rest of the continent. As such, efforts to ‘decolonise’ the international legal academy in South Africa stand to benefit the rest of the continent, potentially. However, as this article has demonstrated, we still have some way to go in this regard.

Conclusion

In 1962, Kwame Nkrumah began his address at the opening of Ghana’s first Law School by noting:

[In] opening these buildings we are reviving part of our African culture and heritage interrupted by the colonial period, and we are not embarking on any new venture. Long before the foundations of the universities of the European continent, law schools developed on African soil (Nkrumah 1962: 103).

These African ‘centres of university life and learning’, Nkrumah added, ‘taught a system of law more advanced at that time than that existing in feudal Europe’, in the idea that law ‘must serve all men equally’ (Nkrumah 1962: 103). The task of the Law School, then, was ‘the general reconstruction of African action

and thought and help to remould the generally distorted African picture in all other fields of life' (Nkrumah 1962: 105).

Since 1962, considerable and at times competing efforts have been undertaken by scholars across the continent towards the 'general reconstruction of African action and thought' (Nkrumah 1962: 105) regarding the international (legal) order, past and present. However, to date, international lawyers in South Africa have made little effort to engage with this scholarship – neither the *pre-colonial* traditions that Nkrumah referred to as he opened his 1962 address, that 'contributionist' international legal scholars have spent considerable energy excavating; nor the abundance of 'critical' scholarship that has emerged since then, which have grappled with international law's 'colonial and postcolonial realities', to borrow Anghie's phrase (Anghie 2006: 739).

This silence structures the field of international law in South Africa today, as what passes for common sense amongst many scholars, practitioners and judges – namely that 'international law opposed apartheid' – does not hold up to even a superficial engagement with this scholarship, or that of TWAIL more generally. The story is, at the very least, a little more complicated than that. In the end, it is this silence that is most perplexing, more so than the hold of the 'international law myth' (which, like many myths forged in the 1990s is wearing thin). After all, one can see the appeal to South African international lawyers of a story of triumph and renewal, in which local 'human rights warriors' make common cause with the 'international community' to overcome an evil, '[un]civilised', 'Other' (De Wet 2004: 1532). It is a story as likely to appeal to the enthusiastic, if a little 'gullible', new entrants into the field post-1994, encouraged by the 'special place' international law enjoys in an equally triumphant 'new' Constitution; as it is to appeal to the older generation of international lawyers who might nevertheless know or suspect that the story might conceal more than it reveals.

What is perplexing is that, in the age of 'decolonisation and Africanisation' (institutionally and financially incentivised of late), and calls to de-centre Europe, South African international lawyers cannot find their way to an established body of work helpfully called '*Third World Approaches to International Law*', with a leading text equally helpfully titled *Decolonising International Law* (Pahuja 2011), let alone to the African international legal scholars past and present that continue to play prominent roles therein.

In point of fact: in 2006 the Editorial Board of the *South African Year-*

book of International Law decided that, ‘the time was ripe to reflect on the international law scholars who have emerged from the continent’, and decided that henceforth ‘[e]ach edition of the *Yearbook* [would] ... feature an exceptional African international lawyer’ (Botha 2006: 1).

The *Yearbook* duly profiled South Africa’s John Dugard in 2006, another South African Navi Pillay *six years later*, then stopped. One wonders what might have happened had the *Yearbook* profiled a third South African, its founding Editor Hercules Booysen, and disclosed the role of White ‘farmers, businessmen, professionals and ordinary people’ from South West Africa (Booyesen 2007: 129), domestic and international corporate interests, the legal profession’s society and the apartheid government’s propaganda machinery in the establishment of the *Yearbook* and the other South African international law journal: the *Comparative and International Law Journal of South Africa* (see Gevers forthcoming).

While the widespread acceptance of the ‘international law myth’ contributes significantly to this ongoing silence, there are other contributing factors as well. These include the prevailing Eurocentricism of South African international law textbooks, and their ‘(poor) engagement with theory’ – in contrast to critical approaches which draw on Critical Legal Studies, post-structuralism, post-colonialism, Feminism and Critical Race Theory (Gevers 2015: 456;460f).

More generally, as Modiri points out (2014: 6;10), ‘[m]any law teachers in South Africa...approach their subjects as though colonialism and apartheid did not take place’ and adopt ‘some or other brand of legal positivism’ (the very same ‘highly legalistic’ approach that Dugard associated with apartheid-era international law), which means international lawyers are less likely to stand out amongst their colleagues for this omission. A less forgiving, but equally important, explanation is that ‘the majority of [South African] academics ... are simply not sufficiently trained or literate in non-Eurocentric paradigms of thought emanating from the Global South’ (Modiri 2016b).

So, while it is clear is that international law in South Africa stands ready to be ‘decolonised’, it is less clear whether we yet have the international lawyers to do this. Should they be forthcoming, efforts towards ‘decolonisation’ must begin with a comprehensive engagement with African international legal scholarship, but they cannot end there; as the second part of this article aimed to show, conditions past and present appear to work against

a sustained critical engagement with international law on the continent. And while the critical scholarship that continues to emerge from the rest of the Third World is an important supplement, as Ramose points out in this issue it is important to place African intellectual contributions at the centre of any such project ('decolonial' or otherwise). This will require international legal scholars to move beyond the comfort of their discipline and engage with African thinkers from a diverse range of fields. As one such thinker noted almost a half-century ago, '[t]he teaching of law is totally incomplete if it is not accompanied by a background of economic, social and political science, and even politics, science and technology' (Nkrumah 1962: 104). This article has tried to demonstrate how African literature might be one avenue for doing so, much work remains to be done.

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White Line Managers and Black Labour: Ticking the Boxes of Decolonisation in a Teaching and Learning Unit of a ‘First Class’ University in South Africa

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Abstract

This paper offers an existentialist account of the writer’s refusal to participate in ‘decolonial pedagogical practices’ as instructed by his line manager – a White woman who considers herself a liberal – within a teaching and learning unit of a ‘first class’ university in South Africa. The paper sets out to unpack all of the ways in which the university in question, post #RhodesMustFall, and #FeesMustFall positioned itself as a site of decolonisation, with its White liberal colonial staff still actively in positions of leadership continuing their reign.

Keywords: Black labour, decolonising teaching modules, teaching-and-learning, racist pedagogical practices, Coloured and Cape Malay men in education

Introduction

This paper offers an existentialist account of the writer’s refusal to participate in ‘decolonial pedagogical practices’ as instructed by his line manager – a White woman who considers herself a liberal – within a teaching and learning unit of a ‘first class’ university in South Africa. The paper sets out to unpack all of the ways in which the university in question, post #RhodesMustFall, and #FeesMustFall positioned itself as a site of decolonisation, with its White liberal colonial staff still actively in positions of leadership continuing their reign.

This paper offers an account of how the university continues to have colonisers steer the ebb and flow of the country's decolonisation agenda, most of whom without questioning their lived experience continue to perpetuate racism, which they claim to be against yet continue to inflict upon Black staff who now share the same pedagogical platform, albeit under their colonial leadership. This paper began as a letter to the upper management of a 'first class' university in South Africa to seek assistance in dealing with racist, colonial management practices that I, a Muslim, Black man with a racialised and ethnic Coloured and Cape Malay¹ identity, had been experiencing in a teaching and learning unit at the said university. The letter described how over a period of a year, I was constructed as a 'less-than' by my White line manager and how my line manager's irrational and inappropriate verbal outbursts in a team meeting confirmed my suspicions, and thus provided the public evidence: that her construction of my presence, the one she concocted, was based on racial stereotypes and her personal racial biases of my identity, mostly drawn from a segment of the community of people from which my identity emerges who worked as gardeners and cleaners in their homes, or mechanics, without the necessary qualification who nonetheless speedily attended to their fancy cars. For the best of most of the half the year I was ignored; then later, simply as a brown body, I was roped in to assist with a teaching-and-learning tool. During the process, my White woman line manager became frustrated because I, as a Muslim man who identifies as Black, historically constructed as a Coloured man in the city of Cape Town, refused to avail my decolonisation expertise to a project that in its nature was misaligned to decolonial epistemologies and ontologies. The latter, an ethical position on my part, came as a complete shock to her.

¹ I use the term Cape Malay, as it situates my heritage at the Cape, which is one of a history of enslavement by the Dutch colonisers who used the term Malay (to also denote the Muslim faith) and Cape Malay to denote the history of enslaved people that were brought from Malaysia and Indonesia to the Cape. The merge of Cape Malay, and Cape Coloured has very particular stereotypes, some of which include a '*rol*,' a style of walking which can be traced to the period when the inside of the sole of an enslaved man's foot was cut, when caught escaping. See Rozena Maart's, *Black Consciousness and the Politics of the Flesh* (2021).

As a young working person, who obtained my undergraduate degree at the University of Pennsylvania, my presence in a centre of this kind within the broader context of this ‘world-class university’ with a history of White women leadership in many teaching centres, meant that her racist assumptions of my Black, Coloured and Muslim identity were the premise for her engagement with me, not my higher education at an Ivy League university in the United States of America (USA). The team I worked within, along with the predominantly White women staff members in my department, only engaged with the notion of decolonisation in a tokenistic manner – as a form of book knowledge that could be rehearsed, rattled off like a cheap and worthless poem written on a stolen piece of paper that could be inserted into the book without once engaging with the content. We are here talking about 342 years of usurpation and settler colonialism, spanning from the emergence of Jan Van Riebeeck on 6th April 1652 to 27th April 1994, when South Africa participated in the first process of one person, one vote. In this process the very colonisers were in the same room, the same building, the same university, taking the lead in my decolonisation, within education, and that of the rest of the 90% of the population of the country, while treating this process as normal, and beneficial to me. When I pointed out how the intricacies of colonialism were not dealt with by the very White women who were simply instructing on the technical aspects of the project but not looking at their own continued colonial behaviour – that this was more of an ‘applied’ project, and not one that showed honest engagement – I was met with a flurry of White tears, a regular practice but these days afforded a sophisticated term since the DiAngelo text *White Fragility* (DiAngelo 2018). First there were tears, then an accusation followed the tears, and I was told that since I did not want to assist with the said project, I was therefore, sabotaging the project. In this paper I set out three specific tasks in addressing decoloniality within this particular university system within South Africa, where my experience took place, as the example:

- a) I analyse my interactions with the White woman line manager to whom I reported, the managerial practices of the department and the racialised outbursts that followed as a means to understand the dynamics of racism and coloniality within the ‘Teaching-and-Learning’ setting, at the backdrop of the decolonial curriculum work that has been taken up in universities across South Africa;

- b) I examine how racism and coloniality continue to dominate spaces in ‘post-apartheid South Africa’ with a particular focus on the location within which I worked; and
- c) I critique White staff members’ reluctance to meaningfully engage with decoloniality and suggest that it is a danger to the progress of the decolonial project as both an epistemological and ontological endeavour in South African universities.

Existentialism as a Research Method and an Approach to Addressing Racism

In this segment, I offer a reconstruction of a dialogue that took place in my work environment as a means to engage the reader in the performative processes of race and racism. Not only are Black and Coloured people expected to perform our racialised identities, but we are expected to ‘perform’ in accordance with the stereotypes that White people still hold near and dear. Telling and retelling incidents of racism serve the purpose of noting the act; my concern is to show the dynamics, to set the scene, and to offer a reconstruction of the event in order for the reader to visualise it under my written guidance. I draw on Maart’s ‘Race and Pedagogical Practices: When Race Takes Center Stage in Philosophy’ (Maart 2014a) as a means to situate racist pedagogical practices. Dialogues presented in this paper are from different meetings and engagements that occurred over a period of six months. Whilst there was no recording of the events in question, the recollection here asserts the necessity of voice and allows for a visual enactment of a dialogue, which like many of its kind are often treated with moral indignation or sheer White liberal disbelief (Gordon 2000).

Background

I started working in the teaching and learning unit of a ‘first class’ university in South Africa in May 2018 as an Online Learning Designer. The recruitment process in which I participated, sought to simultaneously appoint three people into identical posts. I, along with a White Afrikaner woman, and a fair-skinned Muslim woman were successful in this application and were employed within the same job description. Given the history of South Africa, it is important to

note that racialised identities are noteworthy not only in the decolonial era (but because they often inform the reasons for our hire, or not) and shall be unpacked later in the paper.

Once I began working in this post, I was given different work tasks to the two women who were appointed, both of whom I note above. I was put in an assistant role on multiple projects, with no lead role on projects of my own while the two women who were appointed in the same position, were appointed in leadership roles of two projects each. The timing of the projects could not be used as a justification, as I had been the second of the three to start working in this role, which meant that the opportunity to work and lead the projects was available when I started. In my assistant and support role on these projects, I was mainly brought in to fix things and do menial tasks, in other words as a racialised, gendered, Black man, of Coloured ethnicity, and of Muslim faith, who was now ‘playing’ the handy man role to the White woman line manager. The White woman line manager placed us in these positions based on her racial bias of what she deemed appropriate levels of work to match our physical appearance, with the stereotypes she held. On one of these projects, I had to intervene in the design of a promotional video which I watched out of curiosity – a process that I was not included in nor encouraged to view as part of the team but which I undertook of my own accord because the promotional video itself was racist in the way it positioned Black people as recipients of White saviourship. In other words, with an overwhelming sense of how White researchers believe in the need to save Black people from ourselves.

Shortly after watching the video and mindful of its severe shortcomings, I approached a co-worker, a Bikoist non-white² (Biko 1984), the project leader, to explain my position to her and offer my critique of this flawed and offensive process. After explaining what was wrong with it in great detail, the Bikoist non-white project leader was still unconvinced of my argument, but thought that since I felt strongly about it, she would take my concerns to the client. The concerns around the racist nature of the video were then offered to the client: a team consisting of three White men and one White woman, who in turn agreed with my critique of the viewing and noted that it was racist. After the team of White people accepted that it was racist, the project leader then

² According to Biko, non-whites (Biko’s spelling) are people who aspire to Whiteness, yet their pigmentation makes this aspiration unattainable (Biko 1984).

accepted this as a legitimate fact and asked me how I would fix it. Again, I explained what the problem was in great detail, but I refused to provide the sought-after solution. If one follows the thinking and the string of actions that connect the thinking towards meeting the final objective, in other words – colonial thinking, managing the colonised in order to obtain a decolonial outcome – it is clear that the appearance of a finished product was the focus, not the process or manner in which the product was produced. Thus, the focus was not on the actions of the producers or the racism that was so evident among the manager and her underlings as agents of racism who took their knowledge to the product, under her colonial guidance, and produced it precisely as indicative of their unexamined, unchallenged, colonial lives.

There was no discussion as to what the product said about the team or that as team members there needed to be a discussion of how we put ourselves into the work we do in developing decolonial teaching-and-learning products – unpacking forms of privilege, forms of complicity that women who identify as Coloured within the team were so diligent in performing as part of their histories of internalised racism, some of which speak directly to seeking affinity with their White colonisers. The decolonial backdrop woven into the existing transformation agenda, was as much a part of our everyday lives as it was on the agenda of the university where we worked and yet there was no discussion of either. After the revelation by the client of the product as racist, there was silence. The silence was followed by a ‘top to bottom’ accusation, instruction, and exertion of colonial governance to again ‘take charge’. As such, the scrambling to ‘fix the problem’ began. At South African higher education institutions, there’s an expectation to be silent about racism, as it helps White people keep their status as the benefactor of racism intact, it protects White people from the ‘stigma’ of racism, the silence prevents colonised people from being alienated from White staff and protects dominant White discourses (Costandius *et al.* 2018; Jawitz 2016).

The silence I speak of here, allows the staff to protect themselves from having to acknowledge, interrogate and disrupt their own racist beliefs and practices. My line manager approached me shortly after the notification of the clients’ dissatisfaction and the reason for the dissatisfaction, for which I was expected to be grateful. Shouldn’t any Black man who is sought out by a White woman in the workplace where she is still ‘the boss’, the proverbial South African ‘White madam’, be grateful that she has called upon him? The Coloured labourer who was called upon to play ‘Mister fix-it’ was now called

upon to draw on his Black, and Coloured experience to fix the racism, other people's racism, her racism! The realisation that both my university education, and my lived experience, provided the best vision to include and bring insight into other people's projects, because of my 'sensitivities', was in itself a racist way to erase my Coloured, Muslim, Black, masculine presence. Instead, without having to verbalise it, my line manager constructed my presence as the Coloured, Muslim, Black man, who was sensitive enough, quiet enough, not to make her feel uncomfortable, and therefore, in using the popular word 'sensitivities' as part of a process of developing decolonial tools, she sought me out in the process of *her* failure. She had a sudden realisation that I must know enough about racism because she overlooked me, she tried to erase me, she ignored my university education and training, and then I surprised her: I can speak! I was therefore part of her 'second-look' not at herself, but at what she had tried to invisibilise and now had to draw in, on demand, to get the product she was incapable of producing. Within the unit I worked, the word 'sensitivities' acted as a pseudonym for someone who survived racism and still experienced it, and who was wise enough not to offend the settler colonial line manager with his experience of her racism so that she could silently use it to her benefit and the benefit of the institution. The notion of the silence of racism, and the sacrifice with which silence is met, speaks volumes on what White settler colonials still expect from Black and Coloured peoples. This gross and perverse expectation of complicity exercised by both White and non-White staff (the latter is asserted with intent, as it evokes the apartheid framing of a person who situates their identity at the backdrop of the White experience who as Biko notes, is happy to be the non-White for they are not Black) is a form of complicity in the resistance to decolonisation and it is a form 'of violence against decolonisation' and those who were affected by the racism and coloniality in the departed who need advocates (Pillay 2015).

Again, as on previous occasions, I was not given the same level of responsibility as learning designers, my colleagues so to speak, who behaved with complete assurance that they could use my Blackness and my experience of racism without alluding to it, which served them and not me. My experience of racism, my endurance of it, the meaning I made of it, the understanding I developed of its operation – these components of how racism functioned was my existential experience, for which I was not hired. Nowhere in my job description, that I shared with the White Afrikaner woman and the fair-skinned Muslim woman, was there any mention that racism specific to my experience

would be the premise for my participation in producing a teaching-and-learning product as part of the decolonial education agenda. My Black labour was now being sought, because as the ignored, racialised Coloured Muslim boy, not man, doing menial jobs, surely, I must know how to fix racism! Surely, I, the person who was ignored, whose expertise was not relied upon must know how racism works and since I have fixed it my whole life, I must know how to fix it now at a ‘first class university’ in South Africa. There is something in the way that White women line managers within the unit seem to ask Black people, who they know experience racism, for our experience of their racism without having to say it (Cardinal 1983). However, they ask us not to fix the root of their racism, but to remain silent about it. Rather, we are expected to fix the mess created from their racism. Then, as part of their ‘managerial’ practice, they call upon our labour as Coloured and Black men and women, to fix the mess they created, and for which their lack of education on the subject never seem to render them underqualified or unqualified – they still expect to instruct, teach, design, lead and govern, and be remunerated at the highest level that their racialised Whiteness permits. In her paper, ‘Race and Pedagogical Practices: When Race Takes Center Stage in Philosophy’, Maart asks the question of what happens when race is central to the production of knowledge. She notes,

... when one situates race within the construction and the production of knowledge that one believes it ought to be there; when one presents it in the presence of White scholars for whom the process is foreign, alien, or intimidating, one is placing them in positions of alibis, witness to their own demise, without their consent (Maart 2014a: 10).

Below are three interactions with my line manager during which I, after being overlooked and undermined in my role in the team over the first six months, decided to speak up and question my manager about her practices and my role in the team, and thus, forcing my line manager to confront her own racism.

Mid-year Performance Review

After six months in support roles on a project, I sat down with my line manager for my midterm job review to see how I was meeting my Key Performance

Indicators [KPIs], which I was achieving differently to my peers in the same post because we were assigned different levels of responsibility in our work. I have reconstructed this meeting based on my recollections. I situate it here, in order to insert my voice in this paper, and my Coloured and Muslim presence that had been denied and as such to show the escalation of events. I assert the existentialist method of engagement, as part of my approach to research and writing, using these very acts, to produce knowledge. The meeting, as reconstructed, went as follows:

White woman line manager: Hi Sieraaj, thanks for meeting with me. My first question for you is to ask you how you would rate your performance?

Sieraaj: Hi _____ I actually wanted to ask you that question. I think I have been performing well in my tasks that I have been assigned. I have been doing quality work, I have done the work on time and I think all of the lead designers that I have supported have been happy with my work. But I wanted to know how you think I have been doing. I get the feeling that you may not be happy with my work. I have asked you before about giving me the same level of responsibility as [same post person 1] and [same post person 2] and make me a lead on a project, but I still haven't had the opportunity. Is there something I am doing wrong? What do I need to improve on?

White woman line manager: Well Sieraaj, I think you are a very competent person. I just think you need a little bit more experience before you can lead a project.

Sieraaj: I don't understand. Do you think that I am competent enough to lead a project?

White woman line manager: I think you are very competent. I just think you need more experience.

Sieraaj: I do not understand. If I am competent, then I should be trusted with the responsibility. If I am not competent, then I should not. If I am too inexperienced, it should mean that I do not have certain skills.

Experience should translate into skill. So, what do I need to learn? Where can I improve?

White woman line manager: Well I think you need to show more initiative.

Sieraaj: But I think I have shown initiative. I started the conversations around roles and responsibilities and set up the meetings and facilitated the discussions and then you put _____ [another White woman in my position] in charge of the initiative.

White woman line manager: Because it was a good idea, Sieraaj. But when I asked who wanted to take the idea forward, she volunteered.

Sieraaj: Maybe that's a cultural difference. Because I see it as when an idea comes forward that you either give it to the person who suggested it or to the person who is most competent, not just to whoever comes forward and volunteers.

White woman line manager: Maybe it is a cultural difference. I am trying to be fair and give everyone a chance to do what they want to do. I want to be a democratic leader I don't want to just tell people what they need to do.

Sieraaj: Well, I don't want to do volunteer work here. I want to be recognised for my contribution and given responsibilities based on merit.

White woman line manager: Then you need to show more initiative and take-up those roles.

Sieraaj: Well, I have been thinking of an idea to make a collection of videos for the lecturers that we work with, to show them what is expected of them at each phase of development for online courses. Maybe I can work on that. So that when they come and see us, they know exactly what to do.

White woman line manager: We already have something similar in

place and we are bringing in _____ [White man junior designer] after the holidays to lead that project.

Listening to my line manager talk about wanting to be a democratic leader made me realise how out of touch she really was. In the new South Africa, post-1994, she had no qualms reminding me that democracy was still in her favour, not mine. I left the meeting feeling very confused about my perceived competencies and what I needed to improve on in order to be considered for leadership roles. This also deeply concerned me because White man (hereafter noted as White man junior designer) was appointed on a year contract to do this work, without going through the process of a selection committee. These are the acts of White privilege that go unnoticed by White staff members as it is part of their day-to-day life; there was not even a question that the hiring did not follow university protocol. What was also concerning was that White man junior designer was an unsuccessful candidate in the recruitment process for my position and was now hired to lead a project while I, who was appointed by the selection committee, was made to assist others and to work in subordinate roles. It is also important to note, that during this time, two White freelance learning designers were also appointed to lead the development of online courses, while I was still acting in a support role, to a different freelancer, I might add. These appointment strategies and practices undermine the transformation goals of the institution. These underhanded acts made me feel that my appointment was a tokenised one to meet transformation numbers and to ensure that my White colleagues do not offend anyone by their lack of race consciousness, particularly their lack of an understanding of their own White privilege. This communicated the false belief that White people are superior in the ability to lead the course design process and Black people are only good at understanding 'Black experience', such as being easily offended because we are, allegedly, 'too sensitive'. Following that meeting, the nature of my work continued unchanged and I was still brought onto projects in a support role doing mostly menial tasks.

Meeting about Assessments

In a meeting with the project team of a particular Massive Open Online Course (MOOC), my line manager was trying to bring me on board to support the project because it had been running behind. After more than an hour of

discussing the progress of the meeting, my line manager and the project leader, a Coloured woman, starts discussing how I can get involved.

White woman line manager: So, [Coloured woman project leader], how can Sieraaj help you, because we need to finish this up?

Coloured woman project leader: Well, on this section, it is only about getting the content filmed and finding the right people which I am working on. Then we also need the multiple-choice questions written and the subtitles checked which is grunt work, which I am sure Sieraaj does not want to do. We can get the Course Mentor to do it.

White woman line manager: I am a little concerned now, because we need to finish this work and I am looking for ways that Sieraaj can help and I have called him into this meeting and now you're saying that you don't need his help.

Coloured woman project leader: I do not see work that will be worth his time on this section.

White woman line manager: The next section will have to be released with this one. Since the main component is the big project that the student needs to do, can't Sieraaj work on that?

Coloured woman project leader: It is a small section, and it is dependent on this section, but I can work with him on it if he wants to.

White woman line manager: You see Sieraaj, this section mainly involves a project that students need to do. Some parts will depend on how we finish the first section, but we need to get started on this second section as well. Do you think you will be able to design the project? I know it is messy, but we need your help in getting it done. Otherwise, we can put you on another project. What do you think?

Sieraaj: This does look a little messy and it does look like [Coloured woman project leader] has a handle on it. Maybe we can just let her finish it. I am not sure if she wants help. I am going to have to

familiarise myself with all parts of this course before designing this project, it might take longer than if [Coloured woman project leader] were to do it herself. If I say no to this work, what other projects are there to put me on?

White woman line manager: I do not know about other projects, Sieraaj we will have to see. So, what do you think? Can you do this work?

White man senior designer: You see Sieraaj, the project that students do on this section should really be a capstone that demonstrates the learning across all the other sections. The main part being this project that you need to design. The project ...

Sieraaj: [White man senior designer], I fully understand the task!

Annoyed at everyone in the meeting and feeling like my value to the team and role on the team wasn't fully understood, I sat in silence for the rest of the meeting. I was very annoyed that my ability was being questioned and that I was brought into a meeting with no clear purpose. I was also annoyed by the level of pretence put forward by my line manager, suggesting that I have the option to decline this work when she clearly has not thought of what my options are in terms of work scope. My role on the team did not seem clear and I felt like I was 'just there'. The following day I approached my line manager to tell her that I felt disrespected and insulted because my skills and time were undermined. This is how the meeting transpired:

Sieraaj: Hi [White woman line manager], I just wanted to come around and say that I was really not happy with the way that the meeting went yesterday.

White woman line manager: (sigh) Yes, [Coloured woman project leader] and I also are not happy about it. I was a little annoyed that [Coloured woman project leader] did not have a role for you after I told her that I was inviting you to this meeting to assist her with this project.

Sieraaj: Yes, it was very embarrassing for me to have been the topic of discussion in the meeting without really being brought into the

meeting. I think it would have really saved me a lot of time if you two had discussed my role before bringing me into the meeting. It really made me question my purpose on the team. Then, you decide that there is possible work for me to do and then you question my ability to do it. The White man senior designer explaining the task over and over to me was even more insulting. I have lots of experience designing assessments. As a teacher, I designed my own exams and tasks all the time. I was a curriculum developer for a mathematics competition network where I wrote competition questions, and I was the assessment advisor for a digital literacy learning guide developed in this department. So, I can design assessments.

White woman line manager: Then why did not you just say so, Sieraaj!

Sieraaj: Because it is on my CV!

White woman line manager: But then why did you not just say you will do the work?

Sieraaj: Because it was unclear what *you* wanted me to do. I understand the task, but I was not sure if you and [Coloured woman team leader] were finished negotiating my role yet or if you have fully worked it out.

White woman line manager: Why don't you talk to her about it. She is feeling upset too. I just wanted to know if this project is something you are interested in doing. The two of you can figure out a way of working together on the project. Speak to her because she isn't happy about the meeting either.

This follow up meeting with my White woman line manager left me feeling deeply concerned, insulted and frustrated. Firstly, I thought it was entirely unfair for me to have to present my CV for tasks on projects that were in line with my job description as if I had to re-interview for my job on a daily basis. Secondly, if my line manager did not know what experience I noted on my CV, yet would not give me the same level of work given to others appointed in the same post that I was appointed to, with the same job description, by the same

selection committee, because of my alleged lack of experience, then what was she basing my lack of experience on? If it is not the experience listed on my CV, then it had to be on what she gazed at, took in and racialised: that is, my physical appearance, my racialised identity, my cultural identity as someone who is Cape Malay from the Cape Flats. This led me to become more wary of her racial biases as I believe they affected her managerial performance. What was further humiliating, was being insulted by the lack of regard shown towards me, having to explain to someone how you have been insulted and then being asked how to make it better. It was at that moment that I had become increasingly convinced that I had to speak up. I was further insulted later during the day by the Coloured woman team leader who told me that I ‘need to smile when people give you [me] grunt work’ and that the anger on my face makes me unapproachable and ‘unprofessional’.

The Racist Online Learning Guide

On 8th April 2019, during a team meeting there was a particular incident that confirmed all of my thoughts, feelings and discomfort of the underlying racist attitudes within the department. There had been a tension building up within the project that the White man junior designer was brought in to lead, where the decolonisation section was not progressing well and there were very few resources on which he could draw. The latter speaks to one of the reasons for an overall lack of expertise on decolonisation in the department and a lack of projects committed to it. This made the inclusion of decolonisation tokenistic. It seemed odd to me that while we have very few projects dedicated to producing decolonial knowledge, we still decided to include it in a public guide that would be accessible on our website. Previously, on 18th February 2019, during a team meeting, the White women leadership said that they decided to ‘rename’ the section on transformation to a section on decolonisation. When I asked why the project members, the White woman line manager, the White man senior designer and the White man junior designer made this change, the White man senior designer responded that that is the terminology that people recognise now and that is what will attract people’s attention to the guide. I then responded that they should not use ‘decolonisation’ just to attract attention, but they need to be committed to the substance of the decolonisation project. My white woman line manager then jumped to his defence, saying that he did not mean it that way and that they are committed. The White man junior

designer then said he needed to consult with other people around decolonisation and accessibility for the guide. I was informed that they would consult the other two people appointed in my position on accessibility. I said that the White man junior designer can consult with myself or another colleague of ours in the department, who had been doing decolonial work across the campus, if he needed to. After that he did not really consult any of us on the matter of decolonisation; he only came to my office to ask me to point him to literature that he could consult and then I pointed him to an institutional report that another colleague had worked on and mentioned some scholars whose work might be useful. He left and worked on it by himself.

On 8th April 2019, in the team meeting, my line manager said that she was unhappy with the decolonisation section of the guide. She asked me to contribute to the section. I responded that a section on decolonisation for an online learning practice guide cannot be written on its own as decolonisation is not only an epistemic project but an ontological one as well and if the ontology of the whole guide does not match the decolonisation section then it defeats the purpose. I continued by noting that the decolonisation lens needs to run through the whole guide. My line manager's response was that it was too late to do this, as the guide needed to be completed within a short period of time. I responded by telling her that she should then exclude the section. She was not pleased with this response, saying it was an important section which needed to be there. I responded by asking her why it was so important, noting that if it was important, she would have asked me in the initial stages of the project to offer my 'decolonisation lens' to the guide and not at such a late stage. Her response was: 'It's fine. We will just make our own racist guide now and then you can make whatever guide you want later'. I felt those words deeply within my body; her words had sunk lower than I could ever communicate. I left the room immediately, leaving my laptop behind, taking only my drinking glass, thinking if I am out of line for leaving the meeting at least I can say I needed water. I went to the water cooler, drank water and knelt next to it trying to make sense of what had just happened and thought about how to respond to the situation. Some colleagues asked if I was okay and another colleague noted that I should go downstairs with him, which I did. The meeting continued without me. No one else left the room and it continued as per 'normal', with my line manager saying that it was 'unfortunate' that I had to leave when it came to a line item that I had to report on.

I returned to meeting room once the meeting was finished to collect

my laptop and my line manager was still sitting there. Without really looking at me, a tactic I have come to understand as the depersonalisation of her racism, she noted: 'I suppose we have to talk about what happened, if you're not too upset'. She informed me that she did not understand what I was asking of them. She reiterated why she had asked me to point out how the document was not compatible with a decolonial lens and thought that at least I would offer a critique. I pointed out that while the guide was an online learning guide, it never once mentioned the word student. The guide rather spoke of users and audiences, which I noted was a neo-liberal approach to education that views educational practices in terms of a market and the student as a consumer. In my view such an approach does not recognise the student as an agent in the teaching-learning process and it undermines the student's ability to contribute meaningfully to their own learning. I also made a point of telling her that they should then change the title from being a learning guide to a teaching guide as the student was invisible in the process and it was aimed at those who were teaching rather than those who were learning. Her reply was that she never thought of it that way. I was shocked that a leader of online learning at such a 'world-class' institution did not think that there were people learning whose experience as learners are affected by the work that she does. I responded by telling her that the suggestions I have made were only small, superficial changes (after a quick glance at the guide) and only speaks to the language used which illuminates her underlying assumptions about students, and that a proper critique would have to dive even deeper. The same line manager was suddenly full of praise of my analytical skills and asked me to do a full critique of the guide so that they could use it.

By making menial comments, I suddenly became a critical race theorist that she had invisibilised and realising the error in her judgement, behaved towards me as though I needed to be grateful that she saw me – as human, as a human capable of critical thought. I felt insulted that I was asked to do this kind of labour on a project that I was, apparently not experienced enough to lead. Again, I was too inexperienced to lead a project but competent enough to save the project from the leaders. I informed her that she and her team needed to go and engage properly with it. As though oblivious to my remarks, she proceeded to ask me if I would not *still* consider writing a critique of the guide. I explained to her that she was putting me in a very difficult, unfair, unethical position whereby if I am made responsible for this aspect of the guide and if I do contribute to the guide, then I am complicit in allowing

the racist and colonial ontologies in the department that produce this kind of work to remain uninterrogated; if I do not contribute to the guide then I am complicit for allowing racialised and colonial ontologies that exist in the department to exist in the guide. I made a point, again, of letting her know that it was unfair to put that decision and labour on me at this stage of the project. Affirming my position, she said she understood and then asked me if I can at least point her to sections in another report on decolonisation from the institution that they could use. Frustrated and tired of the argument I said that I would think about it. I left the room in shock.

I was shocked that a manager could verbalise such sentiments that promote racism: that without the assistance of my Black mind and Black racialised body, that she as line manager is admitting that her Whiteness would continue to produce racist guides. Not only is it an acceptance of racist practice, but it also puts the burden on me as a Black worker to deracialise her work as I have done before, which is a labour that does not fall onto anyone else with the same job description. It also means that White line managers do not have to take responsibility for their racist practices nor interrogate their own epistemology, ontology, and use of power. The burden falls on me, the ‘inexperienced’, yet competent (upon desperation in a process of discovery) when needed, Coloured, Cape Malay man. I have tried teaching my line manager in conversations, but it is very labour intensive and time consuming. My line manager has told me, ‘Sieraaj, I find you frustrating, but at the same time, I learn so much from you and you give me so much to think about’. However, it is not in my KPIs to do this work, and while doing this teaching might improve things for her as a White woman and everyone else she believes my insights have educated in the workplace, ultimately it would mean I am unsuccessful in my own work. The expected double labour was exhausting, especially as I was the only one on the team expected to do it.

Colonial Plantations cannot Bear the Fruits of Decolonial Work

The reason why I was the only one who was expected to do this labour in the team lies in the complexity of the Coloured identity and how it has been constructed historically during the colonial period in South Africa, the apartheid period, particularly in Cape Town, and the meaning it carries today in the post-apartheid era. The term ‘Coloured’ was an apartheid construction

to describe ‘mixed-race’ people: those who did not fit into the White, African, or Asian racial categories (Petrus & Isaacs-Martin 2012). The creation of the Coloured classification was an attempt ‘to create a homogeneous racial and ethnic ‘nation’ out of a heterogeneous group of people’ (Petrus & Isaacs-Martin 2012: 93), although the absurdity of this attempt was exposed when the government broke this category further into subdivisions, including Malays, Griquas, and others. The heterogeneity of the Coloured identity has its roots in the colonial period of South Africa, following illegal, unlawful, uninvited entry, known as usurpation, when the European settlers and their enslaved populations entered Cape Town and made contact with the Khoisan people (Maart 2014b; Petrus & Isaacs-Martin 2012). The Coloured identity was used to describe people who were considered ‘mixed-race’, following the ‘miscegenation not only between the colonists and the indigenous Khoisan, but also between these groups and the slave populations emanating from the East’. Since those colonial times, the Coloured population formed an ‘‘intermediate’ stratum’ between the colonists and the oppressed African population in South Africa, receiving privileges that were not extended to the African population (Petrus & Isaacs-Martin 2012: 92). In addition, it is also important to note that one cannot afford the notion of privilege to a population group that came into being at the Cape through a process of enslavement; the term privilege is therefore understood within the context of the legal construction of race classification in South Africa and the divide and conquer strategies employed by the colonial and apartheid regimes (Maart 2021).

Even within the mixed-race Coloured community, those ‘who phenotypically resembled White Europeans enjoyed privileges that were denied to those who were phenotypically darker’ (Petrus & Isaacs-Martin 2012). This resulted in an inferiority complex where Coloured people felt inferior to the White Europeans, and even created platforms for internalised racism within the Coloured community where discrimination against each other and darker-skinned Coloured people further developed into a broad range of inferiority complexes. The above noted complexes played itself out in many different ways during apartheid, where those constructed as Coloured received less privileges and freedoms than White people, but more than African people. Those who believed that they could pass for White, applied for reclassification from Coloured to White, resulting in the splitting of families and communities. Not only were there divisions within the Coloured community based on phenotype but also political and cultural divisions. On the one hand, those who

were phenotypically similar to the Europeans assimilated into the White group to gain more privileges, as well and adopt the language of the coloniser (Petrus & Isaacs-Martin, 2012). These particular Coloured people denied their histories of enslavement in favour of White acceptance and rejected their Khoisan, Asian and African cultures, viewing them as inferior. The culmination of these acts can be described as part of internalised racism, where some Coloured people believe ‘White is right’ (Petrus & Isaacs-Martin 2012: 99). The latter was further demonstrated at the fall of apartheid, during the first ‘one-person, one vote’ elections in South Africa, where it was noted that many Coloured people still voted for the National Party (NP), the very same White party who oppressed them during apartheid. This trend still exists today, where the Western Cape, which is a province in which the majority of people are from the Coloured community, is the only province where the Democratic Alliance (DA) – a historically White party – won the majority vote. All the provinces, except for the Western Cape, elected the African National Congress (ANC) to steer the political leadership of the country. We can see from this and many examples currently, how many Coloured people accept the European and White people as superior and aspire to Whiteness and White culture. Those with proximity to Whiteness leveraged it to gain privileges and opportunities that would place them above the self-hatred of their own Blackness. This colonial construction still exists and is evidenced by the race politics of the higher education institution within which I worked, where Coloureds were ‘blind’ to the racism inflicted upon them and around them and did not want to speak up, which I witnessed first-hand, as they did not want to upset the White boss in fear of losing the privileges they believed were granted because of their affinity – whether true or not – to White culture and White identity.

When I walked out of the team meeting, no one else left, even though the racism, while directed at me, clearly affects everyone. We had a conversation among ourselves as the Coloured staff at a particular time in my experience as a worker, whereby several of us acknowledged our slave histories, noting how some Coloured people aspire to Whiteness in order to acquire privileges and how our institution is run like colonial plantations, like those set up during the colonisation of Cape Town, to turn Cape Town into a ‘refreshment station’ for European sailors. That particular conversation was inspired by popular music and movies such as Jay-Z’s *The Story of O.J.* (Carter 2017) and Quentin Tarantino’s *Django: Unchained* (Tarantino 2012), from the USA. Everyone in the conversation attempted to divide themselves, and

various Coloured staff, into *house n*****s* and *field n*****s*, alluding to the different roles that slaves had been assigned on plantations in the USA, where some of the slaves that the masters favoured were allowed to work in the house where the labour was much more pleasant, and others had to work in the field³.

The divisions in the department at the ‘first class university’ I speak of were very similar: the *house n*****s* were the ones who were favoured by the White masters and White madams; they enjoyed a certain amount of privilege and therefore, as the argument can be made, were less likely to join the anti-racism fight in the department. The *field n*****s* in the department were those who had access to less privileges and did not seek favour from the masters and therefore more likely to join the fight against racism. In a little more than just a joke, I responded to the conversation when someone mentioned that I was a *field n****** by saying ‘No, I am not a *field n******. I am a *n****** on a horse’. This was in reference to Django who is a free man, riding onto the plantation to the amazement of both the White masters and the Black enslaved, who have never seen a Black man on a horse. It always makes me uncomfortable when South Africans, especially White and Coloured people use *the n-word*. There are far too many complexities around the word and around the Coloured identity which make this unacceptable. Firstly, the word has its own complexity within the US society, and the African American community. While it is pretty widely accepted that *the n-word* is a taboo word, the same is not the case for the word *n***a*, which some has claimed is not linked to the

³ I want to assert here, as per my discussion with the editor, that I do not use the *n-word* lightly; I use it here because it has been directed at me, used against me, when I first studied in the USA, so much so that I had to grapple with how to understand this infliction and/or whether to understand it as it had been used by Black men who sought affinity with me and saw me as part of their ‘ingroup’. I also identify as a Black man and have experienced this racialisation within the USA on a daily basis. It is, as such a term that has been inflicted upon me historically both in the USA and in South Africa although with regard to the latter, in racially specific ways that speak to the history of Cape Town, the city with the largest population of previously enslaved peoples in South Africa. I return to this later in this paper. But, to note, I do quote Fanon’s use of ‘nigger’ in his context – which is well-known – and also ‘nigga’ in terms of the context of this argument, and its related references, as well as the derogatory, ‘niggerization’.

same meaning as *the n-word* and is now a term of endearment within the African American community (Smith 2019). Most Coloured people do not know this distinction and even if they did the Coloured accent (and pronunciation) from the Cape (the community that I speak of) would make it difficult to tell which term they are using and thus difficult to establish the distinction. Secondly, Coloured people have a complex history with racism both internally and against Africans, as discussed earlier, as well as a complex relationship with the Black identity as many Coloured people do not identify as Black, therefore using *the n-word* or *n****a* - would be problematic. If one has not lived or participated in a system where this racialisation took place one cannot fully understand the nuances of the term, certainly not its intent, and therefore should not participate in the misappropriation of both terms. I for one have lived in the USA and have been called both *n****** and *n****a*, (my mother always tells everyone how shocked she was that my friends in the USA called me *n****a* when she visited me to attend my graduation), and even then, I was very apprehensive about using *n****a* myself. I use the *n-word* in the above passage as a recollection of being made a *n****** in the USA and being made a *n****** at this South African university. I use it to quote from *Django* (the film) and to show that if I was made a *n****** in that department then I, like Django (the free Black man), would be on my horse, a free man, ready to ride off if I needed to. I use the term *n****** to be explicit about the direct words that were used by my colleagues and to show their acceptance and understanding of their '*niggerization*' (Yancy 2005: 217). *Niggerization*, is described by Ossie Davis when he recalls an incident when at the age of six or seven, he is picked up by two White police officers and taken to the precinct where they proceed to make fun of him, throwing cane syrup over his head and laughing at him, turning him into their buffoon (Yancy 2005). This ritual of humiliating a Black boy, Davis calls '*niggerization*'. In this ritual, Black people are constrained by White people, secluded, humiliated with the assistance of White people they can rely on to enact group dehumanisation. After they returned Davis to the street, they gave him peanut brittle as a reward for participating in this ritual. This is the trick of White Supremacist ideology, where the White gaze interpellates the Black subject as inferior, with repetition, so much so we that the internalisation forces us as Black subjects to not see ourselves outside of the internalisation of that gaze (Yancy 2005). We are made into '*n*****s*', slaves, the inferior object, in the White imagination and forced to partake in their rituals to make us visible in this way and to accept our

inferiority as fact. Our bodies are ‘given back’ (Fanon 1970) or returned to us (Yancy 2005), through the imagination of the White line managers, where we are expected to look at ourselves as inferior to them. Fanon states that the Black man is made Black in relation to the White man (Fanon 1970): we are made *n****** in relation to the White masters who have ‘niggerized’ us (Yancy 2005) in order to subjugate us, to make us accept our role as slaves so that we will accept them as our masters.

Therefore, seeing ourselves’ as inferior, and seeing the White master as superior is the completion of this White supremacist task. This internalisation of our inferiority, or ‘epidermalisation’, as Fanon puts it, is one part of a double process; the other more primary is the economic aspect (Fanon 1970). We see this economic process in the department where workers are classified, according to a hierarchy, similar to the ones employed in a class analysis: that is, academic, and professional support/admin staff. The academic staff are mostly permanently hired, whereas the professional, support and admin staff are mostly hired on contracts. The academic staff are better remunerated, have more flexibility and autonomy around when they come to work, they get to have sabbatical leave and can study further as part of their job description, and can be promoted through an *ad hominem* process. In contrast, the rest of the staff have to work strict hours (sometimes having to account for every second with a digital recording system), are generally paid less, and cannot be promoted without applying for a different job at a higher level. There is a process by which a post can be regraded; those who have tried have been threatened and told they may have to reapply for the job or told that due for financial reasons their contracts may not be renewed. In both hierarchies of employees, the managers are mostly White, and if there are any Black managers, they don’t manage White people.

Let me situate this matter as per my experience of it: when I was in the department (within the large centre), most Black workers had White managers, but only one White worker had a Black manager, and even then she had her own office, while her Black line manager shared an office with the other Black staff member that she managed. The physical space distribution in the office was interesting as well. As pointed out above: most White workers had their own offices, while most Black workers had to share an office. Even White man junior designer was assigned his own office when he was appointed, while the rest of us in the same position, shared an office. This job insecurity accompanied by low pay, makes Black staff more likely to play the ‘good

nigger' (Fanon 1970), because they do not want to risk upsetting their White managers and not have their contracts renewed. This fear was real, because we saw many staff who refused to participate in their 'niggerization' rituals, have their employment relationship with the department terminated at the end of their contracts, whereas the White staff and '*good niggers*' (Fanon 1970), were retained from contract to contract.

Therefore, Black staff are rewarded economically for participating in their 'niggerization', because they accept their construction as inferior so that they can remain employed, and this inferiority complex develops from their acceptance of the terms of their contemporary enslavement. In turn, the White staff remain superior (or so they believe), continue in management roles with all the economic and institutional power it offers them to participate in these rituals, thus continuing to maintain their White privilege. As the inferiority complex develops within Black staff, the ideology of White supremacy is further reinforced. These master-slave relationships resemble those that operated in colonial plantations (in the USA and in South Africa), and by our own admission of being *house n*****s* or *field n*****s*, we recognise that the department we work in is a 'colonial plantation'. However, when I referenced *Django*, saying 'No I am not a field n*****. I am a n***** on a horse' I was expressing to the group in a sense that while we recognise that our work environment is a 'colonial plantation', we do not have to subscribe to roles of subjugation.

Our enslavement exists in our acceptance of these roles as enslaved; whether a *house n****** or a *field n****** we are still choosing to be enslaved and still accepting the White managers as our masters. During my employment at this 'first-class university' I made a point of rejecting this construction. What was clear was that the majority of the Coloured staff members, whether they were gaining access to privileges or not, accepted that our department and the broader university institution was a plantation community. Beckford describes a plantation community as,

Within plantation community, interpersonal relations reflect the authority structure of the plantation itself. It engenders an ethos of dependence and patronage and so deprives people of dignity, security and self-respect. And it impedes the material, social and spiritual advance. Within plantation society, the tradition, values, beliefs and attitudes which have become established as a result of long periods of

plantation influence are, for the most part, inimical to development (Quoted in Lavia 2012:1).

Lavia further explains that:

the concept of the plantation resides within – at individual and institutional levels, and cultural practices of education are complicit in the process of reinforcing what Kamau Brathwaite called ‘the inner plantation’. The ‘inner plantation’ therefore refers to a deeply pervasive ethos of internalised oppression (Lavia 2012: 13).

The acceptance of the enslaved role by Coloured workers (as noted above) through epidermalisation comes from this deprivation of dignity, security, and self-respect by our White colleagues, through ‘niggerization’, and the economic and institutional power that the White colleagues have attained from the institution. From these conversations, we can clearly see the existence of the inner plantation whereby the oppression from the White managers has been epidermalised and internalised by the said Coloured workers. Working within the plantation community impedes any decolonial development: this was my experience within the school that I worked.

In the mid-year review meeting with my line manager, when she said that I did not show initiative and that I was inexperienced, she did not see me as an Ivy League-educated man, but rather allowed her negative stereotypes of ‘the Coloured’ and ‘The Cape Malay’ to determine her engagement with me. That is, as part of the stereotype that depicts us as people ‘being particularly prone to laziness, alcoholism, gangsterism, violence and drug addiction, as well as not having any recognised culture or language of their own’ (Petrus & Isaacs-Martin 2012: 88). This is how a stereotype steers into a racial trope. My White woman line manager informed me in one of our meetings that she had at one point been worried she might feel threatened by me but had experienced me to be very diplomatic. This verbal expression on her part left me flabbergasted; she, on the other hand, treated her remark as a compliment and expected me to feel flattered!

My Black body was being returned to me, again, through her racist imagination, and the verbalisation of a racial trope she had no qualms in verbalising. This meeting served as another ‘niggerizing’ ritual, a reminder that I am the slave, and that the ‘master and madam knows what is best’. This

reduction was not only from my White line manager, but Coloured staff members as well who, when a White staff member locked themselves out of the office, ran to find me and asked whether I could help them break into the office. This was shortly after one of them alluded to their perception that I was the 'most Coloured person in the department'. If a non-South African reader puts these two statements together: there is a White woman locked out of her office, the search for the most Coloured person begins... allow me to finish the sentence... to break into the office because this is apparently what we Coloured people do. Clearly, in their eyes, as the most Coloured person (most visibly Coloured looking as per the expected visual and physical form that Coloured identity takes for those who follow this understanding), I am, without evidence: the most threatening, the criminal, and also the laziest, etc. Again, my colleagues, the Coloured staff with whom I worked, presented me with an opportunity to be 'niggerized', hoping I would be rewarded with gratitude and elation if I unlocked the door. The falsehood of the racial trope when undertaken by one's own people, colonised Coloured people who accept the terms of colonisation, locks one into the need for approval even if it means being seen as 'the thug'. The stereotype of Coloured men as gangsters, thugs, familiar with 'breaking and entering' is an activity with which I should be familiar. In the assessment meeting, I was reduced to a Black unit of labour, where the White boss and her intermediary Coloured woman discussed what work I could do while I was in the room and argued about where to 'use me' as though I were a piece of equipment. The White man in the room assumed I was silent because I am unintelligent and repeated the explanation of the task. After being visibly frustrated and angry at the lack of a plan for me in the team and the fact that I was insulted, I was then tone-policed by the Coloured woman who labelled my expression as anger and termed it 'unprofessional'. In essence, what my Coloured woman colleague was doing was telling me that to curry favour, I have to be the '*good nigger*' (Fanon 1970) and sit quietly and accept the shortcomings she has identified within herself, which she projected onto me, and toe the line, otherwise the master will be upset with me.

In the meeting about the learning guide, the 'plantation community' members all get together to discuss how the project is not progressing. The White master is now forced to acknowledge my expertise on decolonisation, but at the same time refuses to accept my role as an expert and expects me to just do as I am told so that I can help the White master in charge and White man junior designer. My line manager wanted me to complete the project

because she, the White madam of the plantation is saying so, not listening to the actual expert knowledge that I am providing to the project since it goes against the terms of working that she had assigned to Black and Coloured people. The White leadership, with no expertise, will not go back and change the whole guide to make sure it aligns with the decolonial agenda; the decolonial agenda must fall in line with their agenda.

As discussed earlier, Maart (2014a) along with Andrews (2016), point out, that I have put the White woman line manager in a process that is foreign, alien and intimidating, and in a position where she is forced to witness her own demise. The White woman line manager erupts with anger, because I have lifted the veil and have exposed the truth: that I am not the one who is inferior, she is. And if I am not inferior, she is not superior. What I have exposed is that the whole plantation is a hallucination from the psychosis of her Whiteness, which cannot be reasoned with (Andrews 2016). Any expertise that I brought forth from that point is lost in this hallucination and cannot be rationalised in her state of psychosis. Her verbal outburst that she will ‘just make a racist guide’ and I can make my own guide, is an acknowledgement of the extent of her psychosis of Whiteness, her inability to reason and engage with the decolonial expertise in her presence, and her refusal to let go of the hallucination of the plantation from which she draws all of her power, and where my decolonial work has no place.

Reflections upon Reflections ...

In the analysis above of both the structures in the teaching and learning centre, as well as the interaction between my line manager and I, we see how the plantation community is constructed and how White people have established their supremacy through the ritual of ‘niggerization’ of Black staff. We also see how Black staff have ‘epidermalised’ this inferiority into accepting their plantation slave status and the White staff as their masters and madams. These acts of colonisation continue to dominate interpersonal relationships, like my relationship with my line manager, and the structural positioning of the White staff. We see how White staff side-step the selection process to undermine the transformation agenda, and we see how Black staff are overlooked for management positions. It is, therefore, evident that these White-run teaching and learning centres are incapable of responding to the call to decolonise the curriculum within higher education. The White managers and staff at these

university academic centres are committed to the reproduction of colonial configurations of which they are the benefactors, and the Black staff are held in insecure employment positions, constructed as inferior which in time can be internalised to produce inferiority complexes.

Who then can we trust to steer the decolonial project in these academic centres? How can these projects produce decolonial outcomes and decolonial learning tools and materials? In order to develop the capacity of these centres to respond to the calls for decolonising higher education, we have to examine these processes and have an honest look at Whiteness, diagnose its psychosis, so that we can move beyond the hallucination of the plantation and develop new configurations of working. White staff must become aware of these practices and recognise their violence and harmfulness to both their Black colleagues and the projects they claim to work towards. We must develop centres and institutions of learning where Black staff are empowered, and where we can exercise our agency with the Blackness we are forced to keep dormant. It means that the master should give up their mantle and the enslaved unchain themselves. The plantation needs to be destroyed, which means that the plantation community has to be destroyed. This can only be achieved through interventions that are not led by the White management but from an external, educated, conscious, group who can identify the plantation without becoming a member of that community.

Without interventions, Whiteness and coloniality will continue to impede the development of a decolonial project in South African universities and Black staff will continue to live in violent working conditions where the only option for existence is submission as the enslaved, bound to the colonial agenda. Alternatively, the enslaved can destroy their inner plantation by refusing to participate and shield themselves from this violence. Both these choices leave 'decolonial' projects within teaching and learning centres without people who are truly committed to the decolonial project.

Conclusion

The violence that I experienced based on the racism that exists in the department (within a large school and teaching and learning centre) where I worked was enormously difficult for me to deal with. The stereotypes and complexes inherited from colonisation and apartheid have taken an emotional toll on me. But what I have learnt from this experience in terms of how

coloniality still hold backs the work that is being done at first class universities, has been invaluable.

What is clear to see is that while previously White universities might note that decolonisation is a priority for them, they only mean it as far as the ‘products’ that they produce from the plantations. In other words, how things appear, not how they actually are. Like the learning guide described in this article: much like a course, or research output. But how can that soil really bear decolonial fruit when it is where the seeds of coloniality are still sown? Without a real commitment from each staff member to leave or destroy their inner plantations and without destroying the plantation community to find other ways to relate to one another, the work done in the institution can never be decolonial. In realising this, my only option was to refuse to participate. What followed from that was harassment to get me to submit and accept my place on the plantation. Facing daily harassment, I decided to resign from the institution, because they (my White line manager and her dutiful staff) could not see the plantation for what it is. The irony is that at my farewell party I was handed a farewell card by the staff with a picture of Django on it. I guess they realised that like Django, I had burnt down my inner plantation and rode my horse off into the sunset. The ‘decolonial’ project at that teaching and learning centre located within one of the first-class universities in South Africa, is still very much a hallucination just as the plantation of the historical South in the USA. Hallucination or not: my initiative – the one that seemed invisible to my White line manager – was part of the process of healing from the violence of the coloniser who wears sheep’s clothes and poses as the decolonial technician while erasing the previously enslaved.

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Acts and Actors: Decolonising the Study of Architecture at a South African University

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Abstract

In this article, I examine the practices of coloniality and ethnic African liberalism within the South African university where I teach. I do this by examining how Black and ethnic Zulu students were treated by examiners from East Africa. I examine some of the prominent features of colonisation and its recycling at the hands of the colonised who transfer and re-enact coloniality upon a younger generation of newcomers who have recently entered an age-old discipline, delayed by the racialised policies and practices of the apartheid regime. In doing so, I bring forth the history of my racialisation whilst offering a possibility for where and how a decolonial approach might be necessary to move both the curriculum and pedagogical approach of the School of Architecture at the University of KwaZulu-Natal forward, and the agenda of the university with regards to its Transformation Charter, particularly its current focus on decolonising the curriculum.

Keywords: South African Architecture curriculum, African liberalism, decoloniality, internalised coloniality

Introduction

This article, examines the practices of coloniality and ethnic African liberalism within the South African university where I teach. I do this by examining how Black and ethnic Zulu students were treated by examiners from East Africa. I examine some of the prominent features of colonisation and its recycling at the hands of the colonised who transfer and re-enact coloniality upon a younger generation of newcomers who have entered an age-old discipline due to the racialised policies and practices of the apartheid regime. In doing so, I bring forth the history of my racialisation whilst offering a possibility for where and

how a decolonial approach might be necessary to move both the curriculum and pedagogical approach of the School of Architecture at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) forward, and the agenda of the university with regards to its Transformation Charter, particularly its current focus on decolonising the curriculum.

Before 1994, Architecture as a discipline of study within the South African university system was taught within White dominated universities for the sole purpose of ensuring that White South Africans would be involved in all aspects of the apartheid process: its education, structuring, building and implementation (Kallaway 2002). As the term apartheid suggests – apart, separate, apartness – the usurpation, theft and subsequent allocation of land, distributed among the settler community were undertaken by the settler, then apartheid government and the built environment was created by town planners, engineers and architects, trained during this period to ensure that ‘the city’ and its pockets, townships, homelands, and land from which Indigenous people were forcibly removed, were all aligned with the apartheid policies that facilitated and enabled the system of White domination and Black subjugation (O’Connell 2014). As Belinda Dodson (2013) argues, this situation is parallel to the situation of spaces within our cities are still reflecting apartheid planning, which we see daily along with its social, political and psychological legacy. Apartheid left physically built forms, spatial divisions, and landscape scars that, unlike apartheid laws, could not simply be undone at the stroke of a ‘presidential pen’ (Dobson 2013: 1). Similarly, attitudes of White privilege and entitlement among White colleagues tend to go unchallenged as the system itself has not changed much. Even though there was a change in government, the state and its governance did not necessarily change. A new constitution heralded a process of breaking with apartheid laws, yet the realities are still evident within the system that does not challenge White attitudes especially within Architecture where White colleagues believe they have ownership.

During the apartheid years, architects – much like engineers and town-planners – came from the White population, where their early, secondary, and higher education was set on furthering their White dominance, and simultaneously allowing their governance over the oppressed and the colonised communities of South Africa. The amount of money the apartheid regime spent on a White child, an Indian child, a Coloured child, then a Black child, in that order of bottom-up hierarchy, offers us further insight into how this stratification within basic and further education fostered the material

conditions for inequality and allowed the White population to continue to benefit from governance, dominance, and control (Netswera & Mathaba 2006). White universities catered to the needs of the apartheid regimes' grand plan of segregation by participating in the design and planning of the aftermath of usurpation and settler colonialism, and as such, White students who became architects under these conditions (Coetzer 2016) assumed their 'rightful place' within the society that they lived, and into the post-1994 South Africa with the firm belief that architecture was their domain, their rightful place as leaders, teachers and gatekeepers of the country, particularly the built environment, and ultimately the conditions under which Black students had to learn.

In this article:

1. I locate my point of departure as a foreigner in South Africa, using an existential approach to bring forth my racialisation, and situate my presence within the School of Architecture where I teach;
2. I unpack how examiners from East African countries enter the university, which is located in KwaZulu-Natal Province, South Africa, which was a previously Whites-only university; and
3. I examine the curriculum, which continues to be European-based, for a student population where more than 90% of the learners are Black – that is, of African, Indian South African, and Coloured heritage.

Methods and Approaches: Autoethnography, Existentialism and Critical Race Theory

My point of entry into this article is as a foreigner from Colombia to South Africa. I married a Black South African woman more than three decades ago and moved to South Africa, when it became clear that she wanted to be back in her home country permanently after the formal end of apartheid in 1994. I raise this for reasons which speak to her politicised identity and not mine in her racialised context of South Africa, and for reasons that we each steer clear from, such as depictions of coupledness and heteronormativity. Instead, I wish to put forward my existentialist framework for this article in offering my reflections on how I came to understand my racialised identity. As a man who

was born in Colombia, I was classified as both *Mestizo*, which is a racialised identity of Indigenous and Spanish descent, and *trigeño*, which is a pigmented identity. Columbus' 'discovery' of the Americas has led to the continued use of the term, 'American Indian' when referring to Indigenous peoples of the Americas. And whilst Colombians still today take a certain pride in the classification of *Mestizo*, through which we (I intentionally refrain from the use of the word *they* as I consider my upbringing implicated in the very process that I critique) are also able to falsely claim that we are of European descent, and therefore White or 'almost White' (an expression I return to later in this article).

These racialised identities were created so that there would be a population that identified with the coloniser on the one hand, and against the African enslaved and Indigenous population on the other. Besides, I am acutely aware that among people who self-identify, the term Black in Colombia is used sparingly, and with trepidation. Similarly, the term Afro-Colombian, the preferred term, is also used with caution and only offered by the person who self-identifies. In Spanish, the word *negro* refers both to the colour black (as in the colour of a shoe, for example) and to the person who carries African heritage. The latter is often used as a diminutive, as in *el negrito* (the little Black person) as a term of debasement towards the person upon which it is inflicted, *Mestizo* Colombians insist that the term is one of endearment. When asked whether the speaker would object if the term was bestowed upon him or her, such speaker would often say, 'I don't mind ... but I am not Black'.

Racialised identities remain a complex expression that leans towards identifying oneself, and the person to whom one is referring, with terms that offer them the Whitest (in terms of racialised identity) possible description. The naming of *negrito* is considered an etiquette, and an act of kindness; the practice of inaccurately offering a false identity is considered an expression of goodwill, and for which the speaker is rewarded. To clarify, the term *negrito* is conditioned as a label associated with someone who has darker skin, regardless of their heritage and ethnicity. The *Mestizo* identity, by definition, is not only inaccurate if one examines the DNA make-up of the alleged *Mestizo* population of Colombia but it foregrounds European-ness in such a way that the number of European colonisers in Colombia is exaggerated. Additionally, and more critical, the Indigenous peoples are shifted to the borders of the unconscious, made invisible, placed in the 'jungles' so that as Colombians we can feel good about ourselves because we are far removed from the Indigenous

people from whom we owe our existence. Colombians refuse to grapple with indigeneity, our Indigeneity, and whole-heartedly believe, for the most part, that our Indigenous ancestry is either non-existent or of such a small percentage that it is not worth mentioning. Better still, those who identify as *Mestizo* stand firm in their belief, particularly after their ‘nose jobs’ and dyed blonde hair, which of course are courtesy of the many plastic surgeons our country continues to produce, and the peroxide infused hair products Revlon and similar companies has manufactured over the years to maintain the false consciousness of *blanqueamiento* (Ministerio de Educacion Nacional 2011), which is the active process of trying to make oneself appear White and as ‘European-looking’ as possible.

The term *trigeño* takes its name from wheat; *trigo*, means wheat in Spanish, and therefore suggests a skin colour that resembles the colour of wheat. For reasons that speak to the length and focus of this article, let me say, in brief, that my history as someone who comes from the Indigenous people of South America has consistently been denied in my family – both on my mother’s and my father’s sides. Not only did this become an embarrassment to me in my early twenties but also to the many people from similar backgrounds in Colombia I met, especially during my university education in Bogotá, who dutifully performed this customary denial, even though our facial features, much like mine, spoke directly to our Indigenous heritage. The fact that I, like my father, am lighter in skin colour than the rest of my family members speaks directly to Indigenous ancestry that emanates from the colder mountainous regions rather than the warm coastal areas.

When I studied in the United Kingdom (UK), I met people who were from South America who were ignorant of the skin colour identities of Indigenous peoples and called themselves White. As soon as we met Spanish students from the empire, the humiliation and ridicule, the condescension, and the patronising attitude of our presence as ‘little Indians’ soon changed the mindset of the South American students with whom I kept company. We were, instantly, all at once, the Indigenous people of the Americas and reduced to an existential nothingness, ‘*Los Indios*’ by our colonisers. In the many verbal declarations that followed, I observed their defence with amusement as I noted the immediate embrace of Indigeneity by my South American peers. This act of claiming Indigeneity made me acutely aware that my peers’ identity politics were not grounded in ignorance as I previously thought, but in a desire to assert governance that speaks to social class, first and foremost. This was coupled

with racialisation, as long as the *conquistadores* [colonisers] were not in the room to remind us that we were the wretched, ‘savage’ Indians whom they saved with Catholicism and whom they robbed of gold and emeralds while we ‘allowed’ them to. My Masters’ degree supervisor at the time at the University of York, when introducing me to the students he supervised referred to me and another South American student as ‘exotic’, to which I hastily replied that I was not a plant or bird of the forest. He seemed rather shocked at the immediacy of my response, as he had, in his description of me, constructed me as a quiet, well-mannered Latino.

But let me return to my home and my upbringing: My paternal grandfather, for example, is visibly Black – I did not need anyone to point this out to me as a child and yet it remains an unspoken topic within the vast repertoire of annual gatherings where elders speak to the younger generation of their youth, significant events in their life when they were growing up, and events that allow us as the younger generation to learn from them. Yet, our racialised identity is hardly spoken about nor is there an open and agreed acceptance of our ancestral heritage, which is Indigenous, as is evidenced by my facial features, that of my daughter’s, my siblings and their children, and many members of our family – most of whom would shudder, let alone be insulted, at the knowledge that I have identified them in this manner. Indigeneity is worn as a mark of shame, a topic for jokes and a basis for reprimand with the intent to ridicule. Twenty-first century children are still encouraged to say, ‘*Los Indios*’ about people who live in the *Amazonas*, and when calling out behaviour that is contrary to the norm of a presumed middle and upper class, that are then labelled unmannerly, rude, uncouth, lacking in sophistication, to which the added expression that contains the word *muy*, as in ‘very’, *muy Indio* is used to silence the person into shame, and remind them that they have not successfully rid themselves of their unfortunate ancestry.

When I was a teenager, my paternal uncle, my father’s second brother, who worked as a pilot, took me under his wing for a short time. He invited me to join him on a trip to the United States of America (USA) shortly after my 17th birthday, as a means of getting to know me and to persuade me to study architecture in the USA. He was very different from my father, who is a businessman, considered rather quiet, stern, a disciplinarian, strict and someone who does not consider his sons as his friends. My uncle, on the other hand, had one daughter and three sons and would go on hiking trips with his sons. During my time with my uncle he shared with me how as the second

oldest child, and second oldest son, he was called '*el negrito*' which, as previously mentioned, in the Colombian context means '*the little black*'. Unlike in the USA, the term '*el negro*' is not given the same historical significance in Colombia nor the politicised significance of the 'n-word', which bears many levels of racial tropes around the world especially among those who understand the triggering effect of the word, its history of enslavement of the African people across the Atlantic, the histories of lynching, murder, rape and massacres.

My uncle was called '*el negrito*' and '*el Negro*' because his Black heritage was visible; he was, as it were, 'the black one' in his family. As the second child, and second son, he was also visibly darker than my father, and because my paternal grandmother could not hide her son's obviously Black heritage, she hid him! My uncle was put in another room, and out of sight of visitors, at times closed in a cupboard, even though he resembled my father quite a lot, and started to resemble all of his siblings born after him, all of whom were lighter in skin colour. He shared this history of his childhood with me, with great detail, and with anguish on his face and tenseness in his body. It was clear to me in his narration that the pain that was inflicted was deep. As I grew from the teenager he shared these stories with into a man I saw his pain manifest itself in many different ways, one of which included always expecting someone to demean him, for which he readily had a response waiting.

During my teens, as I grew into understanding what these identities meant, I learnt that in my society it was far more shameful to be descended from 'Los Indios' than it was from '*Los Negros*' since the latter afforded us as Latinos a sexiness, a rhythm in our dance and a love for pleasure that our Spanish colonisers could never erase, despite their attempts. The '*Los Indios*' part of my identity I had to carry with shame because this heritage placed me in the inevitable predicament of being a carrier of a series of traits stereotypically inflicted by our Spanish colonisers to depict our inhumanity, as such the justification for our colonisation: unintelligent, a 'savage', without grace, violent, no Western etiquette or desire for a code of behaviour that placed me among humans, and therefore undesirable to count as not only part of my DNA but as the main contributor to my DNA.

My decolonisation is not a process I can fully offer an account of here; this is an ongoing process that continually demands taking responsibility for my thinking and undoing the processes I was taught to uphold, along with the values and beliefs of my colonisers. But it was not only the history of my uncle

that broke the silence of racial abuse I suspected, it was also the actions of the wife of one of his sons who openly announced a few years ago that her dark-skinned children did not get their skin colour from her side of the family but from their father's side. She wanted to make a point – that there were 'no Blacks' on her side of the family even though the oblivion and contempt she held for her own dark skin was obvious, to which the necessary etiquette of the moment allowed me a silent, mindful awareness . . . perhaps even a grimace. I stood in amazement, reflecting on what my uncle had shared with me. The children of my cousin were now being ridiculed by their mother for being darker than her side of the family; she did not hesitate to call them into the house for fear that the sun might further deepen their Blackness.

Colonisation and the Transatlantic Effect

In addressing decolonisation in a context outside of my birth I am very much aware that this process transcends oceans. If one addresses oneself in the context one finds oneself in and understands the history of ones' location and your place within it, one notices a pattern, a repetition of racism and colonisation, of internalised racism and divide and conquer strategies, and the accompanying tactics. I traced this trajectory to offer an account of my decolonial journey, and as a father to a daughter of Indigenous African and Indigenous Colombian heritage, whose birth and racialisation in Canada and Colombia, opened my eyes to a reality that forged a particular agency within me, I decided many years ago that I had no right to claim silence as a defence mechanism because it suited my quiet disposition; the latter was always put forward as a great compliment that I as a Latino man carried and of which I needed to feel proud. It is only in the past 28 years that I began to speak out, and not silently sit by and observe the many and multi-layered processes of racism, internalised racism and colonisation unfold in my presence. On many occasions, I caught myself being the good, well-mannered Latino, whose light skin placed me outside of the realm of confrontation if I so chose. I felt the eyes of the perpetrators on me in ways that confirmed that they knew something about me: that not only had I been shielded by my lighter skin than the Black people or Indigenous people they ridiculed – and of which I was expected to understand that I was excluded – but on occasion when I wanted to address the said matter I did not have the language to confront these perpetrators. The regular doses of Catholic guilt with which the matter forged

a stronghold in my life – through childhood in a Catholic home, school and broader society – did not equip me to challenge family members, friends or older relatives against whom one's confrontation would be treated as an act of disrespect. Speaking out against racism and coloniality has since then become part of my life as a choice; silence is no longer an option, as the birth of my daughter 28 years ago disrupted that possibility forever. As such, in this article: in offering a narrative of my education on race, some of which includes the way that Blackness and degrees of Blackness operated and continue to operate in my background, my concern has been with ways in which the subject of the racialised experience develops an awareness of her/his lived conditions and understands the implications of its reproduction. If and when we speak of decolonisation, are our histories left in the geographical spaces of our birth or do they, like us, travel and meander within the globe, where we engage with the world and continue our commitment to deracialise and decolonise ourselves in geographical spaces where the meaning of our racialisation takes on new and different nuances?

Joining the University of KwaZulu-Natal's School of Architecture

In September 2011, I joined the Architecture discipline at UKZN. With a five-year degree from Universidad del Javeriana in Bogotá, Colombia, a Masters' degree from the University of York in the UK, several years of private practice on diverse projects, mentorship of younger architects I was able to bring my expertise to UKZN. As a design lecturer, fully aware of my foreigner status, I began to immerse myself within the school's broad range of teaching and learning activities rather quickly. I was pleased that I could draw on my history of community architecture, especially my earlier work on the participation of residents in community architecture projects in Colombia and share some of those experiences with our Masters students.

My First Internal Examiner Experience at UKZN

In December of 2011, I was asked to be an internal examiner for the Masters' design project's portfolios (a two-year degree); these are students who are in the fifth year of their study, hence the final year of their Masters' degree. We were 10 internal examiners from UKZN and seven external examiners from

various South African universities as well as three examiners from East Africa, Later, within conversation, I ascertained that two were from Kenya and one from Uganda, thus amounting to a total of 20 examiners.

The process was that each of us offered a comment, a verbal and written opinion of the work exhibited, and allocated an individual mark to each of the students' presentations and their exhibited projects. As per the process, we were then asked to offer our analysis and overall evaluation of each of the projects. It is by no means a surprise to find, like in all professions, that opinions among architects differ. Opinions that we draw on are, as such, from our education and training, how the latter was cultivated. Like all professions, architects also cultivate certain likes and dislikes, and these are often voiced between and among one another regularly in a professional setting, not in the company of students over whom we preside as examiners. As such, one examiner would comment on certain aspects of what they saw while another would reflect on something very different within the same student's project. The grade average from all examiners then determines the final mark of the student's project.

On the day in question, we had a group of students with different racial backgrounds, indicative of the KwaZulu-Natal landscape whose work we had to examine: Black, Indian, Coloured and White. It has to be noted that the Zulu population group, also noted as an ethnic group constitutes the vast majority in the province, and likewise within UKZN. What became clear during the students' presentation, a process that was headed by the fifth-year coordinator who self-identified as a French-speaking West African national. Each time a Black student was introduced to the examiners, it was done with offensive, derogatory and humiliating off-the-cuff comments upon the revelation of the student's name and identity, which involved pointing to and/or physical identification so that all examiners could see who the student was. The coordinator took these liberties, openly, with a great degree of entitlement, and no one stopped him. It was my first time as an examiner at UKZN and whilst I knew that it could not possibly be part of the formal procedure, I sought disapproving verbal and facial expressions from my peers, none of which were found. The coordinator, as such, laid the foundation for the examiners to engage with the students' work via the liberties he took with humiliating them, and because no one objected, the Black students continued with the process, with the discomfort that was evidenced by their distraught faces. It is easy to observe how a Black student of architecture in South Africa reflects on issues

of identity when there is a system of European White domination still prevalent in the country in general and in the programme of Architecture at UKZN in particular. As per Lewis Gordon's article, 'Thoughts on Decolonization',

it does not take much to realize that almost exclusively arguing against Eurocentrism through discussing European thinkers results in maintaining European thought as the center of thought (Gordon 2019).

Some of the students carried the humiliation as though it was a form of punishment for skipping class when the latter was mentioned as part of the introduction of the said student and the work that they produced. In some cases, the remarks were made when a student at the beginning of their presentation that the coordinator had not seen that student for regular classes during the semester; the student was now suddenly presenting the final project without the coordinator's knowledge of a proper progress report or knowledge that the student in question had produced the design under evaluation. The coordinator's comments portrayed the Black students as negligible, irresponsible and untrustworthy. This alone gave examiners a biased approach towards the Black students as no one was aware of the intricacies of the students' attendance before the final examination, except for the coordinator.

What was difficult then, and remains difficult to this day, is understanding the attitudes of superiority of African architects from outside of South Africa (Cote d' Ivoire [the coordinator], Kenya [two examiners] and Uganda [one examiner], where the study and practices of architecture have a long history), towards Black South African students and observing the degree to which Black South African students were put down by these examiners, much like what one observes from resident British colonials. It is not a secret that the Zulu nation has its history within KwaZulu-Natal of fighting the British. It is not a secret either that Black students in South Africa were only able to study Architecture at universities after 1994, which took more than a decade to set-up at a great many universities in South Africa. Reddy (2004) At UKZN, the discipline of Architecture opened its doors to black students after 2004. With a history of decolonisation that was known in Kenya, which can be credited to the Mau Mau rebellion of 1952 which lasted for eight years, and a decade later the work of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's (1992) *Decolonising the Mind*, one would have expected that university-educated Kenyan examiners who spearheaded the humiliation, would show an awareness of the history of exclusion of Black

students from the discipline of Architecture in South Africa, and not brutalise Black students, by showing them and everyone that they preferred White students. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o addresses the issue of African realities that are affected by the greater struggle between the two mutually opposed forces in Africa: an imperialist tradition on the one hand, and a resistance tradition on the other (wa Thiong'o 1992). Memmi, in a similar vein talks about the two options left to the colonised, in *The Coloniser and the Colonised*:

The first attempt of the colonized is to change his condition by changing his skin. There is a tempting model very close at hand – the colonizer. The latter suffers from none of his deficiencies, has all rights, enjoys every possession and benefits from every prestige. He is, moreover, the other part of the comparison, the one that crushes the colonized and keeps him in servitude. The first ambition of the colonized is to become equal to that splendid model and to resemble him to the point of disappearing in him (Memmi 1965: 164).

Ngũgĩ's dichotomy and Memmi's psychological critique of internalised colonisation, quoted above, is drawn upon when higher-ranking colonised people crush those they believed to be lower-ranking; the higher ranking colonised people, by inflicting the humiliation, show their admiration for the coloniser in repeating the pattern of abuse and continuing the legacy of the coloniser for all the colonials to see, as was demonstrated in the scenarios I noted above, and for which they were rewarded. The colonised is often rewarded when we show the extent of our colonisation and our willingness to subject other colonised people to servitude. Memmi's extensive work on the process of internalisation that the colonised takes up, suggests that African examiners could have done that precisely when confronted with a situation where Black students, White students and White examiners in the same room aroused old colonial sentiments. The African examiners then, in asserting an imitation of British power over the Black South African students (especially in KwaZulu-Natal) with whom the Kenyan and Ugandan examiners share a coloniser, were as such exercising their prowess and chastising the lower-ranking colonised to assert power and control over the discipline of Architecture. These acts, for the most part, were not verbal but they were present in ways that one experiences with the coloniser who ignores, shuns, 'invisibilises' and as such punishes the colonised insinuating, 'you don't matter... I don't see you'.

What I am referring to here are acts of non-verbal communication, averted eye contact with Black students, bodily gestures of dismissal, a tone of voice that is suggestive of the British colonisers who colonised Kenyans and South Africans, and to which these Black South Africans students were subjected to in a manner reminiscent of what I had experienced as a learner at a British school in Colombia, and as a university student in the UK.

Whilst I am careful of the insinuation of the colonised extending the arm of colonialism towards the colonised in another location, this component of transference in the Freudian sense, and the colonised who becomes the coloniser in the Albert Memmi sense, cannot go unnoticed. What needs to be stated is: that within the context of a university degree course such as architecture, with examiners coming from East Africa, Uganda and Kenya in particular, anti-colonial struggles as spearheaded by the writing of wa Thiong'o's *Decolonising the Mind* (1992) and Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1992), played an enormous role in the process of conscientisation of the masses that led to decolonisation, decades ahead of South Africa. One then asks the question of the said examiners who ventured to South Africa to examine the work of Black students from the KwaZulu-Natal region who entered the study of Architecture one decade after democracy was declared: why reproduce the rotten British master and slave paradigm within another African region, when you fought so hard to rid yourself of it? Another question that I had at the time was how it was possible to transition from colonialism to anti-colonialism and then inflict a similar pattern of master-slave dehumanisation against Black students in another region? Transformation Charters were introduced at UKZN after 2008 (and around the country) and the external examiners surely must have been familiar with this. However, it seemed that inflicting superiority and ownership of a field such as architecture was considered a justifiable action – against students whose discipline towards their work and practice as apprentices these examiners were unfamiliar. Nonetheless they inflicted the worst kind of servitude; was this because it was the best demonstration of how they could show that they had become their coloniser?

'The theatre of cruelty', reminiscent of Rozena Maart's article on Marikana stuck in my mind years after this examination process, when I became familiar with the concept she introduced in unpacking the massacre against Lonmin mineworkers inflicted by the South African police (Maart 2014b). Whilst the acts of cruelty were visible to me they were not always verbal, but disguised in some places to suggest that they were acts that

belonged to the process of examination and necessary, crucial, to teach students a lesson. These silent acts of racism are reflected by Maart in another article (2014a) who suggests that ‘racism in the form of the trace, the hint, the gesture, the murmur – are all acts of atrocities’ (Maart 2014a: 55).

The three East African examiners were quick to point out all sorts of deficiencies concerning to the work of Black students, even if a project was competent; they were unkind when delivering their comments (both in the manner and in content), in fact, they were brutal and inflicted the highest form of public humiliation possible. When the White students were introduced by the coordinator and sometimes that introduction was not kind, although nothing close to the humiliation metered against Black students, the three East African examiners in question would compliment the White students even if the project was weak and did not deserve any accolades. Brutality and cruelty are the best descriptions of the acts and series of interactions between these examiners as the perpetrators and the Black students as the victims. Such levels of verbal, and non-verbal brutality were never extended to White students under any circumstances, even when the work was poor. The negative remarks towards South African Black students and general positive remarks towards White students were reflected in the mark allocation of all the students, and it was as clear as daylight that the Black South African students were punished that day – for which crime, I am still uncertain.

Knowledge production within Architecture is still reflected by the standards that were set up by the colonial and apartheid legacy. It is this in-the-flesh presence, the agency, the person as subject and actor, reproducing the act of coloniality that was perhaps the most disturbing. As Maart notes: ‘... agency is key to the formation of knowledge production ...’ (Maart 2014a: 56) and the East African examiners used their agency to frequently comment negatively on the work of the Black students and rarely on the work of the white students. In doing so, they asserted their willingness to side with and participate on the side of the White colonials, in showing Black students that they have risen above their colonised status and have become, even momentarily, the new coloniser. Not only did the East African examiners identify with the White lecturers, and locked gazes with them to show silent, unspoken solidarity of the maintenance of Black debasement, they showed a particular form of exceptionalism, one I would paraphrase as follows: we are the better Africans and look down on the Zulu newcomers to architecture – we are also the better Blacks, the more esteemed ones, and we learnt very well from our British colonisers!

Looking for Reason

Over the years when confronted with a situation where power was exerted and debasement was the objective, I found myself wondering why it happened. It is both difficult and troubling to understand why both the fifth year coordinator and the three East African examiners presented their display of seeking affinity with White students, praising their work, even if the work was mediocre and in stark contrast to how they behaved when a Black student was introduced. There was no exception for this behaviour throughout the presentation process. What this attitude of debasement sought to show, is that the British colonisers were correct in their assertion that the ‘native needed discipline and cannot prosper’ until as the colonised he transgresses and becomes the British coloniser, he is at his best. Lester (2001) Not only is he at his best because he values and shows the behaviour of his master, but he ensures that those over whom he presides, those he dominates understand it too and suffers through it in the same way. Why would the high-ranking colonised show the coloniser that he was relevant in his life? As a fair-skinned Latino man I found the behaviour of the fifth-year coordinator and the three examiners embarrassing. Their behaviour was transparent to me. If I could see it, be witness to it, surely the White colonials in the room could see the blatant attempt at reproducing coloniality – or so I thought? But I was wrong. As a newcomer, I found myself at a loss for words at the time. The scenarios never left my mind as I replayed them over and over in my mind.

Curriculum

Architecture at UKZN has been taught over the years from an exclusively Eurocentric curriculum that focused on the historical, technological, and ideological points of interest. The university in question: the University of KwaZulu-Natal, was called the University of Natal, part of the apartheid education system of White-only universities. When the University of Natal merged with the University of Durban, Westville, the advent of transformation began with an emphasis of opening the doors to Black and Indian students. Despite this grand gesture, the Eurocentric curriculum remained intact, held together by the glue of White privilege and false colonial superiority, and Black liberalism by those who still come across as though they are so happy to work at a university under the leadership of White colonials or African liberals who look down their noses at African systems of knowledge. As such, despite

UKZN's claims of transformation and diversity, very few efforts have been made to transform the way that students learn in architecture as well as what they learn. George Yancy discusses issues of diversity as simply talk, nothing more. He notes:

if diversity-talk is to be more robust, and if diversity at the level of lived experience is to be more fruitful and vivacious, then it is necessary that we engage in the process of un-concealing Whiteness revealing the subtle dynamism as destructive (Yancy 2012: 44).

The reality at UKZN is fitting and speaks directly to what Yancy directs our attention. Owen digs a little deeper, explaining that with,

recent South African Architecture, one often experiences a deeply disturbing ambivalence: an oscillation between admiration for its intelligence, formed experimentation and audacity, and for the frequency with which such work has been realized: and revulsion at the social context within which it has been produced (Owen 1989: 3).

Owen's assertion speaks directly to the matter of the curriculum, which has not been addressed despite the constant reminder that we live in a democracy.

Even in 2020, Architecture at UKZN teaches our students a European understanding of architecture as though it is the pinnacle of academic acceptance. Post-2004, Architecture at UKZN still had a high percentage of White students. These days, especially post 2011, Black and Indian students form the majority, yet there is no reference to the Black South African or South African Indian built environment, both historically and within the contemporary setting, that allows them to be explored and to be treated as academically relevant and necessary. Maart makes a point in her work to address the question of attitude, especially because the UKZN Transformation Charter references and openly declares the history of apartheid at the start of the said document. Maart notes, that despite this revelation, '[h]owever, I contend that whilst one can legislate for, and against, almost anything and everything one cannot legislate attitude!' (Maart 2014a: 57). This is still prevalent concerning the curriculum that is taught in Architecture at UKZN, where Black staff fear that they will be looked down upon for suggesting that more African content is needed, some of whom have little knowledge of

African architecture because they have never been taught it. Therefore, they become actors, carriers of Eurocentric knowledge systems, reproducing the same colonial framework among the Black students they teach.

This article would not be complete without referencing the operation of Afrikaans nationalism amid the quest for transformation and within the current context of decolonisation. In 2017, Professor Ora Joubert asked several colleagues (myself included) to provide the name of the top Masters' student at UKZN. Those of us who were consulted on the matter believed that only one student, a young Black man, carried enough prestige to hold such a title: not only did he have a talent for thinking beyond his years, but also because he had the best hand drawings that I have seen in my almost ten years at UKZN. The objective was to include the student's work in a collection Joubert (2017) edited, *10 years + 100 projects: Architecture in a Democratic South Africa*. When the editor made her final decision, it was a big surprise to us to find that the young Black man we had put forward was not even on her list. Instead, it was an undergraduate White Afrikaner who completed his Masters' degree at the University of the Free State but now listed under the UKZN section. The quality of his work was not even close to that of the young Black student we had put forward for consideration. Besides, there were other students at UKZN whose work was more deserving than the White student in question. The process of democracy that is claimed in the title of the work was never extended to the Black student; the editor's choice was seemingly based on the fact that she chose an Afrikaner student, in line with her own identity, enforcing Afrikaner nationalism and did not show the slightest concern for democracy, while ready to utilise the phrase in the title that stood in stark contrast to her political practice.

Drawing on Manning's reflection that 'Apartheid social engineering used the Built Environment as part of its repressive arsenal against Black South Africans' (Manning 2004: 5) it is easy to illustrate how a White architect would still prefer to showcase the work of a White student rather than that of a Black student. Joubert's choices, made as an Afrikaner nationalist, uses the term 'democracy' in her title. But where was the democracy that she claimed to exercise? She uses a South African history of apartheid, the heralding of a new democracy, which makes her a heroine because she is utilising political phrasing that situates her at the forefront of a process of which she is not a part. She is in fact only utilising the words and the phrases, while actively practising racism as an Afrikaner nationalist.

When I participated as an external examiner at Nelson Mandela University, Port Elizabeth in 2019, the examination was done in two panels. In two days, we were presented with the students in our panel. After two days of examination and marking, all examiners got together and together where we were shown both student panels. The examination committee consisted of two Black architects, seven White architects, and me, thus making ten panel members.

Two students, one from each panel, got the same mark, which was the highest. One in our panel was an Indian student from Mauritius who presented a beautiful project with exquisite drawings and most importantly he presented the full extent of his process during the semester of how much he had thought out, mapped out, and contemplated his project with different approaches, clearly not satisfied with an initial attempt at his design but with major thought processes of inquiry that was simply commendable.

The other student on the second panel was an Afrikaner male who presented an interesting project of a sheep farm revitalization in the interior of the Eastern Cape. It was also a very well developed and competent project. To select the top student then became the focus of our task. This student would also represent the university at a national competition. Here, once again, the principle of democracy was exercised. To me, it was a ‘no-brainer’ that the White panellists all voted for the White student without fail, which meant that a 7 to 3 vote was never going to give the Indian student from Mauritius a chance at experiencing democracy nor be rewarded fairly for his work. Unfortunately, I was right.

Manning has written on how the general impact of architecture is viewed in South Africa. Manning notes: ‘an architecture that is both in tune with African culture, and celebratory of African cultural heritage rather than that of European needs’ (Manning 2007: 10) reflects on the need to ‘re-evaluate how architecture must be seen removing European White supremacists’ standards’. It is accurate indeed to say that the White supremacists’ attitudes, social practices and political gestures that were rife during the apartheid years are still very much intact.

Conclusion

In this article, I have offered an indication of how examiners from other parts of the African continent come into a university in KwaZulu-Natal and assert a hierarchical position of power over Black students of Zulu heritage as a means

to show that they have been working in the field of architecture longer than the previously disadvantaged students, who are trying to enter the field. I have also illustrated how internalised colonisation on the part of the colonised does not necessarily produce actors who continue their future in freedom. Actors who act to reproduce colonisation do so because they want the same rewards they believe their colonisers received. Many a time, people who reproduce these patterns believe that they have an audience and that particular audience was the White students, however few White people were in the room was of no significance. It was a means of saying to the White people who were present: 'look, we are just like you, we are like our White coloniser'.

Observing this display of glorification of the coloniser, being the colonised, inflicting hurt and harm, was both frustrating and embarrassing because I saw the examiners as making fools of themselves and demeaning certain students. By all accounts, they did not care what I thought because they were not there to impress me. It is important to recognise that just because people go through a process of anti-colonial struggles does not make them free from reproducing power dynamics in other places, continuing to use racialisation and/or ethnic hierarchies as a basis to stage forms of power. The editor of the book and the choices she made as an Afrikaner nationalist while using the title of democracy is just as much a mockery as the East African examiner who asserts a false identity and imitates the coloniser so that he (and they) can feel powerful, and masterful. Where was the democracy that she should have exercised in giving the young Black man the credit he deserves? One could say she is using the South African history of apartheid, the heralding of a new democracy which makes her a heroine (in her eyes) because she is utilising political phrasing that situates her at the forefront of a process of which she is not part. In fact, it would seem she is only utilising the words and the phrases but is still basically practising the racism and Afrikaner nationalism to uphold racism.

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Rainbow Schooling Pains: An Auto-Ethnographic Account of Model C Schooling in South Africa – In Dialogue with Rozena Maart

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Abstract

This article explores the schooling history of the author as a Black South African who grew up in the 1990s and the first decade of the new millennium, during which time she had to endure a colonised Model C education. The article looks at the history of the author's schooling as a way to identify and recognise the trauma that the author, and others in a similar position, have suffered in the new democratic South Africa. The discussion of some of this angst and the Model C experience as one of its sources is discussed in this article against the backdrop of the colonial matrix of power. This is done to analyse some experiences that the author faced in a way that exposes the continued dominance of White supremacy in Model C schools after the end of apartheid.

Keywords: Model C Education, South African Education

Introduction

This article explores the schooling history of the author as a Black South African who grew up in the 1990s and the first decade of the new millennium, during which time she had to endure a colonised Model C education. This article looks at the history of the author's schooling as a way to identify and recognise the trauma that the author, and others in a similar position, have suffered in the new democratic South Africa. The discussion of some of this angst and the Model C experience as one of its sources is discussed in this

article against the backdrop of the colonial matrix of power. This is done to analyse some experiences that the author faced in a way that exposes the continued dominance of White supremacy in Model C schools after the end of apartheid. Model C schools were born out of restructuring in 1990. The House of Assembly, which represented White interests in parliament, was forced to have its schools open to other racialised groups if they were to continue operating (Sedibe 1998: 270). This meant that Black people would move into previously classified White areas, still colonial environments, for their education. Although different models of schools were abolished in 1996, Model C schools still exist as a code for former Whites-only schools in public nomenclature (Sedibe 1998: 274).

I consider myself a political experiment. In this dialogue, I reflect on a few moments of my Rainbow Nation¹ experience: an upbringing that displays the New South Africa's² intention to move away from the apartheid regime's design, but only goes so far as having intent and little follow through with many missed opportunities. I undertake this examination because I am part of the first generation of post-apartheid children, and I believe that my experiences have value. I also undertake this examination of my schooling as part of a decolonial project, as a means to connect my lived experience with the process of decoloniality. The second part of this article moves to the dialogue model as a means to make my voice present, and respond to questions put to me on the topic.

Methodology

The methodology employed in this article is an auto-ethnographic one. This is to accurately capture my lived experiences of the era of which I write and simultaneously critique them. I recognise that I am a member of a very unique social group, in three distinct ways. The first being that I'm a Black South

¹ South Africa was dubbed 'The Rainbow Nation' by Archbishop Desmond Tutu in 1994 in celebration of desegregation and our first democratic elections (Khumalo 2018: 191).

² I say 'the New South Africa' to reference the strong sociopolitical marketing supporting the idea that South Africa had entered a new era with the 1994 democratic elections.

African, born in 1990 who attended a Model C school. These intersections are still relatively new because it has not been that long since my generation has reached maturity. We live in a country that is still preoccupied with dealing with the ramifications of apartheid and the new social order under which we live. Being a member of a distinct social group with unique intersections puts me in a position to add my experiences to the foundling knowledge of post-apartheid Black Model C experiences. Auto-ethnography allows me to accomplish the above mentioned by asserting my presence, along with my culture and heritage as central to the examination I undertake here.

Auto-ethnography is a decolonial act because it does not reduce the subject to an ‘Other’, an alien to the ethnographer that has to be studied. Chawla and Atay (2018) write that auto-ethnography ‘seeks to shift marginal voices to the center’ (Chawla & Atay 2018: 4). It sees the subject as a complex, fully formed and interactive being that can contribute greatly to the understanding of human beings and the way we live and interact with each other and the world around us.

Auto-ethnography is a decolonial undertaking that requires ‘prior knowledge of the people, their culture and language’ (Hayano 1979: 100), all of which is suited to the purpose of this article and the experience that I tackle as an African who is an isiZulu speaker and attended a Model C school for my entire basic education. This level of membership and personal experience gives me ‘master status’ that means that I am a group insider writing about the group and group experiences of which I am a part (Hayano, 1979: 100). This is very important because the academics that I have come across who are working on researching the Black Model C experience are White such as Christie and McKinney (2017) who are cited in this article out of respect for the Black students they wrote about. While I will give a partial picture of being in a Model C school as a Black South African born in 1990, I also problematise my experiences by viewing them through a decolonial lens. In the last segment of this article, a dialogue between the author and Rozena Maart, allows some of the above noted content to be unpacked.

Living and Working through Decoloniality

Decoloniality isn’t an abstract theory, it is an act with a ‘who’, ‘when’ and a ‘why’. As a child of the nineties, I am *that* missed decoloniality personified. I am also a person, a cognitive being with agency, which puts me in the unique

position of recognising the failures of the apartheid regime, such as the privilege afforded to colonial languages in my school, and remedying them alongside others who have plodded the same schooling history. Remedying those failures starts with identifying them not just from the perspective of policy, but from the lived experience of those that had to suffer through that policy as it was put in practice (or failed to be put into practice) firstly by the apartheid government then by a government calling itself post-apartheid. Speaking out on my lived experience is a way of displaying my agency as one of the oppressed (Maart 2015a: 69–70). An important part of decoloniality is identifying and recognising the trauma that we have suffered collectively, as a group and as individuals. Recognising this trauma is an important part of the decolonisation process and serves as a foundation for the actions that we take in addressing our past to create truly democratic and decolonised societies (Mignolo 2009: 2). Colonisation is political just as much as it is personal; this article is therefore personal as well.

As a Black South African of the nineties, I was born and raised during a time of political transition, which took place from 1990 to 1994. I was born when South Africa was leaving one political era for another, leaving apartheid for the Democratic Rainbow Nation. My experience with decoloniality is therefore limited because I was born in 1990. The ‘before’ entity that South Africa used to be before 1994 when we had our first democratic elections is theoretical to me. My schooling took place during the dietary changes and exercises that attempted to shape South Africa into a model of post-apartheid elegance. I’m not a ‘born free’³ of 1994; I’m a child of 1990. My earliest connection to South Africa of which we would be on the receiving end is CODESA (the Convention for a Democratic South Africa): the negotiated framework that would set up a South Africa that would have the ramifications of not removing White people from their position of power as settlers and colonisers, but reaffirming that position in language that was meant to suggest a ‘calm’ and ‘civilised’⁴ transition from apartheid to democracy (South African History Online 2017).

³ A born-free is a person who was born in 1994 or shortly, therefore, as 1994 marks the year of ‘one-person, one-vote’ (Maart, 2015b: 195)

⁴ As opposed to other seemingly ‘uncivilized’ transitions of other countries. *At least we didn’t end up like other African states, right? We are the ‘civilized’ Africans, see?*

There was a process in South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), that was designed to deal with *some* of the injustices of the apartheid government, and by extension, address some of the trauma that people have suffered. Llewellyn and Howse (1999) offer a short description of the process, as follows:

... the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) addressed gross human rights violations in the country's past through a process aimed, not at the punishment of guilty individuals, but at determining what happened and why. Through its process, the TRC provided the opportunity for victims to tell their stories, to be heard and acknowledged, and, eventually (to some extent), to be compensated (Llewellyn & Howse 1999: 356).

As Llewellyn and Howse (1999) also note,

... the transition from a past marred by mass human rights abuses to one based on the principles of democracy and respect for human rights could not be had simply by a transition in government (Llewellyn & Howse 1999: 366).

The problem with the TRC is that its mandate was to address 'gross human rights violations,' it had no space for microaggressions suffered by Black people that may not be considered gross human rights violations. That means that the 'minor' traumas that Black people suffered remained unaddressed.

My generation was thrust into the position of trailblazing a future where racism would be a thing of the past even though we were physically and emotionally caring for a previous Black generation that was suffering trauma from the violence of racism, and the White anger from forced cessation of overt perpetration. We were the 'bandage baby' of an arranged marriage of people in an abusive relationship. And as a generational bandage baby, we were expected to fix a relationship that was irreparable while smiling happily for family photos, pretending that there was no trauma from the situation we had thrust upon us. The trauma that we as a generation of trailblazers have suffered comes from the racism we experienced, partly due to being taught by the very people who participated in the oppression of our families and community.

There had never been a framework for the average White person to address their part in apartheid and the continued oppression that Black people faced. Had the average White person even been expected to account for their complicity and active participation in racial oppression?

As Black students attending Model C schools, we had the burden of having to move into White spaces that were unwelcoming to us because they were not decolonised. We had to learn White people's ways and beliefs, with both descendants of British Colonials and Afrikaners in my school, and in the process risk the loss of knowledge over our ways. There is a particular incident that happened in primary school that left the Zulu students in the class traumatised. The White teacher in charge of the class had determined that the class had been misbehaving and decided to punish us all. She made us stand on our chairs with our hands on our heads for an entire class period. What the teacher did not know is that there was a strong belief by the Zulu students that putting their hands on top of their heads would result in the deaths of their mothers. Several students spoke up and informed her of this. I don't remember what she said, but I remember that we had to continue holding our hands on top of our heads. This was highly traumatic for us as children.

The post-1994 country was christened the Rainbow Nation by Archbishop Desmond Tutu in celebration of South Africa's rebirth as a unified desegregated democracy (Khumalo 2018, p. 191). Desmond Tutu said,

Each of us is as intimately attached to the soil of this beautiful country as are the famous jacaranda trees of Pretoria and the mimosa trees of the bushveld – a rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world.

The declaration that we were a Rainbow Nation suggested that we had come together – the many ethnicities, many cultures, many racialised groups – to form something beautiful. Khumalo notes that through desegregation and democratisation, we had come together as one nation and that the struggle had ended (Khumalo 2018: 194). It was as if trauma and racism had suddenly stopped existing and we were all unified towards the same goal, or maybe that was Archbishop Desmond Tutu's hope. Regardless, the Rainbow Nation rhetoric dominated my early years, making my generation grow up with the expectation that all was well in the Republic. This left us blindsided by our existential experiences of this Rainbow Nation world.

There has to be a lot of angst experienced by a generation carrying a

burden as huge as the one we do. Angst is defined as ‘a strong feeling of anxiety about life in general’ (Soanes *et al.* 2002: 29). Our lives have been based on a racist history that has been allegedly dealt with through democratisation. This is in contradiction to the experiences that Black students faced in the Model C school setting, as will be explained below.

The colonial matrix of power is a ‘racial system of social classification’ that led to the division of the world into the three capitalist defined classes of development or modernity (Mignolo 2009: 2–3). There is no surprise at the Western world being defined as the most modern or developed, after all, classifications were produced within the Western world to further entrench ideas of superiority and thus exert control over the rest of the world. Walter Mignolo identifies four interrelated domains that make up the colonial matrix of power (Mignolo 2009: 19). All four of these interrelated domains are identifiable in the Model C school setting in South Africa. The domains are the control of the economy, the control of authority, the control of gender and sexuality and the control of subjectivity and knowledge (Mignolo 2009: 19). Some of the domains will be addressed below. It is important to emphasise the word ‘control’ as it has a particular significance in South Africa when it comes to schooling. The group who can control these domains is the one with the power. Although all four of these domains are identifiable in the Model C context, the biggest and most powerful one is that of the control of subjectivity and knowledge, as the article unpacks below. I now move to the dialogue segment of this article.

Dialogue ...

Rozena Maart: In some of the discussions we have had, you talk about Rainbow Schooling as a type of education that is very specific and brought about very particular outcomes. Can you tell us a little more about this?

Philile Langa: Part of the clean slate for South Africa when apartheid ended was the integration of the apartheid-entrenched racial groups in schools. These racial groups were Black, White, Coloured and Indian (Maart 2015b: 184). As Black students attending Model C schools, we had the burden of having to move into a still-White space that was unwelcoming to us but was marketed as being otherwise. What I mean by this is that the Rainbow Nation rhetoric suggested that we were now free to attend these formerly Whites-only schools,

but when we got there, we found them in the same colonial state that they had been during apartheid. In my school, in particular, the administrative block stood as a historical witness to the apartheid years through the presence of photographs of the student body over the years. The photographs were never added to, to reflect the democratic era that the country was now in. We as Black students had to live with the reminder that we did not belong in that space. The space was under white authority, not a democratic or progressive authority.

Rozena Maart: You attended the Decolonial Summer School at UNISA in 2019. Tell us about some of the issues that you engaged with there and what resonated with your position on Rainbow Schooling?

Philile Langa: Some of the issues I engaged in at the Summer School included claiming space within the text. What I mean by this is, I was educated to know that I could not insert myself into the text. My experience as a Black woman could therefore not be reflected in what I was writing. I had to write as if I was a foreigner to my own experiences and to the work that I was doing. I remember having to write essays in high school on various topics that were assigned to us. None of these topics was ever about my existential experience of being a child growing up in the new democratic era. The only time I managed to insert myself in writing was when it came to the rare times when we were asked to write short fiction pieces. Then I would take the opportunity to write about my existential experience as a Black girl living in the time I was in. The Decolonial Summer School gave me a glimpse of some of the education that I should have received during my basic education years. The Decolonial Summer School taught me how to situate myself in the centre of my own narrative, rather than seeing myself and my experience through a colonial lens of othering myself.

Rozena Maart: What does Decolonial thinking and Decolonial Education mean to you within the context of Rainbow Schooling and its impact on your identity?

Philile Langa: My Model C school didn't have any ethnically Zulu teachers teaching, right up to two or three years before I graduated in 2007. The school hired many Indian and Coloured teachers through the years, but there was

never an ethnically Zulu one. This meant that I graduated high school without ever being taught by a Zulu teacher. This is not to say there were no ethnically Zulu staff. The only ethnically Black staff that I had encountered were the cleaners who lived in appalling conditions on the school grounds. When a Zulu teacher was eventually hired, it was a former student who had graduated and come back to teach in the primary school section.

Rozena Maart: Can you comment on why being taught by a Zulu teacher was imperative for Zulu learners within the Model C schooling framework?

Philile Langa: The importance of having a Zulu teacher in a former Whites-only space comes down to representation and the impact that it has on the identity of those that share that teacher's identity. There is a power in taking up space in a place where you were once denied access. It is an act of resistance against White supremacy. In the position of being a Zulu teacher in a Model C school, there is a destabilising effect on the historically normalised lack of Zulu presence in the space in a predominantly Zulu town in KwaZulu-Natal. It teaches Zulu students that they too can take up space in ways that are meaningful to their Zulu identity. Let me give an example here of a conversation I had with my mother: 'You can't go into someone else's house and make your own rules' (The author's mother, talking about why she and other parents she knew didn't lobby for the Zulu language to be taught at the author's Model C school). Representation extends outside the classroom to the school governing body. Parents of students and the wider community could have played a major role in lobbying the school and the government for a change in the way Black students received their education at Model C schools, but judging from my mother's comment, some Zulu parents felt powerless to ask for changes in a space they felt they had no claim to. School governing bodies had a role to play in changing the way that schools were run and should have, especially in the Model C context where the student body was becoming more and more diverse in the democratic era. With regards to language, the Schools Act of 1996 states that 'school governing bodies may determine the language policy of the school provided such policy is not used to implement discrimination' (Sedibe 1998: 275). According to Mncube (2009),

Their functions include creating an environment conducive to teaching and learning, developing a mission statement for the school, promoting

the best interests of the school, ensuring quality education for learners, safety and security of learners, deciding on a school-uniform policy, disciplinary action and policy regarding the determination of school fees (Mncube 2009: 83).

This means that school governing bodies yield power over students and the experiences that they have in and out of their school. The problem is that the government did not take the persistence of apartheid power relations in schools and communities into consideration when awarding decision-making power to school governing bodies. When Black parents did have complaints, they noted that they could not speak out because their children might be affected, especially if the Model C school their child attended was the only one that was accessible to them (Msila 2005: 182-183)

School governing bodies are made up of ‘teachers, students, where applicable, and parents who constitute a majority’ (Sedibe 1998: 274). This means that parents are percentage-wise the most powerful group in the governing body. The activity of parents in the governing body relies on their presence at meetings; a presence that was difficult to actualise for Zulu parents as the majority of Zulu families that sent their children to the school I attended were living in the Black township, of which was a significant distance from the suburb. This meant that transport arrangements needed to be made that would take parents to the school after dark, which is when meetings would take place. The school could have remedied this and made sure that meetings, including parent’s ‘evenings’, would take place on a Saturday during the day, when public transportation would be available to allow parents and students from the township and other far flung areas to attend. This was never the case. Instead, only parents with private transport could attend the meetings, clearly making this a matter of affordability. This enforced a class and race-based apartheid constructed representation of parental participation in the governing body and parent’s ‘evenings’.

The idea of ‘White is better’ also cannot be ignored. The apartheid-era enforced ‘superior-resourced’ White school gave many parents the idea that the school was better and therefore, whatever the school enacted had to be in the interest of delivering quality education to their children. Whenever I was around Zulu parents and the subject of education came up, this assumption was raised and felt tiring on every occasion. Our Black parents’ lack of previous experience in whites-only schools and the colonially enforced ideas of white

superiority that came with it made our parents ill-equipped to guide us through our challenging experiences. The new fragile landscape Black people were experiencing that was led by reputable Black politicians who surely knew best on how to approach this new era, but the Black parents around me were in the position of simply accepting whatever news and decisions that came from the school. Everyone in authority surely knew what was best for their children. This was all enforced by the perceived lack of discipline and the low quality of education that came out of township schools (Msila 2005: 175). Msila (2005) references work by Steyn and van Wyk (1999), and writes on their findings, noting:

... the lack of a culture of learning and teaching was evident in many township schools and many teachers were unable to maintain discipline, especially after the abolition of corporal punishment. In light of these and various other problems, it is not surprising that many Black parents opt for choice. These parents seem to be saying that township schools will not improve and that quality education can only be found outside the township (Msila 2005:175).

What this shows, aside from the lack of trust that Black parents had for township schools, is the lack of training by the government of township teachers on how to address issues around discipline and how to contribute positively to the quality of education in townships.

In his research, Mncube (2009) found that Black parents were reluctant to participate in student governing bodies because of their own perceived lack of education (Mncube 2009: 95). Black parents would find themselves unable to keep up with educational issues and therefore chose to be passive listeners, delegating their roles to those they saw as being more capable. This was a result of the school's failure to educate parents on the issues that affected their children's education (Mncube 2009: 96). This is in line with the many ways that Model C schools make themselves inaccessible to Black parents such as more amenable meeting times, finding a way to resolve transportation issues, and only using colonial languages at meetings, languages that Black parents aren't necessarily proficient in (Mncube 2009: 96). It meant that the meetings were not conducted for the benefit of *all* parents and students, but for the White people in leadership to assert their colonial presence and maintain a colonial haven for their children.

Rozena Maart: What are some of the key features in the Decolonial debate that resonate with you?

Philile Langa: The key features that resonate with me have to do with taking up space. Everything I do with regards to decoloniality comes down to the colonised unapologetically taking up space in colonial spaces. This space can be physical or in the text, visual or auditory. This goes back to when I was in primary and high school and having my Zulu classmates and I be told that we talked too loudly when we were talking to each other in Zulu. It made no sense to us when we were told that we were too loud. It was only in the colonial space that we were told this. When we were in Zulu spaces, our conversations were hardly ever considered to be too loud.

Rozena Maart: Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o makes a point of addressing language in *Decolonising the Mind* (1986), is this an area of concern for you since you address basic, primary education as well as secondary?

Philile Langa: Yes, this an area of concern for me. I grew up in the predominantly Zulu town of Mandeni in the province of KwaZulu-Natal not too far from the Eastern coast of South Africa. The core part of the town consists of two townships and a suburb. Under apartheid classification and zoning, one township was for Blacks and the other was for Indians. The suburb was, of course, for Whites. By the time I started preschool in 1995, the migration of Black people, Indians and Coloureds, who came from out of town, into the better living space, which was the suburb, had started. There were little to none of the Whites moving into formerly non-White spaces. In my youth, I only remember one White person moving into the Black township. I spent my entire childhood in the Black township, which was approximately two kilometres away from the suburb. The apartheid isolation of racialised groups due to the Group Areas Act of 1950 meant that there was isolation in culture, and in particular, in the language (Maart 2015b: 182). The isolation also meant that there was the isolation of resources and a language attached to those resources or lack thereof. In my case, the lack of resources was attached to the Zulu language and the presence of resources was attached to the English language primarily and the Afrikaans language second. While there were many schools in the Black township, there was only one school in the suburb, which started as a primary school and later expanded to include a high school. The

control of subjectivity and control of knowledge and knowledge production by a school seems obvious. After all, the point of a school is to teach skills and impart knowledge. But when the government has a large hand in the way that schools are run and the kinds of skills and knowledge that are imparted, then control of subjectivity and knowledge seems to primarily be in the hands of the government, handed over into the hands of the school. Yet when the government fails to be a decolonising force and chooses instead to be an integrating force, then the result in South Africa can only be that a colonial environment is handed the primary power to control subjectivity and knowledge. The only result there can be from this is the continuation of the production and preservation of coloniality by both the coloniser and the colonised.

The importance of language cannot be denied. It is an integral part of the identity that links us to our families, our communities, our history and our heritage (Msila 2005: 184). Frantz Fanon notes in *Black Skin White Masks*, ‘to speak a language is to take on a world, a culture’ (Fanon 2008: 25). As much as this phrase has been applied to colonial languages, it also applies to indigenous languages. Through being primarily located in the Black township, we were upholding Zulu culture, the Zulu world. Language, through its attachment to resources, is also a gateway, a way to access privileges that we could not otherwise have accessed (Msila 2005: 180). This applies to the colonial aspect of ‘to speak a language’. It is why my parents sent me to an English language preschool in an Indian township and then to a Model C school in the suburb from grade one through to grade twelve: so I could access the resources I wouldn’t be able to access through the Zulu language. But through accessing resources through the language of English as a first language and Afrikaans as a second language, we were upholding colonial worlds and cultures.

Talking to my mother about her turn towards a former Whites-only school for my education, she indicated that there was a great mistrust of Black schools because of how the apartheid government had made sure to make them desolate places for learning. During the apartheid years, expenditure and resources provided by the government varied according to race, with Blacks receiving the least (Sedibe 1998: 270). At the start of the democratic era in 1994, the ratio of ‘spending on white learners was about 1.5 times the spending on urban African learners and more than four times the spending on rural African learners’ (Fiske & Ladd 2004 in Branson *et al.* 2013: 1). This meant

that there was a great migration of Black students into Model C schools when schools were desegregated. Model C schools did not represent trust but an opportunity for Black parents to place their children in educational institutions where they could be certain their children would be provided with an education that had more resources than the alternatives (Msila 2005: 174).

Conclusion

In this dialogue, the author has examined some of the ways White supremacy has persisted in the Model C context. This was done to show that all is not well in democratic South Africa's schooling system. This dialogue also saw it as important to situate the experiences of Black students in Model C schools as traumatic. This is so that there can be recognition that there is still harm that is being done to Black children. The government should have taken its role in running the new school system more seriously, by monitoring the lived experiences that students faced in these formerly Whites-only environments. The government should have also done more to stem the flow of students from township schools into suburban schools through equipping township schools with the resources necessary to run effectively.

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Redrawing Dystopian Borders: A Decolonial Reading of Vernacular Dystopias through Mahasweta Debi's Short Stories

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Abstract

This article analyses three exemplary short stories of the Indian literary stalwart and activist Mahasweta Debi (1926 - 2016), to trace how literary dystopias can set aside their gentrified first world status and their usual connection with futuristic societies, to evolve with and accommodate the demands and realities of decolonial and postcolonial societies. Dystopias, especially literary dystopias, since their inception, have been one of the primary cultural forms that reflects in a creative way, the fear, disillusionment, and collapse of a world order and social structure while serving as a warning of an improbable probability. This article demonstrates that even though twentieth-century Bengali literature lacks genre specific nomenclature and analogous category of literary dystopias, however that in no way signifies a lack in such writings in the many vernacular languages, which is showcased through the reading of Debi's Bengali short stories. It further exemplifies that even in a limited span of a short story, it is possible to capture the acute and poignant realities of decolonial societies: realities that blur the distinction between the present and the dystopian futurism.

Keywords: literary realism, decolonial societies, literary dystopias, Mahasweta Debi, Bengali literature, postcolonial literature, dystopian short stories, hunger, starvation, violence

Introduction¹

The primary aim of this article is to trace the evolution and accommodation of dystopian elements in vernacular Indian literatures, taking the short stories of the Indian writer Mahasweta Debi (1926 - 2016) as examples. This article aims to bring the canon of dystopia out of its gentrified first world status and its usual association with futuristic hypothetical societies, to connect it with realistic yet largely unacknowledged dystopian elements that are present in postcolonial and vernacular Indian literatures. Postcolonial dystopias are one of the many cultural forms where disillusionment, disappointment, and breakdown of the social structure of a postcolonial nation is productively illustrated. This article, in its limited scope, is based on three exemplary short stories of the Bengali literary stalwart and activist, Mahasweta Debi. Twentieth-century Bengali literature does not have an analogous and comprehensive category of utopian and dystopian writings, nor is there a distinct terminology, which qualifies as an equivalent of dystopia.

However, that does not signify an absence of fantastic, satiric, anti-colonial, anti-totalitarian, or anti-industrialisation depiction of the society therein. Social satire, as a form of dystopian writing in Bangla² literature made its mark already in the 19th century, but since most of these writings were in the garb of social satire or political treatises, there is an absence of a genre-specific nomenclature (see Sen 2012: 123 - 146). Despite some active and valuable contribution from mainly South Asian scholars (see Bagchi 2012), the lapse in establishing dystopia as a genre in postcolonial Bangla literature is symbolic of the tendency to overlook vernacular contributions to the canon of dystopian literature, and this is further complicated by selective acknowledgement and inclusion of Indian writers writing in English, thereby overlooking the diverse and assorted tributaries of vernacular dystopian writings. Mahasweta Debi is a globally acknowledged writer whose works consolidate the challenge that postcolonial writers like her pose at the

¹ The author is extremely grateful to Prof. Rozena Maart and to the anonymous copy editor and reviewer(s) for their effort and support, and for the meticulous and valuable feedback on the article.

² The more common anglicised version is Bengali. In this article, it refers to the literature and culture from West Bengal, a state in eastern India with Calcutta (Kolkata) as the capital city. It was the capital of British India from 1772–1911.

association of literary dystopias with futuristic writings. The article will develop and clarify the areas of overlapping and distinction between social realism and dystopian writing, and for this I focused on Debi's contribution towards experimenting with and establishing dystopian narratives in the limited expanse of a short story. The calibre and finesse of these laconic compositions exemplify that the despair and urgency of the dystopian realities of the 'third world' can be as analogously and deftly demonstrated in the confined span of a short story as that of the more established and expansive form of novel. At the onset, it is important to trace how literary genres, and in this case, the genre of dystopia, travel and connect across cultures, societies, and nations.

One of the most important aspects that emerged from the works of scholars on genre theory is the cultural specificity of genres, since genre illuminates not only the social structure, but also the culture, and in extension the nation through its connection with specific historical periods, social interaction, and use of distinct rhetoric and language (Mayes 2003; Ilot 2015). Studying genres across cultures can give us a glimpse of how different cultures access, relate to, and modify different genres. The redrawing of the dystopian borders that I have included in the title of this article alludes to the shifting boundaries of a genre and its abilities to expand, evolve, and adapt to unique situations of postcolonial societies that require such accommodation. Vernacular dystopias have been the outcome of a new set of fears, anxieties, and a revised version of the apocalypse. This renegotiation and revisiting of the generic boundaries of dystopia can also be a part of the *regentrification* (and alternatively regentrification) process (Ilot 2015: 5f), a term Ilot uses in the context of traditionally marginalised authors. While Mahasweta Debi does not fall in the category of marginalised writers, I think her works can be re-explored as chronicles of 'third world' dystopian narratives, adequately redefining the aesthetics, style, and nuances of the genre as well as stretching and experimenting with the conventions. Genre theorists often argue that genre and nation work in similar fashion, both with porous boundaries and trying to contain the whole in its mobility and multiplicity. Harnessing the instabilities of genre boundaries, one can delve into the politics of inclusion and exclusion and thereby redrawing the borders of both the genre and the nation (Ilot 2015: 6). Furthermore, literary forms and genres are linked historically to political and social conditions of a nation and they respond to political situations of a society. To give an example, realism in Bangla literature developed (which was

a distinct departure from Rabindranath Tagore's brand of humanism and romanticism) during the turbulent conditions of the mid-20th century when India was grappling with several crises in the form of the infamous famine of 1943 and the imminent partition of India and Pakistan in 1947. Furthermore, Rick Levine conjectures that literary forms themselves, exert political power. While forms respond to the forces operating in a society and contains diversity at its heart, it also constrains because 'it imposes powerful controls and containments' (Levine 2015: 4). It is this constraining factor which works as a checklist for the arrangement of elements, structures, and patterns, that lends form to its uniqueness and rigour. However, this rigour and structure is actually a reflection of the binary patterns of the structure of the human communities themselves (Levine 2015: 5), argues Levine³. We find such binarism in the development of utopian and dystopian forms in societies where binaries of rich/ poor, developed/ underdeveloped, free/ captive, colonialism/ imperialism have made their way into utopian and dystopian visions of societies. In fact, in this case, social structures and situations have determined the parameters of the forms.

There is one last aspect of forms that Levine calls affordances, which further solidifies our concept of its structure as in what it can include and exclude. Simply put, affordances are what forms can afford to do or represent. Forms, while moving across time and space, carry with them the specific arrangements and patterns of what they are capable of doing. This capability is embedded in the inclusion and exclusion: '[...] a specific form can be put to use in unexpected ways that expand our general sense of that form's affordances. Rather than asking what artists intend or even forms do, we can ask what potentialities lie latent – though not always obvious – in aesthetic and social arrangements (Levine 2015: 6). This article precisely explores the potentialities of the form of dystopia when it represents a postcolonial society:

³ [...] forms travel [...] by moving back and forth across aesthetic and social materials. [...] human communities were organised by certain universal structures. The most important of these were binary oppositions– masculine and feminine, light and dark – which imposed a recognisable order across social and aesthetic experiences, from domestic spaces to tragic dramas. Structuralism came under fire for assuming that these patterns were natural and therefore inexorable, but one does not have to be a structuralist to agree that binary oppositions are a pervasive and portable form, capable of imposing their arrangements on both social life and literary texts (Levine 2015: 5).

how dystopian thinking and social realism combine to further consolidate the aesthetics of dystopianism through the portrayal of systemic repression and annihilation of marginalised people. Debi exemplifies that in the context of postcolonial societies, one need not to venture to an imagined future to visualise the end; it is near and at hand. Besides questioning the canonical dystopian worldview, Debi as a postcolonial writer, also articulates and questions the essence and parameters of the canon by offering alterity, since her stories rewrite the conventions of the genre from within and she navigates and articulates these conventions by identifying how the fear, hopelessness, and sense of doom, that lies at the heart of dystopia can be negotiated through her narratives.

The western definition of dystopia (see Chatterjee 2019) evokes an apocalyptic vision of chaos, wreckage, and annihilation, usually adhering to the political, environmental, and technological aspects of society. Dystopia, consisting of the Greek words *dus* and *topos*, signifies a bad place, a failed utopia. The usage was coined around 1747 but gained popularity in the late 20th century in the Western world (see Boller & Voigts-Virchow 2015), mainly within apocalyptic science fiction (see Claeys 2017). With their focus on the society, literary dystopias usually bring forth a social-political message,

[t]he overall strategies of the dystopian novel are those of political satire. The writer offers militant criticism of specific aberrations in our own, present social-political system by pointing out their potentially monstrous consequences in the future (Gottlieb 2001: 13).

There are distinctions within the genre, for example, Moylan distinguishes between 'classic dystopia' and 'critical dystopia', both of which are socially critical, allowing 'readers and protagonists to hope by resisting closure: the ambiguous, open endings of these novels maintain the utopian impulse within the work'⁴, and the 'anti-utopia', 'pseudo-dystopia', and 'anti-critical dystopia', which do not offer a horizon of hope but focuses more on the cruelty, deception, and inherent venality of human nature. Fredric Jameson talks about two different types of dystopian text: 'the 'critical dystopia', which functions by way of a warning, through the 'if this goes on principle'; and the 'anti-

⁴ For a detailed discussion see Baccolini, Moylan (eds.) 2003. As quoted in Milner (2009: 833).

Utopia' proper, which springs from the quite different conviction that human nature is so inherently corrupt, it can never be salvaged by 'heightened consciousness of the impending dangers' (Milner 2009: 831).

This article focuses on three short stories, '*Sishu*' (Children), '*Sandes*' (Sweet), and '*Mahdu: A Fairy Tale*' (translated by the author), written by Mahasweta Debi, one of the greatest Bengali authors of the 20th century, with an attempt to read dystopian writings in the light of realism of postcolonial societies. Debi's portrayal of the evils of a repressive state apparatus, a regressive social structure and its onslaught on marginalised human lives veers more towards the portrayal of anti-Utopia than any other abovementioned forms of the canon. Her stories portray a certain disillusionment and hopelessness that forms a part of the everyday functioning of postcolonial societies, which are turned into spaces on which the unbelievably corrupt or the unthinkable bad plays their role to blur the boundaries between what could happen and what is happening now.

It can be safely assumed that Mahasweta Debi, in these narratives, did not undertake to rework nor appropriate the canonical western dystopian model and hence did not contribute to reinforcing the centrality of the genre. What she did was to narrate the life conditions of the indigenous population almost with journalistic faithfulness. It is my conscious choice to read her texts as dystopian additions from the ex-colonies, to broaden the horizon of the Western canon of dystopian literature and redefine it to include similarly themed literature from the subcontinent. In the process, if I have subjected the narratives to some of the parameters of Western dystopian writings, that is simply for the sake of understanding and reference, since these exemplary stories are unique contributions capable of standing on their own. Vernacular dystopian literature does not require validation from Western/Eurocentric models of writing, and I have used the term dystopia for lack of another suitable vernacular term. In a previously published article, I have used *keyamat sahitya* [apocalyptic literature] to refer to vernacular dystopias, but Debi's stories are not exactly apocalyptic in nature. What I wish to achieve through this article, is to show that vernacular literature has a distinct dystopian branch of writings and once brought to focus, they can significantly enrich and broaden the horizon of literary dystopias. Mahasweta Debi (1926 - 2016), one of the most celebrated and widely translated Bengali writers and a notable activist is known for her writings on the ostracised Indian indigenous tribal population and minorities. Debi's writings explore the failures of decolonisation and the

ensuing crisis of a postcolonial state mainly through the indigenous popularisation's survival conditions. Gayatri Spivak (1996), in her assessment of Debi's creative political writings and her positioning of the subaltern in the consciousness of a decolonised nation notes that although decolonisation operates on a logic of reversal from colonisation, whereby,

[t]he new nation is run by a regulative logic derived from a reversal of the old colony from within the episteme of the postcolonial subject, the exclusion of the subaltern is not reversed into an inclusion in a decolonised society, but, there is however a space that did not share in the energy of the reversal, a space that has no firmly established agency of traffic with the *culture* of imperialism. [...] Conventionally, this space is described as the habitat of the *subproletariat* or the *subaltern*. Mahasweta's fiction suggests that *this* is the space of the displacement of the colonisation-decolonisation reversal. This is the space that can become, for her, a dystopic representation of decolonisation *as such*⁵ (Landry, MacLean 1996: 164).

This dark cave-like space, frozen in time, and imbibing the suffocating regimes of imperial domination long after imperial domination is said to have faded away, or where imperial domination reinvents itself to suit the postcolonial structure, is what we find in the pages of Debi's narratives. Her dystopian space is not another society one can have nightmares about, but a chunk of this same society coexisting in the same temporal and spatial dimensions.

The inhabitants of this dystopic space bear the prefix of 'sub', signifying under, below, beneath, imperfect, not quite and displacement is the core of this space, not just on the level of the colonisation-decolonisation reversal but also for the displacement of the sub-bodies. Through the short stories, I situate this embodied displacement of the people and at times the process of disembodiment as well as the space where the dystopic tragedy of decolonisation unfurls. Furthermore, in a society where the majority of the population is forced to forge a till-death-do-us-part relationship with poverty and hunger, it is not surprising that crises-ridden reality would constitute the core of Debi's anti-Utopia. Furthermore, the calibre and finesse of these laconic compositions exemplify that the despair and urgency of the dystopian

⁵ All italics are from the original text.

realities of the ‘third world’ can be as analogously and deftly demonstrated even in the confined span of a short story as that of the more established form of novels. Even though fantasy and fiction have ruled the genre, realism is still a major component of literary dystopias. In the realm of Western dystopian literature, realistic dystopias have garnered more attention and popularity. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) ‘inspired dread above all, that is precisely because its materials are taken from the real world’ (Meyers 1975: 268). So is *The Year of the Flood* (2009), which the author Margaret Atwood herself claims as ‘fiction, but the general tendencies and many of the details in it are alarmingly close to fact’ (Atwood 2009: 443).

Relatability makes the horror of dystopia more real. As Claeys sums up,

[T]he writer’s function is to tell the truth, not to sell dreams. And even if we assign utopia the latter task, dystopia’s is surely the former (2017: 431).

In the vernacular context, literature’s engagement with reality is well articulated in Premchand’s Presidential address delivered at the First All India Progressive Writers’ Conference on 10 April 1936. He remarked:

Literature properly so-called is not only realistic, true to life, but is also an expression of our experiences and of the life that surrounds us. It employs easy and refined language which alike affects our intellect and our sentiments. Literature assumes these qualities only when it deals with the realities and experiences of life Literature can be best defined as a criticism of life (Premchand 2011: 82).

In the 20th century Bengali literary scenario, *bastabbadi sahitya* (realistic literature) also made its mark by virtue of prominent literary figures’ insistence on realism as a literary technique. Their endeavour gave rise to a form of resistance, which came from within the established literary structure that heralded modernism in Bangla literature. It is important to trace the advent of realism in Bengali literature since dystopia and realism are very closely linked in the context of vernacular dystopian narratives. Depiction of famine, especially after the deadly famines of 1770 and 1943, became a key subject of literary production. Outstanding Bangla novelists like Tarashankar Bando-

padhyay⁶ and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee⁷ used famine in their seminal works. Especially Chatterjee in *Anandamath* (Abbey of Bliss 1882), which is counted as one of the most important contribution to the history of Bangla literature, describes famine-ridden Bengal of 18th century as the dystopia of Muslim rule. Similarly, Rabindranath Tagore's *Tasher Desh* (Land of Cards) a musical written in 1933 highlights a dystopia of fascism, regimentation, machine efficiency, and lack of creativity and freedom, which seems to coincide in timing with Hitler's rise to power in Europe. The brand of literary realism that was championed by the *Kallol*⁸ group of writers is further consolidated by Mahasweta Debi. Debi's portrayal of the conditions of the marginalised, subaltern lives creates her signature realism that iconises her protagonists. In an Orwellian fashion, she narrates the truth often depriving her readers of hope, because the lives she narrates are often without hope and the despondency that is disseminated to her readers is only a fraction of what her subjects go through on a daily basis.

While Debi's exemplary short stories discussed here posit subaltern individuals and groups against societies to bring out the clash between the two, which is a prominent dystopian trope, her characters are often the representatives of the classes to which they belong. Her account of the systemic abuse of tribal populations, the poor, and women weaves a dystopian society, which is very familiar and present. Debi's works are a powerful mixture of facts and creativity, where literary devices and her unique narrative techniques like chaotic registers, lend power, poignancy, and consolidation to her plots, which are often based on her own first-hand experiences of working with her subjects. Organised injustice lies at the heart of dystopia and dystopian narratives operate on the distorted principle of 'the deliberate miscarriage of justice' (Gottlieb 2001: 10). In Debi's *Sishu*, we see this deliberate miscarriage of justice at the hands of a repressive government. The story was first published

⁶ Bangla novelist lived from 1898–1971. See Chatterjee (2019) available at <https://olh.openlibhums.org/papers/10.16995/olh.358/#>

⁷ Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838 - 1894) is considered a key figure of the Bangla literary renaissance; he was a novelist, poet and journalist, famed for composing *Vande Matarm* (Hail the Mother) which became a clarion call for India's freedom movement.

⁸ See discussion on realism in Bengali literature: Chatterjee (2019) and Bhattacharya (2017: 57 - 88).

in 1979 and underlines a government's conspiracy against its own people⁹. It has received critical acclaims and scholarly attention mostly for its importance from an ecocritical perspective.

The plot is set on a distinct *topos*, Lohri, which is situated at the border of Ranchi, Sarguja, and Palamou (the provincial districts). The landmass is described as dry and burnt, emitting heat, and almost barren except for some stunted vegetation. Even the soil is atypically brownish red resembling congealed blood (Debi 2011: 55). At the onset of the story, the author does away with the popular romanticism often associated with the Adivasi (tribal) population mainly through their depiction in Hindi films. The newly employed relief officer, Mr Singh, on his first trip to Lohri, had assumed that he would get to see Adivasi men playing flutes and women dancing around with flowers in their hair and running from one hill to another. Now their almost naked, worm-infested, and emaciated bodies disgust him. In his newly assigned post, which he only has to 'suffer' through for three months, the young officer eagerly thinks about returning to Ranchi, whose light and glitter he has left to come to this scorched, disgusting place (Debi 2011: 56f). There is, however, another reason why the land is allegedly abhorrent – because of the inhabitants of the land, the Agariya people who are seemingly averse to their own development. They are known to sell off their land and agricultural resources to moneylenders and are too impatient to wait for crops to mature, arguing that they cannot starve until then. However, there is a legend connected to their past, which is both proud and cursed, and speaks of different Agariyas, distinct from their alleged lazy, obnoxious character that the relief officer comes to know from the block development officer. These people are the descendants of the *asura* or demons and were fire eaters, men of iron, whose livelihood was to extract iron ore from the earth and make ironware. However, their ancestor and king Logundi, blinded by his power, challenged the Sun god to a fight and eventually lost to him. The Sun god destroyed the king, his eleven brothers, and the burg as well, only Logundi's wife, who was in a different village, survived. Later the wife gave birth to a son named Jalamukhi, who again challenged the Sun in a battle and brought down an irreversible curse on the Agariyas that all their wealth earned by mining ore would turn into ashes and

⁹ I have used the original Bangla versions of the stories *Sishu* and *Sandes. Mahdu: A Fairy Tale* is translated by the author herself. Unless otherwise stated, all translations used in this article are my own.

their land would turn barren. In a conflict with the Indian government over iron ore mining, the Agariya people avenged the destruction of their ancestral land by killing the team of geologists who had blasted and blown up the hills and then disappeared into the forest without a trace.

The poignantly satiric treatment of the themes of law and lawlessness is revealed to the readers through the way the government officials encroach upon the lands of the tribal population for minting money through mining ores and the subsequent efforts to hunt down the indigenous people for attempting to defend the land and nature that rightfully belongs to them. Debi here points at a massive failure of decolonisation: that of the unaltered condition of the tribal and indigenous people of India and their systemic oppression at the hands of their own government. Tribal people were under persecution in the colonial regime on the pretext of opposing various 'development projects' which depleted the natural resources and disturbed the holistic connection between the indigenous people and their habitat. Furthermore, they were also criminalised for resisting the aggression of the colonial government¹⁰. This narrative stays unaltered in the postcolonial society as well. In the Block Development Officer's (BDO) constant reference of the Agariyas as 'obnoxious' and 'stubborn', and responsible for their own sufferings, one still sees a reflection of that colonial criminalisation of the tribes. In addition, the relief officer's feeling of irritation and betrayal that the tribal people do not stand in a queue to receive relief but steal provisions, takes us to the much-discussed terrain of disciplining the bodies in a totalitarian regime (see Claeys 2017: 195). Mr Singh listens to the curious incidents of relief material being stolen at night by strange 'creatures' resembling little children.

The narrative develops steadily and arrives at a climax when the relief officer, asleep in his tent at night, hears noises outside and driven by a stubborn anger generated by the feeling of betrayal over his noble intention of helping the Agariyas now and rehabilitating them later, chases these creatures to catch the thieves. As a result, he discovers the truth, that these are not children but have long white hair, women, who have dry, hanging breasts. The officer is confounded, and fear engulfs him with the realisation that these are grown up people. An old man from the group comes too close and rubs his dry, shrivelled penis against his body. While the creatures indulge in a show of mocking him with their stunted, dry, arid, desiccated bodies, the officer loses his mind with

¹⁰ See Tolen (1991: 106 - 125), and Schwarz (2010).

the anguish of realisation of what these people are and why they are like that. Their giggles stun him and render him speechless, only capable of shedding tears.

Debi describes the scene:

He cannot speak. Standing under the moon, while watching them, listening to their giggles, feeling their genitals rub against him, the undernourished body of an average Indian and their laughable height seems like civilisation's heinous crime, one feels like a death convict, and for their midget stature the relief officer condemns himself to [a] death sentence and lifts his gaping open mouth toward the moon. They dance, laugh, rub their dry withered penis[es] on his body; now his only way of redemption is to shatter the horizon with a cry like a mad dog. But why does the head not order the voice to break out in a scream? Tears roll down his eyes (Debi 2011: 65).

The prototypal inhabitants of the realistic third-world dystopia are benumbed people with blocked consciousness cohabiting with the sub-humans, who are occupying a dystopic space within the larger 'normally functioning' society, Debi, in the final lines of her story, jolts the protagonist out of his daze and forces him to realise the heinous ways in which the regime works. The botched up social system that the author portrays, and the government's neglect of its own people are the central ideas behind the microcosmic dystopia that Lohri is, further perpetuated by the moneyed class' self-justification and the justification of the indigenous people's appalling condition. One can see the indigenous bodies as the *topos* on which injustice, neglect, deprivation and eventually death is being played out as the ultimate expression of sovereignty¹¹ of the state. *Sishu* exemplifies a system where a part of the population is deprived of their livelihood and left to starve, while the government makes insignificant effort to redress their crisis. The starved, stunted and barren bodies of the 'creatures' become the bio-political body on which the totalitarian regime exerts its power. With the individualised action of disciplining the bodies coexists necro-

¹¹ See Mbembe (2019:66): 'The ultimate expression of sovereignty largely resides in the power and the capacity to dictate who is able to live and who must die. To kill or to let live thus constitutes sovereignty's limits, its principal attributes'.

politics, which is carried out on the tribal people. Lohri can be the archetypal dystopia whose rightful inhabitants starve and die out while the government officials spread the propaganda of their stealing relief or their alleged unwillingness to work for subsistence. While Western dystopias like *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) have employed the trope of using women's bodies as breeding machines, the women of Lohri's dry hanging breasts and barren, malnourished bodies along with their inability to produce children exposes the other end of the spectrum, where starvation wipes out an entire population and adds to the force of necropolitics in its grimmest and darkest facet.

Physical hunger, poverty, and impoverishment have been at the heart of the realist dystopian fiction. In *Sishu*, the small, impoverished men and women, through their mocking of the relief officer, expose the travesty of the failed promises that a sovereign government made to its citizens.

They also jeer at all other well-fed bodies who look for justification of their starvation or stay apathetic. And finally, the dystopia of emaciated bodies mocks human civilisation. Debi herself writes in the context of *Sishu*:

Starvation over generations can reduce ordinary sized human beings to pygmies. Of course, the starving Agariyas are savagely angry at a system under which some people eat three meals a day while they are forced to starve! For I believe in anger, in justified violence, and so peel the mask off the face of the India that is projected by the Government, to expose its naked brutality, savagery, and caste and class exploitation; and place this India, a hydra headed monster, before a people's court, the people being the oppressed millions (Debi, as quoted in Syal 2016: 27487).

The sacrifice of its indigenous citizens in a dystopian society perpetuates the nightmare of dystopia. In *Sishu*, the starving bodies of the Agariyas serve as a human sacrifice to a regressive state and its brutally flawed policies. In addition, central to the plot, is the night of discovery of the 'creatures' by Mr Singh, which itself is like a nightmare, and both these aspects serve as key dystopian devices in Debi's story. Her stories draw our focus to a microcosm of propaganda (blaming the tribal people about their plight), barbarism (of the democratically elected government and state machinery), and inhumanity amidst a generally 'well-functioning' society, like the rotten core of an apparently healthy-looking apple. The end of colonial regimes ushered an era of utopian

hopefulness in decolonial societies like India. Liberty, self-determination, equality, freedom from exploitation were some of the founding principles of a newly freed country. Global capitalism had shown a particularly grim side of human existence and India, still reeling from the aftermath of the onslaught of colonialism struggled hard to pick up the pieces and start anew.

The imagined blueprint of a consolidated modern Indian nation became a utopia promised to its citizens. While the founding fathers like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Rabindranath Tagore offered their visions of the new nation (see Ashcroft 2017: 114 - 132), what emerged most prominently in the national imagination was the figure of the mother: Mother India¹², who has the power to contain her children, irrespective of their caste and class divisions and to nourish, protect, and provide for them through her self-sacrifice. Comple-menting the figure of the martyr mother was also Gandhi's ideals of non-violence which had gained enormous popularity during India's struggle for freedom. Mahasweta Debi here exposes the utopian ideologies of the founding fathers, whose dreams had remained unfulfilled and promises undelivered to a section of Indian citizens. In fact, the nation itself disguised as a killing machine robs indigenous populations of their means of sustenance. Thus, Debi turns the nation itself into a dystopian entity subverting the utopian visions that was once associated with it, thereby putting the failures of a decolonial state at the centre of a dystopian reality.

Sacrificing the indigenous body forms the key content of another dystopian short story, *Mahdu: A Fairy Tale*, written in 2000, published in 2003 and translated into English by the author herself. This short story of only twelve pages is a compact narrative about a gathering tribe who faces extinction due to the loss of their natural habitat: a lush teak forest of a few thousand acres, which sustained them physically, emotionally and spiritually¹³. However, with

¹² See Ashcroft (2017: 116): 'Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's coining of the Mother India ensured that it would continue to haunt the Indian imagination. Such images offer much more powerful focus than "visions of spiritual unity" and the connection between the nation and Mother India was imprinted on the Indian psyche'. However, the image of the mother was far removed from the actual plight of Indian women.

¹³ 'Saga forests provided them with a home. The bride and the groom were first married to saga trees to make the marriage lasting, strong and productive. Saga was the deity they worshipped' (Debi 2003: 102).

the felling of the teak trees to construct railways, Korjus, the tribe, lost their desire to live. They offered silent resistance to every form of assistance that the government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) showed them. The story is an instance of a strong to-and-fro narrative, where the author interjects the story of the Korjus with special emphasis on one particular member of the tribe, with glimpses of factual information about human nutrition, and eventually ends the story with strong irony and surrealism. At the introduction of the story, Debi quotes from Josua de Castro's *Geography of Hunger* (1952) to set the tone. *Mahdu*, almost like *Sishu*, is not about 'total hunger' which leads to starvation. But it explores the,

[m]uch more common and more numerically lethal hidden hunger, which for lack of certain indisposable nutritive elements, condemns whole population groups slowly to die of hunger although they eat everyday (Castro [1952] as quoted in Debi 2003: 97).

The story is about the Korjus, another indigenous population living in the Sagwana (teak) forest who lost their means of livelihood when the forest was felled. Korjus become the subject for 'brilliant' research articles on them about their resistance to 'development' and food:

... in-built resistance against progress is killing them. Their mindset controls the body. So, whenever they eat something they are not used to, they become violently ill (Debi 2003: 100).

Eventually their lifespan was reduced to twenty years and they have stubbornly yet peacefully refused any help or relief. Of particular relevance is how the resistance of the Korjus and their refusal to accept help is described:

DEDICATION [the NGO] sank a few hand pumps, but failed to bring the mothers and children to the nutrition centre. They wouldn't come ... they didn't trust us ...
-- were they violent?
-- oh no! Highly civilized, quiet, soft spoken. No violence. A silent *satyagraha*! Yes...a *satyagraha*!
-- A great tragedy (Debi 2003: 101).

Gandhi's much lauded non-violent resistance against the colonial re-

game stays relevant to and in use, years after ‘independence’ amongst a dwindling tribe whose livelihood and home, that is, the few thousand acres of saga forest¹⁴ that was destroyed by the democratically elected government for the purpose of development. The author informs the readers that cutting and clearing of invaluable forests have been a regular phenomenon since the mid-19th century due to the building of the Indian railway. As exemplified by the plight of the Korjus, many tribes who were sustained by such forests were not only rendered homeless but also non-existent. Loss of their habitat resulted in the gradual extinction of these tribes:

This death is a slow process. The process continues through quite a number of generations. Nutrition of the body depended upon the food they were used to. And there was their belief, ‘nature is the provider of food’, so integrated with tribal existence. Their psyche is a protected zone. Impossible to penetrate into ... they are dying in the last five or ten decades ... no written report ... very defeating ... (Debi 2003: 100).

A systematic destruction of the ecological balance and as an extension of the tribal population, nonchalance on the part of the government or gross mismanagement, and lack of experience, insensitivity, and the lack of ethics in dealing with the dying humankind, are some of the prominent characteristics of a postcolonial dystopian society, as Debi contends. The story proceeds rapidly as Mahdu, a dying Korju man is kidnapped for the purpose of research and to solve the mystery of why the community would refuse food and to ‘investigate into the great Korju extinction mystery’ (Debi 2003: 104). Madhu, the ‘specimen’, is fed intravenously to examine how the emaciated body that has refused food for years, reacts to feeding and nutrition. The ending of the story is somewhat surreal, drawing on the ‘fairy tale’ element indicated in the title. Through the experimentation on Mahdu’s body, the scientists working on nutrition, try to develop a modified version of the Korjus, similar to the experimentation on Shetland ponies and pygmies.

However, that procedure backfires and Mahdu gains an enormous proportion, devouring the popular landmarks of Mumbai, aeroplanes and trains, roaring, ‘I am hungry. Feed me’. He drank from the Arabian Sea to quench his thirst and eventually left to write the authentic Korju story in the

¹⁴ Alternatively referred to as Sagwana in the story.

sky with the stars that would replace man-made myths about the tribe. The ending of the story is allegorical, hinting that Mahdu's body rejected the intravenous feeding and died, since 'His eye balls [eyeballs] mirrored a tall saga resplendent with leafs [sic] and blossoms', (2003: 108) is indicative of the information that Debi provides the readers in the beginning of the story that 'if you lift the eyelids of a dead Korju you will find the imprint of the old saga forest on his or her eyeballs' (2003: 98). Balancing the bitter reality about centuries-long abuse of environmental resources and indigenous lives, that started with colonialism and continues with equal force and vigour in the postcolonial state, with the use of allegory, magic realism, and irony to end the story, is transgressive, subversive and expresses a distortion that further bolsters the impact of the narrative. Besides the author's claim that Mahdu, the Korju will write his own story: 'No man-made Korju myths. Over. Thus the true Korju story began. Mahdu would write it on the sky. He would pluck the stars, arrange them into alphabets and write' (Debi 2003: 108), on one hand this signifies the powerful discursive resistance of the colonised 'other', violating the imposed and received narrative of neocolonial masters, on the other hand it denotes an impossible task. Dead man tells no tales, neither can a dwindling tribe who has refused to speak and more than anything else, live. A piece of land, that was once a utopia for the indigenous people, sustaining and sheltering them, is turned into a dystopia with no hope of a different future. What further magnifies the anti-utopian and apocalyptic impression is the slow but sure march of the tribal population toward self-inflicted extinction through their 'refusal' to develop. The story of *Mahdu* charts the journey of transformation of a utopia, the Sagwana forest home for the Korjus, into a dystopia, which is embedded in an overall dystopia of the nation. What was once a majestic jungle of tall, gorgeous trees and vegetation providing food and shelter to the tribal population is turned into barren fields. Korjus started living in a settlement which the author calls '*nishiddha bhumi*' or the forbidden land,

[t]he Korjus forgot the outsiders and the outsiders forgot them. The timing was great, as the Pokhran Nuclear Explosion took place. Everything became a non-issue to the media, the nation and the power-barons (Debi 2003: 104).

Thus, the loss of shelter for a part of the tribal population was conveniently forgotten due to the great din and strides toward 'development' the nation

made, namely establishing itself as one of the nuclear superpowers.

Two central aspects of colonialism that – of exploration and developmentalism – have also been the key aspects of western utopianism (see Ahmad 2009: 3 - 18). Notable postcolonial writers like Debi have voiced their concern over the kind of modernisation and development that is selective and has a strong capitalistic base. Debi, in particular, repeatedly took up the topic of development that ruins the ecological balance between man and nature to write her dystopian narratives. She further underscores the fact that both in the colonial and neocolonial societies, the presence of the ‘irrational’ ‘primitive’ and ‘backward’ are important to continue with the materialistic development and eventually their elimination.

The hungry body receives a unique and different treatment in Debi’s short story *Sandes*, which opens with the spectacle of a man, eating glass at a party, as a way of entertaining the guests. Chintamani Desai, the host, is a generous and affluent businessman, a sugar dealer, who not only throws opulent parties but also, as a way of diversion and celebration, hires different kinds of people with unusual talents to perform at his parties. On one of those occasions a man devoured a live cobra, in another, a circus girl danced inside a tiger’s cage. At Desai’s parties, these kinds of entertainment are a must. This time, while the performer eats glass, next to him is spread a buffet table laden with all kinds of food for the guests. On silverware, on display, are fried crispy brown fish, chicken *pulao*, crab meat in white sauce, blackcurrants, ice cream, fruit cocktails, and several other varieties of exotic fruits. In view of that table is the performer, who had once seen better times, now eating glass to keep himself and his family alive. After his performance, while resting, he eyes the table on which the feast is spread out. There is no end to the procession of food being served and the butler eventually brings some ‘*Sandes*’¹⁵. The glass eater falls asleep while waiting for his payment. When he awakens, he finds that the party is over, and he is left all alone in the room – with that table still full of food. Driven by his hunger, he takes a cushion cover and starts stuffing it with sweets and cutlets, when suddenly he is discovered by Desai. He finds himself trapped and Desai threatens to call the police or set the dogs on him unless he eats more glass to entertain him. Trapped and desperate to leave without getting arrested, the performer starts eating glass again. The reader is informed that Chintamani Desai is someone who is bored with life. By throwing parties to

¹⁵ Sweets, usually dry and made from milk.

entertain himself and his friends, he is obsessively and continuously looking for thrills and one way of thrilling himself is to procure performers who perform dangerous feats. Soon after he forces the performer to continue eating glass, the man chokes, collapses and later dies in the hospital. Chintamani Desai dies as well, from too much excitement, which his heart could not bear.

In this story, Chintamani Desai's house serves as a microcosm of both a utopian and a dystopian society. While the rich are fed and entertained, exemplifying a hedonist utopia, poor, desperate people are hired, trapped, and even killed so that the rich can derive some adrenaline rush from the spectacle. In that microcosmic dystopia, a performer can gaze at the food but not touch it and once he breaks the rules, he is trapped; death becomes the only way of escaping that cage. However, one could not have assumed a safe passage for the glass eater had he not touched the food, since Desai deliberately looks for ways to risk the lives of his 'entertainers'. The story is a scathing censure of a society deriving pleasure from unnecessary cruelty and using destitute and compelled hungry bodies as entertainment and spectacle. The portrayal of sharp distinctions in the room, in the form of opulent food, bejewelled women and dancing men, side by side with a performer eating glass for a little money illustrates the economic inequality and division-ridden reality of a society, as well as the numbness of the collective conscience. Dystopias often occupy the no-man's land between satire and tragedy (Gottlieb 2001: 13 - 15). *Sandes* aptly fits the description, because what started off as a bitter satire, eventually culminates in a tragedy with the loss of the protagonist's life. What constitutes *loss* in dystopia can manifest on different levels, especially in Western dystopias where the loss of individual and private identity is considered a classic dystopian loss.

In a massively unequal and cruel third world society, loss of one's life for the entertainment of a rich man can simultaneously symbolise the ultimate loss (for the victim and his family) or no loss at all (for the society), for human lives in such a space are cheap and even worthless. A man loses his right to live while catering to the whim of another – this is how a quintessential 'third world' dystopia operates, where the individual falls prey to the collective. As in *Sishu*, *Sandes* also embodies the element of an impenitent population through a striking and intense depiction of humanity that has stopped feeling, as exemplified in the following passage:

But what happens if there is a little miscalculation? What if while

eating the cobra, the performer swallows the yellow poison-filled venom sack? Or if someone forgets to sedate the tiger on the day the girl is supposed to dance in the cage? And what if the tiger gets irritated and pounces on the girl? Will not these ever happen? This is exactly what Chintamani Desai wants to know. With the man eating the glass, he had expected that blood would ooze out of his throat. That is why he bought thick glass. Then he learned that thick glass was actually more convenient for him [the glass eater] (Debi 2011: 99).

Toward the climax of the story, the numbness of the human heart is deftly described in the way Desai almost ‘plays’ with his prey. Forcing and cajoling him to resume eating glass in spite of the performer’s repeated requests to let him go, Desai lures the performer with the offer of more money. Debi writes about Desai’s reaction:

Chintamani Desai glances at the man with a thoughtful look. For a while, he is the master of the man. If he wants, he can keep him or get him arrested; but he must admit that catching a thief alone is making him feel good. The doctors tell him to do whatever makes him feel good. Chintamani Desai forgot everything and dropped a few grapes in his mouth. [...] he felt the sugar in his blood and the juice of the grapes are mixing together to form alcohol. If not, why is there so much commotion in his veins or behind his ears? He did not drink alcohol (Debi 2011: 98).

This passage is a fitting example of what Andrew Milner (2009) calls ‘apocalyptic hedonism’, a,

[j]uxtaposition of light and shade, cheerfulness and death, ... a textual erotics deriving from the simultaneous juxtaposition of the terrors of imminent extinction and the delights of yet a more immediate hedonistic affluence (Milner 2009: 835).

The notable point is that, here the delight and excitement of Desai is caused by the apprehension of the glass eater’s death, and that frenzy becomes potent enough to also bring about his own death. While dystopia has been mainly about dictatorial regimes, state violence, and mass oppression, *Sandes* exposes the

violent autocrat inherent in human character and that anyone, with enough power over the other, can assume the role of an oppressor.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I wish to bring forth a couple of points: firstly, vernacular dystopian writings can be seen as non-modular¹⁶ dystopias, where postcolonial societies need not consume, as dystopian literature, what the West has produced. The genre of dystopian writing can be adapted, modified and rewritten according to the needs and relatability of a particular society. The dissent that postcolonial scholars such as Partha Chatterjee has voiced regarding the West's tendency to provide modular nationalisms to be followed by the postcolonial societies, also applies to the Western canonical genres and how postcolonial societies would understand that their 'anticolonial resistance and postcolonial misery' (1993: 5) are determined by the Western societies, rendering the former as perpetual consumers of modernity (Ibid.). Hence, it is important to highlight the contribution of writers like Debi whose authentic portrayal of a decaying society offers us the kind of insight from which many writers steer away. The three separate stories are political satire culminating in tragedies and which congeal together to form a solid dystopian structure. What is unique about Bangla vernacular dystopias is their politically different stance compared to the futuristic-speculative genre of Western dystopias. While most examples from the latter serve as warnings by showcasing hypothetical societies under totalitarian regimes, vernacular dystopias instrumentalise universal realities like poverty and hunger to expose the pervasiveness of dystopia.

For societies that have dealt with humanitarian crises like famines, destruction of nature and colonial exploitation, dystopia forms a part of everyday reality; it is traumatisingly intimate and personal as well as collective and those societies exemplify how totalitarianism is embedded within democracy, as Achille Mbembe notes,

[t]he brutality of democracies has simply been swept under the carpet.
From their origins, modern democracies have always evinced their

¹⁶ I have borrowed the term following Partha Chatterjee's coinage of modular nationalisms in his essay 'Whose Imagined Community?'. See Chatterjee (1993: 3 - 13).

tolerance for a certain political violence, including illegal forms of it. They have integrated forms of brutality into their culture, forms borne by a range of private institutions acting on top of the state, whether irregular forces, militias, or other paramilitary or corporatist formations (Mbembe 2019: 17).

Secondly, the poetics of dystopian writing in Bangla show us the difference between projecting one's fear of catastrophe in the future and responding to the catastrophe at hand. Hence, while the former is based on imagination, the latter brings into light the facts and figures. Use of emotions as a literary tool is another significant aspect of vernacular dystopias in general and the examples that were discussed in particular, since often writers narrated disasters with emotions to empathise with the victims who are themselves not at fault for their plight. Narrating dire circumstances and disasters with emotions has been a strategy of vernacular writers since the colonial period when they used their pen to depict emergencies and catastrophes: Bhattacharya talks about the emergence of the,

[l]iterary form [in the 19th century] where emotions, ethics, conscience, and melodrama of the catastrophe were inter twined with the features of reasoning, analysis, journalism, ethnography, and satire on the British colonial and the native bourgeois establishment (Bhattacharya 2017: 61).

Finally, Debi's dystopias pose the question: What went wrong that a newly independent society with ideals of equality and justice turns into a dystopian nightmare for a certain section of its citizens? Debi exemplifies that colonialism is a perpetual process and that egalitarian states are still utopian since the division between the centre and the margin will always remain and the regime will continue to feed on its marginalised population. Debi is here writing back at the postcolonial nation state that, following Gottlieb's definition, is a society that

[p]uts its whole population continuously on trial, a society that finds its essence in [...] disenfranchising and enslaving entire classes of its own citizens, a society that, by glorifying and justifying violence by law, preys upon itself. Like a dysfunctional family that maintains its

framework but is unable to fulfil its function to advance the good of each member of the family, who would, in unison, form a community, dystopian society is what we call today dysfunctional; it reveals the lack of the very qualities that traditionally justify or set the *raison d'être* for a community. As a result, dystopian society is ultimately a moribund, death-bound society that is incapable of renewal, where the ruling elite cling to their existence as parasites on their own people, whom they devour in the process (Gottlieb 2001: 40f).

While Western dystopias mostly leave the reader with the suspense that if the downward spiralling of society into the 'hypothetical monster state' (2001: 267) can still be prevented, Mahasweta Debi's dystopias show that spiralling down is complete. One can unpack her stories, to find the signature dystopian pessimism and anger accompanying the narratives of brutality. One also finds the resilience of the marginalised in their everyday survival within a dysfunctional society. Her short stories are less for entertainment and more for serious pondering and action. Debi (1999: viii–ix) herself remarks, ... I desire a transformation of the present social system [...] After thirty-one years of independence, I find my people still groaning under hunger, landlessness, indebtedness and bonded labour. An anger, luminous, burning, and passionate, directed against a system that has failed to liberate my people from these horrible constraints, is the only source of inspiration for all my writing¹⁷.

In Debi's stories, subalternity is closely linked to dystopianism and this introduces her uniqueness as a writer of dystopian literature. She does not unwrite and rewrite the Western literary canon but introduces a completely novel and current flavour to the genre, through her focus on the subaltern. Her writings contribute to the heterogeneity of the canon by posing an ideal for transformation whereby multicultural literature about the subaltern can add to its expanse. Furthermore, reading Mahasweta Debi's dystopian short stories in the global context of a dystopian narrative adds to the humanistic reading of such texts, which to me is one of the most crucial contributions that vernacular dystopias can bring to the global literary table. Even in the most pessimist of times, vernacular dystopias rarely fail to arouse pathos, even though canonical Western dystopias like Orwell's *1984* send the message that human values and tender emotions are out of place in a totalitarian, materialist, industrialised/

¹⁷ See Debi 'Introduction,' (1999: viii - ix).

technological world, Debi's stories do it with a more empathetic and humane touch. While vernacular dystopias with their all too recognisable *topos*, deprive the readers of the reassurance of a future that *might* go wrong, the assertion that dystopia can very much be a part of the everyday reality of the Third World might indeed trigger the possibility of a revolutionary transformation.

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Challenging the Coloniality of Languages

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Abstract

This article aims to reflect on the coloniality of language as a vertex of coloniality that acts with coloniality of being, power and knowledge; besides this reflection, it is also my aim to propose alternative ways to challenge the coloniality of language in the context of language education and teachers' education. In the first part of this article, I present some aspects of the coloniality of language, where race and racialisation play an important role (Garcés 2007; Veronelli 2015; Fanon 1967; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1997). In the second part of the article, I propose alternatives to challenge the coloniality of language mainly in the context of language education, focusing on a diversity of voices and knowledges (as plurality) associated with the perspective of language deregulation, as proposed by the Brazilian applied linguist Inês Signorini (2002) and the perspective of heterodiscourse/ heteroglossia as proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin (1981).

Keywords: Brazil, Coloniality of Language, race and racialisation, language of deregulation, heterodiscourse

Introduction

In my view language was the most important vehicle through which that power fascinated and held the soul prisoner. The bullet was the means of the physical subjugation. Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation (*Decolonizing the Mind*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1997).

They made us into a race. We made ourselves into a people (*Between the World and Me*, Ta-Nehisi Coates 2015).

This article aims to reflect on the coloniality of language as a vertex of coloni-

ality that acts with coloniality of being, power and knowledge; besides this reflection, it is also my aim to propose alternative ways to challenge the coloniality of language in the context of language education and teachers' education. In the first part of this article, I present some aspects of the coloniality of language, where race and racialisation play an important role (Garcés 2007; Veronelli 2015; Fanon 1967; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1997). In the second part of the article, I propose alternatives to challenge the coloniality of language mainly in the context of language education, focusing on a diversity of voices and knowledges (a plurality) associated with the perspective of language deregulation as proposed by the Brazilian applied linguist Inês Signorini (2002) and the perspective of heterodiscourse/ heteroglossia, as proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin (1981).

'Who of you identify yourself as Black?' – this was the question with which Rozena Maart opened her session on Black Consciousness at the 2020 University of South Africa (UNISA) Decolonial Summer School in Pretoria, South Africa, on Wednesday, 15th January. After the session, Maart visited participants at their lunch tables and later joined the Brazilian participants who were locked in conversation for most of the lunchtime period. We were four Brazilian researchers who attended the Summer School and lived in an apartment close to the downtown venue for the duration of the school. After the Summer School ended, we took up many of the themes discussed at home and remained in conversation for several days. It was a very productive week and a provocative period for each of us on different levels, which in turn motivated diverse reflections and conversation. As four Brazilian scholars from different fields: two from Mathematics Education and two from Language Education and Applied Linguistics, we were engaged in transdisciplinary work, all of which we brought together intentionally to construct transdisciplinary knowledges.¹ The joint purpose was to take part in the development of a Brazilian perspective on decolonial thought, related to the history of the Portuguese colonial processes and Portuguese Enlightenment, which as Brazilians we shared, especially on racialisation in Brazil. Maart's question, and subsequent examination of Black Consciousness and the many

¹ The expression knowledges is used to refer to a set or diversity of knowledge, I suggest reading Lewis Gordon (2014). In his text, the author considers it more appropriate to use knowledges as opposed to knowledge, since in his view the singular form erases the varieties of knowledges.

faces of racism and racialisation, was pertinent to our ongoing discussion and prompted further debate among us.

The question Maart posed was in-line with the theme of the UNISA 2020 Decolonial Summer School: ‘Power, Knowledge and Being’. This overall theme was addressed by three of the speakers, in particular, Maart herself, Lewis Gordon and Mogobe Ramose, all of whom focused on how race was drawn on by the colonisers in South Africa, and various parts of the African continent, as well as within the United States of America (USA), to dehumanise Black people, and to deny Black people the right to be human. The three speakers in question also highlighted contemporary processes of dehumanisation and where prevalent, examples of how non-being was inflicted upon Black people. As such, Maart’s question was posed in this context of the larger discussion. For me, in particular, the discussions within the Summer School and the question Maart posed were very important in assisting me to rethink and deepen my understanding of race as constitutive of:

- i. language practices, and discourses that focus on language;
- ii. the construction of knowledges;
- iii. the operation of social relations; and
- iv. teaching, research and pedagogical practices.

I identify myself as Black woman. However, in my experience, it appears that this must be asserted and frequently emphasised in many different locations with different interlocutors. For example, I needed to assert my racialised identity as a Black woman in South Africa in a similar way that I assert it in Brazil – a country affected by *branqueamento* (*blanquiamento* in Spanish), which when translated means ‘whitening’. The latter is part of the social construction of Blackness that evades and erases its history through the superficial and cosmetic alterations to physical appearance to resemble the White colonisers from Europe, thus evoking a reverence to the Portuguese coloniser, and part of a process towards a rejection of physical Blackness, even though 56.10% of the Brazilian population self-identify as Black². I am, as

² According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), 56,10% of the Brazilian population self-identify as Black (*Negro*) in Brazil (2019). From 209.2 million people, 19.2 million identify as Black (*Preto*) and 89.7 million identify as mixed (*Pardo*). As such, the category Black (*Negro*)

such, writing from this position: as a Black Brazilian woman working within the field of Language Education³ and Applied Linguistics and thinking through the features that mark coloniality within these disciplines.

Part of Applied Linguistics studies in Brazil is characterised by its transdisciplinary (Signorini 1998b; 2006) or non-disciplinary and undisciplined texture, intentionally as a measure of non-conformity (Moita Lopes 2006); it suggests, a field that describes itself through forms of racialised lived experience, such as ‘mestizo and nomad’, that dares to think in different ways ‘of creating intelligibility of social problems in which language plays a central role’ (Moita Lopes 2006: 14). Positioned in this context of Applied Linguistics, I agree with Castro-Gómez (2007) on the need for transdisciplinarity to decolonise our processes of knowing and creating knowledges, and as such to overcome the arboreal structure of universities and their institutionalised ways of knowledge production. With this in mind, within applied linguists, we intend to create knowledge that transgresses boundaries, as put forward by bell hooks (1994). Many researchers are developing scholarly work with a decolonial focus (Nascimento 2015; 2018; 2019). In this sense, Brazilian applied linguists have been asking, as Signorini (1998a; 2004) emphasises: what kind of epistemic and political-ideological project has underpinned language uses, practices and analyses within teacher education and language teaching-and-learning processes? From this question, others arose, such as: how have we understood students and their languages? What kind of language(s) and writing have we taught? For whom? For what purpose? In whose name? The latter were questions similar to those raised by Maart in her first 15th January session

joins Black (*Preto*) and Mixed (*Pardo*); the term *Pardo* usually groups people from a range of skin pigmentation. With regards to the range of skin pigmentation, Abdias do Nascimento notes that in the Brazilian context, there are many euphemistic words to talk about a ‘person of colour, it means, without any doubt, this person descends from a previously enslaved African. Therefore, this person is a Black/Negro, it does not matter what their skin pigmentation is. Let’s not waste time with this superfluous distinction...’ (Nascimento 2016: 48, own translation). Translated here by the author of this article.

³ I have been working on teacher education training and continuing teacher education focusing on processes of teaching and learning Portuguese as a home language and Portuguese as an Additional Language/Portuguese for speakers of other languages.

at the UNISA Decolonial Summer School⁴ in 2020. As a researcher and scholar thinking through interventions in decolonisation, I have to ask this question: What are the consequences of these epistemological and political-ideological projects that we have taken up? Whilst mindful of this question as part of the backdrop of this article, I am not attempting to find answers for them at present. Rather, I am focused on the process, as the constant unfolding of decolonisation suggests.

This article, as one in-progress, offers me as the author the possibility of shedding light on the entanglement of voices that constitute this South-South dialogue that I embody, and thus in itself creates a platform for such an exercise.

Following the introduction, this article is organised into two parts: Firstly, I focus on some aspects of the coloniality of language, considering that race and racialisation play a central role, drawing from the work of the following scholars: (Garcés 2007; Vernonelli 2015; Fanon 1967, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1997; McKinney 2017; Mignolo 2011).

Secondly, I focus on debates in the field of the decolonisation of language and language education as per the work of Fanon (1967) and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1997), whilst engaging with the perspective of language deregulation as proposed by Signorini (2002).

The Coloniality of Language

Reflecting on race is central when one intends to understand, challenge, refuse and stop processes of dehumanisation and sub-humanisation that are part of the fruits generated by colonialism, considered the primary practices of coloniality. Even though the administrative and political domination of colonialism has ceased for the most part within countries where it was present, the mentality, the strategies and procedures built to justify and to continue domination remain practically and discursively in place as coloniality (Maldonado-Torres 2007). Practices and discourses of coloniality act and exert themselves through their agents in all aspects of being in the world: the body,

⁴ Questions similar to those Rozena Maart raised in her first 15 January 2020 session at the UNISA Decolonial Summer School.

https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=2574883209291156&ref=watch_permalink

emotions, reason, spirit, alterity, relationships with other beings, experiences of living and the experience of wealth. Race and language are intertwined in so many aspects of coloniality; one such aspect is exposed by the Martinican scholar Franz Fanon (1967):

The problem that we confront in this chapter is this: the Negro of the Antilles will be proportionately whiter – that is, he will come closer to being a real human being – in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language. I am not unaware that this is one of man's attitudes face to face with Being. A man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language (Fanon 1967: 8f).

Having a language⁵ means having a worldview, a set of values, a way of seeing the world and seeing ourselves and others (Fanon 1967; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1997). I return to this aspect later in this article. For the present, I would like to highlight that language – as part of a process enforced upon the

⁵ The concept of language has been contested among different theoretical perspectives that have developed in the broad field of Language Studies. It is however not my aim to return to this debate here. I would like to point out that language as an ideological sign has been the focal point of several disputes of many different groups. The legitimacy to talk about language is attributed according to power relations among groups: for example, groups seen as experts in language as an object of study, groups seen as non-experts in language but seen as experts in other 'objects' related to language, and groups seen as laymen (among them, those schooled groups, those with economic capital dominance, those few or not schooled). Disputes inside the field of Language Studies focus on linguistic perspectives that founded Linguistics as a field of inquiry. These perspectives developed conceptions of language as structure and imply that language is objectified and is bounded according to internal structure (and also political boundaries) so that each language would be differentiated from another and be identified as a unit. Authors that contest these perspectives have pointed out the political and ideological basis, bias and consequences of this structural view. I draw on some aspects of this contestation in my article here mainly through a decolonial lens, however I am not going to summarise this debate. Some texts on this debate can be found in Makoni and Pennycook (2007) and Kroskrity (2000).

colonised – is seen as part of the process of dehumanisation and sub-humanisation and thus crucial for understanding the construction of race, subjugation, and the process of racialisation. According to Fanon, for example, speaking French confronts the construction of Blackness and Whiteness.

Every colonized people – in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality – finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle (Fanon 1967: 9).

For the Black person renouncing Blackness concerning language implies adopting a 'White language', since this language symbolises the culture of the White coloniser, the civilising nation, the colonial worldview, the acceptance of colonial knowledge and domination. Besides, languages also participate in racial construction since race is discursively built upon it. The construction of race and racial hierarchy is discursive – and practical, in the body, inflicted through violence – and part of the process of coloniality. As such, languages constitute and reflect elements of coloniality and decoloniality, both of which speak to how the languages have been mobilised within socio-discursive practices and how power relations are addressed in these practices; languages are also components of decoloniality since the discursive critique of coloniality is decolonial as well. In this sense, Fanon has been seen as a decolonial thinker whose legacy is acknowledged by Walsh and Mignolo (2018). Fanon's critique of how Black people are dehumanised, through the production of non-being, is central to scholars of the Modernity/ Coloniality/Decoloniality group⁶ (MCD group). The Kenyan writer and

⁶ The Modernity/ Coloniality/ Decoloniality [MCD] group is composed of academics from different fields of Human and Social Sciences. Many are from countries in South of Abya Yala (known predominantly as America, as named by colonisers) and work in universities within the United States of America (USA). The authors of this group that I cite in this article are Catherine Walsh (from the USA; works in Ecuador), Walter Mignolo (Italian heritage, from Argentina; works in the USA), Santiago Castro-Gómez (Colombia), Ramón

scholar Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1997) is also acknowledged for his legacy in anticolonial scholarship; he cultivated and developed an important position in the 1970s, demonstrating the link between and among written and spoken language and colonial domination, asserting his refusal to write in the coloniser's English language but his mother tongue, Gikuyu.

According to authors from the MCD group, coloniality refers to multiple and asymmetric power relations of race, ethnicity, sexuality, epistemology, economy and gender (Castro-Gómez & Grosfoguel 2007). And languages constitute and are constituted, by these multiple interlocking relations. Languages have been used in processes of domination and exploitation due to the intertwined and mutual constitution of language, the economy and the social reality an economy of coloniality generates (Castro-Gómez & Grosfoguel 2007). Languages were brought into play to assert colonial domination and still function within coloniality of being, knowing, and power.

According to Maldonado-Torres,

coloniality ... refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labour, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations (Maldonado Torres 2007: 243).

Coloniality is based on the 'rhetoric of modernity' and can consequently be described as a discursive process. According to Walsh and Mignolo (2018), 'coloniality is constitutive, not derivative, of modernity. That is to say, there is no modernity without coloniality' (Walsh & Mignolo 2018: 4). In the words of Maldonado-Torres (2007: 244), 'modernity as a discourse and as a practice would not be possible without coloniality, and coloniality continues to be an inevitable outcome of modern discourses'. If coloniality and modernity are both practice and discourse, the decolonial project, besides being practical, is also about enunciation, discourse:

decolonial thinking and doing focus on the enunciation, engaging in epistemic disobedience and delinking from the colonial matrix to open

Grosfoguel and Nelson Maldonado-Torres (from Puerto Rico; work in the USA). About naming the place invaded by colonisers, see Gordon (2020) and Ramose (2020).

up decolonial options – a vision of life and society that requires decolonial subjects, decolonial knowledges, and decolonial institutions. Decolonial thinking and options (i.e., thinking decolonial[ly]) are nothing more than a relentless analytic effort to understand, to overcome, the logic of coloniality underneath the rhetoric of modernity, the structure of management and control that emerged out of the transformation of the economy in the Atlantic, and the jump in knowledge that took place both in the internal history of Europe and in-between Europe and its colonies (Mignolo 2011: 9f).

Coloniality, modernity and decoloniality, in this perspective, have to do with discursive⁷ and analytical processes. Decolonisation does not end with activities of analysis; it extends way beyond it. Since coloniality refers to practices of domination, decoloniality is also praxis (Walsh & Mignolo 2018), and ‘decolonisation is both a process and a movement’ (Maart 2020b).

One step toward this ‘analytic effort’ is to understand how coloniality

⁷ According to the Russian scholar M. Bakhtin (1986), the production of knowledge within the human sciences and philosophy implies to analyse texts, words, and other signs (verbal, musical, visual). ‘The text (written and oral) is the primary given of all these disciplines and of all thought in the human sciences and philosophy in general (including theological and philosophical thought at their sources). The text is the unmediated reality (the reality of thought and experience), the only one from which these disciplines and this thought can emerge. Where there is no text, there is no object of study, and no object of thought either. The ‘implied’ text: if the word ‘text’ is understood in the broad sense – as any coherent complex of signs – then even the study of art (the study of music, the theory and history of fine arts) deals with texts (works of art). Thoughts about thoughts, experiences of experiences, words about words, and texts about texts. Herein lies the basic distinction between our disciplines (human sciences) and the natural ones (about nature), although there are no absolute, impenetrable boundaries here either. Thought about the human sciences originates as thought about others’ thoughts, wills, manifestations, expressions, and signs, behind which stand manifest gods (revelations) or people (the laws of rulers, the precepts of ancestors, anonymous sayings, riddles, and so forth)’ (Bakhtin 1986: 103). So, the decolonial undoing and thinking have texts in this broader sense as the primary material.

is constituted and how language operates within this process. According to the MCD group, coloniality is structured as the coloniality of power, knowing and being and is based on an epistemic project that intends to cope with the totality of knowledge. (Castro-Gómez 2007; 2005). Maldonado-Torres (2007) defines vertexes of coloniality as follows:

The concept of coloniality of being was born in conversations about the implications of the coloniality of power in different areas of society. The idea was that colonial relations of power left profound marks not only in the areas of authority, sexuality, knowledge and the economy but on the general understanding of being as well. And, while the coloniality of power referred to the interrelation among modern forms of exploitation and domination (power), and the coloniality of knowledge had to do with the impact of colonization on the different areas of knowledge production, coloniality of being would make primary reference to the lived experience of colonization and its impact on language... The emergence of the concept ‘coloniality of Being’ responded to the need to thematize the question of the effects of coloniality in lived experience and not only in the mind (Maldonado-Torres 2007: 243).

Maldonado-Torres explains the coloniality of being, reflecting on the denial of the rationality of those who were forced to live under colonial power and how it produced denial of existence, denial of the possibility of being and existence. Coloniality of being was based and continues to operate on the grounds of racialisation, which means, the production of hierarchies based on theories of race. People who were under the yoke of colonial power frequently were seen and told that they are racially inferior. Such a statement was based on the assumption that colonised people were not able to adequately think for themselves. Existence was related to a certain kind of reason – linked and interpreted in a manner that limits the ‘I think, therefore I am’, the *cogito, ergo sum*, enunciated by the 17th century French philosopher, mathematician and scientist René Descartes – limiting the ability to rationalise, thus leading to limited existence, sub-humanisation, and dehumanisation. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) highlights this aspect of dehumanisation that characterises coloniality of being:

At the centre of ‘coloniality of being’ is the consistent and systematic

denial of humanity of those who became targets of enslavement and colonization. The denial of humanity of others was a major technology of domination which enabled them to be pushed out of the human family into a subhuman category and a zone of non-being (Fanon 1968). Two techniques were deployed in the ‘colonization of being’. The first was the social classification of human species. The second was racial hierarchization of human species per invented differential ontological densities (Quijano 2000; Maldonado-Torres 2007; Dastile & Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013). Race actively worked as the reorganizing principle (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018: 102–103).

As Maldonado-Torres (2007) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) emphasise, based on their Fanonian interpretation, race is the main area where the denial of being is generated. It is important to remember that the assumption of lack of reason, linked to race, is derived from an understanding that language would be all-encompassing of the expression of thoughts. Since the verbalisation of thoughts of Black and colonised people were considered limited, the thinking was considered deficient. Languages were also part of this process of definition of who had and who did not have the right to existence, and to experience the human condition. Another scholar who focuses on the intertwined relationship between language and race in the dehumanising process is Veronelli (2015). Veronelli’s main emphasis is on the coloniality of language, like Garcés (2007). These two authors are my main reference sources when discussing this vertex of coloniality. Their discussion is complementary since Garcés’ interest is on the coloniality of language with relation to the geopolitics of knowledge; Veronelli is mainly interested in the theorisation of race. She notes, as per below:

Regarding the theorization of race – and this is crucial to my approach to the relationship among race, language and communication – the decolonial historical approach marks a difference (and at the same time a relationship of complementarity) between race as a category of classification of world populations and racialization as a long-term dehumanizing process (Veronelli 2015: 40).

Veronelli utilises the concept of race as used by authors discussing the decolonial turn:

race is seen as the mental construction that imposes inequality amongst populations and societies as being natural by transforming differences into values (Veronelli 2015: 41).

Racialisation has to do with the process of dehumanising through avenues such as,

institutions, laws, ways of being treated, practices and desires that distribute the world population in the ranks, places and roles of the power structure, placing all who have been devalued in situations and relationships only because they are considered beings that are naturally inferior in contrast to naturally superior, civilized and human beings (Veronelli 2015: 41).

The author analyses the processes of dehumanising produced when devaluing people and language based on race. Veronelli and Maldonado-Torres cite Mignolo (2003) to show how coloniality of being is based on language.

‘Science’ (knowledge and wisdom) cannot be detached from language; languages are not just ‘cultural’ phenomena in which people find their ‘identity’; they are also the location where knowledge is inscribed. And, since languages are not something human beings have but rather something of what human beings are, coloniality of power and of knowledge engendered the coloniality of being (Maldonado-Torres 2007:130).

Mignolo (2000) emphasises that modern (colonial) knowledge was created mainly in two classical languages (Latin and Greek) and continued in six modern languages: Italian, which was the language of the Renaissance; French, German and English, which were the dominant languages from Enlightenment to present day; ‘they remain the hegemonic languages of scholarship and world literature’ (Mignolo 2000: 40); Portuguese and Spanish, that were subaltern languages in Europe despite assuming dominant positions in colonial contexts, and marginalised in international academic contexts. This can be observed, for example, to show how few texts written in Spanish and Portuguese are cited by scholars where English, French and German are the official language of speech and/ or writing.

The hierarchy of languages, as shown by Mignolo (2011: 20), is related to epistemic, artistic and literary hierarchies, since,

the linguistic hierarchy in which Eurocentrism has been founded ... controls knowledge not only through the dominance of the languages themselves but through the categories on which thought is based.

As Mignolo (2011) explains, languages of colonised people were seen as inappropriate for exercises of abstraction considered necessary to science, but they are suitable for culture and folklore. These were seen as different, inferior, and of less social value compared to scientific knowledge. Culture and folklore were related to tradition, not exactly to modernity. In this sense, modernity produced a hierarchy of languages:

A linguistic hierarchy between European languages and non-European languages privileged communication and knowledge production in the former, and subalternised the latter as sole producers of folklore or culture, but not of knowledge/ theory (Mignolo 2011: 19).

Connected to the construction of epistemological hierarchy, the hierarchy of languages bore social hierarchy and inequality. In these processes, languages, knowledges and writing are entangled, in the same way that language and power are entangled. Garcés (2007), in discussing geopolitics of knowledge, proposed the concept of coloniality of language and emphasised these entanglements:

Without the development of a type of useful knowledge for the machinery of the state, which is aimed at controlling all orders of social life, the project of capitalist expansion would not have been possible. In this process of epistemic constitution, which took place between the 16th and 19th centuries, the structuring of the social sciences as we know them today is framed. In this way, a classificatory model of the word and its truth, of knowing and saying, of knowing and its expression, was consolidated. Language and knowledge, then, were marked, until today, by two unavoidable characteristics from the power lines: a Eurocentric knowledge and languages, and knowledge and languages modelled in a colonial matrix of valuation (Garcés 2007: 222).

Geopolitics of knowledge is engendered not only at the political macro-level (states or international union of states) but also generated in medium and micro levels of institutional and social relations. Internally in Brazil and several countries on the same continent, Indigenous and Black people have been victims of geopolitics of knowledge due to the effect of coloniality, which continues to operate across the continent. Despite this, our knowledges have gained ground as a result of Black and Indigenous movements and the growing numbers of Black and Indigenous scholars in academic contexts in Brazil; however, epistemicide and linguicide are still common practices. Epistemicide, as defined by the Brazilian sociologist Carneiro (2005), is in line with the concept of coloniality of knowledge and being:

more than annulment and disqualification of knowledge of people positioned as subaltern, [epistemicide] is a persistent process of production of cultural destitution by denying access to education, mainly quality education; by producing intellectual subordination; by different processes of delegitimizing the Black as someone who has and produces knowledge; and by debasement of her/his cognitive ability in inflicting poverty and/or impairment of self-esteem through imposition of frequent processes of bias in educational contexts. This is because it is impossible to disqualify the different forms of knowledge of dominated people without disqualifying them, individually or collectively, as people of knowledge (Carneiro 2005: 97).

Carneiro developed her concept by joining the Foucauldian concept of *dispositif* (also known as apparatus) and the concept of epistemicide developed by the Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos. She emphasises that epistemicide kidnaps [the] reason of subalternised people. In this way, epistemicide has to do with power relations in denying knowledges and the ability to know and learn. The latter gives rise to other processes, such as the imposition of poverty and the impairment of self-esteem. In this way, Carneiro draws upon the criticism made by Abdias do Nascimento, the Brazilian scholar who reported the genocide of Black Brazilians under the ‘myth of racial democracy’. Nascimento ([1978] 2016: 47f) explains that this myth was built on ‘frequently with the support of historical sciences’, and such racial democracy ‘supposedly would reflect specific concrete relation on Brazilian society: that Blacks and Whites live harmoniously together, enjoying same oppor-

tunities of existence, without any interference from racial or ethnic origins, in this play of social equality’⁸.

The ‘myth of racial democracy’, widespread in Brazilian society according to Nascimento, was produced by 1. whitening people through the politics of migration that invited White Europeans to move to Brazil mainly in the late 19th and early 20th centuries; 2. not employing Black people or offering employment in precarious and undervalued forms of work⁹, which lead to poverty, and 3. cultural whitening. The author called attention to the fact that the whole structure of power – state structure (government, laws, capital, army and police) and White dominant Brazilian elite – had at their disposal instruments of social and cultural control, that were indicative of the ‘system of education, all the range of mass communication (like radio, press and TV¹⁰) and literary production’ (Nascimento [1978] 2016: 112). Principally

⁸Abdias do Nascimento was one of the main authors that reported on and discussed racism in Brazil. I understand he was a decolonial thinker in the Brazilian context.

⁹ Despite this changing, it is still rare to find Black people in high positions in many different spaces and types of work in Brazil. Access to universities is being changed. According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (*Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística – IBGE*), in 2018 51% of students at public universities identified as Black. This is quite a significant change, but things did not change in the same way concerning professions well charged.

¹⁰ It is important to keep in mind that Abdias do Nascimento published his book in 1978 when the internet was not available. Nowadays Black and Indigenous people have been using the internet as a space of voice and activism. See, for example, www.mundonegro.inf.br; www.geledes.org.br; YouTube channel Pensar Africanamente and Video nas Aldeias; www.videonasladeias.org.br. These are a few examples of using the internet as a space of action and as a decolonising practice. Besides that, there are two important laws related to the system of education that have been used as a tool against bias and as a tool in education to ethnic-racial education. Law 10.639/2003 determines that history of Africa and Afro-Brazilians and African and Afro-Brazilian culture must be focused on Basic Education (pre-schooling, primary and secondary levels). Law 11.645/2008 determines that history and culture of Africa and Afro-Brazilian and Brazilian Indigenous people have to be taught in primary and

the system of education functioned ‘as a mechanism of control in this structure of cultural prejudice’ (p. 113). Nascimento affirmed that all these apparatuses were used ‘to destroy the Black as person/subject and as creator and leader of own culture’ (112). The destruction of our culture included silencing or marginalising African cultures and knowledges. In this way, similarly to what Mignolo (2011) pointed out concerning the hierarchy of knowledge, Nascimento (1989) affirmed:

Another deadly tool in this scheme of immobilizing and fossilizing the vital dynamic elements of African culture can be found in its marginalization as simple folklore: a subtle form of ethnocide. All of these processes take place in an aura of subterfuge and mystification to mask and dilute their significance or make them seem ostensibly superficial. But despite such attempts at deceit, the fact remains that the concepts of White Western culture reign in this supposedly ecumenical culture in a country of Blacks, marginalizing and undervaluing our heritage of Africa in the process (Nascimento 1989: 61).

Ethnocide, as referenced by Nascimento, can be seen as one strategy of epistemicide, which can be understood as a component in the process of coloniality. Even though colonialism had ended (theoretically and officially) in Brazil in 1822¹¹, coloniality keeps exerting itself onto the minds and hearts

secondary levels in Basic Education. These laws are relevant tools against cultural whitening and for decolonisation in education. But, despite the first law being in place for almost 20 years and the second for more than 10 years, we face many challenges and even resistance in their implementation, challenges that we face in ‘processes and movements’ of decolonisation (Maart 2020b). I have been working on teacher education to implement these laws in language education contexts. The final discussion of this text is part of a project that I am working on with some teachers of Basic Education (primary and secondary levels) and professors to implement these laws from a decolonial perspective.

¹¹ Although independence was declared on September 7, 1822, it is important to bear in mind that the declaration was made by a member of the Portuguese royal family who was living in Brazil. The Portuguese court moved to Brazil in 1807. In April 1821, part of the royal family returned to Portugal. The

of the colonised and informs the practices of the colonised. What Nascimento reports as the genocide of Black people in Brazil can be characterised as operating modes of coloniality in the same way that we can see as a process of coloniality in what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o refers to when discussing colonialism and its effects:

The real aim of colonialism was to control the people's wealth: what they produced, how they produced it, and how it was distributed; to control, in other words, the entire realm of the language of real life. Colonialism imposed its control of the social production of wealth through military conquest and subsequent political dictatorship. But its most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonised, the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world. Economic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control. To control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others. For colonialism, this involved two aspects of the same process: the destruction or the deliberate undervaluing of a people's culture, their art, dances, religions, history, geography, education, orature and literature, and the conscious elevation of the language of the coloniser. The domination of a people's language by the languages of the colonising nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonised (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1997:16).

In a very similar way that Nascimento points out forms of domination of Black people, I would like to add, and Indigenous people in Brazil, the Kenyan author describes economic and political control imposed upon the

colonial process in Brazil developed some particularities during this period; and Portuguese Enlightenment also has some elements that need to be addressed: low rates of education, few universities in Portugal, no universities in the colonies. The first Brazilian university was established in the early 20th century (Federal University of Paraná – 1912). These aspects inform our beliefs in the need to rethink some statements made by the CMD group, which focus on the Spanish colonial processes; this will not be discussed here as it is not the aim of this text.

colonised. Reading Carneiro (2005), Nascimento ([1978] 2016) and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1997) helps us to understand how coloniality of power, of knowledge and being, are entangled and how they continue to operate:

1. promoting poverty of some groups and controlling economic production and distribution;
2. denying knowledges, arts and other forms of culture, controlling self-definition of this people;
3. injuring self-esteem, that weakens other aspects of self-definition; and
4. dominating languages.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o calls our attention to an element that is not referenced by Brazilian scholars – languages. Although Brazil is a multilingual country (Cavalcanti & Maher 2018), the ideology of monolingualism is dominant. This ideology is known in Brazilian Language Studies as the 'Myth of Monolingualism' (Cavalcanti 1999; Altenhofen 2013), which means that Brazilians believe that 'in Brazil we speak Portuguese', silencing and denying approximately 280 Indigenous languages¹², roughly 80 migrant languages¹³,

¹² 'The 2010 official census of the *IBGE – Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística* [Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics]—registered, for the first time, a total of 274 Indigenous languages. Linguists bring this number down to 188, considering that several of these self-denominated languages may, in fact, be varieties of the same language. These languages are spoken by most of the Indigenous people (*circa* 896,900) who either live on Indigenous lands or inhabit towns and cities in 5,565 municipalities in Brazil (IBGE, 2015)' (Freire, 2018: 27).

¹³ In different historical periods, many people from different origins moved to Brazil. For example, firstly, the forced movement of enslaved Africans from the early 16th to late 19th centuries. Secondly, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Brazilian historians registered the arrival of diverse groups of European immigrants (Italians, Germans, Ukrainians, Polish, Dutch and Pomeranians), Japanese (in two different waves, 1908 and after World War II), diverse groups from the Middle East (Lebanese, Palestinian, Jordanian, Syrian). Recently, from 2010, Brazil is the host country of new flows of migrants from Syria, Venezuela and Haiti. All these migrants bring their

Brazilian Sign Language (*Lingua Brasileira de Sinais* – *LIBRAS*), and many languages of the borders also known as languages of frontiers¹⁴. The ‘myth of monolingualism’ can be understood through the lens of what Ndhlovu (2015) calls ‘monolingual habitus’, which is ‘inspired by Pierre Bourdieu’s (Bourdieu 1977, 1991) notion of linguistic habitus – this being a set of unquestioned dispositions toward languages in society’ (Ndhlovu 2015: 399). Many Brazilians have the perception that the unique language that people who are born in Brazil speak, is Brazilian Portuguese. Education plays a key role in this perception since the education system is conceived of, and developed predominantly, in Portuguese. Schools and the media (in Portuguese only) reinforce the production of strategic blindness to ‘multilingual and multicultural lifeways’ (Ndhlovu 2015: 399).

The ideology of monolingualism¹⁵ (as we see with the ‘myth of monolingualism’ and with ‘monolingual habitus’) is rooted in the German romanticism notion of ‘one language, one people, one nation’. This notion was mobilised in the form of ‘one language, one nation’ in modern nation-state building (Hobsbawm 1990). This modern idea of a monolingual nation guided not only the language policy in Europe – language diversity was denied in Spain, Portugal, the United Kingdom, Germany, France and Italy – but also in new national states that were colonies of these European empires¹⁶.

The geopolitics of knowledge, as part of coloniality, produce what the Brazilian Indigenous writer Ailton Krenak calls ‘civilizatory abstraction’,

multilingual trajectory and repertoires. Many retain the use of their language within domestic and religious practices.

¹⁴ Throughout the Brazilian border with other countries, we can observe language practices that are constituted by different linguistics resources.

¹⁵ Ideologies of language, language ideology and linguistic ideology have been studied in different areas that focus on languages: Linguistic Anthropology, Sociology of Language, Discourse Analysis, Language Policy. For an introduction, see Schieffelin, Woolard & Kroskrity (1998). An important study of language ideologies developed by Modernity is Bauman & Briggs (2003). For monolingual ideology, see Blackledge (2000). For ideology of standardization, see Milroy (2001).

¹⁶ Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018), McKinney (2017), and Ndhlovu (2015) criticise the presence and effects of this ideology in South Africa. McKinney (2017) also discusses the ideology of standardisation.

which can be understood as the process of homogenising knowledges and languages in the name of universality. This abstraction ‘suppresses diversity, denies the plurality of forms of life, existences and habits. It offers the same menu, the same costume, and, if possible, the same language to everyone’ (Krenak 2019: 11)¹⁷. As Krenak highlights, in a similar way as the authors who put forward the decolonial perspective, this universality was rooted in Eurocentric paradigms. The ideology of monolingualism is strongly connected to the ideology of standardisation.

The ideology of standardisation refers to the idea that a language has an ideal or prototype form. Linguistic forms that do not correspond to this ideal structure could be seen as a variation or deviation, being evaluated predominantly as illegitimate. This standard is currently associated with writing since writing would make this structure permanent as opposed to spoken word, which tends to undergo modification. This idea is also connected to viewing language as a list of words structured as a sentence. It is not a casual gesture that dictionaries and grammar books are indispensable tools of standardisation. Written texts should imitate that grammatical arrangement and forms of spoken word and should use those words recognised in dictionaries. Standardisation was first connected to political affirmation and empowerment within Europe; it was linked to colonial empires as well; and finally, it was related to the construction of national states. Setting the limits/boundaries of languages in Europe corresponded to marking territorial limits of power influence of each state. This process of standardisation is especially important in performing the coloniality of language because it was the production of a unitary language that was built consistent with the interests of the group exerting the political and administrative power. A unitary language, according to Bakhtin (1981), was produced with the support of authors dedicated to language, philosophy, religion, and literary studies. In Bakhtinian words,

(a) ... unitary language constitutes the theoretical expression of the historical processes of linguistic unification and centralization, an expression of the centripetal forces of language. A unitary language is

¹⁷ Ailton Krenak is an important Brazilian Indigenous thinker and activist. He has raised his voice in the struggle for Indigenous rights (for education, the public health system, protection of lands, cultures and languages). His voice is central among other Indigenous decolonial thinkers in Brazil.

not something given but is always in essence posited – and at every moment of its linguistic life it is opposed to the realities of heteroglossia. But at the same time, it makes its real presence felt as a force for overcoming this heteroglossia, imposing specific limits to it (Bakhtin 1981: 270).

In this sense, the unitary language crystallises a ‘relative’ unit that starts being seen as the ‘correct language’. Also, a,

common unitary language is a system of linguistic norms. But these norms do not constitute an abstract imperative; they are rather the generative forces of linguistic life, forces that struggle to overcome the heteroglossia of language, forces that unify and centralize verbal-ideological thought (Bakhtin 1981:271).

Heteroglossia refers to the diversity of world views and is related primarily to how different social, economic, professional and cultural groups view, value and evaluate themselves, other groups, and the world. Heteroglossia can be identified with linguistic forms, but this is secondary since the ‘same’ grammatical category and the ‘same’ word can carry different world views. The word ‘same’, in the aforementioned sentence, is written in inverted commas because, carrying different world views means such a word is the same only as form, on the surface, not concerning ideology. A unitary language is an exercise to guide and control the way we view the world and develop our values. As Bakhtin emphasised, the standard unitary language (the ‘correct language’) is an exercise of power with the purpose to centralise and unify the power in a specific group. It is possible to connect the Bakhtinian perspective with the study on the coloniality of language articulated by Veronelli (2015). Veronelli shows the criteria to legitimise the language representative of Spain:

- a) to have a filial relationship with the traditionally superior languages perceived as gifts from God (Latin, Greek and Hebrew) and, consequently, to be languages capable of expressing knowledge;
- b) to have the capacity for the political enterprise to unify a territory, including the expression of the laws, authority and order of that territory; and

c) the connection between alphabetic writing and civics. So, when the means of expressiveness of people perceived as ‘beasts’ are evaluated, from this criterion, they are not languages (Veronelli 2015: 45).

The principles noted above were used to legitimise the Castilian language in Spain.

Language was related to territory, political and juridical power, religion and writing. Veronelli (2015) analysed epistemological patterns that have oriented scholars toward the study of the Castilian language during the period of Spanish maritime expansion. Veronelli returned to texts written by Elio Antonio de Nebrija¹⁸ (1441 - 1522) and Bernardo de Alderete¹⁹ (1565 - 1641) and exposed their criteria for identifying and, consequently, legitimising the language²⁰.

Although development of the religious criterion lost force in society, the second and third criteria remained valid for the Enlightenment and Modernity and in some cases are still valid. The construction of languages as bounded units is linked to three main social and historical processes:

1. colonial domination;
2. the building of the modern nation-states; and

¹⁸ Veronelli refers to *Gramática de la lengua castellana* (1492).

¹⁹ Veronelli refers to *Del origen y principio de la lengua castellana o romance que oi se usa en España* (1606).

²⁰ These criteria seem similar to those that led Pero de Magalhães de Gândavo to affirm that the language of the people who lived on the coast of Brazil lacked three letters: f, l, and r. As said by this author, ‘something worthy of astonishment, because they do not have Fé (Faith), nor Lei (Law), nor Rei (King): and in this way they live in disorder without taking into account, neither weight nor measure’ (História, chap. 10, fl. 33v.). Language and, specifically, letter, correspond to social organisations and worldviews. In the absence of letters and linguistic correspondence with the coloniser’s language, the colonised would lack not only faith and social organisation but very specific types and modes of faith/religion and social order. The reference of language and society is that of the coloniser. Not identifying any similarity in the colonised, the coloniser points out the lack. This lack was used to imply lack of humanity, building the non-being, dehumanising people.

3. the development of public instruction due to Enlightenment's²¹ emancipation project.

Despite the differences that distinguish European colonial processes (mainly British, French, Portuguese and Spanish), colonial empires used language as part of a process of domination and exclusion of colonised people, imposing colonial languages and often denying the languages and knowledges of colonised people.

The connection between language and nation was part of the process of imagining the nation as a community of people that shared a common language, culture and a past. A nation is a discursive construct where language and writing play a fundamental role (Anderson 1983; Hobsbawm 1990). Imagining the nation implied the task of inventing unified languages and common narratives about past and present that could be shared throughout the territory. Writing would be necessary to spread such narratives and to standardise and stabilise language.

Schooling was also part of the process of imagining the nation. It was especially important to national development. The Enlightenment's emancipation project²² defined public schooling²³ as the main way to emancipate

²¹ As pointed out by Castro-Gómez (2007), 'The European Enlightenment [...] is not considered [...] as an 'original' text that is copied by others, or as an intra-European phenomenon that is 'spread' all over the world and against which it is only possible to speak of a good or a bad "reception"'. The author says that Enlightenment in his context (Colombia) is best understood if it is seen as had been 'read, translated and enunciated'. The consequence of this perspective is that reflecting on the Enlightenment implies to ask about 'cultural translation', which in turn 'carries the idea of dislocation, relocation and displacement'. Agreeing with the author, I understand that it is necessary to ask how Enlightenment was 'read, translated and enunciated' in Brazil, but also in Portugal, since there are specificities of Enlightenment in these contexts.

²² Emancipation, in this context, meant to free people from any kind of guardianship: families, religion, political and ideological.

²³ It is important to mention that for the most part schooling in Brazil was developed by the Catholic Church until 1891 (Cunha 2017) and that science and scientific knowledge were developed later in Brazil compared to neighbouring countries.

people through science²⁴. Scientific and legislative knowledges – and the scientific and legislative writing – were the foundation of freedom and the autonomy of enlightened people. Free, autonomous and informed citizens were the desire of the state because they could know and decide what were better for people and the nation since people became responsible for choosing governments.

Schooling relied on (and relies upon) writing (since knowledge might be defined and fixed in written texts) and promoted the teaching of the legitimate language of the nation-state. All citizens should know the same standardised (unitary) language. Language studies were connected to this national project: it was necessary to describe, standardise and create the instruments to prescribe the language. Writing performed the central role of producing hierarchies of languages given that it was used as a paradigm of language forms and uses. Only one specific pattern of writing was used: alphabetic writing (Mignolo 1992a; 1992b). Indigenous forms of writing – like embodied and graphic signs, paintings, and images – were delegitimised and not considered writing²⁵. As such, colonisation of languages implied the imposition of the Roman alphabet and the denial of other writing systems used by colonised people. These systems are still marginalised, and visual signs that compose communicative practices are still seen as inferior when compared with the spoken word. Such patterns of evaluation can be seen as being connected to the coloniality of languages.

The use of a legitimate alphabet, however, did not always guarantee the legitimating of languages spoken by colonised people, nor guarantee the legitimating of their knowledges. According to Garcés, embracing alphabetic writing can still be treated as insufficient for validating these languages and knowledges expressed within them. Coloniality of language is engendered so that the hierarchy remains even when the person uses the legitimised writing system or the legitimised language. Coloniality of language, therefore:

shows a double face: on the one hand, modernity subalternized certain languages in favor of others, but on the other hand, it also colonized the word of the speakers who speak subalternized languages. In other

²⁴ In colonial contexts, emancipation was put forward as the way to ‘free’ colonised people from ‘primitive beliefs’ and to ‘civilise’ them.

²⁵ On this note, see Boone & Mignolo (1994).

words, not only were certain languages subalternized, but the word itself and the speech of colonized speakers: the word of a Quechua speaker, for example, even if it is expressed in Spanish, will always be less valued than the word of a Spanish-speaker, especially if is urban, White, mestizo, male, titled, etc.; that is, the valuation of the word continues to depend on the colonial trilogy indicated by Quijano (class, race, gender) (Garcés 2007: 150).

In this sense, the coloniality of language can be seen as another vertex of the structure of coloniality (with coloniality of being, knowing and power). It has to do with the intertwined processes of racialising, classifying, hierarchising and dehumanising of colonised people. In this way, values are attached to the speaker and writer according to their class, gender and race. Garcés (2007) affirms this position, by noting that,

Languages and knowledges function like the economy: through a valuation system, which asymmetrically classifies the production, consumption, distribution and circulation of goods (Garcés 2007: 225).

Coloniality of language implies evaluation and produces asymmetries that construct dehumanising since it is that vertex of coloniality that directly affects world views, on values. Experiences of hierarchies of languages into schooling were embodied and narrated by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, who examines how schooling was used to produce subjugation of the colonised by the British within the Kenyan system of education in the 1950s. This production of coloniality operated through language, ensuring that the colonised understood that the coloniser's language was the most important:

Thus, one of the most humiliating experiences was to be caught speaking Gikuyu in the vicinity of the school. The culprit was given corporal punishment – three to five strokes of the cane on bare buttocks – or was made to carry a metal plate around the neck with inscriptions such as I AM STUPID or I AM A DONKEY. Sometimes the culprits were fined money they could hardly afford

The attitude to English was the exact opposite: any achievement in spoken or written English was highly rewarded; prizes, prestige,

applause; the ticket to higher realms. English became the measure of intelligence and ability in the arts, the sciences, and all the other branches of learning. English became the main determinant of a child's progress – up the ladder of formal education (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1997:11, 12).

Different from what is noted by Garcés (2007), Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o brought into focus the support and affirmation given to students for using the language of the coloniser. While speaking Gikuyu was punishable, on body and soul, speaking and writing in English was rewarded, especially showing the capability of learning normative uses of English. A similar narrative is produced by Indigenous people in Brazil in the documentary *Indigenous of Brazil 2 – Our Languages*, produced by Ailton Krenak. According to participants, Indigenous people from different ethnic groups (Baré/ Warekena, Tariana, Baniwa) living in the North of Brazil were prohibited from speaking their languages and were obliged to speak Portuguese at schools, mainly within Catholic schools, in 1970s Brazil. If Indigenous children were seen or heard speaking their languages, they would be forced to carry an object as punishment or would be deprived of a school meal.

Unlike Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's narrative, Brazilian Indigenous learners were not offered rewards for using Portuguese as a language within the school. Those narratives show how the coloniality of languages were embodied and experienced within the souls of the colonised and the Indigenous people. In this way, civilising suggests a project of homogenising 'forms of life, existence and habits', homogenising languages (Krenak 2019: 11), which has as its reference the unitary language, the language of groups of power (Bakhtin 1981), and producing hierarchies. Once language is homogenised by standardising processes, a hierarchy is built not among languages as units (for example, Guarani, Tukano, isiZulu, isiXhosa, Kimbundu, Portuguese, English) but among what we learnt to witness as varieties of the 'same language'. As such, the superior position is ascribed to a standard variety used in scientific, academic, juridical and literary written texts: fields where writing is central to the discipline, and as such fields with high social value. This value is attributed to the standard and was used later to build and sustain hierarchies among languages as units since standard languages are positioned higher than languages that were not standardised, not being written with the Roman alphabet, without grammar or dictionaries.

Fanon²⁶ (1967) developed considerations that are related to language hierarchies. The Martinican scholar draws our attention to a double language hierarchy, which means a hierarchy of languages as units and a hierarchy of linguistic norms (varieties): The Frenchman's French first and foremost, followed by Antillean's French, then Creole. The author cited a poem to exemplify the aversion to Creole and the aspiration that is instilled upon the colonised to speak in 'French French':

The middle class in the Antilles never speak Creole except to their servants. In school the children of Martinique are taught to scorn the dialect. One avoids Creolisms. Some families completely forbid the use of Creole, and mothers ridicule their children for speaking it.
My mother wanting a son to keep in mind
if you do not know your history lesson
you will not go to mass on Sunday in
your Sunday clothes
that child will be a disgrace to the family
that child will be our curse
shut up I told you you must speak French
the French of France
the Frenchman's French
French French

(Fanon 1967: 10).

²⁶ In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon calls attention to how the Negro (his phrase for referring to Black people) in the context of the French colonised island of Martinique used to relate with his/her language and the colonial language. Fanon highlights that on the one hand, Black people seek to use colonial language to show proximity to the coloniser to be accepted but on the other hand being aligned with the coloniser, using colonial language in a legitimate standardised way, thus created and sustained hierarchies in colonised societies. Speaking French as a French speaker would allow Black Antilleans to create a differentiation from those Antilleans that were not able to use the language in the same way. Fanon helps us to think about language uses by focusing on the relations between Black people and the White colonisers and relations between and among Black people in colonised societies.

Here Fanon leads us to reflect on different values attributed to ‘varieties’ or degrees of language articulation such as the: ‘the well-spoken’ or the one who ‘mastered’ French in writing, which was valued by French colonisers as speaking ‘like a book’ (Fanon 1967: 11). This is measured as the best French, worthy of being feared, like the speaker who shows command is feared, for command suggests mastery, and mastery is the highest form of governance and control of the masses. The colonised Black man from the Antilles who speaks French with this kind of mastery ‘talks like a white man’ (Fanon 1967:11).

McKinney (2017) shows that some patterns of English language usage are connected to Whiteness, and she analysed naturalised and contesting practices of power relations based on the entanglement of language and race. She focused on how ‘white ethnolinguistic repertoires’ are taken as reference for legitimate and privileged usages and how practices and linguistic forms that are not included in this repertoire are delegitimised. McKinney coined the concept of *Anglonormativity*, which ‘refers to the expectation that people will be and should be proficient in English, and are deficient, even deviant if they are not’ (McKinney 2017: 80). As the author points out, parameters of proficiency are based on prestigious varieties of English language spoken, above all, by ‘‘White’ ways of speaking English’ (McKinney 2017: 84). In this sense, this proficiency can be connected with the need to speak French like the Frenchman (‘the French of France; the Frenchman’s French; French French’) referred to by Fanon (1967), ‘the normativity or dominance of whiteness’ (McKinney 2017: 81).

Anglonormativity can be seen as an ideology and practice that reinforce hierarchies of prestigious linguistic norms and, as shown by McKinney, reinforce a specific set of knowledge referred to as ‘knowledge of the world’ (McKinney 2017: 103). In this way, the author discusses the normativity of pretence ‘universal knowledge’, pointing out the construction of Eurocentric universality. Thus, McKinney shows ‘how knowledge is regimented through racialised discourse. *Anglonormativity* here reinforces ‘the position [of] White people as bearers of “preferred knowledge”’ (McKinney 2017: 103). In this way, the analysis offered by McKinney connects with the concept of coloniality of language and coloniality of knowing. Her analysis of how *Anglonormativity* has been contested in education can be seen as a step toward decolonisation.

Decolonising Language Education

Reflections on the coloniality of languages produced by Garcés (2007) and Veronelli (2015) (both based on Mignolo's texts) assist us in challenging this vertex of coloniality. Decolonial thinking and decolonising languages involve, as noted by Mignolo (2011: 10), the 'analytical effort to understand, to overcome, the logic of coloniality underneath the rhetoric of modernity'. But, as mentioned by this author, decolonisation is not only an analytical practice. Walsh and Mignolo (2018) emphasise that decoloniality is characterised by 'thinking-doing and doing-thinking' (Walsh & Mignolo 2018: 9). According to Walsh (2018), decoloniality,

is a form of struggle and survival, an epistemic and existence-based response and practice – most especially by colonized and racialized subjects – *against* the colonial matrix of power in all of its dimensions, and for the possibilities of an otherwise.

Decoloniality denotes ways of thinking, knowing, being, and doing that began with, but also precede the colonial enterprise and invasion. It implies the recognition and undoing of the hierarchical structures of race, gender, heteropatriarchy, and class that continue to control life, knowledge, spirituality, and thought, structures that are intertwined with and constitutive of global capitalism and Western modernity. Moreover, it is indicative of the ongoing nature of struggles, constructions, and creations that continue to work within coloniality's margins and fissures to affirm that which coloniality has attempted to negate (Walsh 2018: 17).

And further along:

Decoloniality, without a doubt, is also contextual, relational, practice-based, and lived. Also, it is intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, and existentially entangled and interwoven (Walsh 2018: 19).

In this way, decoloniality is a responsive, responsible and engaged practice of struggle against dehumanising practices (that also involves discursive practices). In this sense, Walsh's statement can help us to respond to Maart's

questions posed during the 2020 Decolonial Summer School: ‘What does it mean to decolonise? Decolonising whom from what? What do you decolonise from?’²⁷. And we could complete Walsh’s affirmation with what Maart asserts about process and movement of decolonisation:

The process is one that involves several acts aimed at directing one’s energies toward the undoing, toward the removal of the colonial, and this may include the settler colonial’s attitude, language, culture, entitlement and forms of Black surveillance often referred to as social etiquettes; the movement is the collective process through which decolonisation takes a community focus because various acts involve disenfranchised communities and not the individual (Maart 2020b).

Some of these actions, processes and movements were previously expressed by Maart (2014): ‘To decolonize is to remove the process, the movement, and the procedures that decapitated Africa – left it with a body and robbed it of its head, stole its mind’ (Maart 2014: 75). Because of the stealing of the mind, we sought Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s (1997) *Decolonizing the Mind*. And for Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, decolonising the mind implies to go back to an African home language that was, and in some cases still is, the language of your parents, grandparents, and ancestors which the coloniser forbids you to speak. In the Brazilian context, it means that Indigenous people would be educated in their languages if they want it, how and when they want²⁸. About the latter, we have

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https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=2574883209291156&ref=watch_permalink.

²⁸ Many Brazilian Indigenous people have developed education in their languages, and they also fight for education in the Portuguese language. There are many experiences in Bilingual Education in Brazil produced by different ethnic Indigenous groups (Freire 2018; Maher 2018). They struggle to work with their own knowledges at school, and they also want the modern-based knowledge and language of schooling. They want the dominant language and knowledge to use strategically (as guns) in struggling for their rights (Kondo 2020). In a similar sense, they have strategically used the idea of a unified language (providing writing, dictionaries, and grammars) to legitimise their languages in schooling (Oliveira 2018). Schools in their territories provide

faced many challenges. Even though the Brazilian government wrote many official documents (laws and other kinds of educational briefs) guaranteeing the right of education in Indigenous languages, Indigenous people deal with many difficulties to develop Indigenous School Education, beginning with teacher education, passing through publishing materials (textbooks or literature) in their languages to be used in schooling, until the effective implementation of intercultural education. Despite the ‘permission’ to use Indigenous languages in schooling, Indigenous people are also obligated to use the Portuguese language.

But what does one do when the home language is also the coloniser’s language? So another answer is possible in Maart’s voice:

To decolonize is to unpeel and examine each layer of colonialism, each segment that is layered with history, lodged in, hooked, entrenched, in words, sounds, blood, with body parts, with breath drawn from the fermented land ... you inhale it, draw it in. To decolonize – is to open the wounds of the word; the word gone flesh from its moment of announcement (Maart 2014: 75).

And the word that went flesh was a word in English. Taking ownership, possessing the word is also decolonising.

Although not talking from a decolonial perspective, bell hooks’ voice sounds very decolonising. The North American feminist bell hooks wrote about how she imagined the enslaved Africans arriving at that distant land, oppressed, deprived of their languages and obliged to learn the language of the oppressor:

I imagine, then, Africans first hearing English as ‘the oppressor’s language’ and then re-hearing it as a potential site of resistance. Learning English, learning to speak the alien tongue, was one way enslaved Africans began to reclaim their personal power within a context of domination. Possessing a shared language, black folks could

Indigenous School Education, which differs from Indigenous Education. The former is theoretically based on Intercultural perspectives and is oriented towards national and provincial curriculum documents. The second is the education of Indigenous cultures and is not related to schooling (Brasil 1998).

find again a way to make community, and a means to create the political solidarity necessary to resist (hooks 1994:171).

The author looks at language usage as a means to undo oppression. Collectively Black people used English to create a community in the USA. This community was characterised by resistance and transformation. In this way, we can go back to the statement of Coates, quoted as the epigraph of this text: ‘They made us into a race. We made ourselves into a people’ (Coates 2015: 149). Deprived of family, prohibited from using their own language, dehumanised, they used the ‘the oppressor’s language’ to build a community and to experience Being. ‘Needing the oppressor’s language to speak with one another they nevertheless also reinvented, remade that language so that it would speak beyond the boundaries of conquest and domination’ (hooks 1994: 170). hooks underlines the subversion of grammar as a strategy of possessing the language.

Some of these features are also present in Maart’s (2014) text, which undertakes an examination of the decolonising process by contesting the norms with which we write academic articles. Maart visually subverts the arrangement of English language sentences by inscribing her analysis within and against the grain of reading and writing, with a particular focus on the system of punctuation, which she asserts is key to understanding the systemic nature of the English language (Maart 2014).

This process of decolonising language goes further than subverting forms of language (phonetically, morphologically, syntactically or textually); decolonising language, as Maart notes, focuses on examining the layers of colonialism in the words, opening the wounds of words, which implies to deepen the analysis of the value that words carry in language, and also occupying these words. The way Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o undertakes the entanglement of language and culture shows us the need to navigate language also in this sense (not only as a form) and unpeel these values in words.

Culture embodies those moral, ethical and aesthetic values, the set of spiritual eyeglasses, through which they come to view themselves and their place in the universe. Values are the basis of a people’s identity, their sense of particularity as members of the human race. All this is carried by language. Language as culture is the collective memory bank of a people’s experience in history. Culture is almost indistin-

guishable from the language that makes possible its genesis growth banking, articulation and indeed its transmission from one generation to the next (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1997: 14f).

And further along in the same text:

Language as communication and as a culture are then products of each other. Communication creates culture: culture is a means of communication. Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world. How people perceive themselves affects how they look at their culture, at their politics and at the social production of wealth, at their entire relationship to nature and to other beings. Language is thus inseparable from ourselves as a community of human beings with a specific form and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1997:15f).

Similarly, the Russian thinker Mikhail Bakhtin notes:

We are taking language, not as a system of abstract grammatical categories, but rather language conceived as ideologically²⁹ saturated, language as a world view, even as a concrete opinion, ensuring a maximum of mutual understanding in all spheres of ideological life (Bakhtin 1981: 271).

This perspective of language as a system of ideas and set of values overcomes the limit of structure and focuses on how one person carries values in and throughout using languages. It is also useful to overcome the objectification of language and the view of language as a unit which boundaries match with

²⁹ According to Emerson and Holquist (1986: 101), ideology in Bakhtinian work 'should not be confused with the politically oriented English word. Ideology, as it is used here, is essentially any system of ideas. But Ideology is semiotic in the sense that it involves the concrete exchange of signs in society and history. Every word/discourse betrays the ideology of its speaker; every speaker is thus an ideologue and every utterance an ideologue'.

national or ethnical groups boundaries.

My proposal to thinking-doing decolonising language education is to join this perspective of language as value/worldview with Signorini's proposal to deregulate language. Signorini is a Brazilian Applied Linguist who has been working on Literacy (through the lens of New Literacy Studies) and teacher education. She challenges her readers in the following ways:

- One, to find other goals to teaching language differently from the national and the modern project (enlighten the ignorant);
- Two, to research language by focusing on what is out of the normative and standardised umbrella.

She focuses on the actions and agency of speakers, readers and writers and how they handle the standards both because they do not know the prestige forms and uses and because they dare to challenge the standards to position themselves within these interactions. She proposes a look at the heterogeneity of uses, forms and meanings of language practices and to look at how people value this heterogeneity.

Signorini emphasises that texts and knowledge 'transmitted' by schooling (knowledge produced inside the rhetoric and logic of Modernity/Enlightenment) are connected to economic and cultural-specific groups, despite their pretence of universality and neutrality. These texts and knowledge are often connected to legitimised and privileged linguistic forms. The privileged and legitimate 'varieties' are also presumed to be neutral. Despite being exhibited in this way, texts, knowledge and linguistic norms are politically, historically and socially allied with dominant groups. Signorini suggests that students excluded from practices that focus on these texts, linguistic forms and knowledge can feel or see themselves as being very far from these texts and knowledge; besides, one possible effect of schooling is that students perceive themselves as ignorant (Signorini 1994). As such, schooling could emphasise the exclusion rather than promote the inclusion of students performing these prestigious practices. Described as neutral technology, literacy appears to be apolitical, ahistorical and asocial. However, as affirmed by Signorini (1994: 21f),

literacy practices are social practices and, as such, are inexorably committed to the ways of reasoning/acting/evaluating of the groups

that control access to these practices. In the case of groups of greater prestige in society, literacy practices are committed to mechanisms of political-ideological domination/subordination of socio-economically marginalized people.

Literacy is not neutral; on the contrary, it is constitutive of domination and exploitation; it is also constitutive of power relations that build and sustain inequality within society. In societies where racism is structural, some literacy practices are connected to silencing and excluding groups, such as Black and Indigenous people in Brazil. Racism reinforces mechanisms of exclusion, exploitation and domination (Almeida 2019).

Signorini (2002) criticises and challenges this pretence of universality and neutrality, and she proposes that we look at the deregulation of language. This perspective, as explained by the author, focuses on multiple and heterogeneous forms and uses of languages, as opposed to focusing on what is described as unitary, homogeneous or common in seeing languages as bounded³⁰. Within the language deregulation perspective, the interest is on multiple language practices and on what is built as:

common and uncommon, compatible and antagonist, legitimate and non-legitimate, possible and unacceptable, etc. Thus, instead of referring to a standard, lingua franca, or privileged norm, in contrast to a non-standard, stigmatized language, or vernacular, we are interested in the notion of linguistic order as always temporary and contingent configuration of what, in playing socio-communicative as well as political and ideological social relations, is constructed as division, border, or frontier in the uses of language (Signorini 2002: 93f).

As a consequence, this interest is unstable and provisional as it informs and uses it as a guide, thereby focusing on speaker/reader/writer agency:

we are interested in common practices of language use in which the ‘disruption’ brought up by variation is what allows the speaker/writer to create him/herself as an agent that both reproduces forms and meanings, roles and identities as well as changes, strains, twists,

³⁰ Usually, studies that describe one linguistic variety tend to concentrate on what is homogenous and common to constitute such variety.

subverts and produces the new, whether it is perceived as creative, revolutionary, or perceived as just unreasonable, crooked, badly organized (Signorini 2002: 94).

In this sense, attention is directed at subjects in interaction: to the speaker or writer whose text (oral or written, verbal or verbal-visual or verbal-sound) is constituted by disruptive linguistic forms, and to the person who listens or reads and values/ evaluates these forms. Since we look through the Bakhtinian lens, Signorini's proposal is similar to an invitation to observe centripetal and centrifugal forces of tension within the text, the enunciation. Signorini does not draw on this Bakhtinian lens, however, in a similar way, she focuses on the one hand on social forces that tend to centralise, unify and maintain stable linguistic forms and tend to legitimate these unified stable forms; on the other, she focuses on forces that tend to decentralise and produce different forms, disrupting and challenging unifying forces and forms.

Since language is sensitive to social and cultural changes, social and cultural transformations are felt and lived within language, which are conceived as a worldview. Disputes and struggles for social and cultural permanence or transformations take place in language (word meanings, linguistic or stylistic forms, and, consequently, genres of discourse) as well. These forces and disputes are produced by groups collectively. Considering collective agency, the perspective of language deregulation keeps its eyes on individual enunciations understood with other enunciations, which the subject agrees or disagrees with and/or fights against. The collective does not subsume the individual, but the individual is constituted by other subjects within the collective.

Centralising and decentralising social forces are related to the evaluation of meanings and forms of languages as well as the evaluation of groups, their values and their knowledges that constitute the worldviews they construct and share in their languages. Centralising forces create the privileged unified standard language and legitimate knowledge and texts. Through this lens, other uses and forms of language, seen as 'varieties' of the legitimate, texts and knowledges are valued. In this perspective we understand Fanon, when he notes:

Yes, I must take great pains with my speech, because I shall be more or less judged by it. With great contempt, they will say of me, 'He

doesn't even know how to speak French'. In any group of young men in the Antilles, the one who expresses himself well, who has mastered the language, is inordinately feared; keep an eye on that one, he is almost white. In France one says, 'He talks like a book'. In Martinique, 'He talks like a white man' (Fanon 1967:11).

Maintaining or disrupting language forms and uses that are expected in social relations produce effects because these relationships imply judgments and evaluations. Expressing oneself 'well', as Fanon notes, means expressing oneself according to the privileged White coloniser's standard language. This is a value addressed to the language and the speaker.

Language education in this perspective focuses on the values ascribed to languages and 'varieties' including the privileged standard one, guaranteeing access as well as arguing the legitimacy and power of this standard. This perspective of language deregulation in language education, in accordance with what I am proposing in this text, keeps the attention focused on the agency of speakers and writers as producers and listeners, and readers as evaluators and as co-producers as well; listeners and readers understand a text as a comprehensive active response (Bakhtin 1986), that includes evaluative forms and meanings directed at them. Therefore, these interlocutors are not passive. This joint process is constituted by and a constituent of multiple asymmetric power relations that pertain to race, sexuality, the episteme, the economy, gender and spirituality.

Conclusion

Challenging the coloniality of language and decolonising language education involves paying attention to the context out of which the language emerges and allows us to direct our energy toward the agency of subjects in communicative dynamic interaction and the interpretative practices of interaction (Signorini 2002). Importantly, since language is seen as embodying values (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1997), as worldview (Bakhtin 1981), we look at this 'temporary and contingent configuration' of forms focusing on the agency of subjects to position their worldviews, their ideas/values. In this way, decolonising language education focuses on attentive listening to multiple voices, principally of those historically silenced or forced to stay in the margins. In

Brazil, it means listening attentively to Black and Indigenous voices, reading, seeing, and listening to the vast range of diverse oral, written and visual texts that have been produced in different sociopolitical spaces. The voices of Black people and Indigenous people rarely come into schools, even when and where they constitute the majority of students. Starting from Black and Indigenous students' voices at schools, including voices of their families and communities and voices of more prestigious representatives of the Black population and the Indigenous population in Brazil and other countries. For all of these inclusive concerns, I understand it is essential that we continue the South-South dialogue, especially with African voices. As Nascimento asserts, African cultures were silenced for a long time in Brazil. Decolonising language education implies listening to African voices, as well as voices of the African diasporas.

This practice of decolonising language education involves negotiation, often times conflictive, of the values carried within languages. There is a diversity of 'moral, ethical and aesthetic values' within and among groups. At the same time, considering that we circulate through different social spheres, developing a range of diverse human activities, where values may be contradictory, it nonetheless allows us to bring common uses and forms of one sphere into another. As such, it is not uncommon that we also draw on the values of one sphere and insert it into another sphere. In this sense, transformations allow for an intertwining of varied criteria and contexts and in the process a series of entanglements take place.

A word carries this tension of values. The word is simultaneously the place of encounter and the dispute of values. When we learn a word and when we take ownership of it, we do not strip it of its values, but we repaint the word giving it the tonality of our previous experiences of that word and lived values played out by that word (Bakhtin 1986). It means that negotiations are present among values/worldviews shared or disputed by groups that use the same-named language or different-named languages. Within the experience of Blackness, different values/worldviews are shared, disputed, contested, much the same as in a range of sociopolitical and racialised identities. Within the 'same' ethnic group (Brazilians Guaranis, for example), values/worldviews are shared, disputed and contested. Within Whiteness, different values/worldviews are shared, disputed and contested. There is not homogeneity in any group. Diversity of values and worldviews throughout what is named (and people treat) as the 'same' language (Portuguese, for example) requires negotiation;

negotiations are also required between what is named as ‘two’ completely different languages (Kimbundu and Portuguese, for example). Conceiving of languages as values or worldviews, as opposed to structures by themselves, leads us to understand that we enact some form of translation of different values/worldviews even within the ‘same’ named language. It is critical to think about how we dialogue and ‘translate’ in interactions using ‘same’-named language and using different-named languages. Having this perspective as a point of departure, all interactions imply some kind of intercultural dialogue. Decolonising language education needs to address this central aspect of discursive practices and literacy practices. In this sense, language education can become a space where we challenge and resist coloniality of language, of being, of knowing, and of power. In addition, within language education, being multivocal (multiple voices, worldviews)/multilingual, can be a space ‘for alternative cultural production and alternative epistemologies – different ways of thinking and knowing, that were crucial to creating a counter-hegemonic worldview’ (hooks 1994: 171).

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Opinion Piece 01

White Arrogance Tramples Mandela's Legacy for African Self-determination

Sipho Singiswa

One major problem in South Africa is the unspoken truth about the steadfast refusal by conservative white South Africans to accept that indigenous Africans are people and equals or even that they have a natural right to govern themselves in the country of their ancestral birth. This is a sentiment that white South Africa often shares with racist groupings within minority non-white communities. Although these minority communities had subsequently been declared officially black after the 1994 general elections, these racist groupings continue to share the anti-indigenous African white racist sentiment. These are non-white people who feel, just like the famous Mahatma Gandhi did, that they are superior to the indigenous African people, and therefore, resent an indigenous African-led government.

Right from the beginning of the Nelson Mandela Presidency, the African leadership was duped, coerced and expected to implement economic policies and govern according to the fancies of white sentiments even though this continues to perpetuate the many injustices that violate African people's human dignity. It is also at this time that the Mandela administration gets manipulated and convinced by white liberals, especially within the ANC itself, through whom corporate giant bosses had strategically endeared themselves to the ANC, to change and soften its stance on most of its radical social transformation policies. One of their key arguments was that it was imperative for the ANC to appease white fears, as well as to address the possibility of white capital flight whilst making the country attractive and open to new foreign direct investments globally. This was done with the great help of ANC white members; academics; advisors and economists mostly motivated by self-

serving agendas. Of course, they did not care about the well-being of the African people. Most of these liberals simply viewed the ANC as a theatre to butter their bread on both sides.

These sentiments were emboldened by how easy it had become for wealthy white South Africans to wine and dine, while simultaneously entrapping ANC leadership structures into a web of corrupt business schemes that targeted BBBEE deals to compromise targeted individual ANC/Alliance leaders. It is also around this time, soon after Mandela's release, that more shady political characters, turncoats and askaris, started over-populating ANC leadership structures, including its deployment and economic policy structures. And fragmentations eventually gave rise to the manifestation of factionalism within the ANC. Unfortunately, Mandela's campaign of appeasing white fears in order to attract foreign investment and facilitate national reconciliation was betrayed, rendering the ANC more vulnerable to further infiltration by WMC agents, much in the same way as the many apartheid spies, such as Craig Williamson, easily and very successfully infiltrated ANC structures to identified many ANC cadres for elimination.

Although all the signs of the 'WMC Divide and Rule Strategy' were becoming more obvious, unfortunately, some ANC seniors who, at the time, were still drunk with power and more concerned with protecting their new instant, but clandestinely acquired wealthy and associated lifestyles, chose to brush off these signs. In this narrative, any weaknesses or lack of political discipline and commitment to the people is exploited and becomes an ideal scapegoat, a stereotype that white supremacy uses to explain and justify its resistance to social transformation. This then explains why weak and compromised leadership is targeted with promises of instant investment schemes and wealth which eventually is intended to collapse the ANC.

Part of this narrative is creating the emotional bogey-man campaign using the historically owned white media houses to feed and widely spread the general perception that corruption and crime wears an African face. This is coupled to the lie that if the ANC led government does not concede to the racist-driven demands for an economic safety net that protects white privilege the country will suffer the indignity of losing foreign aid and increased levels of unemployment, violence and crime that leads to both political and economic instability.

However, instead of using the power vested in it by the African majority to effect social change, the indigenous South African leadership has

dismally failed to transform the country from a white social system to a humane social system that is well informed by real introspection of its racist past that continues to resist a desired social transformation that delivers meaningful empowerment to the African majority. Against a well-resourced and western-inspired sea of resistance to real social change coupled to lack of political discipline, the majority of the current leadership, including ANC stalwarts, had succumbed to the universal human condition, the avarice of self-enrichment, and opted for minority personal comforts and instant wealth that gets explained away as benefits of the new government policy of BEE deals. These are often disguised as family foundations and businesses characterized by co-option into the corrupt white system against which African freedom fighters had waged a liberation struggle.

One of the results of this general absence of morally strong African leadership is that the poor and indigenous communities continue to be shackled to the brutal injustices of the western-inspired racist Economic Strategy of Divide and Rule as highlighted by many revelations at gatherings such as the Ian Farlam and Judge Richard Zondo Commissions of inquiries. It is now clear that these actions and ANC responses thereto are ultimately biting the ANC in the back. It is bleeding and has lost focus of its historical objective to serve the people because it is being drowned in a sea of legal battles and trying to save itself from the devil within.

The problem, however, is not only how easily corruptible African leaders can be or that they are. It is equally, if not more so, about when and how they get corrupted and by whom, as well as the conditions under which they succumb to corruption. To interrogate this it is then very critical how holistic South Africans problematize it and its impact of the persistent negative propaganda on the psyche of the indigenous people and their human dignity. It is also about how an indigenous African leadership is being thwarted and sabotaged from all quarters to prevent it from successfully governing the country from an African perspective and to implement the social policies that the ANC promised to the constituency that voted it into power to govern. From the word go the ANC, Mandela and his political successors were being set up for failure.

But if South Africans are really serious about curbing all forms of corruption, they must also insist on a forensic investigation of the historical role played by the advocates of WMC in corrupting ANC and its Alliance leadership structures in order to render them ineffective and to discredit them

to the people. For any genuine anti-corruption campaign to be successful in South Africa, it needs to be much more in-depth and inclusive of the key historical role played by WMC and its core financial institutions, including the many infiltrators/ double agents that the WMC populated the ANC with. It is also very equally critical that an anti-corruption campaign must include an in-depth investigation of the role played by ANC INSIDERS such as Gill Marcus, Pravin Gordhan and Trevor Manuel who, during their tenure of office, have advocated economic policies that have ultimately exposed and entrapped African leadership into self-serving corruption deals, rather than the selective focus on, and the exclusive general targeting of African people which is the norm with most South African commissions of inquiry.

For example, there is a lot of evidence that proves that white corporate corruption (which includes legalized corruption; tax evasion; and money laundering to offshore secret accounts) is historically rife in South Africa. But to this date, there has been not a single commission of inquiry to investigate this form of corruption. The sad thing is that these South African commissions of inquiry have been reduced to a WMC platform to, among others, perpetrate the racist stereotype that ‘All The Good Guys Are White People And All The Criminals, Corrupt and Disease-Infected People Are Indigenous African People’. They have become nothing more than stomping grounds for a resolutely racist white system to undermine and humiliate indigenous African leadership in an arena whereby African people perform to the Whitist script in which they have to take each other out, making a spectacle of themselves to guffawing white audiences.

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Opinion Piece 02

The Fallists and White Male Hegemony

Gillian Schutte

In this opinion piece, I turn my lens onto the genesis of the Rhodes Must Fall movement in South Africa 2015, when students at the University of Cape Town organised a mass call for decolonisation. I argue that the impact this movement had on the psyche of White masculine hegemony became the mirror image of the very thing that Whiteness does to Blackness in its gaze upon the ‘Black skin’ – that oppressor’s gaze which in their imaginary erases its (wearer’s) humanity, thus eviscerating the soul of Black humanity and the personhood of the Black individual. This remains the gaze of Whiteness on the Black subject even after the so-called emancipation of the dispossessed majority in South Africa because neither economic nor cultural emancipation occurred when the ANC came into power. In this ‘post-apartheid’ state, Whiteness has remained stuck in the master-slave narrative precisely because there has been no pressure on the White collective to move out of their apartheid consciousness. The power/race dialectic has had no reason to budge in the White imaginary, decades after independence was declared, and the White population continues to view the Black population in terms of the master-slave framework. It was this untenable reality that gave rise to the decolonisation movement under the banner of #RhodesMustFall.

As the collective call for decolonisation by a mass body of Black students spread nationally and gained traction, it shook the White status quo to its very roots of coloniality, creating collective paranoia in those who occupied White hegemony – a status quo that has remained obdurate and static in relation to the majority. This crisis then mirrored their own ontological and epistemological violence back onto them as they, in turn, fell into their crisis mode at the possible invisibilisation, or worse, eradication of themselves in the

framework of the potential shifting of power in a decolonised reality. This neurotic response occurred precisely because, in the White academic imaginary, the possibility of a Black collective challenging their superior positionality in their space of certainty, had not occurred to them as remotely possible. In the White masculine hegemony, particularly in a settler country like South Africa, this gave rise to Fanon's assertion on page 109 of *Black Skin White Masks* that:

... As long as the Black man is among his own, he will have no occasion, except in minor internal conflicts, to experience his being through others. There is of course the moment of 'being for others', of which Hegel speaks, but every ontology is made unattainable in a colonised and civilized society.

I write from the position of a White woman born in the 1960s in an apartheid South Africa and socialised to accept the tenets of White privilege and racism. At a certain time in my life, I recognised all the ways my identity has encouraged me in reproducing racism. Whilst I do not believe that I cannot not be racist I enter this discussion as someone who has been named a race traitor because I refuse to look away from structural and day-to-day racism perpetrated by White people in this country. My consciousness was spurred on by various acts of rebellion and defiance that I took up willingly in my youth as well as a continued deep reflection of my place in a White society.

As a social critic and op-ed writer, I covered many aspects of the *Rhodes Must Fall* and *Fees Must Fall* uprising between 2015 and 2017 and published my writing in various newspapers. What follows is an extrapolation of some of my observational opinion pieces with additional writing drawn from the fieldwork and film work that both I, and social justice activist Sipho Singiswa, did when we extensively covered the Fallist movement. I must declare that there were many times in the struggle where White presence was inappropriate and sometimes not welcome. In those instances, I recused myself. Singiswa, however, camped out with the students as they occupied Bremner Hall, at the University of Cape Town (UCT), for weeks and he recorded the struggle as it grew into a momentous nationwide action which eventually became known as *Fees Must Fall*. It was out of this movement that a decolonial body of theory and praxis took place under the title of Fallism.

In March 2015, 21 years after the rise of democracy in South Africa

(in the framework of liberation) a single UCT student performed the act of throwing human faeces onto the statue of Cecil John Rhodes – which was erected on the stairs in front of the main hall on the campus – a monolithic structure of Rhodes staring contemplatively over the landscape towards Cairo, signifying his dream to build a railway track across Africa and colonise all the people, land and resources in its wake.

The fact that this colonial statue still occupied a space of honour in a so-called post liberated South Africa tells us all that we need to know about the utter failure that this ‘liberation’ had been for the majority, because since the negotiated settlement in 1994, though there had been some change as seen in the building of a Black middle class and the cessation of apartheid laws, that is where it ended. Not much had, nor has, changed for the majority of Black South Africans in the systemic and institutional racism that had continued to plague this so-called Rainbow Nation. This continues to manifest both in high levels of racial incidents on our social landscape as well as in the silent and violent scourge of the covert and insidious racism that Black people are exposed to daily in institutional attitudes by the White and privileged. It is still most obviously seen in the gross economic inequalities between White folk and the majority of Africans, who continue to live in desperate poverty, still landless.

By the time Chumani Maxwele threw human faeces onto the statue of Cecil John Rhodes, it was clear that Black people were *gatvol* of (loosely translated as ‘fed up’) the bourgeois democracy that entrenched Whiteness and gave rise to market values in place of a developmental state – which resulted in corporate rule from which the African National Congress (ANC) leadership benefitted economically at the expense of the majority in a frenzy of neoliberalism which adamantly put profits before people. Post 94 South African politics can rightly be described as the theatre of the grotesque, a spectacle of neoliberal desire which adamantly put profits before people and cuts off the majority from any possibility of joining the economy while usurping them of all social safety nets in the drive for privatisation and profit. The rainbow had long since been shattered and the illusionary electric kool-aid, shoo, wow, non-racism lies had been exposed.

So, when UCT student Chumani Maxwele executed the subversive act of throwing human faeces on the Rhodes statue that had lauded itself over the UCT campus for decades, his systemic disobedience gave rise to collective combustion of defiance premised on the rage of Black students and their

ongoing struggle against systemic racism in the socioeconomic sense and institutional racism in the university sphere. This act shed light on the collective ontological break experienced by Black youth and gave voice to the crisis of their banishment to the space of non-beingness in the dominant White discourse. It was the cry from Black students collectively as they expressed the outrage they had long suppressed around the erasure of Black epistemology on White-dominated campuses as well as in the social spaces of a post-liberated South Africa that continued to privilege the White race over the majority. Chumani Maxwele's use of carnivalesque performance, along with tights and cerise pink hard-hat, viscerally made the connections between the phenomena of the perpetuity of social cultural and economic deprivation imposed on the majority Indigenous to this land vs the perpetual privileging of Whiteness in a so-called liberated South Africa. This, Chumani Maxwele's systemic disobedience told the world, was the stuff that is too intolerable to withhold. It must come out. It must be seen, smelled and experienced by those who perpetuate it. The genius of throwing faeces collected from the impoverished community of Khayelitsha in which he grew up, was a powerful statement about the ongoing dispossession of the Black majority who were still forced to live in untenable poverty with little or no adequate sanitisation in conditions that can be described as medieval serfdom, while the White population had largely grown exponentially richer under the neoliberal dispensation that had replaced what was meant to be reconstructive and developmental reformation.

Frantz Fanon writes that racism denies recognition of the dignity and humanity of the colonised subject and relegates him to the zone of non-being which is viscerally felt by the Black-skinned subject relegated to what Fanon calls 'an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an incline stripped bare of every essential from which a genuine new departure can emerge'. And it was from this dark chamber of the colonial imaginary, this space of nothingness in the face of White superior depravity, that Chumani Maxwele rose from inaction to utter defiance of the Whitist erasure of his humanity and the humanity of all Black-skinned humans. In this act, he courageously assaulted White certainty by forcing the system to recognise that this zone of non-being to which they had banished Blackness could never erase the palpable humanity of the oppressed. The nothingness of Black skin is only in the eye of the White beholder, not in the souls of the Black subject.

Chumani Maxwele's direct action also brought to light the violence of the Whitist erasure of Black beingness (in this case in the academe) – that

which causes the splitting off from the self in their collective psyche as Black-skinned humans who are forced to traverse and navigate a White-dominant epistemological logic that does not recognise the ontological or epistemological reality of being Black. Moreover, it did not acknowledge the impossibility of Black expression of their full human capacity and agency in the straight-jacket of a Whitist discourse that squeezes the breath from them. Chumani Maxwele's carnivalesque disobedience gave life to Fanon's meta-physical assertion that 'Man is a 'yes' resonating from cosmic harmonies'. His action was a performative function of life breaking free from the sterile region to which Whiteness has relegated Blackness.

And once the lid had come off, the national rising of students was inexorable. It quickly became a spontaneous mass movement predicated on a combined phenomenon of Black rage and youthful life force that could no longer abide the state of 'not being' – of not being recognised as equal to their White counterparts; of not being allowed to be Black and proud, of not being offered a slice of the economy via their educational endeavours. When the movement began it did not even occur to the students to look anywhere other than inside themselves and draw the revolutionary fervour from their collective lived experience of Blackness that is constantly up against the violence of a White supremacist system that alienates and divides them, rips their skin from their bodies and tells them they are less than they are. They expressed themselves in frameworks that spoke of the coming of age of a new race discourse, a new race theory that rubbished the notion of non-racism and instead resonated with the unique situation of being Black in South Africa at the same time as being connected to Blackness in the world.

They spoke of the terrorism of Whiteness in the constant attack on their psyches via a perpetual anti-Black social discourse. They said they lived in a system that expects them to accept their gains in a democracy and overlook the wants and needs of the communities that gave birth to them. Theirs was a discourse that ran counter to the institutionalised nation-building, national identity, non-racism propaganda that is pushed by the ANC-led government as the social cohesion that binds us.

But Fallists asked how they were supposed to talk of national identity in a country with the highest Gini coefficient/index and ongoing separate development? How do they speak of social cohesion when Black people Indigenous to this land own a mere 3 percent of the economy and White graduates are six times more likely to gain employment than their Black

counterparts and earn better salaries based on their hue?

How do they speak of non-racism when the macro-economic policy is predicated on protecting White monopoly capital and putting profits before people? The resounding answer to these questions lay squarely in their mass student uprisings: their answer to these questions was clear when they declared that they don't. They erupt instead in their ontological insistence that the Black youth are seen, heard and valued.

As the visceral call for decolonisation proliferated, so too did the evidence that this antihegemonic movement had created an ontological break in the certainty of White masculine hegemony. It was clear to me that they were in no way psychologically prepared for this mass action and in response they set about doing what White males know best how to when their survival is threatened - that is to attempt to dominate and colonise the movement of decolonisation to ensure their longevity and non-erasure in the process of change. This attempt at an ideological coup to unseat the Black collective in the decolonisation wave masked White neuroses in response to having the very seat of their power threatened by Black epistemology, which I argue, they do not recognise as fully developed nor remotely plausible. Thus, they set about engaging in a counter-attack that reduced the intellectual basis of the movement into one that was seemingly only concerned with identity politics.

This was seen in writing such as by DA member of Parliament and UCT board member, Michael Cardos' patronising article posted on Politics web at the time, in which he posited:

The driving force behind the #Rhodesmustfall campaign is an amalgam of racial nationalists, leftists, self-styled social justice activists, and politically correct ideologues who view the world (and the humanities in particular) through the narrow prism of critical race theory, 'Whiteness studies' and 'White privilege

For them, the whole history of humankind can be reduced to the colonial encounter between 'Black' and 'White', 'us' and 'them'. This inevitably gives rise to a form of identity politics based on racial mobilization.

<https://www.politicsweb.co.za/news-and-analysis/the-sinister-underbelly-to-the-rhodes-must-fall-ca>

Equally curious was the positionality of some Black academics in this debate, specifically those who, perhaps inadvertently, re-inscribed White masculine privilege by assisting in the circumvention of open discussion about the role of White male academics in neo-colonialism.

Achille Mbembe's essay on the matter caused particular public ire and Black backlash. In his article 'The state of South Africa' this Cameroonian-born, Wits academic, hypothesises seemingly to the White Wits academics, about the collective psyche of middle-class Black South Africans:

Ironically among the emerging Black middle class, current narratives of selfhood and identity are saturated by the tropes of pain and suffering. The latter has become the register through which many now represent to themselves and to the world. To give an account of who they are, or to explain themselves and their behaviour to others, they increasingly tend to frame their life stories in terms of how much they have been injured by the forces of racism, bigotry and patriarchy. Often under the pretext that the personal is political, this type of autobiographical and at times self-indulgent 'petit bourgeois' discourse has replaced structural analysis.

<https://africasacountry.com/2015/09/achille-mbembe-on-the-state-of-south-african-politics/>

While the students rubbished these perspectives on their positionality, White and Whitist male gatekeepers, on the other hand, were overcome with relief and joy at Mbembe's articles which ratified their disavowal of 'the personal is the political' and shifted the onus for Black pain, frustration and rage to Black people themselves, suggesting this is a state of mind that should all too easily be transcended since it is not valid. So, Mbembe asks, 'Could it be that the concentration of our libido on Whiteness, pain and suffering is after all typical of the narcissistic investments so privileged by this neoliberal age?'

These essays set off a protracted public debate on the issue of Black pathology, deflecting the attention away from the historical privileging of White males. Unfortunately, this intervention occurred just at a time when the momentum had been gathered to effectively challenge the politics of language and power.

On social media platforms, White academic gatekeepers congratulated Mbembe for his wise words – many taking the opportunity to denigrate Black opinion. They also paid particular attention to the ‘personal narrative’, which they more or less collectively agreed, was a poor substitute for structural analysis. Terms such as ‘paranoid’, ‘over the top’, ‘pernicious’, ‘violent’, ‘self-victimised’, ‘angry’ and ‘irrational’ were bandied about in Whitist male dissent of the Black responses to Mbembe.

In a fit of spontaneous colour-blindness, they joined in the chorus that Black and White as racial categories do not in fact exist. This narrative, of course, works to obfuscate the truth that they have benefited from the social constructs of Black and White which undoubtedly do exist and are undoubtedly what students were fighting to deconstruct.

On mainstream media what should have been robust debate about the historical privileging of White male intellectuals in public and academic discourse, instead became a discussion about Black behaviours and how to contain and discipline them. It became a discussion seeped in White outrage at the so-called misdirection of Black rage and about the low intellectual quality of personal narratives and accounts of lived experience. All of this cast Black people in the struggle as either violent or victims, accusing them of entitlement and generally circumventing Black concerns. Once again, this deflected away from White racism and privilege and overlooked White racist pathology and its dangerous collective libidinal projection onto the Black collective.

It also reinscribed the White masculinist tendency to assert power overall it defines. So, by defining Black responses as ‘paranoid’ ‘empty’ and ‘personal’, power is maintained in the logic and reliability of the Whitist masculine discourse. These anti-Black narratives, some charged, created decoys and distractions that only served the agenda of White supremacy and detracted from the real issue of decolonising academic, social and cultural spaces – all of which speak to the actual shifting of White males out of their historical position of privilege. This, it seemed, was the reality that the White male psyche could not fathom.

The insistence on the Whitist masculine enlightened input into decolonisation, with its talk of staggering transformation, progress and preferential ‘structural analysis’ in opposition to other knowledge systems and narratives of Black pain, rage, suffering, and humanity, was simply another form of power that legitimates the structural dominance of Western, White, educated middle-class males over all others. It also arrogantly assumed that

processes outside of this framework are not intelligent, rational and humane.

Those ‘not White men’ were relegated to the status of the other and essentialised. Their narratives were diminutised and scorned as the monolithic White male academic club seem unable to appreciate other humans’ capacity for multiple and heterogeneous narratives of knowledge, history, pain, suffering and immeasurable joy, whether in first-person accounts, poststructuralist theory, lyrical lexis or feminist language. But the decolonial movement, in tandem with Fallism declared that the time had come when people othered by Western patriarchy had begun to inundate academic and public spaces with narratives that emphasise the feelings and experiences of the colonised, of women, of gender non-conforming people, of historical pain, alternative or Indigenous knowledge systems and lived experience. This was decolonisation and ‘depatriarching’ in motion. It happened on the streets, in communities and in public spaces. It lived in the realm of a multiplicity of expressions where diverse narratives, personal narratives, feminine narratives, Black narratives are used as a means to disrupt and deprive the orthodox language of White patriarchy which has held all those ‘not White men’ hostage for far too long.

It was, however, the unseating of the Cecil John Rhodes statue at UCT that all but did the White male academe in as this signified their demise as top dogs in all that is considered rational and enlightened and this gave rise to more neurosis, recognisable in their, by now, shaky postulation which emulated from their newfound nervous condition. And then, when they had reconstituted their hegemonic, we witnessed a counter wave of pompous hot air and hubris, a response which most certainly gave them a tenuous sense that they were still in control of their possible expiration, for from their perspective no Black-skinned collective was going to unseat them. The call for the decolonisation and the actualisation of the Fallist movement to have the statue of Cecil John Rhodes removed shook the very roots of White masculine hegemony and gave rise to the possibility of social suicide in the scholarly White male collective psyche.

In a Settler-biased neocolonial society, it is the Settlers’ fear of their own usurpation that evokes a savage and violent response from Whiteness, which they easily project onto that which threatens it. In no time institutional and systemic violence was meted out on the dissident students under the auspicious of the UCT management and VC at the same time as an underhanded anti-Rhodes Must Fall social media campaign flourished.

However, this insidious social media violence that emanated largely from the White academic echelon went unnoticed in the public sphere. This in turn evidenced the ongoing facilitation of Whitist views – and exposed the trick of Whiteness to position itself as reasonable, working within the rule of law and even upholding human rights standards while enacting violence on Black skinned humans. By drawing on all these tropes they are able to convince themselves and the general public that their adversary is not as rational as they are and this they manifested through their ongoing use of derogatory terms in social media for Black students. This method was clearly seen in Cape Town University lecturer, Ron Irwin’s proclamation on Facebook about Rhodes Must Fall being a movement of rapists, an assertion he made in response to the alleged sexual assault of a female student during their occupation of Bremner House, which the students had renamed Azania House. To many, these Facebook comments may have seemed innocuous. But the ease at which a UCT academic paints the movement as one which is made up of ‘rapists’ based on a single case that had not yet reached the court of law, smacks of coloniality and reiterated the inherent assumption that Whites are above the rule of law in their proclamations on the lack of collective Black morality.

Yet he got away with these broad brush strokes at the time, evidenced in the lack of response to his public hate speech and ad hominem attack on the Rhodes must Fall movement as a whole. It was this lack of societal response that enabled the unleashing of systemic physical violence onto the dissident students as the movement grew.

Though this occurred in the 21st century, it is clear to me that that the imagined bestial nature of the colonised Black subject has not shifted much at all in the Whitist imaginary and is used in the same way as it was centuries ago – right down to the rules of engagement. This lack of recognition of the humanity of those in Black skin, in turn, allows Whites individually, or obliquely through the Whiteness construct, to enact horrific physical violence onto the Black body. Thus, over and above the epistemological violence from the White academe, you will often find Black policemen enacting this violence on behalf of this system which, in the Western world and South Africa, is geared towards protecting White wealth and asset ownership. As Fanon denotes – in most ‘previous’ colonies and settler countries, the role of the state is often reduced to managing White capital using brutal methods, as revealed in the ongoing propensity for police and the state to punish and discipline the impoverished Black population. This happens even though the protests may be

for basic human rights to water, housing and education, or against corporate abuses – a systemic reality that alienates an entire group of so-called liberated people who are reduced to non-human status by being excluded from the trope of Human Rights.

Fallism heralded the possibility of decolonisation, where Western pedagogy would be turned on its head, and signalled a vibrant possibility for the future. It was in this movement that alchemy happened and theories born out of Black philosophies and practices became the basis for decolonisation and incorporated the pillars of Black Consciousness, Pan Africanism and intersectionality. But some four years later the decolonisation movement has been frustrated and universities remain in the clutches of Western epistemology. This, I posit, is as a result of the collusion between the White academe, state, business, media and University Management as they worked to manufacture the public consent required to finally smash the already demoralised movement, given the multiple attacks on the Fallists during the uprising. By 2017 the Fallist movement had seemingly been infiltrated with various engineered narratives and divisive neo theoretical frameworks that ran counter to the collective call for justice and students began to devour each other in a frenzy of power struggles based on gender and ideological differences. In the final stages of the Fallist struggle the state engaged the full might of the security cluster and over weeks violently brutalised what was left of the more radical Black consciousness and anti-capitalist contingency of students who had remained on the forefront of the struggle. Students were interdicted and many male students jailed – not a surprising outcome in a country where the dominant discourse remains Whitist and White hysteria and demands are facilitated by a captured government that is beholden to White monopoly capital.

Both the psychological and physical violence enacted against the Black youth by the White male establishment and the state proclaimed the untenable truth that the Black subject is not heard and Black body is not safe where Whiteness remains dominant, even in a ‘liberated’ democracy. It demonstrates that no matter how post-race a multicultural discourse tries to convince us we are, this does not accurately reflect the world.

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Gillian Schutte

[NRF], for their support in making travel and symposiums available that furthered discussion and research with students.

↪ Roundtable 01 ↩

Race, Space and the City

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Abstract

In this roundtable three members of the research group, ‘Race, Space and the City’ discuss various components of their overlapping interest in the African built environment during the final year of their studies in architecture with the primary investigator of the project, and how the biweekly seminars of ‘Race, Space and the City’ set the basis for their understanding of coloniality within architecture at a previously White university. During the course of the discussion, they address how they developed various approaches to cope with, then overcome, some of the experiences of their education in architecture at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The roundtable offers an open and honest discussion of colonial practices amid a climate of decolonisation and the chastisement of Black students who ask questions on race, apartheid and the built environment.

Introduction

In June 2014, as the director of the Centre for Critical Research on Race and Identity (CCRRI) at UKZN, I met four Black women who were studying towards their masters' degree in Architecture. Juan Solis-Arias, a contributor to this collection, suggested that I meet with the said women who had asked questions about African identity within the South African built environment that he as a foreigner to South Africa could not answer. At that stage, I ran several research groups that focused on critical race theory, Black consciousness, African social and political thought and had just hosted a Biko conference. I took the four women around the centre, and at each place where I stopped to talk about the particular African scholar whose image was on the wall, they indicated that they had not heard of that person. In our first meeting, we discussed what they wanted to achieve in their course of study and their shortcomings or obstacles. We discussed crucial items. Among them was the concern with not being able to draw from their existential experience as Black women and taking the history of their lived experience in KZN into their architectural projects because it was prohibited. After all, they did live in a built environment and yet was not allowed to reflect on it. The latter seemed peculiar to me, but the more I listened at that first meeting and the subsequent one, the more the realisation of architecture devoid of African knowledge, African lifestyle, African aesthetic, became a reality. Shortly after, we formed 'Race, Space and the City', a research group that met every two weeks. Juan Solis-Arias and several students at UKZN joined the discussions and presented on their research. The said four women also attended various research events at the centre, such as the Fanon workshops, the Biko Education project seminars, including Prof. Barney Pityana and Prof Mabogo More as guest speakers.

'Race, Space, and the City', was first started to address research questions students brought to the centre on land, race, space and identity. Students reported an absence of discussions on race in some disciplines where design, aesthetics, land, the city and geographical space formed part of the curriculum. Yet, an analysis of race was either absent or dismissed when raised by students. Somehow this is still left outside of the South African architectural textbooks, still steeped in apartheid narratives, aided and abetted by the beneficiaries of apartheid that still conveniently teaching architecture as though racialised living spaces were not the cornerstone of the policy of racial

segregation, the aftermath of which we are still living through today. For the Black lecturers as accomplices that were hard to fathom: what was in it for them, I always asked myself? What benefits did they derive from showing their colonisers how well they could put Black students in their place? Whilst I still struggle with addressing the many facets of this complex coloniser – colonised relationship, what we were able to accomplish in ‘Race, Space and City’, by far outweigh the concern I have with agents of complicity who pay dearly for their bond with the coloniser.

As news travelled across the city of Durban, and journalists read of our events, which were posted online, the formation of ‘Race, Space and the City’ made the national news. In an interview with *The Mercury*, I was told that no one in the school of architecture in a leadership position which was contacted was available for comment. I was asked by a journalist at *The Mercury* why it had taken so long for architects at UKZN to address the history of apartheid? The same interview was reproduced in the university’s online newspaper, *ndabaonline*, Vol 2, Issue 32, June 04, 2014. Below is a small excerpt of my response to the question posed by *The Mercury* journalist:

There is a belief that the construction of race takes place outside of the construction of buildings, which is erroneous. Every building has a history, every building has a foundation, and that foundation reflects the history of the country, the demarcation of the city, the soil upon which it is built, the history of those who till the soil, and the history of those who inhabit it (*ndabaonline*, Vol. 2, Issue 32, June 04, 2014).

Over the years, the members of ‘Race, Space and the City’ met up for various events, conferences, symposiums and discussions. We have all continued the research work in this area and remained in contact in various forms.

As part of an ongoing discussion, the three Black women (who have remained at the core of ‘Race, Space and the City’) and I got together to address the research group’s history, their respective paths towards the completion of their masters’ degree in architecture, and the question of decolonisation. In this issue on decolonisation, six years after our first meeting, and five years after they completed their masters’ degree in architecture at UKZN, we unravel some of the salient features that marked their path towards obtaining their degrees and license as architects.

Methodology

For discussion and to ensure that all three of the participants in conversation with Rozena Maart were able to offer their reflections in their own capacity chose a question and response format in this written presentation. The approach was that each of the former students reflects on their experiences independently to show their individual and particular experience and address each of these.

Discussion

ROZENA MAART: Good afternoon, everyone. I am pleased that we can sit down and have this discussion today. As previously noted, I will put forward questions on the history of 'Race, Space and the City' and your journey within the school of architecture, as indicative of what you have shared with everyone in the research group over the period of six years. We can also discuss how the past six years have marked your engagement with your identity and the broader implications of decolonisation.

ROZENA MAART: Shall we start with how you entered university?

NANDIPHA MAKHAYE: I applied to two universities, namely UKZN, in Durban, and Wits (the University of the Witwatersrand) in Johannesburg. Unfortunately, when one is shortlisted after applying for undergraduate studies in architecture, a portfolio of work must be submitted for further assessment. Johannesburg was at the time too far for me to submit my portfolio. I then hand-delivered my portfolio to UKZN while awaiting my final matric examination results. At the end of December 2006, I obtained enough points to enter the architecture programme and was accepted to begin my first year in February of 2007.

NOMPUMELELO KUBHEKA: A brief history of my relationship with architecture started when a career guidance programme was introduced to our grade 10 class at my school. My art teacher at the time, Ms Leone Hall, introduced to us, her students, various careers that aligned with art and creativity. Architecture stood out for me. Upon choosing a possible career path, I was set on my first choice to study architecture and had no plan B. I applied to study architecture in various institutions and was accepted in all of them. I

chose to study at the University of KwaZulu Natal because of its reputation as a prestigious university and its proximity to my home. The biggest factor was that I was raised in a middle-aged family of four children, of which I'm the eldest. The option of living on campus wasn't possible as there was simply no money for it. For my undergraduate study, I applied through the Central Applications Office (CAO). When I completed the form, it was clear that I had enough points to study architecture. As a prerequisite to becoming a professional architect, I reapplied for a masters' degree, of which I was granted a conditional acceptance.

LONDIWE SOKHABASE: My high school invited university representatives to speak to the matric class and advised us on which profession we could pursue. That is when I learned about the Central Applications Office (CAO), which accepts application for all KZN tertiary institutions. I then applied through that process, and I was conditionally accepted into the architecture programme and placed on the waiting list. When I received my final matric results, I went to the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) where I found that my results had catapulted me to the top of the waiting list, and I was accepted there and then.

ROZENA MAART: What were your expectations when you entered the school of architecture as an undergraduate student?

NANDIPHA MAKHAYE: As this was an arts programme, I expected a group of very diverse and unique students who embraced and celebrated their uniqueness. I did not expect to be pressured to 'fit in' but I expected that the lecturers would be as diverse as the students and that the lecturers would understand most of us, considering that we were all artists in our own right. My art teacher at high school encouraged me to apply to the programme, and as our art class in high school was mostly dominated by White students, I did not expect any less from the school of architecture. I expected to enjoy the course as much as I had enjoyed the subject of art throughout high school. I expected the curriculum to bring out the best in me while being taught a new dimension in what was to be my future career.

NOMPUMELELO KUBHEKA: One of my many talents is art (drawing and painting); I consider myself generally quite creative. I had expected studies in

architecture to offer a perspective on the contribution of art in the world of construction. The more I studied it, the more the sector became layered with environmental, social, and political issues that needed to be confronted. To put it bluntly, I did not expect to be fed European solutions to architecture as the main source of my education whilst being reduced to a lesser person, lesser of an academic student purely because of my skin colour and gender. For a notoriously White-dominated industry, the expectation would be for the institution to be geared towards grooming and empowering more Black women – at least that is what I thought and given the university's promotion mandate. However, it was the complete opposite.

LONDIWE SOKHABASE: I expected so much more than I was ever offered. I was prepared to work hard as I am a hard worker by nature. I expected new experiences and knowledge, in addition to the knowledge that I already had. I expected to enjoy the course at least. Apart from the tough academic training, which I was ready for, I didn't enjoy myself. I had to repeat two modules in year two and year three. I still came back, expecting something different, and I was disappointed each time.

ROZENA MAART: Everyone has expectations when we enter educational institutions. Did the programme meet your expectations?

NANDIPHA MAKHAYE: In terms of experiencing White domination, the architecture department at UKZN exceeded my expectations. Only a small percentage of the students in my class was Black, and an even smaller percentage was Indian. In terms of artistic diversity: there wasn't much diversity, it seemed all of us were trying to fit in rather than stand out. Most of the White students were addressed by their first names as some of their parents and relatives were either UKZN alumni or had strong working relationships with the lecturers. They also seemed quite familiar with students ahead of them in the programme. The White students seemed to be acquainted with one another and therefore formed a large collective leaving the rest of us feeling out of place and disoriented, to some extent, which lasted for the first couple of weeks until we found our little groups. In the first two years, I was less concerned with skin colour (and racialised identity, which is generally based on skin colour in South Africa) and more concerned with finding my feet in what seemed like a potentially enjoyable yet extremely demanding course.

Later, I started suspecting that maybe architecture was not meant for Black students because of the obvious treatment. This was highlighted during a ‘crit’ session (a session where lecturers critiqued our work) in my third year: a lecturer told the class that ‘architecture is a hobby for rich people designing for other rich people’.

ROZENA MAART: Apart from being a racist statement, that was also incredibly insensitive. We know why the apartheid government only taught architecture and engineering at White universities in South Africa during apartheid – architects and engineers worked alongside and within the apartheid laws to maintain racial segregation and played along in all spheres as they provided the blueprints for building those townships. To say that architecture is a hobby for the rich is an endorsement of racism and an endorsement of the apartheid regime. Even saying this after 1994! This is just callous and completely inappropriate.

NANDIPHA MAKHAYE: At that moment I felt extremely out of place, not only was I not rich, but I was in the middle of trying to build a career and invest all my time and efforts into a so-called hobby. Another concern was that I could not think of anyone off the top of my head who was rich, well at least not from my circle of family or friends. My reasons for wanting to study architecture were purely to create a better physical environment than what I grew up in, and this was going to be my contribution to the world I thought, especially to the Black majority in South Africa who were in desperate need of a revamp of their living conditions and the built environment. For a Black student, certainly for this one, studying architecture really proved to be difficult. Firstly, many off-site locations are visited throughout the course. One of the prerequisites should have been vehicle ownership, especially because most of the locations we visited were not on the taxi route. As a Black student, you are then forced to ask or beg for lifts from your more fortunate classmates. The course is already time and cost consuming, printing alone made one extremely nervous, especially towards the final submissions. In contrast, Black students could only afford the cheapest, which were R40 per page for one print, while our peers stood out as so much more as professional with the fanciest paper on the largest pieces of paper taking up an entire wall at times. By the time it was our turn as Black women to present, we were already feeling inadequate even if our work was amongst the best.

NOMPUMELELO KUBHEKA: For me, learning about architecture was a pleasant experience on a very layman and somewhat naïve level. However, I gradually discovered more to architecture than mere creativity and aesthetically pleasing buildings – architecture framed time, politics and sociology. I became hungry for deeper critical thinking, which I believed was behind the design of the building. The experiential analysis of being a student taught me a lot about unpleasant and unspoken politics in the profession’s real world. Architecture, particularly architecture taught within higher education, is for White men. Period. That is the harsh realisation I did not expect to discover early on, as was evident time and time again throughout my degree. I remember receiving a first prize corobrik award (corobrik is the leading South African supplier of eco-friendly bricks), in my second year for a project I was marked average for in class as it was hand-drawn, with my hands, and presented on a shoestring budget, and appeared by far less in presentation than most of my White male peers who, as it happens, excelled. They excelled because they had the gadgets, the funds to purchase equipment, and the networks to ensure that they could present the best drawings. Unchanged and unrefined, my project’s uniqueness and conceptual depth captured the attention of external examiners and was deemed best with that of a fellow Black woman student, who was also an ‘average’ performer academically, according to the lecturers in our school. From this point, our eyes as Black students began to open.

LONDIWE SOKHABASE: Well, I wanted to be a professional architect; from the moment I made my decision; it took ten years, and I became a professional architect. There were hardships and the constant battle waged against me ... *that* I felt every step of the way. By the end of it all, I wished for a different profession. As a Black woman, I experienced learning about architecture very differently than my peers. I struggled more, there weren’t enough hours in the days for me to use the computer, and I was exhausted travelling back forth from site visits to printing establishments. I was not equipped financially for this course. I had no laptop, no car and no bottomless pit of money to fund the endless printing that was required. Site visits were 10 to 15 km away from university, for which I needed transportation. Having to take taxis to get to the site on time with students who had cars was such a struggle. Having to walk at night to print drawings because public transportation was no longer available where I lived, also brought many different challenges. I am still exhausted, just thinking about it.

ROZENA MAART: I hear what you're saying. The materiality of race is still very real, especially when it comes to life as a student when no one in your family has followed that route. Even when I entered UWC in 1981, I had no idea what the costs would be. But let me ask you, for the record: what urged you to want to look outside of architecture and be part of 'Race, Space and the City?'

NANDIPHA MAKHAYE: What led me to 'Race, Space and the City' and being part of a group with three of my peers and a professor who spoke about African identity, was firstly the lack of information in our architectural library with regards to African literature and also, the lack of support from the lecturers within the school. My chosen topic of African identity was deemed very controversial by the Black lecturers who were teaching me. On many occasions, lecturers told me to change my topic, even the African lecturers. The reasons for their insistence ranged from the topic being too big for a master's dissertation . . . Another White lecturer actually said that we are all Africans: White, Coloureds, Indian and Black. Therefore, she did not understand what I meant in saying that there is a lack of African identity in the architecture of African countries post colonisation. This White lecturer made this comment publicly, and it was geared at reducing the relevance of African identity within the architectural realm, not just the school. The lack of support and information forced me to look elsewhere for information. As much as my topic was relevant, I needed supporting literature that was nowhere to be found in architecture. A lecturer told me about Prof Maart, who was at the Centre for Critical Research on Race and Identity (CCRRI) as its director. A trip sparked my interest in African architecture I made during my internship years to Rwanda. This was a business trip, but in my spare time, I was fortunate enough to visit the local attractions in Kigali, the capital city of Rwanda. I learnt a lot about Rwanda on my trip, and that was when it dawned on me that I was extremely ignorant of Africa in general. After completing a whole degree in architecture, I was still unfamiliar with African architecture. I realised how much I knew about European architecture to the point that my two favourite architects were of German descent. To this day, I still do not have a favourite African architect as so little is said about African architects who, interestingly enough, place enormous emphasis on vernacular aesthetics. This may be due to my ignorance or lack of research in the area, but I strongly feel that they systematically conditioned our minds to solely focus on European architecture.

NOMPUMELELO KUBHEKA: Having voiced my experiences earlier, this meant that as a student, I had to prove myself more than other students. My talent and academic capabilities were no longer sufficient, and my academic success was mostly out of my control. My dark skin colour determined my chances of surviving the course; this is certainly how I was made to feel. Several events happened to my peers and me to confirm the narrative that Black students were not welcome. Upon graduating from my undergraduate degree, my marks were short of the aggregate needed to qualify for the masters' degree. Therefore, I had to work longer than the prescribed twelve months between a bachelor's and a master's degree. I worked for three years as an architectural intern to build enough financial muscle to survive the course to follow, whilst building a stronger architectural portfolio. Re-entry was hard when I returned to pursue my masters' degree; new management and new faces in the staff stood out in management as a Black man in the field (I will elaborate later). My fellow Corobrick award winner (Corobrick is a company that builds clay bricks and offers awards to students around the country each year) was never accepted within the school of architecture at UKZN and never returned. After much consultation with this new management, my application was finally accepted on a bogus conditional offer. To cut a long story short, I was kicked out of school six months into the semester following my results and was told never to return. I had not failed any modules, and yet this was happening to me. After another round of begging, then banished for twelve months into 'exile' and subjected to scrutinising the terms under which I was expelled, my application was accepted again. This time I was given an ultimatum that I should not get too comfortable, as the course was not for me. I needed a support group that understood my position without fear of confronting my academic flaws whilst creating a healthy environment for critical thinking on race in the spaces we find ourselves at university and within the country and the larger global world. At the point, I was introduced to Prof. Maart at CCRRI. I was battling depression while trying my best to not upset the system (within my school) with my decolonial and 'emotive' approach to architectural theory. The latter label – emotive – was put upon me each time I tried to express myself. My study's focus was the design and role of church buildings on South African colonisation as symbols of conquest and the shape it had taken in recent post-colonial times while proposing a modern African inspired model of the church. I was passionate to evoke critical thinking on the subject and understand the intent behind its funding and preservation that continues to this day.

LONDIWE SOKHABASE: As a group of Black women who started working together, we were introduced to the centre by one of our lecturers. The first session, upon meeting Prof. Maart, was a breath of fresh air. After that, our small group of four Black women started attending group sessions with Prof Maart and the students she supervised and worked with at the Centre for Critical Research in Race and Identity (CCRRI) where she was the director. This was a long-awaited journey in my development not only as an architect, but a Black woman trying to navigate a world that is systematically trying to push me out and away from it. The day I realised, and understood systemic racism through a session at the centre hosted by Prof Maart, was the first time in my university career that I felt sure of myself and what I was doing in my studies. I was determined to fight until the end. I was not on equal footing with the rest of my classmates: I was Black and simultaneously a woman. The only way I was going to succeed was if I worked twice as hard. And workshops at the centre motivated me every time I attended the seminars and the talks.

ROZENA MAART: During the course of your study at UKZN many of you tried to address the absence of a discussion on the African built environment. Can you talk about the responses you received?

NANDIPHA MAKHAYE: The lecturers ignored us, to say the least. They strategically diverted our thoughts to other issues which had absolutely nothing to do with the African built environment. The suggestion would throw you off so much that you ended up more confused than what you started with. One guest lecturer told me that, ‘African architecture is too basic; it lacks the complexity needed to be explored by a masters’ student’. In all my years in architecture school, I only remember one lecture where we discussed anything closely related to African architecture. It was a lecture presented by Professor Peters who was telling us about the Zulu beehive hut, which was an introductory lecture to other more sophisticated native inventions around the world. I only discovered Mapungubwe and Great Zimbabwe’s ruins when I was researching out of the UKZN architecture school’s confines. And this came as a shock to me, as I was conditioned to believe that nothing of significance in architecture could be found in Southern Africa.

NOMPUMELELO KUBHEKA: An African built environment? This was deemed ‘not an architectural question’. The subject matter was simply not

entertained, at all. The narrative of being a successful student was geared towards just producing high budget designs and presentations reinforced by current issues without delving into writing that reflected lived experience of the built environment, such as race and how race affected and influenced social and political theory. For most Black students, including myself, that was very restricting and literally unavoidable.

LONDIWE SOKHABASE: African built environment? There was no discussion. None. Having been raised in the rural villages of KZN I watched my grandmother build the beehive hut from the ground up. I was proud of the tacit knowledge that my dear grandmother had passed on to me, but I was not allowed to share this knowledge as valid, as architectural knowledge. I experienced first-hand the tradition and planning hierarchy that was followed in the hut. From the *Umsamu* area to the *Hearth* and the women and men sides of the hut. I was always shocked when lecturers would come with information contrary to what I knew and teach it as the gospel truth. In my first year, I soon learned that what I had lived and learned was not correct, but what some researcher wrote about my culture was an unquestioned truth. I remember a guest lecturer who came to present a series of photographs depicting Black women's lives in hostels, in one of the pictures there was a representation of a dead body covered in a white sheet. She explained how the sheet is used as a sacred covering for the deceased in the Black culture. When we tried to explain to her that this is incorrect and it was, in fact, a blanket which was used as a sacred covering, she told us her research proved otherwise. It became apparent that the little literature about African built environment and culture came from second-hand sources and sometimes inaccurate observations. The African built form topic was always palatable when presented by a White student, who will throw in a few Zulu words here and there for effect but was never a subject worth pursuing if you were a Black student.

ROZENA MAART: Despite the resistance, it sounds as though you could do your work on African identity? If not, how did you proceed?

NANDIPHA MAKHAYE: After many sleepless nights and questioning my decision for even considering this topic, I was able to put together a comprehensive dissertation on African identity. I doubt that I would have been able to do it without the support and help from the UKZN Centre for Critical Research

on Race and Identity (CCRRI), headed by Professor Rozena Maart. When I first visited the centre, I was a wreck because, in all honesty, I could not understand why my chosen topic was causing such a stir within our architectural learning space – a university. A lecturer even asked me, ‘why are all Black students seeking this African identity?’ It was not until I was presented with tons of literature on African discourses by Prof Maart, who together with us created the ‘Race, Space and the City’, research group, and had endless discussions on systemic racism hosted at the centre, did I understand the magnitude of the problem. At some point, I really thought I wasn’t going to make it to graduation because of disregarding my lecturer’s advice and going ahead with a topic that made everyone so tense. Since Prof Maart’s main specialisation was expertise in political philosophy and psychoanalysis (Black Consciousness and critical race theory), she would unpack everything psychoanalytically we were going through as Black women in architecture and tell us why it was happening. Having heard all her theoretical unpacking and explanations it became clear that we had defied the most important rule in architecture, ‘it’s Europe first and Africa last’ syndrome that we had decided to fight against. We had shown the highest form of disrespect by seeking to solve African problems with solutions which would benefit African people, and as a result, change the African discourse in architecture – how dare we!

NOMPUMELELO KUBHEKA: Doing work on African identity wasn’t easy; we had to stand our ground and believe our points were valid and revolutionary. Until that point of working within the research group, ‘Race, Space and the City’, all we had been fed for years through our syllabus was European theories of creating meaningful architecture in the world at large. Very little on indigenous African content was ever recommended to further groom us into being well-rounded South African and/or even African architects. The disappointing part of it all was that even Black lecturers shied away from embracing our proposal on African Identity. We only had ourselves as students and many healthy interactions with comrades at the CCRRI, who offered us peer support and helped curb our mental breakdowns. At CCRRI, with Prof Maart as director, we felt heard and triumphant whilst in our architecture classes, we were made to feel like failures.

LONDIWE SOKHABASE: No, I could not do work on African identity: I could not! That is one of my biggest regrets. In my fifth year, I submitted a

proposal for my research, and it was returned with a statement, ‘this is racist’. Imagine how ignorant a lecturer has to be to say this to a Black woman from South Africa. This was actually the written commentary. The paragraphs that were deemed racist were paraphrased from an article I found in the Architecture library that reported apartheid South Africa, and apartheid planning. I was confused how an event that had taken place not 20 years ago could be so quickly be forgotten to a point where no mention of it is to be present in a student’s assignments in the year 2015. I was surrounded by lectures who were suffering from selective amnesia, and who could only remember everything good and nothing bad about South Africa – known for the system of apartheid from which they benefitted enormously. This demotivated me. I was being called a racist! I ended up doing a somewhat politically correct version of my original idea, including an African literature floor in my proposed library.

ROZENA MAART: Can you share some of what happened during your final year of the architecture masters’ degree?

NANDIPHA MAKHAYE: It was very fortunate that we all dealt mostly with our supervisor in the final year, so I never had to present to my other lecturers who were clearly very underwhelmed with my persistence in continuing with my topic. I remember on my last presentation in my final year of the masters’, I presented to an all-White panel (in 2015, in the ‘new’ South Africa) who were vocalised that they were impressed by the work presented in front of them. They sang my praises and noted how clear my presentation was and how well it flowed from the beginning until the end. The problem arose when I elaborated on my topic and thoroughly explained what it was that I meant when I spoke of a ‘lack of African identity in our African cities’, namely Pietermaritzburg, which is still littered with statues and buildings from the colonial era, of which the all-White panel had nothing to say. My dissertation was not published or placed in the architectural library like all dissertations, as per the university regulations. This was even though I submitted it on time together with many of my colleagues. I guess I just had to be grateful for the fact that I passed the course, and everyone can now move on swiftly with their lives, and with the knowledge that they were somewhat able to punish me.

NOMPUMELELO KUBHEKA: We were treated like amateurs and often made to question our sanity. We were belittled and sometimes ridiculed for our

outspokenness and our ‘left’ approach to architecture and architecture education. The worst attacks were personal and displayed extreme abuse of power from some lectures and the powers that be – the White lecturers they tried to please. I remember one instance during my ‘twelve-month exile’ where whilst pleading my case, realising that two other Black women were in more or less the same boat. All three of us were dismayed by the experience and felt unfairly treated and needed answers. This conveniently happened concurrently with the school’s accreditation and evaluation by the South African Council for the Architectural Profession (SACAP) officially. Clearly, the last thing the school needed was Black women weeping over the flaws in the system in the corridors. So, we were ‘silenced’. _____ (name removed) often called us all into his office to offer solutions we couldn’t resist. These included international trips with internship programmes. The whole proposal was enticing to poor students struggling with depression and very little ability to question a Black man of high stature at the university or contemplate making live phone calls to his ‘international connections’. I was assigned to South Korea, the others to the USA and Brazil. In excitement, we were deterred from our mission of further attending classes and advised to prepare our visas and ready ourselves for the once in a lifetime sponsored trip. As soon as the accreditation process was over, so were our trips, immediately. Unprepared and unaware, we were suddenly thrust into many disciplinary hearings planned by _____ (name removed) and put on display, where we were depicted as unruly, incompetent students. And that our trips were stories we invented as no one had tangible proof of this person’s proposal. Never was the deep-end more hurtful and confusing, but once again we fought immediately, on the spot, and cried later. As a result of this, many painful consequences produced horribly low grades no one could prove. I missed two graduation ceremonies due to this level of incompetence that was set on inflicting Black suffering.

LONDIWE SOKHABASE: In my life, I don’t think I have cried as much as I did during my final year of University. I was admitted to the hospital for a week, and the doctor demanded that I get rest. It was just one terrible critique of my work after another. I am glad that I was part of ‘Race, Space and the City’ by then. I henceforth approached all negative comments with a background of knowing why this was happening to me.

ROZENA MAART: What are you saying? That you were able to understand

the mechanisms of racism much better and the complicity of some of the Black lecturers who played along ... those who also fought you?

LONDIWE SOKHABASE: Architecture was a fight, a fight that at the beginning, I was not aware of, but in the end, my eyes were opened, and I came prepared for the fight. And I knew that if my classmates submitted four A0's, (an A0 is the largest sheet of paper used for Architectural drawings), I had to submit eight A0's for all presentations. I was not expected to succeed, but I was determined to go down swinging if I was going down.

ROZENA MAART: When did the question of decoloniality come into your life, your studies and your work as an architect?

NANDIPHA MAKHAYE: I was once asked, whether people respect me more than before, now that I am a professional architect. And the answer is no; people will always judge you by what they see; in my case, a young Black woman is what they see before seeing any of my accomplishments. Being a professional just helped me give me the confidence to respond to whatever is thrown at me. As much as being Black and a woman is not favourable in the architectural realm, I have embraced my Black identity, and therefore, I wear it with pride in whatever life throws at me. As an architect in training, I was presented with an opportunity to work at a prestigious Durban-based company where I met other aspiring architects who had studied all over South Africa. I vividly remember having a one-on-one encounter with a colleague who unapologetically told me, 'you do not look like an architect'. I came from a poor background, where I could not afford the latest apple gadgets owned and carried around by most architects. I was not shocked by this statement since most architects worry more about their aesthetic appearance, which makes them 'look' like an architect rather than *be* an architect; I was more concerned with the latter. It was a fact that both this Indian woman who remarked and I had completed our undergraduate degrees in record time, and we're now both working for the same company. I was not the only Black woman who had studied at a mainstream university employed at this firm; I was just the only woman who carried my Blackness and was aware of my Blackness and embraced it. I was not trying to fit in with the 'norm' in that setting. The architectural dominion is quite a harsh environment for a Black woman. I remember countless engagements, especially White men, where they disre-

garded my opinion and did not even recognise my professionalism. What makes it worse, though, are the White women who make you feel insignificant because of their insecurities, since they see themselves as inferior to White men. In their attempt at recognition, they desperately feel the need to reduce the significance of other women trying to occupy the architectural space; it is so obviously most of the time. Unfortunately for us Black woman, we have always been at the bottom of the food chain, we, therefore, become targets and somehow the more we express our Blackness, the less we fit in and the more targeted we become. I cannot remember a specific point in my architectural career where I had to deal with decoloniality; looking back, the ‘Race, Space and the City’ research group offered this on so many levels. Once I became conscious of racism and the related issues of the lack of transformation in architecture at UKZN, things progressively became worse. Conversations with White peers became extremely uncomfortable as the traces of their reliance on White supremacy always seemed to be present at all times. The architectural monarchy has made it so comfortable for racism to exist unapologetically. It has become a lifestyle, and the perpetrators are no longer even aware of their contribution to racism nor that their behaviour is toxic.

NOMPUMELELO KUBHEKA: Decoloniality came as we were growing as students and becoming more aware of the alarmingly scarce content on African literature and Africa architecture in the country’s context. Our final project in our undergraduate semester was to design a city for the city of Durban. I remember an obvious instruction to never reference African artefacts such as spears and calabashes as a basis for our designs as it would result in a definite failing grade. Decoloniality was further cemented during our discussions at CCRRI and our ‘Race Space and the City’ research group. It was not only in architecture where African excellence was restricted but also in other studies at the university. Given my experiences, ranging from being the top achiever at school to being treated like scum in architecture at university, I learnt why I should not be surprised that the country has so few Black women in architecture. We are a handful. Systemic racism is designed just to have us as Black women just give up. It takes lots of money, extra resilience and mental strength to become an architect. And in the end, the pay isn’t even worth it. For us as Black women, we are not considered ‘connected’ in the field (there is no history of friends of parents who are architects, etc.), and even if we manage to be connected, we are never granted the opportunity to be in the forefront of

dismantling the colonial structures in our African landscape which are foreign and resistant to us thriving as Africans. Those who are, like so many Black lecturers who trained with the same White racist lecturers they work with and remain indebted to, even in racism, the feat is simply not worth it. For us as Black women, the few of us, the current saving grace is a government job: not much room for creativity as we have to abide by the policy, but the pay is good, thankfully. Our revolutionary spirits have to be shelved for now, and it hurts. It hurts because I would like to put into action everything that got me to the finish line.

LONDIWE SOKHABASE: On the question of decoloniality: in architecture, we were taught about Classical Architecture and the symbolism of the gothic and renaissance architecture. However, no one speaks about the symbolism of colonial architecture in African countries. At the research meetings for 'Race, Space and the City', Prof Maart introduced me to several authors that explained the purpose of colonial architecture in Africa and its main purpose, which was to transform the continent to suit the European settler. Within the school of architecture, we are taught classical architecture in a revered and respected way. The emphasis is always put on how much we must preserve colonial architecture for future generations. But no one speaks of the indignities experienced by Black people in buildings like the Durban post-office, where they checked Blacks to see if they had a disease before entering the city and signs were placed on warning White people, such as 'beware of Natives'. No one speaks about how land surveying was introduced in South Africa when the European settlers started taking land from native South Africans. It's all just conveniently okay; it is not a topic of discussion and therefore, not knowledge.

ROZENA MAART: I remember us having this discussion several years ago. Nandipha, and Nompumelelo, you both talked about how particular Black lecturers were complicit in carrying out the colonial programme. At UKZN there has been a lot of discussion post-2008 about Transformation. Do you think that transformation was in place when you entered the university, in whichever form, and visible to you?

NANDIPHA MAKHAYE: No, there was no transformation whatsoever as far as I am concerned. For the longest time, I felt that I was trying to fit in or be

‘normal’ to be accepted. I am just grateful that it never reached the point where I started changing myself to be accepted by ‘the troop’ (acting White). I guess that is due to my rebellious nature of never wanting to be considered part of the crowd. I have never been White or even tried to act that way, so when White people failed to understand my perspective, I was neither surprised nor phased by it. The only thing that concerned me was my grades and passing university as knowledge had always been an essential part of my upbringing and life as a whole. My concern with doing well academically almost led me to accept defeat and live as if architecture will never see a transformation in my lifetime. It was not until we spoke about these issues, as a group, that I realised how many of us (as Black women) were suffering in silence and were constantly accepting things as they were. Successfully continuing with the topic of African identity even though it caused my final year marks to be lowered, was extremely worth the effort. It opened a long-overdue conversation regarding transformation, and hopefully, it educated other Black students as to their relevance in the architectural space. Having the dissertation published and placed in the architectural library would have been first-price. This would have formed the basis for the decolonisation and transformation in African literature in architecture, which is still lacking in many ways.

NOMPUMELELO KUBHEKA: Transformation at UKZN, in architecture? Well, it seemed so, at face value, when I first entered in 2006: the diversity in student enrolment and diverse racialised and gendered representation in teaching staff was something I noted. However, given our experience as students on the ground as the years progressed, transformation is a fallacy in the school of architecture at UKZN.

LONDIWE SOKHABASE: The majority of my lecturers were Black, and my year coordinator was Black. But I do not think that helped me at all. I actually think it worked against me. I got the feeling Black women were really not liked in architecture; we were clearly a threat. Transformation is more than putting Black people in spaces; we should go a step further. As people who understand the struggle and are aware of racism’s systemic and structural aspects, we know exactly how the Black African child is dissuaded from entering the university. The university, and definitely architecture, was historically a Whites-only space and now a White-dominated space. Nothing much has changed, as far as I can tell.

ROZENA MAART: Can you address some of the obstacles that stood in your way?

NANDIPHA MAKHAYE: There were many obstacles that I had to deal with in my years in architecture school, which increased in magnitude as I reached the completion of my studies. Despite my consistent marks from my first year of study, my ideas became so vast and out of the box that it gradually became harder for the lecturers to believe that I was working alone and not receiving external help, even though I consulted with them at every step. There were two very comparable problems which both happened in my final year of study. The two problems came in the form of two White women, one was a lecturer at UKZN, and the other was an external examiner who was brought in for my final examination. I encountered the first problem during our many 'crit' (critique) sessions held in the studio. This came as a shock to me as I had never experienced a design lecturer who was so uninterested in my work in all my years of studying architecture. This White woman wouldn't even lift a pen during our one on one 'crit' (critique) sessions. This was very clear because she would give all her attention and endless references for supporting works with other students of a preferred colour. It got to a point where I doubted that she understood me as a person or was even interested in having me as part of the class. As time progressed, I realised that I was wasting my time in consulting with her. In a conversation with her and another student, all of us were engaging with one another, not even once did she look at me or acknowledge my presence. If her eyes were not on a student, they were wandering off into the distance.

ROZENA MAART: It sounds like she performed a form of shunning, a tactic used by White women to inflict one-on-one racism (what I often call, 'racism in the flesh', and make Black women feel insignificant. Is that more or less what happened?

NANDIPHA MAKHAYE: It was like I ceased to exist in that very moment when she made be invisible. She effortlessly disregarded my presence. Fortunately for her, I am not a confrontational person, so I just ignored her too. I didn't acknowledge her at all. As much as this was very much against my upbringing and culture, I honestly did not see the need to beg for her attention. Besides, she was not benefiting my life in any way. Our views and approach

in architecture differed a lot, to the point that I was convinced that she was deliberately going against whatever I was saying. Of all the Black women in the class, she only showed favouritism to one particular woman, black in skin colour but acted extremely White. This particular Black woman was very well-spoken in the English language and always seemed to introduce herself with her English name rather than her first name, her Zulu name, which most of us knew her and addressed her by. It took me the longest time to figure out that she was actually articulate in a *vernacular* since she constantly spoke in English even when she was engaging with a group of African women. Somehow this woman was the most 'relatable' amongst the Black students to this White lecturer. I guess because these White folks saw so much of themselves in her; she was exactly what their racism had done; she did not identify as African. As I had already alluded to the fact that my fifth-year final presentation panel was an all-White panel, there were three White men and one woman who was the only one who had read my document. This woman, who was my second problem, was from the University of Pretoria, one of the most patriarchal and least transformed universities in South Africa. She seemed to be on edge the whole time I was presenting, but she kept her comments until the end. The rest of the panel seemed to have enjoyed the presentation quite thoroughly until this University of Pretoria woman gave me the feed-back she had so reluctantly held back for the twenty-minutes I had been given to present my work. From the anger in her voice to the sneer on her face when she addressed me, I could tell that my work extremely angered her. The words that came out of her mouth made it clear to me that she hadn't fully grasped what I had said in my dissertation. She went on and on about racism even though my dissertation concentrated more on colonisation and preserving the European-city model. She even quoted a few Black authors who had written on racism to seem knowledgeable to the panel members. Unfortunately, this was irrelevant to my work and the fact that the rest of the panel hadn't read my paper, counted against me as she had now convinced them that my paper was a racist attack on White supremacy, which to a point it was. When I finally received my documentation for corrections, there were no corrections to be found. Rather there were very personal comments such as; 'is this true', 'really', 'this is your personal opinion'. My paper had not been evaluated or marked academically, but rather it felt like a reprimand for defying the White set rules of architecture. It was quite a disappointing ending to what had been an inspiring journey on self-realisation and discovering my layered identity. I really felt that my

supervisor had let me down. He knew the turmoil I had been through in conceiving my dissertation, yet he did not protect me from the vultures sent to destroy me.

NOMPUMELELO KUBHEKA: There were many obstacles, including the ones I named above. ‘Not performing’, as I was told (along with several Black women), was mostly dependant on how deep our pockets were, and they were very shallow I might add. We had to take on odd student jobs to survive because we knew our lecturers would not support us. I was once asked why I even chose this course since I was broke (not financially able to afford it) by a Black lecturer. At the time, the school was under renovation and access to resources was limited, and we all had to rely on private computers or hand sketches if all else failed. Apart from the financial fields not being level for all students, there was active gatekeeping that was frustrating. The constant misfortunes and food starvation were all we knew. Constructive criticism is good, however blatant soul-crushing from the lectures was the tactic that they use, and rendered as unfit for architecture as a whole. My saving grace was always external examiners who saw potential in me and encouraged that I stand my ground. I would literally go from a dismal failure to an excellent pass on the same project depending on who evaluated it. The school has questionable agendas with students that need to be highlighted and addressed. Most of us should write books and articles as a means of healing. Architecture schooling at UKZN was traumatising!

LONDIWE SOKHABASE: Though it’s been 5 years, I still get very anxious when I have to write something in the form of an assignment. During my first year of my masters’ degree, a lecturer told me I could not write in English. Maybe that assignment was not the best I could have written. But I had a degree and managed to secure a spot in the master programme, yet I could not write English. That statement still shocks me even now in 2020, when I am about to complete my second masters from UP. How did I make it so far, not being able to write English?, is a question that sometimes comes into my mind It always leaves speechless and unable to respond.

ROZENA MAART: By all accounts, what you have gone through required you to strengthen your mind, as well as to have to acknowledge, perhaps painfully, the degree of complicity that Black lecturers were involved in. I

remember at one of the sessions at CCRRI shortly after we formed ‘Race, Space and the City’, one of you mentioned how shocked you were to see one of your Black lecturers go out of his way to please his colonisers and carry out their programme of putting Black women down. I was quite taken aback myself. Take us through how you fought back and strengthened your mind and your commitment.

NANDIPHA MAKHAYE: I did not have a Black lecturer until the second year of my studies, and I really feel that it was a blessing. My first Black lecturer was one of the worst lecturers I had ever encountered, not from the lack of knowledge but from the lack of guidance he provided during the crit-session. After observing him for a while, I realised that he lived in fear. He needed to gain approval from the other white lecturers before making any major decisions despite being the head coordinator. He somehow gave harsher remarks to the Black students to prove that he was worth his position. He never quite gave a clear direction when he was advising on a way forward in the fear that someone would judge him for helping Black students get ahead. Instead, he gave White students unnecessary advice, which went unused as the white students never quite valued his inputs. According to Ngugi in his book, *Decolonising the Mind*, he alludes to the fact that colonisation of the mind is harder to detect and to eradicate than other forms of colonisation. Most of our Black lecturers were colonised and as a result, were subordinated by their white counterparts.

NOMPUMELELO KUBHEKA: Mr _____ (name removed) had been employed as head of department by the time I had returned to study in postgrad architecture. He was a thorn in my flesh, to say the least. He was at the forefront of my demise as a student followed by his fellow Black staff members’ complacent behaviour. I remember many episodes of being let down by Black lectures that seemingly had a façade of empathy. One of them blatantly, upon approaching me about my lack of financial means to make the design task, looked back at me so cavalierly, and asked what I was thinking in studying a course I couldn’t afford. I had no reply to that question and simply walked away. I remember one particular Black lecturer who had mercy on me during my episode of being kicked out of school, would secretly meet me in his office to give pointers of how to challenge the system using university policy (AKA *The Bluebook*). That lecturer, for reasons unknown to me, was persecuted and

thereafter ousted from staff as a lecturer, a fate he foresaw when he chose to help me. What's even more alarming was that a White man and former lecturer became very instrumental in my readmission as he knew my calibre as a student and saw the unfairness in how I was treating. Coincidentally and to my knowledge, he also never lectured again.

LONDIWE SOKHABASE: I would have rather faced the disdain of the white lecturers than for me to go to my Black lecturers, whom I felt were not confident themselves in my design crits. But also, for their lack of support in my presentation when I had to present my design which had been born from crit sessions I had had with them. It was refreshing to have a Black professor, (a clearly confident person in his space in the architecture profession and academic space) as an external invigilator in my masters' year. He was unapologetic in his support for my design and encourage me in my organic architectural forms, something that had been looked down on for most of my architecture academic career.

ROZENA MAART: We have now taken our discussion to a second session. In some of the comments, you asked that I discuss a hands-on understanding of decolonisation. This is generally what I say: Decolonisation is about removing the coloniser from your being as the colonised ... from your thinking, your actions ... it is about undoing what the coloniser had done and also what you need to do to think through who you are and how you wish to live in the world. Again, all of you show this very clearly in all of your responses. Is there anything, in particular, you want to emphasise?

NANDIPHA MAKHAYE: The language of power in most if not all previously colonised African countries is some form of European language, in the case of South Africa - English. This often makes African languages insignificant, making English the language of 'intellect' or 'superior civilisation'. Thus, a person or individual who is fluent in this language is considered a superior being, especially if their skin colour is black – English somehow becomes the measurement of intelligence according to European standards or at least the minds of the colonised. Living in a township and studying architecture made me aware that I was coexisting in two very different worlds. When I was in the township, I was somehow celebrated by the township for having gone to a White school and having the opportunity to study

architecture which was not popular amongst Black children. Whereas in university, I was frowned upon for coming from a poor and disadvantaged background. This made me very conscious of colonisers from quite a young age, as I constantly felt as though I did not belong anywhere. I was stuck in limbo which was accentuated by my shy and reserved nature. The only time that I felt as though I belonged, was when I was alone buried in my thoughts. It was not until I started doing research on identity and colonisation that I realised how colonised black people's minds are, that they have been conditioned to believe that the whiter your actions and way of life is, the better you are. They somehow desired and accepted those who seemed to be closer to Whiteness. In architecture specifically, as soon as a student showed an inferior understanding of the English language whether in articulation or written, they failed almost immediately and never recovered from that failure.

On the other hand, no matter how White you act or perceive yourself to be, white people are not ready to accept you as part of their world. And thus, constantly make you feel inferior always to know your place as a Black scholar. Even those who spoke English better than their white counterparts were judged more on their skin colour and appearance than their so-called 'intellect'. I slowly realised that the only time one gains full control of their existence in this world is by accepting their existential being and acknowledging the fact that one can be a superior being regardless of the colour of their skin.

NOMPUMELELO KUBHEKA: I sensed earlier during my undergraduate degree how much of a variety we were at school as students. Our different backgrounds ranged from 'rich' kids to 'poor and unresourced' kids. However, the common denominator was that we were all high school top achievers. As our stay progressed, we realised that much as we had all the potential to be great, we were treated and somewhat schooled differently. For example, the less 'English fluent' black kids seemed to have a tougher time proving themselves due to 'substandard' English. Observing from outside of my marginalised classmates' experiences, I realised how torn I had become with conflicting feelings of relief and shame within myself. Relief because I was privileged to have been sent to a 'white' high school, which then sharpened my English vocabulary and subsequently sheltered me from being deemed a lesser scholar compared to other black kids. Shame because it created an unspoken divide between us.

LONDIWE SOKHABASE: Coming from a multiracial high school, an Afrikaans high school to be exact, I thought I understood the dynamics of being in a multicultural setting. In high school I was acknowledged for my academic achievement. I thought everything was okay in my context; we were a rainbow nation, after all. There is something to explore there, with first-generation multiracial schooled black children. Yet, the school environment creates a distorted view of the real dynamics in South Africa. I am grateful for the education my parent was able to afford me, but there was a gap in my education that did not touch on the systematic racism in South Africa. So much so that if I had known the fight ahead of me in the profession I chose, I might have chosen a different career. Experiencing systematic racism at university was extremely painful for lack of a better word. At first, I did not know what it was, I just felt overwhelmed and inadequate, however in my post-graduate years I was able to get tools that enabled me to recognise what I was going through and get tools to assist me in defending not only my academic studies but myself as an Architecture student and future Architect.

ROZENA MAART: The processes of the mind, strengthening the mind, strengthening your identity, and your physical and intellectual being ... this was clear with all of your responses to the questions that I posed close to the end of your master's degree. Our sessions just before your last critical appraisal were focused on you learning to assert your confidence. I think you all did incredibly well, considering what you shared at the time, and what I learnt more and more over the years. Can you talk a little bit about this process?

NANDIPHA MAKHAYE: In undergrad we were not too certain or confident about our architectural space presence. We were competing against White students who had enormous confidence regardless of the standard of the work they produced. It took me a while to realise how unhelpful the advice given by white lecturers was during crit-sessions – they would strategically lead you astray with their advice. As much as in your gut you were aware that you were being led astray, you would listen and implement the advice as best as possible because as a young student you look up to your lecturers and trust that they want the best for you. White teachers/lecturers naturally gave preference to white students over black students; it seemed like such a natural phenomenon which happened spontaneously. Later on, during my studies, it became clear that my books were my only true source of support and guidance. Books never

lied or led me astray, as limited as our architectural library's information was – always providing European solutions and celebrating European excellence. After having worked in black-owned architectural firms reassured me of my talent and presence in the architectural realm, I was able to gain confidence and stand up for what I believed in, which in turn, gave me the strength to excel in my studies and obtain the marks I always knew I was capable of. After realising my potential, very little criticism was able to hold me back.

NOMPUMELELO KUBHEKA: During my undergraduate degree, many of us were not so sure about ourselves. It's natural for students of all races to mingle, however the system was adamant in creating a divide. I was very oblivious to how institutionalised racism had preceded us, Black kids. We slowly adopted a culture of proving ourselves by putting in longer hours and engaging in more crits to pass all modules. We were subconsciously taught to think less of ourselves and our capabilities. We survived on cracked confidence, hope and very few financial options. Given most of our modest financial backgrounds, the strategy was to make the most of this degree as there were no means to consider other career choices. All of our parents' monies were invested in making this particular degree (architecture) work. In hindsight, we were academically better. This is proven because, personally, all work that had been marked average by internal powers was praised as outstanding by external moderators. In postgraduate studies, we had grown a backbone and learned to stand up for what we believed in and the ideas we presented. This is mostly due to a combination of excelling in the real world workplace and meeting and engaging with fellow 'woke' students at the CCRRI headed by Prof Rozena Maart and the subsequent introduction to great literature from the likes of Franz Fanon and Steve Biko and interactions with various professors and veterans of the Black liberation movements.

LONDIWE SOKHABASE: The university setting always made me feel I had to constantly prove myself. Which I did not mind, however, it became clear that the measuring device for my credibility was warped. I was reserved and accepted that I was just not good enough as an architecture student in my undergraduate years. However, in my masters' years, I felt confident in myself and in the work I presented because of the growth I had experienced both professionally and individually. Understanding the system that I was in and how it was designed to keep people like me out of it, helped me fight for my

space in architecture academia and the profession. I remember a talk/discussion we had at the institute with Professor Barney Pityana. He spoke about his experience in the apartheid days. It was very eye-opening hearing the cruelty of the apartheid system from first-hand experience. This inspired me to read Steve Biko. Reading on Black identity has been very liberating for my growth. I am proud of the person I have become and am still becoming.

ROZENA MAART: In the second decade of the twenty-first century, the focus has been on decolonisation and Africanisation in almost all of our universities in South Africa. Are you concerned that your honesty may offend readers because you speak very openly about being put-down by Black men in the academy? Most people who study relations of colonisation and coloniality will understand the mechanisms of colonisation and coloniality.

NANDIPHA MAKHAYE: The entire architectural system in South Africa was designed only to benefit a few and to permit a small minimum to flourish within the field. This is very evident in schools where students are conditioned to think in a particular manner and in the workplace where the former students have successfully learned the functioning of the system and will thus put it into practice. We blame only the White lecturers for ensuring that the system has remained in place till this day, yet the Black lecturers who are also architects and have been through the same challenges continue to exert the same stigmas onto a younger generation of Black students. If the Black lecturers wanted to stop the system or were against the results it produced, they would have made a change by now, but instead, they continue with the same colonial attitudes that they suffered through. It is as if their minds have been conditioned to believe that Black students need to suffer to claim the title of being called an 'Architect'. A part of me wants to believe that systematic racism is so deeply rooted in these Black lecturers that they do not realise how much torment they are causing to Black students, which in turn gives White students the upper-hand as well as the confidence to believe that they are superior even if it is far from the case. In conclusion, the entire architectural realm requires extreme transformation. This should begin with the decolonisation of the minds of architects who so eagerly train upcoming protégées to follow a system designed years ago and has been kept alive by systems routed in colonialism and racism.

NOMPUMELELO KUBHEKA: What I took away from my experience of

architecture at UKZN and understood what was shared by my peers on the Black lecturers' question is that it's a combination of circumstance and exceptionalism. I saw a first-generation Black elite wanting to make it as hard as possible for us to achieve the same status they fought to achieve. This may be because they reflected on their own past experiences or were bowing down to unknown 'powers that be' who control their position in significant roles at the school. If it is the latter, then I feel their means to survive is counter-productive for the industry at large.

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↪ Round-table 02 ↩

Critical Times, Critical Race

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Abstract

This paper is presented in the form that it took as a roundtable, encompassing the key voices of the students involved in ‘Critical Times, Critical Race’, a research project that emerged from a series of discussion at the Centre for Critical Research on Race and Identity (CCRRI) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in 2013. The roundtable addresses questions of consciousness, decolonisation, complicity, Africanisation and the pitfalls of a national consciousness that does not take up its historical responsibility in fighting for the kind of liberation it promised the oppressed masses.

Keywords: race, consciousness, colonialism, White liberals, decolonisation, White monopoly capitalism

Introduction

In this roundtable, four researchers and scholars get together with the primary investigator of the project, 'Critical Times, Critical Race', which ran from 2013 at the Centre for Critical Research on Race and Identity (CCRRI), to discuss their research and scholarly work on race and its merge into discussions on decolonisation. Each of the researchers has their respective affiliations with political groupings within the country and put some of these forward; others are also critical of the very positions they support and openly speak of the shortcomings that they believe make decolonisation a complex matter, which most believe is not happening in South Africa, the country of their birth.

Methodology

A roundtable approach was sought to address questions that speak to the merge between and among race, racism and decolonisation in South Africa. This method of unpacking, where a speaker follows on from another, facilitated a discussion rather than a prescribed agenda or set of ideas which often streamline and limit spontaneity. An existentialist approach is utilised here as well as one that draws from autoethnography in bringing forth a broad range of inquiries to what it means to study relations of race and racism whilst simultaneously addressing questions of decolonisation and decoloniality. All of the students involved in the project named above participated in research activities ranging from focus group studies to interviews and questionnaires. It is, however, an approach that draws on experience as scholars who come to the position of researcher through lived experience, that is present in the discussion here and defines its critique.

Discussion

Rozena Maart chairs this discussion as the primary investigator of this project.

ROZENA MAART: When were you first acquainted with the objective of decolonisation?

JACKIE SHANDU: For me it was in the mid-2000s.

PHEZU NTETHA: I joined the student formation of the Black Consciousness Movement known as the Azanian Student Movement (AZASM) in 1988 when I was still at high school, when I was 15 years old, which means I practically grew up in the Black Consciousness (BC) tradition. Thereafter I was part of every wing of the movement from student, to youth formation, until the mother body. At one stage I was part of Azanian People's Organisation's (AZAPO's) 2-year youth cadetship (a programme composed of cadres) and this is where I was first acquainted with the objective of decolonisation.

PHILILE LANGA: I was first acquainted with the objective of decolonisation during my masters. Up until then, I had been socialised under the banner of post-apartheid integration, the rainbow nation, which I now consider a myth. The language around decolonisation was introduced to me during class, but it was outside of class that the core parts of the conversations on decolonisation started happening. The first and perhaps most important part of the objective of decolonisation is telling the truth. I think that due to the integration objective of the government in the first decade or so after our first democratic elections, we faced many half-truths about the history of our country. For example, I was taught that Steve Biko wasn't murdered by the apartheid government – he simply died in detention. And that Van Riebeeck founded a refuelling station in the Cape, he didn't colonise it. This was probably done in a bid to 'keep the peace' and not shift the power balance that had been 'negotiated' through CODESA (Convention for a Democratic South Africa, which was the period of negotiations to end apartheid that started on 04 May 1990 and ended on 27 April 1994).

AYANDA NDLOVU: For me it was in 2013. I was a member of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF). I encountered people like Jackie Shandu, Phezu Ntetha, John Devenish and Dr. Guna Dharmaraja. Dr. Guna Dharmaraja from the Indian Maoist Party, a very pragmatic Maoist, who were comrades and friends. However, all these folks were into Marxism and Maoism. Dr. Guna and I would spend the whole weekend reading texts on Marxism and Maoism or attending NUMSA (National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa) or SACP (South African Communist Party) workshops. Meanwhile, the EFF's ideological position urged a 'Marxist-Leninist and a Fanonian' approach and introduced me to decolonial discourses, which were essential, especially when reading Frantz Fanon. I started questioning the importance of studying Marx-

ism and Maoism; I was impressed by Fanon's work. Later Dr. Guna took me to the Centre for Critical Research on Race and Identity (CCRRI), where Prof Maart was the director. The centre was new. I was overwhelmed by the portraits that were displayed around the centre when I entered the space for the first time. Prof. Maart's main office had a whole wall of Black thinkers on display: revolutionaries and philosophers, men and women. It was the discussions that happened in the centre that elevated my interest in decolonisation and the research groups that Prof. Maart started. I immediately joined the centre; it is also where I took part in the weekly seminars, the symposiums, the workshops on Fanon, Derrida, psychoanalysis and several projects run by Prof Maart, including discussion groups and events connected to the 'Biko Education Project', then later the project known as 'Critical Times, Critical Race'.

ROZENA MAART: Did you do readings in the area of decolonisation or were you already aware that this was going to happen post-1994?

JACKIE SHANDU: I read broadly and discovered the necessity and inevitability of decolonization through reading various texts.

PHEZU NTETHA: In the AZAPO youth cadetship programme we were taught and we read a lot of material on decolonisation and so we were prepared for what would happen in the post-1994 period.

PHILILE LANGA: I wasn't aware of any readings or aware of what was going to happen in terms of the decolonisation movement until late in my undergraduate years. My awareness was due to the classmates I had and the types of conversations that took place during my undergraduate and honours political science classes. Up until that point, I was aware of racism, race-based inequality and prolific White and Indian ownership of space in my part of the province. I didn't have the language to describe what I saw or experienced, but I was aware that something was deeply wrong with our country.

AYANDA NDLOVU: Of course, I read. What stood out was *The Wretched of the Earth*, as Stuart Hall remarked, ... this read was still the bible of decolonisation (Fanon 2004: xvi). However, during this time I was doing my undergraduate studies. I was more of an activist than a scholar. All I wanted at the time was to emulate Biko, Malcolm X, Anton Lembede and many other

young activists. I was under the influence of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) and I was amongst the prominent members before I assumed a leadership position. I would say that I was charismatic and not afraid to challenge the injustices faced by students. At one time, I remember fighting for students to get NSFAS and access to residence that I myself did not have. In fact, there were numerous times when I thought I was going to be financially excluded because my financial situation was not stable and I had realised that as students, we were on our own. Instead of trying to meet students halfway, the University raised its tuition and residential fees. I became popular not only amongst students but to university management as I was challenging their reasoning for allowing students on their terms, then excluding us. I was determined to study but also agitated by the annual increase in fees, which was a yearly crisis. I saw it as a means on their part to prohibit myself and other poor students from studying. From this point onwards EFF student members started to rally behind me for EFF campus leadership because they saw I was more practical than theoretical. The first programme I initiated was to take our protest into university management offices. We wanted a more relaxed policy and a fair process. Then, this presented an opportunity to bring some EFF folks into the Centre for Critical Research on Race and Identity (CCRRI) under the Collegium, which was a reading group. I was a good organizer hence I was able to organize students. Prof. Rozena Maart introduced my group into diverse readings which included decolonial thought and figures such as Aimé Césaire, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, the Negritude thinkers and others. I can say that I was living decoloniality; at the time I was not able to contextualize my activities.

ROZENA MAART: What were the salient features of the #RhodesMustFall for you and how did you contribute to that discussion?

JACKIE SHANDU: The growing collective consciousness among oppressed people of the ultra-violence of colonial iconography and memorabilia of other forms of oppression (slavery, apartheid, genocide), stands out for me as the most fundamental tenet of #RhodesMustFall. The other equally crucial aspect was the call for justice: the demand for greater access to top Ivy League institutions for Black students, descendants of the enslaved and colonised people whose labour and mass plunder by the West produced monstrous wealth that built and sustains these institutions. My contribution to the discussion at the time was to insist that #RhodesMustFall movement must connect its

particular struggle with the general struggle of Black people for reparations with regard to slavery, colonialism, apartheid, genocide (I refer here to the Congo, Namibia, etc.) and the general massive plunder of Afrikan wealth as facilitated by the Berlin Conference of 1884 and subsequently by international financial institutions such as the IMF, World Bank and the social and economic catastrophes they caused through imposed Structural Adjustment Programmes in Afrika and other 'Third-world' nations. My strong view was, and still is, that student struggles cannot be isolated from the structural, systemic, economic, political and social conditions within which they occur.

PHEZU NTETHA: The #RhodesMustFall movement was an embodiment of the decolonial thought that was present in the country if one ever wondered what form and shape it would take: praxis is theory in action. Therefore its salient feature was the ability of its ideological content to appeal and resonate with youth and students, who then embarked on a programme of action. In many ways it was also a precursor to the #FeesMustFall movement. What I would contribute to this discussion is the form and shape the #RhodesMustFall took in terms of structure and organisation. The structure and organisation of #RhodesMustFall was that of a civil society organisation (CSO), and the weakness of CSO's is that they are spontaneous and fluid with a very short lifespan as opposed to ordinary revolutionary movements who have a permanent character to its existence. The ##RhodesMustFall was a unique organisation in that it was advocating for a radical approach and yet the liberal character of its structure and organisation compromised its existence and was a source of its premature downfall.

PHILILE LANGA: #RhodesMustFall was not just about removing the symbols of colonialism from the land, it was about reclaiming stolen land and lessening the power of White supremacy on African land. It was saying to all who listened, that the Black people of South Africa were not going to put up with being served crumbs from the table of White supremacist capitalism. And the movement dealt with capitalism specifically as White supremacist racial inequality was fortified and perpetuated through capitalism, which in turn dictated who had access to privileges in this country. Facing off against White supremacist capitalism also meant that students and their supporters were fighting for higher education to be a right and not a privilege, and that it was kept out of the reach of the most marginalised in the country, Black people.

AYANDA NDLOVU: I want to begin with #KingGeorgeMustFall which took place at UKZN University of Kwa-Zulu Natal and never gained enough attention. This movement was started by a group of us: Skhenza Mkhize, Nathi Phetha and I, along with several others. Our movement was first; I mean it was before the #RhodesMustFall Movement and #FeesMustFall. It was in December 2015 that we also discussed issues around outsourcing and exploited workers at Howard College, at UKZN in Durban. We then decided to co-ordinate meetings with workers (security guards and general workers) in residences. We planned a mass protest for February 2016, and we aimed to end outsourcing the labour of workers, student's financial exclusions and make a bid to open a students' parliament. The movement got momentum in February 2016 when the university wanted to exclude students from the university on a financial basis and by that time, we had organised the workers union affiliated to the National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa (NUMSA). Workers started to join in the protests, and we had a strong front that was composed of students and workers, fighting against the university management. Everything began to spread, all forms of activism geared at taking on university management, across universities around the country. The intention was to unite students and workers and maintain mass protests so that we could make our demands heard. The #RhodesMustFall Movement received better attention because of Cecil John Rhodes' historical legacy in the country and the entire region; it was also at UCT, which is a historically White university. I believe it was Chumani's act of courage that made the world news when he flung human faeces onto the Rhodes statue. There was already an on-going protest outside universities across the country, which ended with a wave of statues being defaced along with the statue of King George at Howard College, UKZN. The intellectual basis and philosophical trends of these movements were the same, with shared similar ideals about how we should reclaim our space. We wanted to get rid of colonial symbolism that resulted in postcolonial anxieties and forced Indigenous people to be alienated from the land. We wanted to get rid and confront these traumatic histories of conquest. We wanted to influence the curriculum and pedagogical theories or methodologies that can easily penetrate our historical injustices and align graduates into job markets.

ROZENA MAART: Is there a process of decolonisation in South Africa, as far as you are concerned?

JACKIE SHANDU: No. None whatsoever.

PHEZU NTETHA: The absolute truth is that there is no process of decolonization in our country simply because the state, as led by the congress movement, is captured by a very strong liberal grouping with White monopoly capital who are hostile to any form of transformation unless it involves cosmetic change and does not interfere with the status quo, which is how they live their lives as White people in this country.

PHILILE LANGA: From what I, my family and friends experience daily, there is no process of decolonisation in South Africa. There have been battles that have been fought and won, such as turning NSFAS (National Student Financial Aid Scheme) into a bursary fund from a loan fund. But ultimately, on the whole, White supremacy still has a lot of power in the country, especially in the traditional spaces such as certain universities. Traditionally Black spaces remain poor, with high rates of violence and underfunding. The concern with replacing White faces with Black ones in positions of power does not mean that decolonisation is taking place. If decolonisation is to take place, then there needs to be proper political will dedicated to the project, which there never will be as most of our politicians are satisfied with helping themselves with the crumbs of White supremacist capitalism.

AYANDA NDLOVU: I believe there is no project or initiative from the ruling elite in this country. Notwithstanding, it is paramount to acknowledge the work of students, especially, and scholars who have contributed to the decolonisation project. Decolonisation entails a courageous revolt that have taken place within student movements across the country. Hitherto, I can safely say, decolonisation in this country will only be achieved when vanguard student movements penetrate the ruling elite as is the case with our challenge, and what we fought and achieved with the Fallist movement. In fact, the leadership in this country is only interested in preserving the status quo and promoting the so-called Transformation agenda and Affirmative action.

ROZENA MAART: Is decolonisation a personal journey for you? Is it national, a political programme for the colonized and previously disadvantaged?

JACKIE SHANDU: Yes, decolonisation is deeply personal and an ongoing spiritual and psychological journey for me. It is a process of removing the proverbial white mask that Fanon says we Black people have been conditioned by colonialism to put on. It is a painful process of dismantling the DuBoisian double-consciousness syndrome, which has us looking at ourselves through the contemptuous and hateful eye of our oppressor. On a personal level, decolonisation means enacting what Sobukwe referred to as ‘fighting for the right to (re)own our souls.’ But the personal is political. There is always a mutually reinforcing relationship between the individual and the power-structure in the society within which he/she/they exist. My conception of decolonization, therefore, is that for it to be effective it must be a state-conceptualized philosophy, policy and programme of government, not unlike Nyerere’s Ujamaa. South Afrika is currently a neo-colonial state advancing a White-supremacist imperialist capitalist agenda, tied to Washington, London, Paris, Berlin and other important centres of global White supremacy. Decolonisation entails a new, fair and just, social, economic and judicial order, none of which exist in South Afrika. For instance, our constitution, law and criminal justice system is anchored in Roman-Dutch jurisprudence with its European values of hyper-individualism, competition and greed. This enables the courts to not only overlook but also rationalize and protect an economic order that has made South Afrika the most unequal country in the world in terms of wealth and inequality with regard to income. The wealthy White minority enjoys living standards comparable with the wealthiest in the US and Western Europe whilst the overwhelming majority of Afrikans are among the world’s poorest, subjected to the most grinding, humiliating abject poverty. From that prism, therefore, decolonization is nowhere to be found in the fabric and value system of South Afrika. It remains a vacuous abstraction in the corridors of ivory towers such as the university where empty academic sparring among scholars and students have neither links nor bearing with the lived experience of the masses of the people and their concrete daily struggles.

ROZENA MAART: What about you Phezu? What are your thoughts on this matter.

PHEZU NTETHA: Decolonization is a national political programme for the colonized and the oppressed, and the emphasis is on excluding the word ‘previously’ since it’s a contradiction of terms if one subscribes to the notion

that South Africa is now under neo-colonialism as opposed to being liberated. Again the only weakness is that the existence of any national political programme can only find expression in a form of structure and organization, otherwise it becomes an academic temporary political enterprise with a limited chance of advancing radical change.

PHILILE LANGA: Before decolonisation can be a national or political project, it needs to be a personal project. Only those who have conscientised themselves can help us as a country into a decolonial project. Decolonisation is therefore a personal journey for me, particularly with regards to how Black women live in this country. Politically conscious Black women are always the last to be considered in a project like this. We even have Black men who claim to be conscientized whilst also claiming that our issues as women are a distraction from what is really important: the dismantling of White supremacy. These men refuse to recognize that White supremacy is a patriarchal capitalist endeavour: you cannot dismantle the one without dismantling the other. And how can we claim to be conscientised if we continue to actively choose to step on the most vulnerable? That is not conscientisation. It is not decoloniality. It is simply changing the face of the oppressor.

AYANDA NDLOVU: Decolonisation should encompass both personal and collective spheres. The personal should also steer the collective discussion on decolonisation. It was not until I had sufficient intellectual knowledge of decoloniality that I began my consciousness-raising journey. The aim was not to be a catalyst of the movement but to challenge each and every person within our movement to contribute effectively to the discussion without fear. Remember, I was only 20 or 21 years old and all I could do was see how I could be Biko with my Cuban troops ready to tackle all social and political injustices deeply embedded in our communities. In essence, this became a significant journey that I can say today, across UKZN, that contributed to the conscientisation of most of my EFF comrades and peers. As I was getting more reading material, I began to realize how significant it was to share information. Thus, I ended up at Durban University of Technology to help comrades there to formulate a strong movement. We were not going to shy away from our decolonial principles. Now that I think about it, I contributed to the decolonial problem that did not even question why I was always surrounded by men cadres. Eish! Though all I knew was that I was charismatic and loved by my comrades.

ROZENA MAART: This is an interesting reflection Ayanda. It is good to talk about youth, and your youth was certainly very colourful. I think you were present and contributed to discussions that shaped South African history. Well, I hope you remember that contribution you made. How has decolonisation and/or decoloniality taken place at universities across South Africa. I know there are varied positions but let's hear from everyone. Jackie, do you want to go first?

JACKIE SHANDU: In the *German Ideology*, Marx poignantly opines: 'The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas (*The German Ideology* [1845] 2004: 127).

The South Afrikan academy emphatically and crudely depicts the above Marxian position, both in terms of the values upon which the universities are predicated and the hegemony enjoyed by Western epistemology across faculties and disciplines. South Afrikan universities still shamelessly perpetuate the colonial myth that thought is exclusively European and Afrikans can only offer experience, which either corroborates or disproves European thought. The tragic direct consequence of this tyrannical intellectual colonization is that our universities produce self-hating, dislocated and Eurocentric Afrikan intellectuals and professionals who not only do not see the need for decolonization but also actively oppose it. For this unforgivable treachery against their own people, our Eurocentric Afrikan academics in South Afrika are rewarded with prestigious and materially fulfilling jobs and leadership positions in both the private and public sectors, including universities. So, not only has decolonization not taken place within South Afrikan universities, the vast majority of managers, Vice Chancellors and lecturers have long been co-opted into the ideas of the White ruling class and openly weaponize their strategic positions and influential voices against decolonization.

PHEZU NTETHA: For me the answer is no! Decolonisation and/or decoloniality has not taken place at universities in South Africa. There were

few genuine experiences like the #RhodesMustFall which was a short-lived student experiment, and the CCRRI Biko Symposium which was also a short-lived partnership between students and one professor. Another dimension for instance is simply that decolonisation has had its fair share of contradictions through the manipulation of Afro-centric tribalism which is different from a Nationalist tribalism. The reason both the #RhodesMustFall and CCRRI Biko Symposium was short-lived is simply because they were undermined and contradicted by the university leadership cabal who use the misappropriation of Afro-centric tribalism that promotes the physical African identity, culture and ethnicity without the political identity. The aim of African misappropriation was to advance and protect 'White interest' in the so-called previously White universities.

The contradictions of this tribalism and misappropriation of African identity happens through the imposition of the 'new African recruit' and by overlooking the local intellectuals who are considered to be 'rebel radical Black thinkers'. The university replaces the Black radical thinker with the 'new recruit' African foreign national scholar who lacks the historical development and context of the struggle for total liberation in South Africa. The lack of this historical context of the struggle makes the 'new African recruit' vulnerable and an easy target for manipulation who undermines any decolonisation project because it is not in her or his interest.

Interestingly, it is this misappropriation of African identity and tribalism that proves that Black Consciousness (BC) as a political philosophy is even more relevant today. BC has always argued that any form of African identity that lacks and/or is not informed by a critical race consciousness is equally redundant when we advance our struggle for decolonisation. As a matter of fact, BC has a term for this kind of behaviour from the willing participants, they are referred to as 'non-whites'. The term is still relevant today when considering the context of decolonisation in the contemporary African university.

ROZENA MAART: All director positions are for a 3 - 5 year period, in most universities. There is much to be said about how academics who do work 'outside of the box', so to speak, get stopped by those in positions of leadership, which they take as positions of power, over which they rule with narcissistic authority and try to destroy people. That position then becomes their place of lashing out against other women, and the place where they try to restore their

fragile egos, which we all know works against any form of decolonisation anywhere in the world. A leader is someone who assists others, opens doors, creates possibilities for others, lends support to projects that others are doing, and not someone who tries to draw attention to herself all the time. I use a gendered positioning here as we often assume that Black men or White men act with this kind of ruthlessness and self-aggrandisement. In my experience I have experienced women act out the same script.

PHILILE LANGA: As a young Black woman who has performed tutor roles and assistant roles to academics in various fields, I have been exposed to more power hungry academics and university administrators, than leaders. Decolonisation would demand that they look beyond themselves and their own self-interest, see themselves in community with others. These power hungry people refuse to do this, and so decolonisation will never be on the agenda for them. Since we are not socialized to expect women to have these types of narcissistic tendencies, it comes as a surprise when they act in the same ways that men are expected to act. This applies to Black women too. It is in fact most insidious when it is a Black woman doing it, for me. This is because I've seen other Black people assume community with these power hungry types based on race, only to find out that these narcissists will use that assumed community for their own benefit.

AYANDA NDLOVU: I do not believe we have seen decolonisation in the academy yet. However, universities have a tendency of putting academics who come from other African countries first and claim, by doing so that they are embarking on the path of decolonial praxis. This is of course not a problem if it were true, but it is questionable. How can you embark on decolonial discourse with no historical knowledge of the country? What informs your position in decolonisation of the country that you do not belong to? The curriculum remains unchanged and most disciplines want nothing to do with decolonial theory. Universities have become a space where we reproduce the colonial canon and, some universities remain conservative in their pedagogical approaches. Instead we witness Black people who participate in the decolonial discourse yet who are not willing to motivate, mould or mentor Black students, but seek recognition from White folks. This takes us back because we are participating in what we are fighting against.

ROZENA MAART: This issue has been raised many times through the research project, and I think we all have very different points of view here. What would you say are some of the failures and/or misjudgements on the part of our freedom fighters?

JACKIE SHANDU: The ANC (African National Congress), as the first-born of our modern liberation movements, committed the fatal error of being ideologically deviated from the Afrikan Nationalism liberation philosophy as theorized and espoused by Anton Lembede and his contemporaries. This group of young and dynamic intellectual revolutionaries framed and articulated the South Afrikan National Question on the basis of the basic premise that South Afrika belongs to its native, Indigenous, Afrikan majority – and everyone else are guests. That is, Europeans as colonial-oppressive settlers and Indians as a foreign-immigrant national minority. In the mid 1950s the ANC was infiltrated and hijacked by Indians and Whites who, with the adoption of the Freedom Charter, made the ANC reframe the National Question as, ‘South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white’. Something totally false and ahistorical. South Afrika was invaded by European colonisers who violently dispossessed and oppressed the Indigenous people – the Khoi, the San and Bantu peoples. South Afrika will never belong to Whites.

On the other hand, Sobukwe’s error was his preoccupation with exposing race as something unscientific: biologically non-existent. Whilst he was wholly correct at a scholarly level, the South Afrika of his day was a society totally organized on the full application of the ideology of race, that is, the belief in the superiority of Whites and the inferiority of Blacks and the application of that belief: a rationalisation and justification of colonialism and apartheid. Denying the existence of race as a biological concept has the unintended yet problematic consequence of mystifying and obscuring the nature of the oppressor – the White population who use race to suggest that they are superior. Also, the PAC principle that anybody who gives allegiance to Afrika and Afrikans is highly problematic. No foreigner becomes Chinese merely by pledging allegiance and loyalty to China. The same is true for Arabs, Europeans and all others. Biko also wrongly revised the National Question when he claimed that South Afrika belongs to black people whilst his ‘black’ is inclusive of Indian immigrants who are a distinct nation - with a language, culture, religion and a homeland in another continent.

PHEZU NTETHA: Among other things included in the National question is voluntary unification and consolidation of unity regardless of nationalities. A more specific Marxist perspective would argue for the unification of the working class. The Black Consciousness Movement of Azania (BCMA) was responding to a racist ideology whose existence depended on separate racial development of at least four nationalities, that is, Afrikans, Indians, Coloureds and Whites. So the Black Consciousness revolutionaries advocated for the voluntary unification and consolidation of unity among the three nationalities for the emancipation project. The premise of unity was based on Black being a catalyst for collective action. The apartheid separate racial development setting was a colonial world. By introducing a political definition of Black, the aim of the BCM was to break and undermine this colonial world. The argument that Biko made a mistake is based on a false premise, at least on two counts. On the first count, it reduces BPC (Black Peoples Convention), SASO (South African Student Organisation) and the BCM (Black Consciousness Movement) to an individual that is called Steve Biko, as if the individual was a super-brand and a super-brain which is a false characterization of Biko who was a modest revolutionary leader. The relative truth is that BPC, SASO and BCM had a pool of equally gifted modest revolutionary leaders. The fact that Biko was at the forefront had more to do with the organization's strategy and tactics than Biko being a super-brain and a leading intellectual. There is documented evidence that Biko listened to reason and complied when given guidance and when others provided leadership. An example of such instance includes SASO inviting Uncle Zeph Mothopeng to give a lecture on the State of Education at the time.

On the second count, if someone really wants to review whether Indians are genuinely committed to the struggle for liberation then that person must also explain why SASO asked Strini Moodley, as a trained journalist, to establish its own publication. This is not because Strini Moodley designed it, he became the sole contributor and editor at the same time. The name of the publication was known as *Frank Talk* which became the most popular publication in the history of both SASO and BPC respectively. And when the judge asked Biko if he was the man behind this most influential publication, Biko said it was a SASO publication. If someone really wants to review the commitment of Indians then that person must explain why Abu Asvat was killed by the UDF (United Democratic Front) in an Afrikan township. If

someone really wants to review the contribution made by Indians then that person must explain why, when Afrikans wanted the first chairperson of AZAPO Durban Central branch to be an Indian woman, they elected Asha Moodley. I can go on and on listing 100 Indian folks but I doubt that the new Biko critics would be satisfied.

The point is not to argue and say Biko did not make mistakes – that would be ridiculous. The point is to make principled and constructive criticism. The last day when Biko was alive, he was with Peter Jones, a Coloured man from the Cape. For Jones being Black was not a theory but a lived experience. To that very last day Biko could still have chosen an Afrikan but that would have gone against SASO politics. If people want to discredit BC let them write a new political philosophy for our liberation struggle because isolating Indians is just a form of cheap politics which is lacking in substance.

Pierre Bourdieu gave us very useful information: ‘the ideational formation of any social formation has limits. Within these limits, systems of classifications reproduce their own logic, and the nature of the social world appears as both logical and natural’ (Bourdieu 1977).

PHILILE LANGA: Biko definitely made a mistake. It was a case of thinking that the oppressed could band together to fight the oppressor, but that is not realistic. The oppressed were pitted against each other from the second we came into contact with each other, and with the burden of being the most oppressed settling on the shoulders of Indigenous people. Being Black was therefore an identity that only we, as the Indigenous people, could claim. It is important to understand that we as Black people are on our own. We have little to no support from other races, and we don’t need it, not if we as Black people have truly understood the goal of defeating White supremacy and strengthening ourselves as a people.

AYANDA NDLOVU: I believe first, we must acknowledge and judge this based on the historical circumstances that these freedom fighters faced. Of course, now that we are in a different space and time, compare to the time these freedom fighters were in. For instance, Biko’s political definitions should not be moulded into contemporary terms as Biko drew his political position from his own historical subjectivity influenced by his social and political milieu. Lastly, I believe this should be elevated into the theoretical aspiration of the 1960’s. To be Black, not only meant pigmentation but, during the 1960’s, new

leftists wanted to consolidate the marginalized groups and in South Africa, the working class have always been understood to be Black. Not to claim that there is no White working class, but I want to simply stress that Whites remain entangled in their Whiteness as privilege because of the system of White domination, which Black folks do not have.

ROZENA MAART: Ayanda, you mentioned earlier that there was an outcry against Terblanche Delpont sharing his research on Sobukwe. We stopped the session at the time for the break. Shall we continue? Give us some details on the matter?

AYANDA NDLOVU: I believe we have a responsibility to confront and contest knowledge. Again, this goes to show how our own capable Black intellectuals are far behind in terms of preserving and writing their own histories. It is from this position that White folks de-intellectualise and de-philosophise our struggle stalwarts because we take no interest in writing their histories. These are the same folks who end up teaching us about what it means to be an African in Africa. Our ignorance of only being orators should stop and we should start to research issues on our lives and write our own encyclopaedias.

JACKIE SHANDU: The outcry was less about Delpont sharing his work but centrally about the platform he was intending to use, which is a political platform linked to the PAC and Robert Sobukwe. Black people who subscribe to Black radical thought were appropriately outraged at a settler coming to teach natives about the theory and practice of liberation, from settlers: a group to which he belongs and benefits from all the spoils of the enterprise of oppression. The Black radical tradition encourages well-meaning Whites to direct their efforts at the source of oppression – White society – and to leave Blacks to think and act on our own in the process of waging our national liberation struggle.

PHEZU NTETHA: The truth of the matter is that the PAC is dying if it is not dead already, and so the story of Terblanche Delpont sharing his research on Sobukwe and giving a presentation to the party is more of a stunt than anything. It would have been interesting if we were discussing the revival of the PAC as a liberation movement; of course the substantive issue is whether or not a Black

liberation movement should access insights brought forth by a White man. Unfortunately, the merits and insight from such a research study becomes irrelevant in the context of a dying party. It is like planting a seed in the desert and hoping for the best.

PHILILE LANGA: I am tired of White people being made into experts of Black people in any way. They keep studying us and are supported in doing so because ‘Blackness’ is seen as an ‘Other’, as if this was still the colonial era. This approach declares that their history is pure with no harm being done by the White people of this country or their ancestors. White people have a duty to take responsibility for that history, and reckon with what their ancestors have done, and what they themselves continue to do in this country. Why aren’t White scholars investigating the impact of White supremacy on patriarchy in the country? They are always the first to talk about the rape of Black women and demonize Black men in the process, but why won’t they investigate the role that White people have played in the vulnerability of Black women and the violence that we face? What about investigating the corruption of the apartheid government? How about admitting to the falsehoods they write about us and doing something about that? How about investigating the ways in which they have contributed to the maintenance of White supremacy on South African soil? When will White folks address the lived realities of this country and the fact that they have had a hand in the current state of things?

ROZENA MAART: Phezu, you have asked us to do an audit. Am I correct in thinking, as per your earlier question before we began the recording, that you are asking whether we have taken stock efficiently of our possessions in the country, of what we have and do not have, and whether we actually meet the ‘quota’ for our humanitarian needs?

PHEZU NTETHA: Let me address this since I raised the issue: Black people have two sectors, the taxi industry and football, as far as I am concerned. Unfortunately, the taxi industry’s operation is financed by White capital so in economic terms it cannot be regarded as a Black industry. One can try one’s luck and add the so-called Afrikan churches but I don’t know where that leaves us as Black people. If I restate the question: ‘have we taken stock efficiently of our possessions in the country and do we actually meet the ‘quota’ for our humanitarian needs? The answer is a big no! Black people have not established

anything in terms of institutions and infrastructure. Therefore, the notion of a 'quota' will be misplaced in the context of Black people in South Africa.

JACKIE SHANDU: With all due respect to my intellectual peer and friend, Phezu, but that would be an utterly futile exercise. Anybody with rudimentary political consciousness knows that South Afrika is an unjust, unethical, immoral and oppressive society built and governed on the basis of systemic race-based oppression and structural White privilege, with the constitutional democracy legitimizing-veil notwithstanding. The only antithesis to White oppression is Black Power – as Biko (1979) correctly posited. Race relations are power relations. Besides, there is a plethora of studies and data since 1994, pointing to the ever-worsening reality of gigantic White opulence standing as an island of luxury in a sea of Black misery, suffering and dehumanization. Moral protestations, no matter how persuasive, will not take us anywhere. We've been there, for a very long time.

ROZENA MAART: What kinds of measures should we introduce within the university context to ensure that decolonisation is actually going to take place from the position of South Africa's history and South Africa's people? Each time we had a symposium linked to 'Critical Times, Critical Race', students raised the same issue about the hiring of African nationals and how we need to be clear in our deliberations that we are not making a case for xenophobia. It has been said that African nationals are 'easier' for White South Africans to manage and to get on board their programmes; it has also been said that African nationals are there to keep South African Black folks in our place. Most do not identify as Black and for many the term African means that one is born on the African continent, nothing more. When we started this process, we talked about honesty. Since this has been raised over and over by so many of our research students, can someone address this?

JACKIE SHANDU: The university is a microcosm of the larger South Afrikan society; it accurately mirrors and reproduces power relations and establishes ways of doing things in South Afrika. The university, under capitalism, is a little more than an intellectual and academic superstructure of the ruling class, where ideas are developed to modernize, reinvent and further tighten the ruling class's stranglehold on the thinking and behavioural patterns of the society. Needless to say, the ruling class in South Afrika is exclusively White. So, while it will obviously be difficult to decolonize universities as a

fully neocolonial polity, the government as a key funder of universities can insist that decolonization is a crucial and legislated requirement for government grants, in the similar manner that redresses legislation such as Black Economic Empowerment and Affirmative Action have been introduced in the realm of the economy.

The flooding of South Afrikan universities with foreign Afrikan academics and managers is a deliberate manoeuvre on the part of the White ruling class and its key objective is to slow down decolonization, if not totally block it. Attempts to conscientize foreign Afrikan academics on the struggles of Black South Afrikans within the academy have not achieved anything. Interventions such as #PutSouthAfrikansFirst seek to counter this sly divide and conquer tactic and pits Black South Afrikans against foreign nationals who come from the Afrikan continent. This movement demands that the South Afrikan government reserve certain jobs and sectors of the economy strictly for South Afrikans. This approach may also help within the sphere of the university system.

PHEZU NTETHA: Universities are an extension of the capitalist mass production system, similar to a police college in a capitalist justice system, granted they had their moments like when they became a BC breeding ground and established radical movements like SASO, BPC, etc. Their liberal philosophy makes people hostile to our liberation struggle. For liberal institutions like universities to advance radical changes there is a need for a structured implementation plan, initiated by a trained and disciplined youth cadre training. For instance, there is a need to establish an affiliate academic programme or institution that can carry out this work. The designated affiliate programme will serve as an alternative university admission course accredited for an annual enrolment of a group of graduate cohorts who will study toward their undergraduate and/or post-graduate studies. This affiliate academic programme would train graduates in radical political philosophies like Black Consciousness, Pan Afrikanism, decolonial thought, etc., and they would become an advance section whose mandate is to infiltrate universities and drive a radical transformation agenda. That is an extreme but a practical measure that could be taken up if we are serious about decolonial thought in these liberal universities.

PHILILE LANGA: Non-South African Africans should recognise the fact that they are not of this country, recognise the fact that their history is different from ours, and that therefore they should not take up any positions of leadership in our country's higher education institutions. They cannot claim the benefits of the labour of Black people if they do not contribute to that labour when they come here. Also, when foreigners of any race or nationality take up positions of power in South African universities, they are actively blocking the advancement of decolonisation. People who do not have a stake in the positive progress of Black people in this country should not be put into positions of power in this country. At the same time, we should not assume that Black South Africans are invested in decolonisation. Even historically Black universities and campuses struggle with having Black South Africans in positions of power who have been detrimental to the positive progress of black South Africans.

AYANDA NDLOVU: I believe decolonisation is a humanising process and universities are spaces where humanism should be reclaimed. Reaffirming this process demands humanistic efforts to go beyond precincts offered by universities. Henceforth, I would assume that decolonisation discourse in universities will only take place once there are people who have committed themselves to an intellectual initiative that can get all people involved simultaneously – I mean the government, political organizations, intellectuals and civil society. To defend the country's future and to undo the historical legacy would need a strong front. This goes to say, even in universities people will be appointed to develop the country not to be placed for personal gains. As Thabo Mbeki once asked, in 2006, 'where is Black Intelligentsia today?' (The Guardian: 2006). He was aiming at endorsing the new generation of Black thinkers that can inspire and steer the country towards new decolonial-praxis and reaffirming Blackness as a political identity that can breed intellectuals given the history of the country.

JACKIE SHANDU: I want to address this question of ReAfrikanisation of the South African Education system because the current Afrikanisation process is nothing but a brand of tribalism. ReAfrikanisation of the South African education system is a historical necessity if South Africa is to totally uproot the legacy of almost 400 years of European oppression and racial domination. It must be remembered that Western education was introduced in Africa as part of the agenda to Westernize Africans, i.e., remove them from the grounding of

their native value systems, deter them from native languages and discourage them from practicing indigenous African spirituality. This was done ultimately to weaken if not entirely cripple the capacity and willingness of Africans to resist European colonialism and all related oppressive and violent activities. Nkrumah poignantly defined the most fundamental objective of education for Africa in the post-colonial epoch:

Our youth from the primary schools, through the secondary schools to the universities must be taught to know the workings of neo-colonialism and trained to recognize it wherever it may rear its head. They must not only know the trappings of colonialism and imperialism, but they must also be able to smell out the hideouts of neo-colonialism (Nkrumah 1973: 190 and <https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/revolutionary-path-kwame-nkrumah>).

As part of the decolonization process, Afrikans need to therefore cleanse themselves of all the self-deprecating indoctrination that has caused them to self-loathe, self-doubt and associate everything African with failure and incompetence. Western racist propaganda, presented as indisputable scientific truth, has infected Africans with a chronic racial low self-esteem which also makes them disloyal to their own race and willing collaborators with western forces of neo-colonialism.

It is within the context alluded to above that we advocate for the reAfrikanization of the University of KwaZulu Natal and our conception of reAfrikanization entails three fundamental components:

1. Decommodification of Education through removal of tuition fees and introduction of state subsidies for prescribed textbooks, accommodation and living expenses for all students.
2. An afrocentric curriculum prioritising African scholars, writers and philosophers in all disciplines and academic programs offered in UKZN as well as in all other institutions of higher learning in South Africa. Also, it must become a precondition for students to take one native language as a module before they are eligible for graduating.

3. ReAfrikanization of institutions of higher learning, however, must neither be misconstrued nor distorted as a narrow racial/ethnic chauvinist program. It is thus concerning to learn of Zulu nationalist elements masquerading as decolonials at UKZN, in pursuit of narrow, self-serving agendas which have nothing to do with the noble historic mission of ensuring African educational institutions in their look, feel and output center and reflect the values, principles and aspirations of the African people.

PHEZU NTETHA: Nyerere says ‘the purpose of education is the liberation of men’ so what is the point of decolonial thought if it cannot be put into practice. In order to illustrate this point I shall make reference to SASO’s formation, where consultation began at different student conferences including NUSAS conferences. The informal consultations continued until a point where a SASO national gathering was convened for its launch To say ‘we don’t have any organizational and funding partners there is nothing that can done to build a decolonial programme’, therefore speaks to a lack of discipline on our part.

Why don’t we go back to the drawing board and make the Biko symposium an annual event? We can choose a particular university or rotate; it will depend on our strategic approach. What is stopping the Biko Symposium from nominating a secretariat whose role is to organize an annual event until it becomes part of the country’s calendar of national gatherings. The BCM has materials in its history archives of how to organize through self-reliance methods. The Biko Symposium could just be a beginning because we don’t know unless we organise once again and see how many people attend. A tree will never grow unless someone plants a seed.

ROZENA MAART: Students who don’t carry out their commitment to the projects by writing for publication, producing, and offering the necessary accountability ... is one way of stopping this symposium from happening.

PHILILE LANGA: Let me get back to the earlier question: As a Black woman, I’m tired of it being my responsibility to talk about the fact that there can be no decolonisation without patriarchy being addressed. I have to bring this to the table each time, even to Black men who recognise the intricate entanglement of various oppressions. If I as a Black woman I don’t talk about gender politics, no one else will. It’s as if Black men do not have a gender, or

are not oppressors in their own way. Well they are gendered, and the way that they are gendered has privileged them in this society, even though they are racially oppressed. So why can't they understand the position that Black women are in? We as Black women see their Blackness and recognise them as one of us, which is why we help them fight battles, even those that have little to do with us. Yet this is not the case for us; Black men don't see Black women as being one of them. Why can't the Black man's decolonial project include the dismantling of the same White supremacist patriarchy that has helped to position them, encourage them and benefitted them into being violent towards their own?

Conclusion

Five scholars participated in this roundtable and as such it is apt that our conclusion reflect all of our views, which as evidenced in the exchanges, are varied just as much as they share similarities. We have asserted the significance of not making assumptions of what Blackness means, or what an intellectual community means, simply because of a person's racialised or gendered identity. What some of us have noted quite firmly is the need to understand why, when a Black person embraces Black consciousness it is not the same as a Black person who is conscious of being Black. To all of us, what Black Consciousness has meant in our lives varies but what is overwhelmingly similar is how we embrace it, via the work and agency of Bantu Stephen Biko, who laid out the path for our conscientisation. In addition, how we consider the foundations set forth by SASO in the generations of activism it spurred from the 1970s to the present day, is key in all of the work undertaken in the research groups, especially 'Critical Times, Critical Race', which all of the five scholars participated in. For many young Black radical thinkers, Blackness is one that situates the Black man as central to the conception of Black subjectivity and Black experience ... knowingly or unknowingly; for Black women in this roundtable, Black womanhood is often forgotten, or drawn in under compulsion but not necessity. When confronted, many would agree that among Black radicals there is an overwhelming oversight of the mechanisms of decolonisation that are upheld by young Black men scholars of decoloniality, who seek out the work of White men scholars as a means to thrust themselves forward, still with the belief that if they have mastered the thinking of their master, they can master Blackness.

Some of us have asked questions about the lack of support for Black scholarship that poses serious questions to the current decolonisation agenda, especially of projects claiming to be focused on Africanisation when in fact they are pursued at the backdrop of vulgar appropriations of tribalism that lack historical accuracy of South Africa's peoples. The merge of African Philosophy and Black Existentialism are strong currents in all of the contributors' work, and through these trajectories we see approaches to studying and tackling decolonisation and decoloniality by questioning both the coloniser and the colonised, the settler-colonial and the African liberal claiming African liberalism at the detriment of the Black masses in South Africa that have not been granted what we fought for – for all of us, this is not the freedom we envisaged, and any form of decolonisation needs to situate South Africa's history of usurpation and settler-coloniality at the forefront of its purpose. For most of us, university spaces remain both contradictory and contentious, as it is where many of us do our scholarly work; it is also not the only space that we consider key to decolonisation but one of the many that we believe should be held accountable for discourses of freedom that offer false hope to a generation of students whose parents have invested in them as human capital to drive the programme of liberation on their behalf, and the families who died trying.

Universities are part of the broader society within which we live; universities are as such sites within which we have seen apartheid measures be reproduced, and find expression among academics who are not necessarily scholars but who band together to assert authority over students, forgetting that they were once students, and forgetting that their generation where infused by the protests of 1976 in ways very similar to what #FeesMustFall means to the students of the decolonial era. In the words of the one of the contributors, 'If decolonisation is going to be taken seriously, be implemented and succeed, it is not something that will happen in the ivory towers of the university ...'.

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↪ Interview 01 ↩

Rozena Maart in Conversation with Sabine Broeck

ROZENA MAART: In Chapter one of your book, *Against Gender: Enslavism and the Subjects of Feminism* you introduce your point of departure for the book, on page 1, as follows: ‘This book is about a (self-)critical recuperation of White feminist interventions, which have paradigmatically shaped my generation’s trajectory of gender studies. It could not have been written without Black feminism’. Can you elaborate on this a little?

SABINE BROECK: The two most important mental turning points I went through in my decades [of] long study of Black feminism were, one, that it has entirely reshaped my idea of White feminism’s philosophical premises and second, that therefore I needed to study and destruct the epistemic regime of post-Enlightenment White power (including the paradigm of gender) instead of continuing the well-established, practice of White-on-Black ethnography (which is a standing practice in theory and/or lit crit, too!) that has been the overall gist of much White research and teaching of Black diasporic cultures and literatures, including my own for a long phase of my professional life. Apart from having been impacted upon by personal interaction with Black scholars and activists which have massively amplified and furthered those insights, I have been invited and pushed into these reconsiderations by a series of crucial Black feminist texts which have become signposts for this trajectory I am still learning within.

In 1969, Fran Beale published ‘Black Women’s Manifesto: Double Jeopardy: To be Black and Female’.

<http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/45a/196.html>

One of the pioneering intersectionalists avant la lettre, she described the nature of African-American women’s unique oppression within sexist and

racist orders. *The Black Woman: An Anthology* edited by Toni Cade Bambara in 1970, which assembles an array of key texts for the emerging new wave of Black feminism, all of which insist on the importance of recognizing the fact that woman is not one homogenous entity, and criticizing White feminism for its middle class solipsism, elitism and racism. 1977 sees the publication of the foundational Combahee River Collective Statement by a group of Black lesbian feminists ‘actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking’.

<https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/combahee-river-collective-statement-1977/>

Reading this, I realized, again that White feminism had no epistemic, political or ethical right to represent all women as if they inhabited the category of universal female. Similarly, Angela Davis in ‘Reflections on the Black Woman’s Role in the Community of Slaves’, from 1971, taught me to make the history of enslavement and the history of Black women central to my reading of, and takes on, American Studies, and feminism. I came, so to speak, to Poe and to Gertrude Stein, for that matter, after Toni Cade Bambara, to Foucault later on, after the Combahee River manifesto, and to Derrida after Angela Davis since I studied all of these texts (and a whole other plethora of texts culled from their respective bibliographies for my master’s exam thesis in the mid- to late 1970s, before I even entered my professional life as an Americanist. The breakthrough text: *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave* (Black Women’s Studies), edited by Akasha Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell-Scott, and Barbara Smith, was one of the first texts initiating my dissertation, in translation of the publication’s German title: *The Decolonized Body, A Study of the Black Female Narrative Tradition from the 1950s to 1980s* which, again, made me understand the particularity of White feminist claims when seen from a Black feminist perspective. The text, however, for my turn to a kind of meta-reflection of White epistemologies, beginning with a study of White American women’s literature of the 20th century (*White Amnesia, Black Memory*) and taken to a critique of theory in *Gender and the Abjection of Blackness* was Hortense Spillers ‘Mamas Baby, Papa’s Maybe’ from 1987.

[https://people.ucsc.edu/~nmitchel/hortense_spillers -
_mamas_baby_papas_maybe.pdf](https://people.ucsc.edu/~nmitchel/hortense_spillers_-_mamas_baby_papas_maybe.pdf)

This is an essay that turned my world upside down. As much as that essay has been one of the most brilliant contributions to Black feminist intra-mural interventions into Black intellectual and activist debates, I read it as a kind of massive epistemic attack on White gender theory, in its deliberations of the post-enslavement categorical distinction between the free human gendered body and Black enslaved ungendered flesh – which meant to me that gender theory itself as I had immersed myself in it, was deeply flawed in its conception since it has refused to theorize enslavement. I realized that Black feminist intellectual intervention had to be understood as the most advanced vantage point from which to read all the world in its post Enlightenment formation, including the paradigm of the gender episteme, and women’s literature canons. For the second book which came out in 1997, I also intensively studied Wynter’s *The Ceremony Must Be Found: After Humanism* from 1984, and knew then, for sure, that I had to keep up with Black feminist philosophical critique of the solipsism, racism, and agnotology of White Humanities in their various disciplinary forms, and of White gender studies, and feminism in particular.

These were the teaching moments in a very important process of realization for me: that as a White feminist and scholar, I needed to find a way of becoming a ‘spoken-to’ by Black feminist knowledge, in order to turn the lens on White philosophy which has also taken me to prioritize both Christina Sharpe’s and Saidiya Hartman’s work as orientation marker for my more recent work. So the book is literally a reckoning with that history, which means I have immersed myself into a trajectory of the modern West’s epistemologies – as manifest in post-Enlightenment philosophies and sciences of the human – as a White regime of thought, which needs to be aggressively unlearned. From Black feminism, I learned not to read in identification with White gender theory, but in the antagonism created by a perspective that acknowledges our present tense as the afterlife of slavery.

ROZENA MAART: At the start of your book, *Gender and Abjection of Blackness*, you make it very clear that you are arguing against gender. Whilst I have written a review of your book, I was wondering whether you could comment on this, as per the title of chapter one, and perhaps give some indication of how scholars have reacted to your argument.

SABINE BROECK: The book came out in 2018, the year I had my first severe ankle injury, so I could not do a book tour. In 2019 I had another injury and was bound to stay at home as well. Then in 2020, we have the pandemic. So I haven't had much chance to gauge possible responses to the book, because I haven't been out and around discussing it with colleagues and students. I see people are reading the intro chapter on academia.edu, but I can't say, of course, what they think about it. There is a review by political science professor Erica Townsend-Bell in *Politics & Gender* (2020), and a short interview here:

<https://blackagendareport.com/bar-book-forum-julia-jordan-zacheryshadow-bodiesand-sabine-broecks-gender-and-abjection-blackness> .

The title of the introductory chapter of course wants to be a provocation. I do invite readers to rethink their relation to gender as a formation, a discourse, a habitus, and as an epistemology because of the intimate relation it entertains to *enslavism*. So, my aim was not to add something (as much White gender studies that have learned to occasionally include a rather generalized hint a black woman's work for diversity purposes, or add a Black contribution to their argument), and I also did not want to go with the recently fashionable spread of intersectionality in gender studies, because in too many cases in White interventions, intersectionality does not go beyond using it as a lens to talk in more sophisticated ways about Black women, and to read Black critics and knowledge producers as crown witnesses, as ethnographers, of their own particular situation. Those contributions mostly fail to see Black knowledge, specifically Black feminism, as an intervention that calls our entire artifice of post-Enlightenment humanism, including the paradigm of gender, into question. When Wollstonecraft creates the premise: 'We are not your slaves', which served as the crucial lever to mobilize a notion of a society split by gender, but with both sides being read and valued as human, and therefore having to be granted equity in entitlements and rights and civil status, she sets in motion a trajectory of Black being's (the enslaved and as a continuation of that thingified existence of sentient being, the n....'s) fungibility for White emancipation by way of that analogy which permutates way into our present moment. So that a violent anti-Blackness has become anchored within gender theories' various sophisticated incarnations, by way of ignoring Black existence in its life-producing capacity, and its epistemic agency, but using it in so many ways for its rhetorical value. Yes, so then, one needs to be against

gender as we know it ... and I do assume this as a provocation to White readers.

ROZENA MAART: On page 6, you note: ‘I propose enslavism as a term necessary to situate current anti-Black practices in the future that slavery has made ... and thus to critique them as the ongoing afterlife of enslavement instead of addressing slavery as an event in bygone history’. How might students and emerging scholars think through this time in view of the most recent global anti-racist protests?

SABINE BROECK: When I first thought of that term – *enslavism* – it came out of a response to a disjoint. On the one hand, there were Black struggles, Black intellectual interventions, and Black knowledges throughout the US, the wider diaspora, on the African continent, and of course in South Africa, against what Saidiya Hartman has called the afterlife of slavery, the future slavery has made. On so many different levels: political, cultural, social, economic western societies have upheld an abjection of Black life on the levels of individual practices, structures, civil procedures, apparatuses like education and the police, and others. In the book, I talk about why I say abjection: I read the violence against Black life in an entirely anti-Hegelian mode: the subject-object binary has from Hegel onwards been cast as something potentially reversible, and it characterizes an intra-human relationship, a kinship that can be, and has been, struggled over, but that is ontologically a given. Following Wilderson’s and Sexton’s reading of Patterson’s notion of social death, I do not see a human relation between the (White) human on the one hand, and Black life, on the other. In the human (structurally cast as White) gaze there is no acknowledged relation between the human and the things in their possession, in their use, in their fancy, in their desires; and Black being has been made the heir of the enslaved throughout Western history. Black women have been condemned by human society, to giving birth to unfreedom (as both Sharpe, and Hartman have recently argued respectively – see the last chapter in my book). So we are faced with this ongoing gratuitous violence against Black life, this fungibility and this accumulation of Black life for the human (Hartman’s terms, see my book chapter on her work). And then, on the other hand, and in total epistemic disregard, in blatant agnotology, we have White academic systems that have banished enslavement to ‘transatlantic slavery’ which is a bygone event in history. It’s over, abolition cancelled it. We have libraries full of detailed research on almost all small and big facts of

enslavement in the transatlantic (and even the pacific) realm at this point. However, without very few exceptions, outside slavery historians no academic discipline in their White authored incarnations (not philosophy, not political studies, not social sciences, not natural sciences, not even and strikingly so many academics in postcolonial studies) have taken it as their task to ask their own epistemologies and their disciplines the simple question of what does it mean, that the human could become a free subject, because the Black could not (paraphrasing Fanon here). What does that mean for anti-Black violence ongoing – which then appears not at all like a number of aberrations of the system, or a series of voluntarily committed evil deeds by ultra-racist actors, or a lack of anti-racist training, or a not-yet-diverse-enough institutional staff? Instead it looks like an on-going human practice that needs to be theorisable as such, on the same footing as, e.g. sexism, or fascism, or colonialism. So we need to name, critique, subvert and destruct it as a set of political, cultural, social practices on repeat, not just an isolated and past historical phenomenon. We need a rupture, to go beyond historiography (which is of course the indelible basis for all this thinking!) into theory about enslavement and the future it has made for us. Like after decolonial thinkers like Dussel and Mignolo coined the term ‘coloniality’, we could talk about the metropolis and the West as colonial, never mind the presence or absence of actual colonies, we could critique a zoo as colonialist, a museum, pop songs, chocolate advertisement. So, to bring it to the present moment of militant activism against anti-Black violence which has shaken the globe recently: I am hoping the term might help to understand racial profiling in Germany as enslavist, to understand it as connected to learned White practices that make of Black being transactionable lives that the human can do all possible things with and violence to without redress, and without it being a transgression of rights. If we have a term, it might help to connect the dots between those enslavist practices across vastly different terrains which are all connected by way of sharing an acquired human *modus* and *habitus* of entitlement to and use of anti-Black violence and of a learned right to abject Black life on all possible levels.

ROZENA MAART: In your chapter, ‘Gender and the Grammar of Enslavism’, page 45, you note: ‘Gender as an analytic for women’s liberation, or, better for generating knowledge necessary to work towards overcoming patriarchal power structures and social, political, cultural and economic formations, is at the same time, a reiteration of enslavism’. Can you offer us

some insight into how you reached this position and what the implications are for those who teach in Gender Studies, and argue that gender has to be placed within the central focus of the decolonial lens?

SABINE BROECK: What I have shown in my book is the intimacy, as I call it, between the idea of human life as organized by the binary paradigm of gender (even if, as Judith Butler's pioneering oeuvre has argued, gender must be seen as a performative, as a social construction that is not in any way innate to so-called human nature) and the abjection of Black life by human society. The paradigm has worked as a tool for White women's antipatriarchal liberation by the very creation of an antagonism of the intra-human struggle over who has the right to count as human (as in patriarchy against women) versus the abjection of Black life as a fungible commodity split entirely from human value. So, while White women could and have joined a (post)-Hegelian struggle in the terms of the supposed object's resistance against the dominant subject, in order to partake in full human subjectivity, Black (post)enslaved lives and their existential struggles have been, as 'thingified' beings (seen from the human's perspective), a priori excluded from these trajectories of contention over humanness. The book thus calls for a turn in gender studies to see gender theory as an instrument of abjection, in that it has only worked so successfully for White women because it created the necessary frame for them to have their humanity recognized because they were not Black, because they were not connected to slaveness - so that slaveness could be used freely as analogy. And this strand of gender as a White antagonistic differentiation from Blackness runs through the entire canon of White gender theory.

Decolonial feminists based in Indigenous communities have also demanded an overhaul of feminist theory, critiquing the rampant White universalization of Western modernity's philosophical repertoires of masculinity and femininity that is contained even in feminism, as local construction, as it were. I think there is overlap between decolonial and Black critical philosophies in that both struggle against the 'overrepresentation' of MAN (including White women) as the universal human, in Wynter's phrase.

But analytically speaking they do not harmoniously cohere because of the different structural positions between colonized subjects turned into objects on the one hand, and the enslavist abjection of Black being as fungible thing without claims to land or nativist teleologies. I think that many people who do not want to make categorical distinctions between *enslavism* and colonialism

(or even between all the many old and new form of legal and factual forms of violent servitude across the globe) miss the crucial importance of the Middle Passage, which means they ignore the fact that Black being in the wake of New World anti-Black enslavement were by force made ‘shippable’, that is being forced into a sentient life without – in the perspective of the human abjector/enslaver - any claims to human sociality based on land, kinship, civil traditions, epistemic communities, languages, religions, and being forced by this thingified dis- and relocation into a state of self-reproducing unfreedom across generations. If you remember the legal codes of *partus sequitur ventrem*, enslaved mothers gave birth to always already enslaved children. So Black social death was ‘inheritable’ on the side of the (post) enslaved Black person, and property and fungibility of Black life was ‘bequeathable’ across generations among humans, without the enslaved being able to make any civil claims with respect to his own nativity as an Indigenous subject of land and kinship. However, both Black and decolonial feminists have again and again insisted, from Sojourner Truth to theories of intersectionality, and recent interventions in support of trans-lives that a struggle against misogyny, male violence and sexualized transgression must be urgent and vital to the struggles against racial capitalism in all its localized shapes and forms – for me, those kinds of violence are part and parcel of *enslavism*.

ROZENA MAART: Further along in chapter three, in a subsection titled ‘Enslavism and Abjection’, you assert: ‘... by contrast, modern *enslavism* needs to be analysed as the major propeller of modern capitalist mental and constituencies. If commodification and propertisation, the learning, grasping, materializing of the world as ownable, have been generally acknowledged, as the characteristics of (post)modern capitalist society, then the White abjection of Blackness, the violent making of thing beings, of packable, shippable, transportable and possessable, and as such, usable, itemizable, and fungible bodily entities, was its constitutive practice’. Can you offer some further insight here? I am thinking of the decolonisation movement in South Africa, and the manner in which previously enslaved communities are working towards recovering their forgotten, neglected and hidden histories.

SABINE BROECK: So you are asking: given that *enslavism* is the anti-Black environment which is being enacted by ‘carceral capitalist’ human society on a daily basis (from racial profiling to the prison industrial complex to the street

killings to the systematic letting-die of Black life in Katrina's New Orleans, in the Mediterranean and elsewhere, as well as in the abandonment of Black life to the pandemic) but also becomes manifest in White society's profiteering from the massive and indomitable Black creativity, knowledge, as well as from Black social, political, cultural and economic capability (what Wilderson would call 'performing freedom') how is Black life being lived, how is Black life being held tight, how is Black life being saved and is being cared for, against that perpetual onslaught? I don't think it is my position to answer that question as a White person, it seems presumptuous to pronounce on the histories of recovery and resistance, other than learning their lessons respectfully. One thing I do would like to say is that for me, there is no redemptive horizon within the world as we know it, no reconciliation or recognition to expect from the human as we know them. If the human is because the Black is not - again Fanon - for Black life to be free will entail the end of the human world as we White humans have established and dominated it. So there is a Black freedom struggle and life within and against social death - as has so massively become visible in the last years in the #BlackLivesMatter campaigns all over the world. I see it not in redemptive accommodation policies, not in harmonious diversity campaigns, nor in so-called electoral victories like Kamala Harris' vice-presidency. I think Black activists, intellectuals, artists and scientists throughout the entire diaspora have amassed incredibly persistent trajectories of counter-memory, and counter-knowledge in all areas of life over the centuries. These days in particular, one witnesses a massive global proliferation in and because of social media communication channels being so much more international, being shared in real time, and being extremely well networked. The question is much rather: how will that epistemic, cultural and political wealth, establish Black power against enslavism? The end the world as we know it means #RhodesMustFall. That entails as much a material practice of militant struggles already taking place in South Africa, and elsewhere, as it may be seen as a surging inspiring metaphor for culture, politics, social life and the economy. Land must be distributed, the police must be abolished, the state and its White power institutions must be destructed, capitalism has to be vanquished. The problem with those demands is obvious: they come without immediately transparent facile and swiftly ownable 'methodologies' to arrive at results, without immediate solutions. The challenge to us academics who have been trained to think these days that there is a quick fix positivistic research project for everything, is that these struggles

are not contained in discourse, but will demand material change, and will call for massive social, political, and cultural losses for White human possessions and entitlements. I doubt that White academia is anywhere near ready for this, given how minimal even the epistemic inroads into Higher Education still are. But the fact that there is no majority will, nor any general consensus of the ‘how to go about to reach these goals’ does not invalidate the perspective, in my opinion. I go with Frank Wilderson’s reminder: the power to pose the question is the greatest power of all. I would also caution – which, having served my tenure at this point is probably rather much easier for me to say than for younger scholars – to not put too much emphasis, let alone hope on academia, and on us as academics. I am not saying we are useless, I think we have a lot of destructive homework to do in terms of shattering epistemologies of the human. But the world does not pivot on academic institutions. I guess it is going to be much more the issue of, as we used to ask each other in my activist days as a student: which side will you be on?

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↪ Interview 02 ↩

Rozena Maart in Conversation with Jane Anna Gordon

ROZENA MAART: Can you tell us a little about your schooling – both formative and later years – and what led to your interest in political theory and your book’s subject matter?

JANE ANNA GORDON: I will speak first to what was really formative and second to how I came to political theory because, in many ways, by entering into political theory as a field, happened much later. When I think about my own scholarship, it is apparent that there were three really formative dimensions. The first was my situation: my parents are both South African, and they were both only children. So, whenever the school year would end, we would travel to South Africa to spend time with and later care for their elderly parents. I regularly travelled as a small child between Chicago, in the United States and Cape Town, South Africa, with some time spent in Kommetjie (a small town along the west coast of the Cape Peninsula). This was in the 1970s and 1980s. (I was born in 1976.)

ROZENA MAART: Wow . . . I just got goosebumps, not in terms of your age but the year you were born and what the year 1976 means to me.

JANE ANNA GORDON: Yes! The hegemonic way of talking about the United States was that we, as a country in the 1980s and 1990s, were ‘beyond South Africa’, that apartheid was part of the United States’ past. But Chicago at the time was – and it still is – the most segregated city in the United States, including cities in the U.S. South. And so, I was always much more struck by the radical similarities of these places that were supposed to be so different. But as I was a child, these were mainly formative impressions of the effort to create an anti-Black world and a radically segregated society, how that looked and felt, and then all of how it was resisted.

The second formative experience took place at the school I attended before university, the Lab School, which began as an experimental project of U.S. pragmatist philosopher John Dewey. It moved away from those origins in all kind of ways, but it remained based in Hyde Park, a stone's throw away from the University of Chicago. Most of the students who attended the school were faculty kids, and so they were very international and academically 'tuned-in'. It was also a place where some Black middle-class members and Black upper-middle class of south Chicago sent their kids. Even while the school moved quite far away from many of John Dewey's principles, it remained a place where what we were taught remained a focus of conversation and deliberation. When we were in high school, there was only one Advanced Placement class or class that was considered college-level. It was a class in United States history, and it was taught by the only teacher who was an avowed political conservative. He taught a class that reflected his commitments and priorities: he thought the 1960s marked the decline of the U.S. nation. In response, a group of Black parents of Black students at the school organised and demanded that the school institute an African American history course that students could take to fulfil the national U.S. history requirement. They fought for it, and they won. What was striking about this was,

- (a) that the parents had fought;
- (b) that they had won; and
- (c) what transpired afterwards.

I don't know if she spoke for others when she did so, but one of the history department teachers actively discouraged non-Black students from taking the course. So, for instance, I was told, 'you're a strong student; don't take that class'. This was even though it was clearly a superior course to the generic, basically White-U.S. history course. And so many of us ignored the counsel and took the class anyway. Many teachers at the school had some relationship with the University, and so, within our History department, several teachers had done advanced research in History. But none of them either felt or was deemed equipped to teach the new course. They hired a University of Chicago PhD who had been teaching at Malcolm X College. And at Lab, he taught us the course that he taught at Malcolm X College. This meant we had a university-level African American history course taught to us in high school. It became foundational for everything I have done since. I still have my books

from the course. I still have my notes. In terms of thinking about my own pursuit of an education, that experience was formative: the sense that you don't just accept curricula; you ask questions about the limitations and then try to do something about them; that doing so may require a fight and that a lot is revealed in the fight about what people ultimately value.

The third, formative experience was being the daughter of Jewish South Africans. This oriented how I think. I am not an expert on South Africa in a scholarly sense and do not know the country as a local or as an insider. Still, when I think about who was prized by my parents, they were usually heroes of the larger anti-apartheid struggle. I had heard the name Steve Biko before I really knew who he was and I heard of Chris Hani but my dad, especially, really stressed the role of Jews who had been involved in the anti-apartheid struggle. It was in response to this that my daughter, Sula's middle name is Ruth. It is for Ruth First and Ruth Gottschalk. I grew up idolising journalists and intellectuals and lawyers who had committed to fighting apartheid their primary ones and who saw doing that as an expression of being Jewish.

When I went to university, I didn't study political theory in a formal sense at all. I took courses in history and education and Jewish Studies and Religious Studies. I very deliberately avoided Political Science and Philosophy. I had heard from my folks – and they were right – that Political Science was a profoundly conservative field; historically, it had much more to do with the U.S. State Department than with anything liberatory. And with Philosophy, I expected that through it I would only encounter white men's work and that their ideas would be radically decontextualised or very abstract in the wrong sense, not in illuminating ways.

When my husband, Lewis Gordon, read through my work and pointed out themes that ran through it, I realised later that I actually had studied political theory, just through a different lens and of a different kind. I had studied the political theory of people focused primarily on historical and educational questions. I came to political theory in a round-about way in the sense that I didn't know that it was what I was looking for and what I had been trying to understand.

After I graduated, when I was working at the university, I took a political theory course. At Lewis's urging, I took a particular class in political theory to see if it was something I liked. Before it, the scholars I'd read were Frantz Fanon and Karl Marx. I had never read Plato or Aristotle or Machiavelli

or Rousseau or any of those other folks. I loved it and I realised it offered a vocabulary for addressing the kinds of questions I had been asking all along.

ROZENA MAART: So much comes to mind here. Something that really annoys me about the District Six Museum is that it is completely inaccurate in its portrayal of who lived in District Six. Xhosa people were living in District Six; there were also Jewish people living in it. One reason for that is because Jewish people couldn't own property in the CBD (the Central Business District) of Cape Town. One part of District Six, a whole block that ran from Hanover Street almost into the CBD, was mainly Jewish. These were families involved in the printing profession. I mention one person, Mister K, in my 'No Rosa, No District Six' short story, in the collection *Rosa's District Six*. This was a man who called himself Mr K because his name was Mr Kahanovitz. I take people to the District Six Museum and let them experience the space that has been curated for visitors and tourists, but in my opinion, they have created a grossly inaccurate image. My grandfather was Xhosa, and he lived there; there were lots of Xhosa-speaking people who lived there, and there was an area where Jewish people lived. It appears, from listening to what guides tell visitors and by the display of photos to depict what life was in District Six, Xhosa residents and Jewish residents were written out of the narrative.

Moving on to the next question, what was the impetus behind writing this book? Did you have an 'ah-ha' moment when you knew that you needed to write a book that brought statelessness and contemporary enslavement together?

JANE ANNA GORDON: I wish I could say that there was one clear 'ah-ha' moment. There were lots of little ones. And then one bigger one toward the end. When I began doing this project, I thought it would be a book on contemporary enslavement. I hadn't planned to conjoin that with what became the statelessness portion of the text. I came into the discussion of statelessness by invitation. Ramón Grosfoguel, Eric Mielants, and Lewis Gordon organised three conferences in Paris for over three years. One focused on global anti-Semitism, one was on statelessness, and one on global anti-Blackness. For the statelessness one, Ramón contacted me. I had just finished my PhD; I was a newly minted PhD in political science and political theory. Ramón asked if I could attend the meeting and offer a theoretical overview of the issue of statelessness. Everybody else who was coming, in a way that is much more

characteristic of the study of statelessness, was focused on a particular instance of it rather than on an overarching framework that brought each of the instances together. I thought this was daunting but also important. Through my political theory coursework, I knew about Hannah Arendt's classic discussion and the international law that emerged from World War II. These were useful to an extent, but they didn't say much or anything directly to all of the other instances of people who had been made stateless in their own homes; people who had been made stateless through processes of colonisation. And so, I began to try to figure out how to put Arendt and the international law discussions into conversation with these other instances which were far more global in their reach; far more numerically relevant than the case of European Jews in World War II. I stumbled upon a book which helped. It was James B. Minahan's *The Encyclopedia of Stateless Nations*. In encyclopedia form, it was a thick book that listed nations of people who considered themselves to be stateless. Everywhere in the world was represented. I thought this was what I needed to begin to reconcile an account of statelessness that treats it as an exceptional failure with another for which statelessness maps the Euro-modern world's creation. A formulation that really helped was in Vine Deloria Jr.'s *Custer Died for Your Sins*, where he argues that what Europeans did in the Americas began internal to Europe itself. He reminded readers that European nation-states' formation also rendered all kinds of nations of semi-sovereign people stateless through forcible incorporation. Soon after, I began to think about how statelessness as a mode has many different faces. One is the familiar one of pushing people out. Still, another is by forcing people to be inside, on terms instead of their own, which sever alternative forms of relationship between territory and belonging. That was how I entered into the issue of statelessness and how I began to understand it as a necessary lens for thinking about how political institutions had radically failed to but could connect land to political belonging.

I had been thinking about slavery in very different terms. When I first learned that there was contemporary slavery, I was surprised. I was then embarrassed that I had been surprised because it should have been clear to me that there was such a thing. In response, I had assumed that what I was going to do was a very straightforward text about contemporary slavery and how it was built out of the grammar and the continued legacies of racialised slavery rather than being, as some seemed to suggest post-racial. What surprised me was that the people I have always considered my primary intellectual and political allies – and who still are – *hated* the designation 'contemporary

slavery'. Many rejected it out of hand; others insisted it was a misnomer and a really politically dangerous one. So rather than studying contemporary slavery, tracing its connection to older forms and seeing what was new and different, I found myself wrangling with these objections. I thought they were really important, but also wrong. I began to think about how an institution will be similar and different depending on its circumstances. Of course, enslavement will look different in the twenty-first century's political-economic conditions than it did in those of the sixteenth or seventeenth or eighteenth. Many objections to studies of contemporary slavery were really objections to how White activists, primarily in England and Western Europe, had mobilised discussions of it. In many of those discussions, they seemed to turn political attention away from the ongoing legacies of racialised enslavement rather than pointing out that this newer form was a continuation of them. As I worked through those debates, I realised that if statelessness was about the failures to connect land and political membership, discussions of slavery are clearly about failures to connect labour to political membership. As such, I realised that these were two related faces of the same coin.

But the big 'ah-ha' moment for me, which I hadn't realised at the start, was that the two phenomena are fundamentally tied. These are not just two faces of Euro-modern failures, which was the premise with which I began. If you are a stateless person, you are vulnerable to all kinds of exploitation and unfreedom, including enslavement. And then, on the other side, if you've been an object of racialised enslavement, it is highly likely that even once formal, *de jure* abolition has been achieved, that you actually live in a continued condition of *de facto* statelessness. So, for instance, I think many of the conditions facing Black people in the Americas really are ones of statelessness. That was a framework of understanding that I hadn't grasped before putting the two pieces of phenomena together.

Lastly, the political theoretical questions that exploration of both statelessness and contemporary enslavement really raised were about consent and viable political institutions. If you put these questions, which face the vast majority of humankind, front and centre, what are our political obligations? What is it that institutions can do to foster connections that have been severed? What does meaningful consent look like?

ROZENA MAART: In trying to find books with a similar title, I found very few that engaged with statelessness and enslavement in the same text. Can you

talk a little about whether this was an impediment you faced during your research, and/or whether this impacted your ability to obtain a publisher for which your title may have posed a problem in the sense that they had very little to market it against?

JANE ANNA GORDON You are not wrong at all. I try really hard to be as exhaustive as I can be in research fields. I am trying to gain entrance to, and I couldn't find anything that explicitly puts statelessness and contemporary enslavement together. The closest thing that I know of is the *Statelessness and Citizenship Review*, an online journal published in England. They have a symposium in their most recent issue on the theme of statelessness and slavery. They saw the symposium as a call to think about these two issues together. I was invited to write for it because I was the one person who had done that at that point. I think the reason for the absence has everything to do with some of your initial questions, which is that many of the people who do work on either statelessness or contemporary enslavement are advocates and practitioners. In many cases, the best way to be effective is to arm oneself with the most comprehensive knowledge of a particular case. A lot of the people doing the best work on these themes are looking at individual instances. As a result, when I would say to someone that I was working on statelessness, they would ask, 'in which country or region?' That tends to be how the scholarship is undertaken. The same tends to be true with enslavement. Many people focus on very particular, historical instances: the trans-Atlantic in this period or Indian slavery in that period. There is much less work than links, and there is a lot of fear that when you do the linking, you will be very superficial about the specific cases. With contemporary enslavement, many scholars focus on a particular form of enslaved labour or a particular place where people are enslaved. People have a view of the larger whole, but there are such urgent matters that many are really focused on the legal interstices that they have to negotiate to empower people. It follows from their commitments that they have to be highly specialised. But in many ways, I see the work of political theory as thinking these things together in ways that I hope can enrich our practice on the ground. I was very appreciative when *Statelessness and Citizenship Review* approached me because it suggested that making some of these linkages might be useful to practitioners.

I would add that what I am trying to do is very informed by a move in contemporary U.S. Indigenous scholarship which is to put it and Africana

Studies into a greater and deeper discussion and to say that the distinction between land dispossession and labour dispossession has been rendered too neatly; that they have always been intermingled and much more complexly implicated with one another. I see myself as trying to mirror that move within these other literatures connected but also discrete.

In terms of publishing, I was incredibly fortunate. I had an editor who had an ‘ah-ha’ moment and thought that of course, these themes should be in conversation within a single text. I was very fortunate because he is a very unconventional editor who has always been rooted in the social sciences and open to philosophy and theory and intellectual history. A lot of what he sees himself as doing is creating new grounds for different kinds of questions. For him, the absence of a competing book is not a liability so long as the proposed book can make clear that it is offering something new. Therefore, this made a compelling case for the book’s value rather than on showing where it belonged in an existing terrain. The push for me was to make the text very readable to many people because there wasn’t already a constituted audience for it.

ROZENA MAART: The absence of published books and articles exploring these themes together says something about what we are not doing. Hopefully people will take it up. On page 5 of your text, you note: ‘As with statelessness, enslavement, historically and in the present, is not a radical exception. Indeed, enslavement is such a constant feature of human history – one that implicated so much of our species – that it is its eradication or relative transformation that requires explanation’. Can you talk a little more about this?

JANE ANNA GORDON: Sure. The best way to answer this, is perhaps: I teach an undergraduate course at the University of Connecticut called ‘Black Political Thought’. It’s a course that aims to be global in the sense that we end with Steve Biko and Amílcar Cabral and Aimé Césaire and Fanon and Es’kia Mphahlele. Still, we really begin in the seventeenth-century Americas with narratives written by enslaved men and women. The second generation that we explore is immediately following formal abolition, when you have a range of Black American thinkers essentially asking ‘why us? Why was it our community, by which they mean diasporic Africans, who were enslaved for four centuries in the Americas? Why wasn’t it somebody else?’ The question is often coming from a sense of shame and self-blame. ‘What is that we did that made it we and not any other community?’

In that period, there were two primary answers. The first was: ‘we’re not alone. We’re not unique. If you look at the world’s history, it is amazing the range of people who have been enslaved. And it is amazing how similar their circumstances were to ours’. And so, you’ll see texts that list Hebrew Israelites, that list Slavs, you name it. The point was to say: ‘we’re a lot like all of these other groups who faced this condition. We were not exceptional in our weakness. Their enslavement was achieved through similar tactics; they resisted it in similar ways; they faced similar forms of discrimination’. The point is to make the condition faced by some Africans like that of many other groups and point out that it’s not radically unique.

The second answer is to note: ‘We are unique, but not in the sense suggested by the question’. This answer says that Europeans travelled to Africa long before they began enslaving Africans. When they travelled to Africa, what impressed them was how developed Africa was – the robustness of the continent’s many civilisations, the scale of and innovation of their infrastructure – what they actually experienced was *envy*. Therefore, the argument goes: ‘we were selected for enslavement because they wanted these things, our things, and they wanted to call them their own. They wanted our labour, our resources, our ideas, but to call them European and to accrue all of the benefits’.

ROZENA MAART: It’s some of what I say to students: you don’t colonise people because they are poor; you colonise them because they are rich!

JANE ANNA GORDON: What I always say to my students is that I think both are true. On the one hand, the vast majority of human beings living today have ancestors who were literally enslaved or in some kind of forced or fundamentally unfree labour position. And a lot of the techniques of exploitation used across circumstances were indeed similar. At the same time, there was something radically unique about Africans’ experience through racialised enslavement. I end up lingering with exploring these answers because of the way they register with non-Black students. Many non-Black students come to the classroom, thinking that slavery is a Black issue. Black people alone had to deal with it and who still deal with its psychological, economic, and political consequences. Part of what I am doing is to say ‘no, your people did also face this, if in a different way’. I know some people use this move conservatively, to say ‘others faced these conditions and now they are thriving, what’s wrong with you all? Why can’t you shake off the effects as they did?’ That’s not what

I am doing. What I am saying is that the turn to Africa was historically contingent. And it did have to do with the fact that Africans offered the world a fortune. But it is partly to de-individualise the sense of self-blame for what it is that transpired. It is also to say that the scope of slavery is massive; it is not a side issue that only Black people need to think about; it is at the core of human history informing how we think of freedom and indebtedness and collective thriving. When thinking about what political institutions need to do, historical and ongoing enslavement should be the focus. It should be the focus because slavery aims to create the exact opposite of political relations. As such, it crystallises what we should be trying to achieve.

ROZENA MAART: Usurpation, invasion, occupation, enslavement, forced labour, and settler colonialism offer an account of the early stages of colonisation in South Africa, later to be followed by massacres, extermination, forced removal and displacement of various communities. I found your book insightful on so many levels. I wanted to ask you if you could reflect on aspects of your research that speak to the South African condition, and the place where we are currently, that is, a place of continued decolonisation? With some of the scholars from the United States who come into South Africa, they want to go to key places in a similar way that they want to go to Gorée Island when people go to Senegal. I wanted to organise a walking symposium to take a group of national and international scholars to the District Six spots, like where Jewish people lived in District Six and to understand what it means within the many layers of histories; to take people to Cape Point, but also to take people to different parts of the country where there has been displacement. People understand enslavement and see it as something that happened at the Cape, but they don't know, for example, that various communities were just wiped out or that they were completely displaced. And so, you have some of the questions and arguments, 'Why are the people from the Eastern Cape in the Western Cape?' Well, why do you think? There are many histories of displacement that were never covered adequately in our history books or through the news. It's like talking to students about the Namibian Holocaust or genocide (depending on the account of the historian that offers the most fitting description of the atrocity) between 1904 and 1907; about how many Nama and Herero people were massacred, starved, put in concentration camps and exterminated. This was done in the name German colonialism and German imperialism. This was of course the work of the Second Reich and used Africans as their testing

ground for the Holocaust they later perpetrated in Europe against mainly Jewish people. For all of those reasons, I thought what your book does is open up ways for me to rethink the South African situation, especially with the Cape, and think about those kinds of interconnections. What we have in South Africa are provinces. In the United States, you have states, like the state of Arizona or the state of New York. I wanted to make sure connections are being drawn or people can draw connections to South Africa because we have provinces. When you talk about statelessness, you don't necessarily mean a country, like a particular geographical country. As such, I wanted to think about how people could think about that in the South African context. As you've said, you're not a South African historian, but I think we need to have more history of the country's colonisation. I think there isn't enough. It's only been twenty-six years after 1994, and we haven't done as much as we need to. People are finding new things.

Until recently, I had only gone to UCT [the University of Cape Town] once in my life in 1980 when I interviewed for a place in the drama school. I wanted to do drama. I knew that it was contentious. I knew it was going to be difficult. There was part of me that wanted to see – *would I get in?* This was simply based on what I believed were my skills not about race or wanting to study with White students. It was also part of a fight that teenaged girls have with their mothers. There wasn't drama in any of the Black and Coloured universities. But of course, as soon as I did it, I withdrew my application. My mother was hysterical. She said I'd play a maid for the rest of my life and would bring shame on my family. Why would I want to do that, I thought? I was there once in the late 1980s and again in 1988 when I went with a friend's partner to look for particular documents and even then it felt surreal. Recently when I went to UCT, it gave me goosebumps. I felt awkward. It was built in the middle of the 1800s when slavery had just been abolished, officially. The colonials used slave labour to build it – people from District Six, and the surrounding Cape. I said this in my opening talk. Two months passed and somebody called me, asking, 'Rozena, are you psychic?' They had just found skeletons at UCT. For two years they had a whole group of archaeologists and historians that made a direct link showing that the skeletons of workers were of people from the enslaved communities in District Six. And I said, 'no, no, it's not because I'm psychic. It's just a logical thing. You're building something in the late 1820s within 2 kilometres of the slave quarter, where I lived and grew up in the 1960s and early 1970s, and you don't think the labour

will come from there? Men from the old slave quarter built your university?’ So, coming back to your book: some of what I read in your book made me think about what had happened in South Africa. I am new to KZN [KwaZulu Natal]. I used to visit Durban as a child. My grandmother had various distant relatives who we visited here when I was a young child. My grandfather had various relatives – cousins of ... ‘this one and that one’, as you say when you’re a kid – that I visited as a child in Mossel Bay and further east, what is now the Eastern Cape; that is where I thought I could live if I did not live in Cape Town. Still, when I meet students here who talk about coming from communities where they had been displaced and dispossessed, I never learned that at school or elsewhere. Well, I don’t know if this is a question for you or something I can speak to. I asked if you could reflect on how your work speaks to the South African condition, especially where we are currently.

JANE ANNA GORDON: I think you’ve offered a fantastic answer. I would only add a couple of things. The first is that if I’ve written the book and it should be useful to specific contexts, especially those like South Africa. When you were speaking, I was thinking about Tshepo Madlingozi’s dissertation (that I hope will soon appear as a book) and his point that, in many ways, in the South African context, what in the U.S. context is separated as issues of land dispossession, on the one hand and labour dispossession, on the other, merge. If you are looking to the United States for resources – only one of many other sites with resources – you need to read both explicitly Black texts and Indigenous texts because each addresses phenomenon that converge in South Africa.

At the same time, much of the new work in Indigenous Studies in the U.S. is arguing that these forms of dispossession merge there as well. Indigenous nations in the U.S. are multiply displaced; they are displaced over and over again. And each time they are displaced, they are rendered incredibly vulnerable to enslavement and situations like it. For instance, there is an amazing scholar by the name of Sarah Deer, who wrote a book called *The Beginning and End of Rape*. The book includes a chapter on trafficking where she discusses the overrepresentation of Native American girls and women in contemporary trafficking but she also asks, ‘how on Earth could you displace and disempower people the way the U.S. has with Indigenous nations and not also be engaged in trafficking them?’ She points out that of course many women were historically trafficked, and children forcibly sent to boarding

schools were vulnerable to all forms of abuse, including forced labour. Therefore, the idea that land dispossession was radically separate from labour dispossession is a myth and a really misleading one that doesn't equip us well to understand our own past. But the same was true for enslaved Africans. All enslavement also involves forced movement. It doesn't have to be across national borders, though it usually is. It can be internal to a region or internal to a nation, but in almost every instance the enslaved are literally uprooted and uprooted psychically. The whole point about an enslaved person is that their claim to their own genealogical kin and these ties having independent meaning and salience is discredited. In other words, in each instance, you see both phenomena, even if in varying degrees. The book aims to offer lenses and concepts and frames that can help to unearth these histories more richly. Many distinctions we've been working with obscure more than they reveal.

ROZENA MAART: I find your work on Rousseau fascinating in both *Creolizing Rousseau* and *Statelessness and Contemporary Enslavement*. Rousseau is very present in your new book, especially in the chapter on consent. I tend to read the contents page, introduction, references and bibliography at the start of my reading of a book to get a general sense of the book before I delve into it. On page 91, you note: 'The project of making people literally into slaves – whether or not it is ever completely achieved – involves taking someone who has consciousness, and will, that could otherwise give or withhold consent and making it immaterial. To enslave is to take a creature capable of freedom and put these enabling qualities entirely in the service of another so that the slave is literally a tool or arm of another's purpose. In these cases, to resist the obliteration of one's independent, evaluative point of view is met with violence'. Slavery in South Africa took place over three centuries – from the middle of the 1600s at the Cape, right into the 1800s and early 1900s in Natal. This was several decades after the British officially abolished slavery. Many scholars argue that the indentured labour of Indians in Natal was not slavery. Hugh Tinker, in his book, *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830 -1920*, argues that it is, and it rests on what we consider our definition of slavery. Can you talk a little about definitions of slavery and enslavement and how misleading they can be, especially in our current era in South Africa where young scholars are trying to decolonise the older, European-based, curriculum and develop ones that address the neglected and hidden aspects of South African history?

JANE ANNA GORDON: One of the big debates in slavery studies is whether you can define slavery that crosses time and context; whether there can be a transhistorical definition of enslavement. Many historians say ‘no’; if you group everything under that term, you are creating things that aren’t alike as if they are substantively similar in ways that create problems. When they stress this point, they’ll often talk about mistranslation or terms in Indigenous or vernacular languages that are translated as ‘slave’, but ‘slave’ is not really the equivalent. Many also emphasise that the role of the slave really did vary across societies. In some cases, you might enslave someone so that they could serve in the role of kin rather than primarily as a unit of labour. As such, many people talk seriously and very usefully about why we shouldn’t seek out or use transhistorical definitions of slavery. I am on the other side of that debate. We do need to proceed carefully, but you really can. One of the reasons is expressed well in an observation made by Joel Quirk: it may be true that there were important differences among slave systems, but members of each were perfectly good at exchanging slaves. The purchasers may have been using enslaved people for different purposes, but they had no problem treating slaves with different origins as equivalents. I think that is basically right. We shouldn’t flatten the differences, but there is enough substantive likeness that, with care, you can talk about slavery across time.

There is a huge difference between whether people are enslaved in imperial or non-imperial societies. One of the crucial differences is that in non-imperial situations of enslavement, there is often a much greater sense of contingency around who becomes an enslaved person. For example, if enslaved people are prisoners of war, there remained a palpable sense that, if the war had gone the other way, who were enslaved and who were enslavers could have been reversed. The greater sense of fluidity in who could become an enslaved person mattered hugely for the situation of the slave and whether they could expect an actual post-slave situation.

Another key distinction is between what I would call ‘colour-seeing enslavement’ and racialised enslavement. For instance, enslavement in the Arab world was colour-seeing: this was a huge and internally diverse domain. Many distinctions were made about what Nubian women should do or the purposes best suited to Mediterranean men. Colour and nation, always gendered, were understood to correspond with particular abilities and forms of value. So, these systems were definitely colour-seeing or colour-aware, but

they were not racialised as the trans-Atlantic slave trade would be. So, distinctions of those kinds are useful, but I think they still function coherently under the umbrella of enslavement.

What I would then say in terms of indentured labour specifically is many of the people, like Kevin Bales, who were first trying to put the issue of contemporary enslavement on the global table, did it by radically distinguishing it; by insisting on how slavery was distinct from exploited labour and different from wage slavery. Slavery was not just about exploited labour in the extreme. For the sake of making contemporary slavery appear, Bales really emphasised how enslavement was unique. That was a necessary move in the 1990s. In our moment, there are aspects of that point that remain true, but the resulting insights are only useful if we put them back in connection with other forms of exploited labour. If there is something unique about slavery, it has to illuminate those other related forms with which it shares much in common.

In the book I compare literal enslavement with wage slavery and, more relevant to your question, with the situation of guest workers. In many ways, the guest worker's situation is almost identical to the situation of the enslaved person but for the fact that guest worker programmes, at least in the U.S., hire people who volunteer to enrol in them knowing full well the exploitation that will follow. The initial point of entry is not one of kidnapping or fundamental deceit or brutal force. Likening the two is to acknowledge a basic, historical point, which was that with legal abolition in the British colonies and the U.S., everyone who had been benefitting from enslavement saw guest worker and indentured labour programmes as the next best option and often called them 'barely masked slavery'. So as far as they were concerned, what they were getting from these programs was roughly equivalent.

The point of exploring what is specific to slavery is to point out, in these other forms, what they do and don't share. Enslavement crystallises what's going on in a whole variety of other forms that are linked and related. With guest workers specifically, when I say they are so much like slaves, what I mean is that in their status in the United States, they are literally attached to their employer. They have no independent political or legal standing in relationship to the state. Their employer determines whether or not they can stay in the receiving country and on what terms. Their employer is the only voice that describes the behaviour of the person who is the guest worker. The relation is entirely unilateral, and the whole point is to secure labour for a society that doesn't have to recognise the guest worker's labour as a

contribution made *by them*. They can labour and labour and labour and feed a nation, which has no consequence for their voice, standing, or presence in the receiving nation. The programme policies require that the guest worker come into the receiving nation unattached, without kin, and spend the most vital years of their adulthood labouring. If they develop any health problems that would appear as liabilities, they are shipped home. In every political sense, the guest worker has no pathway to citizenship. In political terms, they have almost everything in common with an enslaved person. Still, for the fact that they sign a paper requesting entry and when they are deported (often for engaging in acts of protest and dissent), they often sign back up to return as opposed to being kidnapped and put in the vessel of a ship.

In many ways, I think the work of Hugh Tinker is on the money in the sense of saying: you think that trans-Atlantic slavery is distinct because it was, but we empower ourselves if we see what in it continues and how it is remade and if we use the linkages as bases for crafting new forms of solidarity.

ROZENA MAART: That is a wonderfully detailed reply. Let me turn to page 126 of your text. Here you note: ‘While being stateless and being enslaved are extreme situations, neither predicament is radically exceptional. As Hannah Arendt warned in the aftermath of World War II and Ayten Gündoğdu observed more recently, exceptionalising the condition of statelessness made the nation-state then and makes the human rights framework now appear more viable than they actually are’. Can you talk about this a little more? I am also trying to think through the decolonisation projects of various communities in South Africa, as well as the most recent mass protest in the United States starting with the death of George Floyd, which spread across the globe, and where for example in the UK and Holland, protesters focused on removing statues in the likeness of those slave traders that they felt had inflicted all forms of injustices against them and the people whose lives they ruined. Can you talk about the implications of consent on the current forms of enslavement and how we move the decolonial agenda forward?

In the UK, in many cities along the two coasts, like Liverpool, the focus for the protesting youth was to throw statues in rivers. For me, it was fascinating to see #BlackLivesMatter world-wide and current antiracism actions turn their attention to the histories of enslavement. They were not beating anyone up; they were not ‘fighting’ with anybody, as protestors are often portrayed. They were on a protest march, and when they encountered a

statue of somebody who was involved in the slave trade, they determined, ‘let’s get rid of it’. In South Africa, with #KingGeorgeMustFall, at UKZN, #RhodesMustFall, which started at UCT, the students at the time felt, ‘how can we be in a space and be reminded of all the things King George V had done and Cecil John Rhodes had done?’ I remember chatting to some of our students, Ayanda, Phezu, Nkosinathi, and a few students from that group. King George V was the last emperor of India, and Natal (the name of this province during apartheid) was the last pillar of the British Empire. So yes, students had every reason to want to remove these statues from spaces of learning and spaces that reeked of reminders of their brutal colonisation.

I am thinking of your book concerning various decolonial projects here in South Africa, whether they are the families of the Marikana massacre (communities at Lonmin’s Marikana platinum mine), or people who live in different parts of the country that have gone through different forms of dispossession. There was a march recently that was called from Johannesburg to Stellenbosch. About twenty activists hitchhiked and walked for about three weeks to this one area where there’s been a new settlement that’s been in the news. There’s been a big movement to take back the land of people living in shantytowns and it’s mainly in big cities around Johannesburg and Cape Town. So, my question was really about thinking through the George Floyd protests that spread worldwide and how young people especially sought to remove these that were a reminder of slavery.

JANE ANNA GORDON: As you spoke, I was thinking of the students in the reading group you mentioned and how you said they were very focused on land questions while your generation and mine focused much more on the mind. Statue-toppling, I think, for many people, merges the two. The footage with the toppling of many of those statues shows that the people doing the toppling of statues are mainly the younger generation. They are teenagers and young adults; people who are coming of age or into adulthood. What they’re toppling is an ideal that they were to try to be and to prize. These are also physical markers in the public spaces that they occupy most. So, the statues are a conception of an authoritative, idealised self that functions in an omnipresent and ubiquitous way. It’s *that* that they are toppling. In many ways, they are saying: ‘As we come of age, we are going to have different models and ideals of who we are to be’. The way it connects really explicitly to enslavement and colonisation is that there is a tendency to say that both phenomena were

necessary evils. Many people say, ‘look at what came of them! Look at the wealth, the civilisation. Although you can sit in criticism, you might choose them again if the alternative meant not having these things’. They are saying, ‘yes, we can prize this person because the horrors that they oversaw were a necessary evil that produced the bounty of this place’.

Many of the folks who are doing the toppling are absolutely rejecting that account. This is particularly powerful because many of them are people who are never allowed to slip up at all. There is no room for even the most remote slip-up – being late or not having the money for x, y, z, or misreading a gesture. There is no room to prize one thing and erase the horrific another side, which is always done with prized colonising and Euro-modern White figures. They are always allowed the way out; to only be seen for what is seen as the good they’ve done. And for everything else to be seen as a necessary evil.

In many ways, what many young people are saying is that you can’t build a future without some mistakes and some lamentable things. But recognising this doesn’t excuse it. It does mean that what is called necessary evils should, unlike colonisation and enslavement, actually be *necessary* evils. Neither of those was necessary at all. We could have had a completely different past, present, and future. But when monuments to those figures, in their likeness, tower over us, they are the point of view, the authoritative point of view, that marks and organises the terrain. There is something about their toppling which is an effort to clear the ground to claim responsibility for a different model of what should be prized and how it is that land and mind can meet.

ROZENA MAART: That’s an interesting response. I have an aversion to statues as I find reminders of colonialism more necessary for the colonial than for the colonised. The coloniser needs the statue to mark a victory for itself and for the colonial who stays. The coloniser wants to see, with narcissistic glee, the reflection of the coloniser in the eyes of the colonised who are forced to look, to gaze, to practice the memory of defeat each time they walk by and gaze up at a statue. Statues speak to the engravement of acts of cruelty into stone with the head of the victor as the main emblem of pride for the coloniser, much like the need to have their egotistical heads placed on money. This preoccupation with statues made of stone is very much an act which not only seeks to memorialise colonisation but one that seeks affinity to a religious act such as Moses receiving the commandments, carved in stone, therefore making the statue as though an act of divinity compelled by God. To me statues of the

heads of colonisers always read as a decapitation – and act which removes the head from the body, for the head is the seat of the consciousness, of the mind, that was willful and through a process of conquest, and for which the person is memorialised, put on display, so that the colonised are reminded, daily, of our defeat. It's also a reminder of the 'the head of state' or 'the head of the table', which is mostly the father or dominant man figure in the home.

Historically, in South Africa, there are three or four layers of disciplines or areas of work that people gravitate toward in terms of the contemporary analysis with which activism is marked. For my generation, medical doctors like Fanon, Ché Guevara, Steve Biko, and the very particular readings that influenced them influenced us. They were very instrumental in forging an understanding of the material conditions under which the oppressed lived. There is also the relationship with Jean-Paul Sartre which runs through Fanon and Biko, and with Ché Guevara there is also the Belgian Congo. This is an aside, but did you know that Patrice Lumumba was a *huge fan* of Rousseau?

JANE ANNA GORDON: I didn't know that. I wish I had!

ROZENA MAART: Lumumba was a huge fan of Rousseau. So was my father! Then there are the agronomists, like Amílcar Cabral. There is a whole generation of thinkers on the African continent who did agriculture and economics. And then the lawyers, of course, Anton Lembede, Mandela, Tambo. The literature people, Soyinka, Ngũgĩ, almost emerge at the same time as the medical doctors. That's what gave rise to the anti-colonial critiques. For the literature folks, it was about language . . . the coercion of the coloniser and the methods used, laws, legislation, etcetera whereby we were forced to speak, write and think in the language of the coloniser. . . it was about writing, it was about the imagination, it was about speech. I think it's a cycle and we have come back to the place where our students are now, more than ever, interested in Cabral, in his critique of the land. Maybe the next generation will move back to the lawyers again. But there are people like Tshepo Madlingozi, Joel Modiri, Christopher Gevers, and their peers who are doing phenomenal work in legal theory. They are also legal scholars who do critical race theory, and they come from that tradition.

Thank you, Jane – for a thought-provoking interview.

JANE ANNA GORDON: Thank you, Rozena!

↪ Interview 03 ↩

Rozena Maart in Conversation with Leonard Harris

ROZENA MAART: Can you tell readers a little bit about yourself? Where were you born? How did you become interested in philosophy?

LEONARD HARRIS: I was born in Cleveland, Ohio, the youngest son of first-generation migrants from a racially segregated south to the industrial north. At a Black college, Central State University, Francis Thomas and Marian Musgrave, my philosophy and English teachers encouraged me. I was a Black hippie, Black power advocate, poet, and generally lost.

ROZENA MAART: What stood out during your university years that made you realise that you had a path to carve for yourself within philosophy?

LEONARD HARRIS: Nothing. Francis Thomas told me that they needed a Negro at Miami University to go to graduate school in philosophy, and he picked me. Miami decided to admit a Negro to the historically all-White school, and I was the experiment.

ROZENA MAART: What led you to this particular path, where you address and then went on to develop a philosophy born of struggle?

LEONARD HARRIS: An accident, I think. My Master's Thesis at the University of Miami was 'Justification of Revolutionary Violence'. The University of Miami had no idea that was coming when they admitted me. It started with 'I do not come with timeless truths', by Franz Fanon. I passed all the classes where we had to study European philosophers, but I rarely used them in my thesis save for Marx and Voltaire; otherwise, Fanon, Stokely Carmichael, etc. That was in 1970.

ROZENA MAART: Let me ask you about Part I of the collection: 'Philoso-

phy begins with a full range of human experiences (including genocide, slavery, exploitation, misery, degradation, cognitive dissonance, cynicism, etc.). This philosophy, born of struggle, should help people assess their situation and facilitate the mitigation of struggles and misery, the actual experiences of surviving human populations’. This quote comes from the Editor's introduction of the Reader. I remember reading this from your earlier text, *PHILOSOPHY BORN OF STRUGGLE: ANTHOLOGY OF AFRO-AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY FROM 1917* (1983), long before I met you. It had a huge impact on me. Can you tell us a little about the move from the collection you edited, mentioned above, and the start of the annual conference, ‘Philosophy Born of Struggle?’

LEONARD HARRIS: This question I can answer because it was a particular day: I left the Asylum – the crazy house where philosophy is defined as ethereal, objective, inert properties such as getting privileged access to truth. I was living in a one-bedroom apartment with a wife and child in Washington DC., working a temporary teaching job about to come to an end. The poetic words of Fredrick Douglas, the abolitionist, spoke to me, ‘Let me give you the word of the philosophy of reform ... struggle ...’. Here, where we are. Misery exists. Walk unmoored by traditions that say ignore the range of human experiences and disappear into a mental world of eternal truth, ok, be born, jump into the void, and this is where philosophy begins. Nothing mysterious or courageous. It just happened.

ROZENA MAART: In Part II, you offer a conceptualisation of racism. I'm particularly interested in how ‘Necro-Being: An Actuarial Account of Racism’ (2018) came about. Necro-being, you indicate, denotes ‘that which makes living a kind of death --life that is simultaneously being robbed of its sheer potential physical being as well as non-being, the unborn’. Can you offer us some insight into the unfolding of your conceptualisation in this regard?

LEONARD HARRIS: I met Amílcar Cabral at Wabe Shebelle Hotel, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in the bar; I was introduced to Emperor Haile Selassie at a dinner after a meeting of the African Union meeting as a visiting American student; I saw Samora Machel, Mozambican revolutionary at that time, give a speech at a meeting in the summer of 1972 in Portuguese, and I did not understand a word he said; I taught a course on logic at Attica Prison, New

York, where I met men and women who had committed murder and those facing one year in jail who were there for sentences of petty theft and neither could be parents while in prison; I visited the holocaust sites in Rwanda at the Gikongoro Memorial site (rooms of decayed bodies from the killing fields), Ntarama Church (5,000 seeking refuge, killed) in 1999; I did research on the holocaust in Namibia by the Germans but could not find much help; Cabral and Selassie were assassinated; Machel died in a plane crash. The names of unborn children, killed while in the womb of women hacked to death in Rwanda, were never counted because they were unborn.

So, I do not know. I could point to books like *Medical Apartheid*, *Way of Death*, or Mbembe's *Necro-Politics*. But I think it was probably the personal impact that made such books stand out in the first place. Without health and life, nothing follows.

The last few months (May to October 2020) have been difficult and painful for all of us. At its worst, we have seen the world and at its best, in terms of the masses world-wide resisting racism and police violence. I was reminded of Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*, published 161 years ago, which focuses on the years leading up to the French Revolution. Dickens writes:

It was the best of times, and it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.

As scholars world-wide, we have been confronted with pain and anguish, and in so many ways each day brought another unexpected mass protest even in the remotest part of the world.

ROZENA MAART: *The Leonard Harris Reader: A Philosophy of Struggle* was published before George Floyd was murdered. Can you offer some thoughts on how we can think through the events of the past few months?

LEONARD HARRIS: The #BlackLivesMatter movement highlights the reality of necro-being. Anti-black racism, whether in the United States, South Africa, India, France, or Brazil has made it possible for people in radically different conditions to find a way to give voice in their own worlds. No central

protest authority – so demonic dictators and authorities do not have a single organisation or leader to try and destroy - is a benefit. The incoherency and lack of a centralised authority directing protest in these times of radically different challenges to our very existence – best of times and worst of times – has movements and forms of community, making new traditions, that should give us hope.

ROZENA MAART: As you know, since #RhodesMustFall the discussion on decolonisation has intensified. How might students use *The Leonard Harris Reader* to think through crucial questions on decolonisation?

LEONARD HARRIS: Look for concepts that do not tie you, concepts in the old world; give yourself room to be born of your platform. To be 'decolonised' for me is not to spend time talking to folks who never talk to you or trap you inside concepts that make you a slave to a dead world. In Tuskegee, Alabama in 1980, I had letters from publishers that had rejected the articles I submitted to standard philosophy journals. I threw them all away and said to myself that I would never again try to be in a world that was never intended for me anyway. That's why new books and organisations, *Philosophy Born of Struggle* (1983); Philosophy Born of Struggle Association; Alain Locke Society, etc., and going to every African philosophy meeting I could find. Leave the Asylum. The void means you have to be creative.

Book Review

Addressing the Afterlife of Slavery

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Gender and the Abjection of Blackness

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In *Gender and the Abjection of Blackness*, Sabine Broeck, recently appointed Emeritus professor at the University of Bremen in Germany, argues that the contributions by Black feminist thinkers have not adequately been taken into consideration by White women scholars in their attempt at constructing Women's Studies, Gender Studies and African American Studies, among others, and as such lacks a full understanding of Black women's history in the United States and the African diaspora. Broeck spent more than thirty years teaching American Studies, Gender Studies and Transatlantic Black diaspora Studies in Germany and visiting locations across the globe. Among her many contributions to this field of study, Sabine Broeck is a founding member and until 2015 was the director of the Institute of Postcolonial and Transcultural Studies (INPUTS) at the University of Bremen. I have been familiar with Broeck's work for more than two decades and was not the least bit surprised to see *Gender and the Abjection of Blackness* in print. The 238-page book was published by SUNY Press in 2018 and contains, six thought provoking chapters, mouth-gaping revelations, with sound arguments and a string of insightful, well-sourced theoretical underpinnings, which leaves one breathless at times whilst questioning why any category of gender should be used at all.

In many ways, what Broeck demonstrates in the book is what many have debated but few have managed to put together as succinctly as she has, in six riveting chapters. Broeck's main focus in the book is with the ways in which, 'White knowledge formation', has come about, and the conditions under which Black history and Black thought has been side-lined, yet used in order to construct a foundation for gender identity and gender politics.

In Chapter One, 'Against Gender: Enslavism and the Subject of Feminism', Broeck makes her point of departure clear. Right at the start of Chapter One, on page 1, Broeck makes a concerted effort to situate herself politically, and in doing so asks questions she knows many who do not know her politics or her work will ask: 'how can one – in my case a senior white feminist German scholar who has struggled with and through decades of transnational, (post-)multicultural, intersectional, queered, intergenerational feminism – be against gender. Why – and how can one, or even need one— read the category of gender as constitutively anti-Black, not just in cases of racist practice but as a theoretical formation?' Through careful consideration of her words, Broeck takes us through a series of what she calls, 'white post-Enlightenment' claims to show, what she believes is the gist of the book: 'to put gender as a heuristic concept in more intimate but quite agonistic relation to enslavism, as the historical and ongoing practice of structural anti-Blackness, with the result of seeing the persistent intergenerational blockage on the part of white gender studies against black epistemological interventions not just as an individual white supremacist practice but as a structural problem of theory'. In an attempt not to summarise or clumsily paraphrase Broeck's position, I have taken to quotes so as to ensure that the reader gets the full meaning that Broeck intends. Perhaps one of the key concepts in *Gender and the Abjection of Blackness* is Broeck's concept of enslavism, which Broeck proposes as a 'necessary term to situate current anti-Black practices in the future that slavery has made ... and thus to critique them as the ongoing afterlife of enslavement instead of addressing slavery as an event of bygone history (page 6)'. In chapter Two, 'Abolish Property: Black Feminist Struggles Against Anti-Blackness', Broeck engages with Black feminism's history in the United States as articulated by key scholars such as Michelle Wallace, Cherrie Moraga, Alice Walker, Toni Cade Bambara, June Jordan, Sylvia Wynter, Saidiya Hartman, Beryl Gilroy, Hortense Spillers, Patricia Williams, and several others, as a means to offer what their work has taught her about knowledge formation. To this she offers an interesting hesitation: 'Talking

about the challenge of Black feminism entails, of course, a problematic for a white gender studies descendant like myself, and a German at that, who needs to steer clear of ventriloquism or unbidden translation'. I can see several students with whom I am engaged raising their eyebrows and wondering why White South African women researchers who make the news for undermining and appropriating Black peoples' experiences don't seem to suffer from this dilemma of developing a consciousness of their Whiteness after 1994, where they possibly did not get the memo that says: 'You do not own Black experience just because your White beneficiary status grew from it'. In Chapter Three, 'Gender and the Grammar of Enslavism', Broeck address the language of gender, and how it has been used in opposition to slavery. One need only think of the patriotic song, 'Rule Britannia', strongly associated with the British Navy and the British Army, written by Scottish poet and playwright, James Thomson and put to music by Thomas Arne in 1740. The main chorus is as follows: 'Rule Britannia! Britannia rules the waves, Britons never, never, never, will be slaves'. The chorus was particularly popular when White women sought the vote in the United Kingdom, a subject I discussed with Broeck when she visited UKZN in 2017 and spoke to students of her arguments in this very book, now in print.

On page 44, Broeck notes:

Gender as an analytic for women's liberation, or, better, for generating knowledge necessary to work towards overcoming patriarchal power structures and social, political, cultural and economic formations, is at the same time a reiteration of enslavism.

I leave readers to engage with her many examples. The main strand of her argument continues in Chapter Four, 'Abjective Returns: The Slave's Fungibility in White Gender Studies'. Here Broeck takes on Simone de Beauvoir, and the early history of so-called second-wave feminism, whose work students read as a required text almost globally since the model of undergraduate gender studies and women's studies, forged by White women as a result of the politics of race and empire across the globe, which has historically put them in positions of false authority within the university setting because of their beneficiary status as recipients of histories of enslavement and empire building. Broeck asserts on page 97, 'What does it mean, in this context, that Simone de Beauvoir, in what has become almost universally recognized

as one of the founding texts of second-wave feminism, grounds her inquiry into the situation of “woman” in Hegelian allegory? The premise of her analysis rests on the seductive analogy of woman and slave that, in the long history of Western White feminism, dates back to early foundational texts like Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication*. Mary Wollstonecraft’s title, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women: With Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects* (1792), is considered one of the earliest works of feminist philosophy even though Wollstonecraft spoke for and on behalf of White English women in Britain, asserting that it is the lack of education for woman, a right she suggests should be bestowed to match their social standing in society ... that if these particular women can demonstrate the ability to reason, which of course is due to their class privilege where dinner-time conversations include the reverence of colonisation and empire building, they should be afforded the same rights as the men of their social standing. Britain was not only reeking of the blood of those they enslaved at the time but the benefit it brought to the middle and upper middle classes was no secret at the time that Wollstonecraft wrote her text. It is interesting of course to see reason be established alongside the unspoken but fully benefactor status of ignorance, denial, disavowal, and the neglect of a consciousness of the colonised and usurped as being human. Wollstonecraft’s book is set against enslavement, and she asks for White women not to be treated as slaves because White women have the capacity to reason. In Broeck’s Chapter Five, ‘Post Gender, Post Human: Braidotti’s Nietzschean Echoes of Anti-Blackness’, Broeck reads Braidotti’s Posthuman through Gilles Deleuze, and asks very early on in the chapter: ‘From where can Black articulation take place, if thinking is structurally, in white philosophy, the name of the human?’ (page 177). She continues, ‘The “slave” is not a human in a cage. The “slave” is a shippable, fungible thing outside that orbit where freedom/conatus struggles with conditional encagement so that human philosophy can exist. The “slave” is the outside of the cage, that horror which looms beyond the human, that which gives the human the strength to resist the cage, to think. To be human is to be raised to know in oneself that one’s conatus will not bear the cage becoming perennial’ (page 177). Broeck has been engaging with Braidotti’s work for several years and as such takes on her text *The Posthuman* (2013), and examines the premise of it. Braidotti’s work is well quoted and well regarded among White feminists in the United States, Australia and Europe, at the exclusion of her very problematic anti-Black analysis. Braidotti’s work speaks to White feminist scholars that wilfully

exclude the enslavement of Black people of their poststructuralist and uppity postmodernist critiques, that lack the very substance they claim for themselves – reason and the ability to be human. Broeck is direct and diligent throughout the chapter of her critique of Braidotti, noting: ‘I see Braidotti’s ruminations partake in the ongoing trajectory of post-Enlightenment conceptualization of self-empowering white voluntarism as liberated (post-)subjectivity’, Broeck notes, on page 191. I leave the many arguments and critiques Broeck puts forward in this chapter of anti-Blackness by scholars who posit post gender and post human arguments to the reader. In the closing chapter, ‘On Dispossession as a False Analogy’, considerably shorter than the five that precedes it, Broeck sums up the goal of her project as follows: ‘The goal of this book has been to make visible the white practice of anti-Blackness within and as part of Western Eurocentric modernity while avoiding voyeuristic repetition of Black abjection’. *Gender and the Abjection of Blackness* is a must read for students and scholars engaged in debates on histories of enslavement, decolonisation, gender studies and critical race theory.

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Book Review

Enslavement as a Constant Feature of Human History

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Statelessness and Contemporary Enslavement

By Jane Anna Gordon

New York & London: Routledge, 2019, 164 pp.

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In her third single-authored book, *Statelessness and Contemporary Enslavement*, Jane Anna Gordon, Manchester (UK) born and Chicago raised, of Jewish South African parents, offers readers a thought-provoking, rigorous and well-formulated series of arguments in four chapters, an introduction and a conclusion. Jane Anna Gordon is a Professor of Political Science by training and has university affiliations in American Studies, El Instituto, Global Affairs, Philosophy, and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at the University of Connecticut, at Storrs. Jane was also the president of the Caribbean Philosophical Association from 2014 to 2016. *Statelessness and Contemporary Enslavement* is an articulate, diligently documented, beautifully written, and superbly argued book that proved difficult to put down. It offers readers the much sought after "faces of enslavement", and "degrees of statelessness" that we would all like to know of, as we look back at our past and contemplate the way forward amid the most recent world-wide protests that brought a global face to the state of racism and enslavement still in operation. A large portion of the protests that swept the transatlantic from the Americas to Europe geared their acts of rebellion at toppling statues of colonialists involved in the slave trade, the evidence of which we witnessed from South Africa to the United

Kingdom and the United States. #KingGeorgeMustFall and #RhodesMustFall, speak to our youth's refusal to contend and identify with statues of colonialists who usurped our land and enslaved our people.

Histories of enslavement have such a strong presence in South Africa, especially at the Cape, the city where Jane Anna Gordon's father, John Comaroff was born of Jewish parents who escaped Nazism in Lithuania and the Ukraine. *Statelessness and Contemporary Enslavement* will resonate with South African readers at many different levels. Not only does the book bring a broader, more holistic approach to the study of histories of enslavement, it also ties it very closely, and for the most part simultaneously, with statelessness, and usurpation. The varied examples within the European continent will come as a surprise to readers; it is a warm welcome to me since I have spent a great deal of my adult life explaining histories of enslavement to students I work with, that are not derivative or limited to the African continent, but extends far beyond it, even how I trace the history of psychoanalysis through the youthful Jewish young man Joseph, twice enslaved, who later becomes the dream interpreter and saves Egypt and her people from starvation.

In reading through and following on from Jane Anna Gordon's references, I realised that few books bring the study of statelessness and enslavement together; they are usually studied as though they are separate entities when in fact Jane Anna Gordon brings them together, in the same text, on the same page, where their study is thrust in full force. What is remarkable in this text is that Gordon has steered away from the individualistic accounts of statelessness and/ or enslavement that practitioners of law and human rights lawyers often take up with a singular, individualistic, case-study approach but focused her attention on a broad range of research that is global in scope. Whilst Jane Anna Gordon is known as a political theorist, and a great one at that, her work in Political Theory and more generally Africana Studies, in *Statelessness and Contemporary Enslavement*, also draws on the work of several Indigenous scholars. The range of scholarly engagements makes her text rich and varied. It offers a study of a broad range of geographical locations, peopled by fleshed histories, to better understand statelessness and enslavement.

Jane Anna Gordon's vast knowledge of political theory and Black studies comes through very strongly in this book, maintaining sensitivity where necessary whilst not taking short-cuts on rigorous research for which the book will be remembered. Among the many arguments and citations that are

systematically presented in the introduction is Gordon's reliance on Jacqueline Stevens's 2010 text, *States Without Nations: Citizenship for Morals*, in arguing a reconceptualisation of states by separating states from nations.

In the introduction, titled, "Two Euromodern Phenomena", Jane Anna Gordon offers readers a comprehensive introduction to the book in seventeen pages. From the start, she is transparent in her determination to bring together statelessness and enslavement, even though precedents follow that offer quite the contrary. "As with statelessness, enslavement, historically and in the present, is not a radical exception. Indeed enslavement is such a constant feature of human history – one that implicated so much of our species – that is its eradication or relative transformation that requires explanation" (page 5). In the introduction and the four chapters that follow on from it, there is a thorough engagement of the work that set the foundation for scholarly work on enslavement, such as the work of Eric Williams' text, *Capitalism and Slavery*, first published in 1944, cited by its reproduction date of 1994. Eric Williams was also the first prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago. Born after the first world war, Williams completed his first degree in 1935 at the University of Oxford, where he was ranked at the top of his class. He later obtained a D. Phil, aided by a grant made available to Alfred Claud Hollis. Williams received his PhD but not before travelling around Europe and experiencing first-hand the anti-Black racism of Nazism in Germany. I mention this here, since this particular history of Caribbean scholars like Williams and later Stuart Hall, who also went to Oxford under a Rhodes scholarship, was among a group of esteemed scholars who investigated the relationship between and among racism and empire, the enslavement of peoples in the colonies, which features among some of the examples in Gordon's book.

In Chapter One, "Degrees of Statelessness", Gordon notes: "If the production of stateless people in Europe and North America was bound up with how these nation states refashioned themselves in the first quarter of the twentieth century, their initial formation also rendered nations of people stateless" (page 19). In this chapter, Gordon unpacks several global arguments, with significant examples, and shows how statelessness when specific to regions that are not part of our imagination of enslavement, blur our understanding of the identity of the citizens who are left homeless and stateless. In Chapter Two, "Theorizing Contemporary Enslavement", she draws our attention to contemporary enslavement, which resonates with the current era of scholar-cum activists. I immediately thought of debates that have centred

around whether indentured labourers who were brought from India to Durban by the British can be considered enslaved, and/or whether the conditions for enslavement, which many have argued do not include guest-workers, matter, rather than the acts of dehumanisation that point to ownership and the inability to articulate any form of consent. The latter has been a topic of debate at many events in Durban among a growing number of scholars interested in the study of slavery in South Africa. Jane Anna Gordon asserts: “Just as it is useful to see what is similar and distinct about slaves and wage slaves, it is also illuminating to consider what enslaved people and guest-workers do and do not share in the relationship of their work, status and foreignness. This is because guest-worker programs produce a unique form of precariousness that renders those affected most prone to literal enslavement and other closely related forms of forced labor,” (Page 66). I leave readers further to explore the relationships of guest-workers on their own. In Chapter Three, “On Consent”, Gordon immediately ushers her reader into the work of Carole Pateman and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In this chapter, Gordon truly shines, as she zooms into arguments on consent that are not only pertinent to the study of enslavement but also to gender, sexuality studies, LGBTQIA studies, in unpacking the agency of the subject who is oppressed and what kind of permission, in a form regarded as consent, any oppressed person who is owned as property can offer. She notes: “There is no doubt that consent had a tragic career from its beginning. Emerging in the seventeenth century in Europe with a growing number of masterless men whose existence challenged reigning conceptions of social order based on natural hierarchies of power and subordination, it was not inevitable that it would attain hegemonic status” (page 82).

In Chapter Four, “Lucrative Vulnerability”, Jane Anna Gordon puts forward a series of arguments that scholars on the legitimacy of slavery have made, especially whether it is a misnomer when applied to forced or bonded labour in contemporary society. Gordon also unpacks the racialised and gendered grammar of enslavement, such as “contemporary forced labour” or “trafficking”. Gordon opens up a series of arguments as to why particular conceptual frameworks have steered disciplines such as Women's Studies and Gender Studies, and what the pitfalls of these suggest.

Statelessness and Contemporary Enslavement is a must-read. What is particularly significant is that the content not only crosses disciplines but makes a magnificent case for the knowledge it brings forward on two subjects – statelessness and enslavement – as an intertwined study that we have rarely

Book Reviews

had the benefit of engaging with simultaneously. Scholars of history, philosophy, literature, politics, and those within art and music will benefit significantly from understanding enslavement and statelessness histories. It is equally beneficial to read and become familiar with Jane Anna Gordon's earlier texts cited below.

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Book Review

Philosophy Born of Struggle

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A Philosophy of Struggle: The Leonard Harris Reader

Edited by Lee A. McBride III

London & New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020, 320 pp.

ISBN: 9781350084223

A Philosophy of Struggle: The Leonard Harris Reader, is Leonard Harris's long awaited collection of writings, that cover the length of his life's contribution. The title of the book is apt at describing the body of work that Leonard Harris began to shape since the early years following his doctoral degree at age 26 in 1974, from Cornell University. Influenced by Alain Locke – philosopher, educator and one of the founders of the Harlem Renaissance – and Lydia Maria Child – abolitionist, novelist and women's rights activist – Harris was also influenced by David Walker and Angela Davis. After working for a few years Harris soon realised that the kind of philosophy that he was expected to teach was not the philosophy that embraced all of the human experiences in the world. Harris asked questions about human life – the full range of human experiences, including, as he asserts, genocide, slavery, degradation, misery and cognitive dissonance. Harris did not stand idly by as the then philosophy curricula demanded that he teach courses based on the thoughts and ideas of European 'high-caste leisurely men' but broke into the White mythology of Philosophy and exposed its transparent, unnamed, White Supremacy which it shared with the Ku Klux Klan, stripped it of its core, and returned it to its owners. Harris did not want to embrace a set of ideas that stood in stark contrast to what he understood human experiences to be. It did not take long after Harris's doctoral degree and the first few years of his teaching, to

bond with Lucius Outlaw, Bernard Boxill, Howard McGary, Frank Kirkland, Everett Green and a few noted others, who shared his insights. In 1983, less than 10 years after he obtained his doctoral degree, the first collection, *Philosophy Born of Struggle*, was published, regrettably, many years after my doctoral degree, which I now nonetheless own a copy of. Leonard Harris is one of the founding members of *Philosophy Born of Struggle*, which emerged in 1988 for the first time as an annual conference. I have been reading Leonard Harris's work for more than two decades, and have ensured that students I work with, many of whom are now alumni, have read his work and engaged with his ground-breaking concepts. Lee A. McBride III as the editor of this collection has done an excellent job in introducing readers to the book composed of sixteen chapters that are divided into five parts, each covering a particular subdivision in Harris's work. Lee A. McBride III, himself a noted philosopher, who works in ethics and insurrection, philosophy of race, decolonial philosophy and environmental philosophy, worked with Harris at the University of Purdue, and knows the work of Harris well.

Whilst it is not easy to offer a brief or even broad overview of *A Philosophy of Struggle: The Leonard Harris Reader*, I have chosen a few excerpts that speak directly to what readers can expect within this monumental text.

The opening of the book, as Part One, Chapter One is titled, 'Prolegomenon', which roughly translated means, 'what ones says beforehand'. And what Harris says beforehand, is, 'What, *then*, is "Philosophy Born of Struggle"' *Philosophia nata ex conatu* ... from Latin, which reads as: philosophy born of the endeavour or ... born of the struggle. Here Harris denounces the premise that we often encounter which is concerned with wisdom and reason, which in itself poses questions such as 'whose wisdom?' or 'whose reason or reasoning?' And whilst the latter are intellectual concerns that I enjoy unpeeling, for the present, it is important to know that Harris addresses both the question of philosophy and what philosophy born of struggle means, by situating the human as a universal subject within a complex yet full range of human experiences.

He notes: 'This philosophy, born of struggle, should help people assess their situation and facilitate the mitigation of struggles and misery, the actual experiences of surviving human populations' (page ii).

Part Two, under the subtitle of 'Immiseration and Racism (Oppression as Necro-being)', consists of three chapters: The Concept of Racism, What, Then, Is Racism and Necro-Being.

Harris shows the interconnections between the Necro-being, ‘that which makes living a kind of death’. Very much in a Bikoist vein, we understand Harris’s determination to excavate the materiality of racism by drawing connections between and among racism, ill-health and death. It is no surprise that some of our key revolutionary thinkers studied to be medical doctors – Ché Guevara, Frantz Fanon and Bantu Stephen Biko, because they understood how the implementation of racism, laying the grounds for the material conditions under which people could be racialised, gave rise to high death rates among the oppressed and downtrodden and determined the physical and mental health of the person upon whom racism was inflicted.

Part Three, ‘Honour and Dignity (Reason and Efficacious Agency)’, consists of four chapters, that address Autonomy, Emasculation, Empowerment, Tolerance, Reconciliation, Dignity and Subjection. Scholars engaged in debates on democracy and notions of autonomy in the South African context, in particular although not exclusively, will find this section particularly interesting as Harris asks questions about the misery of citizens of democracy. I think here of South Africa, twenty-six years after the first democratic elections, and still stumble when uttering the word democracy. This segment also addresses questions such as honour and dignity and the difficulties Harris observes with the society he lives in not showing respect toward African American men.

In Part Four: ‘An Ethics of Insurrection, Or Leaving the Asylum’, is composed of three chapters that offer Harris’s work on Insurrectionist Ethics. Harris here, in these three chapters, tackles insurrectionist ethics, asking a similar question Albert Memmi asked in *The Coloniser and the Colonised* about verbal protestations and political action. Insurrectionists – people who rise up against authority – are punished within the university context, even by their peers who seem to speak out of many sides of their face when espousing decolonial politics but want a polite, etiquette-filled one that does not hurt the coloniser’s feelings, especially if the coloniser has invited them home for a drink. We know that the possibility of revolt in South Africa were placed in the hands of Bishop Tutu whose relationship with God was sought to help him steer the colonised, oppressed and previously enslaved towards a politics of forgiveness. Harris asks questions about the purpose of a philosophy that allows for arguments but does not allow for strategies or motivations for the oppressed to revolt, and claim it as reasonable and just.

Part Five, ‘Bridges to Future Traditions’, offers five chapters that focus

on community and building the future. ‘Universal human liberation is freedom from the very boundaries of the names through which freedom is sought’. Harris offers many insightful and thought-provoking strategies for future traditions. There is not one narrative that Harris puts forward as indicative of what the future might hold but several. I suggest readers engage with all of what these chapters offer.

Given South Africa’s interest in decolonisation and decoloniality as an ongoing, interpersonal, psychosocial, educational, wealth and land return and redistribution project, *A Philosophy of Struggle: The Leonard Harris Reader* offers young, emerging and established scholars the possibility to think alongside a philosophy of struggle, one which most will recognise. As someone who has been enormously influenced by Leonard Harris’s work, especially since it provided the possibility for my own work called, ‘Philosophy Born of Massacres’, it was particularly insightful not only to learn of the work of Alain Locke, born in 1885 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, but to learn that when Locke was at Hertford College at the University of Oxford, fellow student and member of the cosmopolitan club, Pixley ka Isaka Seme and he were closely acquainted. After studying at Columbia University in the United States, Pixly ka Isaka Seme entered Oxford in 1906 to study for his law degree. Seventy-seven years earlier in 1871, in the same month as Leonard Harris birth, our very own Charlotte Makgomo Mannya was born in Fort Beaufort in the Eastern Cape. A gifted singer, Charlotte Mannya, upon her marriage and today known as Charlotte Maxeke, travelled with her choir to London, then Canada and the United States. After the choir was abandoned in the United States, the members were assisted through a church scholarship to attend Wilberforce university. It is here where the first Black South African woman to obtain a university degree, Charlotte Mannya Maxeke, did so under the tutorship of Pan-Africanist, W.E.B. du Bois. Not only are there many more connections between Africana philosophy and South African philosophies born of struggle, the work of Bantu Stephen Biko being among them, there are many more that need to be unearthed now that decoloniality is here to stay, whether its disgruntled disavowers like it or not.

A Philosophy of Struggle: The Leonard Harris Reader is a must read for students within philosophy, especially those within the field of philosophy of race, African and Africana philosophy and philosophies of liberation. This long awaited collection is a global phenomenon as Harris has produced a collection that will enrich the lives of all us across the globe who have for many

years followed his work and shared them with others. This is without doubt a monumental read!

I would like to close this review, with the words that Professor Leonard Harris recites when he opens the Philosophy Born of Struggle conference, and when he closes it:

Let me give you a word of the philosophy of reform. The whole history of the progress of human liberty shows that all concessions yet made to her august claims, have been born of earnest struggle

This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, and it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will

If we ever get free from the oppressions and wrongs heaped upon us, we must pay for their removal. We must do this by labor, by suffering, by sacrifice, and if needs be, by our lives and the lives of others.

(Frederick Douglass 1857. *If There Is No Struggle, There Is No Progress.*)

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Fulela, B. 2008. Checking the Post: Derrida and the Apartheid Debate. *Alternation* 15,2: 11 – 37. Available at: <http://alternation.ukzn.ac.za/Files/docs/15.2/02%20Fulela.pdf>. (Accessed on 08 May 2017.)

Journal article by two authors

Mkhize, N. & N. Ndimande-Hlongwa 2014. African Languages, Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), and the Transformation of the Humanities and Social Sciences in Higher Education. *Alternation* 21,2: 10 – 37. Available at: <http://alternation.ukzn.ac.za/Files/docs/21.2/02%20Mkh.pdf>. (Accessed on 08 May 2017.)

Book by one author

Moran, S. 2009. *Representing Bushmen: South Africa and the Origin of Language*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press. (Rochester Studies in African History and the Diaspora, Book 38.)

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Smit, J.A. & J. van Wyk 2001. Literary Studies in Post-apartheid South Africa. In Zegeye, A. & R. Kriger (eds.): *Culture in the New South Africa after Apartheid*. Volume 2. Cape Town: Kwela Books & History on Line.

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