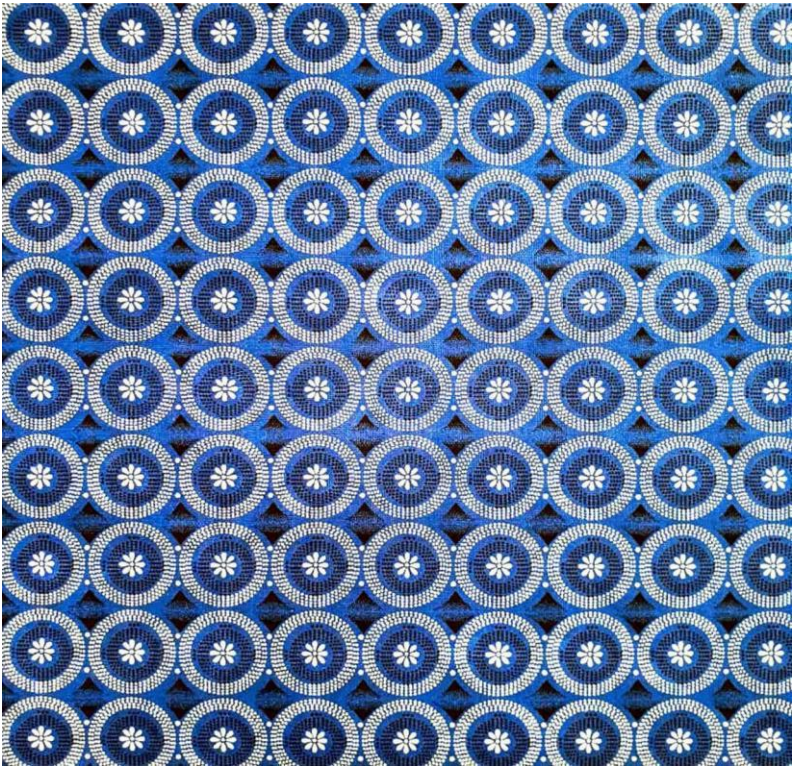


ALTERNATION

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Decoloniality and Decolonial Education: South Africa and the World Volume I



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Alternation

**Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of the
Arts and Humanities in
Southern Africa**

**Decoloniality and Decolonial Education:
South Africa and the World
Volume I**

**Guest Editor
*Rozena Maart***

2020

**CSSALL
Durban**

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Editorial

Decoloniality and Decolonial Education: South Africa and the World

Rozena Maart

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The decision to put together this collection began as an initiative to engage with presenters and participants of the UNISA Decolonial Summer School of 2019 beyond the content that was presented. UNISA, referring to the University of South Africa, was established in 1873 and is South Africa's foremost distance learning university. UNISA is situated in Pretoria in the province of Gauteng, which is one of South Africa's three capital cities where the executive branch of government is located, with over 400,000 registered students, including its international student population that come from 130 countries around the world. UNISA's Decolonial Summer School commenced in 2013 for the first time, under the direction of the School of Humanities, and has thus far run every year except for 2021, due to the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

This collection is composed of an introduction, seventeen articles by eighteen authors, two opinion pieces, two roundtables by eight authors, two of whom have articles in the collection, three interviews and three book reviews, and as such contain the work of twenty-eight contributors. Critiques of racism, definitions of decolonisation and decoloniality, histories of enslavement, coloniser – colonised relations, the coloniality of language, the colonial teaching practices of empire colonies, Black and racialised bodies as sites of racism and colonisation in the afterlife of apartheid, the recolonised economy, and the European colonial curricula that continue to support such practices, especially in law schools in South Africa, run between and among the work in this collection. Not only are we confronted with the overwhelming critique of colonial pedagogies, we are also confronted with an ongoing critique of teaching and learning practices within the university system that almost all of the contributors draw attention to. Some authors utilise the terms, Black and White when referring to racialised identity, with capitalisation, and some do not – those who write Afrika in its newly adopted form within the

South African academy, and those who do not. The collection made provision for these choices, with the full knowledge of how named identities and their writtenness differ from one region to the next.

Drawing attention to the local – South Africa – and the various locations within the world – Bhutan, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Germany, India, Ire-land, Jamaica, Oman, Senegal, the United States of America, the United Kingdom – are not just places where contributors were born or have lived and worked but places where our agency remains active, where we engage with the world, where we challenge the many ways in which colonisation continues to inform how we write, speak, think, imagine, and produce knowledge.

In this collection, we took a broad approach to the study of decolonisation. The collection is composed of varied engagements with decolonisation and decoloniality and is intentionally inclusive of community-based contributions – those outside of the academy, as well as from within it. Students, alumni, activists, and former students play an important role in this collection not only because they are shaping the work that is being carried out in activist communities in South Africa and around the world but because many are student-cum-activists and are, as such, actively involved in communities where dispossession of Indigenous land, forced removals, and forced migration continue to inform the afterlife of apartheid and colonisation.

Strict protocols with the blind-review process were observed throughout, including the work of the editor, which was handled by the editor-in-chief. The process is taken very seriously in the South African context and one that secures that a journal maintains its national and international standards of excellence and repute. Because of the length of time that this process took, we decided to open the call to contributors and participants of the UNISA 2020 Summer School (referring to the University of South Africa and hereafter referred to as the school), as some of the 2019 discussions found continuity there too. All forms of collective work require a commitment to see that the process is adhered to in the best possible way. Here, for this collection, the process took longer than expected as the pandemic forced us into isolation without colleagues to rely on for face-to-face dialogue and discussion, administrative and technical support, which we often take for granted and only realise when those services are not available to us, especially when computers and printers crash, malfunction, and we are left helpless, incapable of furthering the work we stored on computers upon which we rely. For students

who are contributors, this process was more difficult than anyone anticipated as the closure of library facilities impacted access to resources enormously.

The format that has been chosen situates Puleng Segalo's article, as one of the organisers of the school, as the opening article.

Puleng Segalo's, 'Critical Reflections on UNISA's Decolonial Summer School: In Conversation with Rozena Maart', takes us directly into the call to decolonise the university curricula in South Africa. From Segalo's input, we get a sense of why and how the presenters carry out their work with the community of scholars who attended the school. Segalo informs readers on how the Decolonial Summer School began at UNISA, whilst also sharing her reflections on the accomplishments and challenges of the school in a dialogue session with the editor of the collection. The dialogue format was seen as an important shift in the style of the article as it allowed for questions to be put forward and for the two researchers to engage one another. As the opening article in this collection, it gives an overview of the impetus of the school and why it was offered annually with the broad range of participating national and international scholars. Hereafter, the sequence of articles follows a thematic order and are divided into four segments.

The **first segment** is composed of four articles and features the work of Lewis R. Gordon, Sabine Broeck, Thomas Meagher, and Patrick Bond and Gumani Tshimomola as co-author. The articles in this segment address definitions of colonisation, decolonisation, decoloniality and racism (and their interrelationships) whilst also noting the afterlife of slavery, and what Sabine Broeck terms 'enslavism'. The third article in this segment, by Thomas Meagher, addresses the spirit of seriousness as a problem for decolonial theory, whilst Bond and Tshimomola address the process from recolonisation to decolonisation in the South African economy.

Lewis R. Gordon's article, **'Some Thoughts on Decolonisation, Decoloni-ality, Racism and Challenges of Citizenship in Communities of Learn-ing'**, situates, from the outset, what he calls the 'metatheoretical debates', a struggle before the struggle, among theorists who not only spend their time differentiating decolonisation from decoloniality but about the location of where these struggles take place. Lewis Gordon takes readers through some of the differences in the arguments of decolonisation, as taken up by scholars of the global South, some of whom have engaged with questions of dependency whilst others address anti-Eurocentrism thought. In

this regard, Gordon foregrounds the work of Samir Amin, Africa's leading political economist, and the work of Peruvian sociologist and humanist thinker, Aníbal Quijano, who developed the phrase, 'coloniality of being'. The world lost both Amin and Quijano in 2018. Gordon is not arguing against poststructuralism. Rather, he is concerned with the kind of poststructuralism, decolonial scholars are engaged with, and whether they produce the knowledge against the Eurocentric paradigm they assert their vehemence to.

Sabine Broeck's article, '**Decolonality and Enslavism**', follows on from Gordon's and continues with the focus on enslavement. Histories of enslavement, and what Broeck calls, enslavism – the historical and ongoing practice of structural anti-Blackness – is central to her discussion of decolonisation. Broeck consistently offers a basis for discussion, by asserting that we engage with the afterlife of enslavement. Broeck's focus is on the connection between the concept of decoloniality which she considers critical, and the framework of such practices which, informed by the work of Black feminists in the United States and Bulgarian psychoanalytic scholar, Julia Kristeva, she reads through the abjectorship of Black bodies.

Thomas Meagher's '**The Spirit of Seriousness**', is situated in the existential phenomenology of Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir and unpacks why the spirit of seriousness is important for decolonisation. Meagher tackles philosophical concerns pertaining to decolonisation and unpacks them by drawing on, in addition to the work of Sartre and de Beauvoir, the work of W.E.B du Bois, Lewis Gordon, Sylvia Wynter and Frantz Fanon. Drawing on Hegel, which we see on several occasions in this collection, Meagher situates seriousness as a value – one of bad faith – and offers several examples of how it is utilised. He includes acts of colonisation that are committed in the name of Christianity, civilisation, King and country, where colonisation is treated as a value, as we have seen globally with enslavement as the end-result of such justification.

Patrick Bond and Gumani Tshimomola's '**From Recolonised to Decolonised South African Economics**', start their article by asserting that replacing a neocolonial project of financial control by neoliberal forces, with one that represents genuine economic decolonisation has never been more urgent, in South Africa and everywhere. At the time of the #FeesMustFall protests, students demanded an extra R40 million be added to the annual budget, and their power of protest was sufficient to defeat Treasury neoliberals. The limits of bourgeois nationalism are essentially defined not just by

its underlying loyalty to the institutional structures inherited from colonialism but also by the belief of colonial elites that capitalism remains valid despite the state of their underlying and impoverished societies. Samir Amin, born of an Egyptian father and French mother, is considered a pioneer of Dependency Theory and World Systems Theory. Amin, however, situates his work within the school of global historical materialism, and his analysis in this regard is key to the articulations put forward by Bond and Tshimomola, when addressing the move from recolonisation to the decolonisation of the South African economy.

The **second segment** is composed of six articles and focuses on racialised identity, particularly the body as a site of colonisation, and engages with the work of Fanon and Biko, both of whom draw on Hegel. Hegel is key to several articles in this collection especially those by Malick Diagne, Oumar Dia and Rozena Maart. The Black body as a racialised body, along with racialised identities are key themes in this segment and draw out the philosophical and psychoanalytical elements of coloniser-colonised relations vis-a-vis Hegel, by focusing on desire, recognition, the gaze, and the return of the racialised gaze by the recipient. From the body, Dey and Maart open the mouth of the coloniser and unravel how the taste-buds of the coloniser informed the process of colonisation: it was not only the spice route to India or the coffee route to Java but also the clash of the colonisers over food and enslaved cargo as capital, as a social and cultural property of culinary traditions that the coloniser wanted to possess and reap the benefits. The Portuguese, Dutch, Spanish, French, Germans, English, primarily although not exclusively, sought out particular regions to flavour their palate, and return to the slowly emerging empires with what they considered ‘exotic’ food. This segment then moves to Jade Gibson’s article where heterotopias of self are problematised, vis-à-vis Michel Foucault’s concept of heterotopias, followed by Danille Arendse’s coming to consciousness of her racialised and legalised Coloured identity. It is important to situate the history of Coloured identity in South Africa.

In Malick Diagne’s **‘The Socialism of Frantz Fanon: A Theory for the Rehabilitation of Subjugated Peoples’**, engages with the historicity of Fanon’s thought that addresses the radicality of the colonised subject and the drive towards freedom. Herein lies the crux of the decolonial project for the colonized. And as Diagne asserts, Fanon’s position on socialism is rooted in the fight for the values and culture of the colonised – much like Amílcar

Cabral had postulated, which only the colonised can take the lead in fighting. What is clear in Diagne's article, is that it is not the imposition of Marxism or the interpretation of socialism based on European notions of exploitation that are important to the decolonial project, but one where the virtue of African life and African survival to the commitment to decolonisation is accentuated, and which Fanon resolutely postulates.

In Oumar Dia's 'Fanon's "The Negro and Hegel" or How to Appropriate the "Miraculous Weapons Found in the Oppressor"?', Dia takes us through the process of how Fanon utilized Hegel's master and slave dialectics to produce a theory of liberation. Dia relies on the work of Alexandre Kojève, known worldwide for his ground-breaking lectures on German philosopher Hegel. Kojève's interpretation of Hegel's master-slave dialectic had an enormous influence on Jacques Lacan, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Georges Bataille, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and later, on Black Consciousness ideologues and revolutionaries such as Frantz Fanon and Bantu Stephen Biko who envisaged theories of liberation. Dia raises crucial questions about the use of European thinkers in adopting and fashioning theories of liberation from their work. He discusses the reluctance that the colonised have in this regard by noting that the Europe-centric philosopher is often rejected, and notes that this is 'rightly so'.

Rozena Maart's 'Black Bodies on South African Beaches: "Lus" en "Smaak" jou lekkerding', offers a systematic unpacking of the text unleashed by Penny Sparrow – a White South African woman – who along with several others between 2015 and 2016, at the height of the #FeesMustFall protests, continued to attack Black bodies on social media platforms. Maart borrows from Algerian Jacques Derrida's approach in revealing the hidden, forbidden and repressed within Sparrow's text. Beaches as sites of enjoyment and pleasure for Black bodies, Maart argues, become yet another site for the Hegelian master and slave relationship, which Fanon expounded upon extensively. Maart moves her critique to desire and recognition, injecting the Lacanian *jouissance* with the *Kaaps* expressions of *lus* and *smaak*, that define, in a limitless way, a particular history of sexuality, pleasure and enjoyment. The reader gets to see a politics of desire that is already present through the history of apartheid, and how the decolonisation of the beach reveals one of the cornerstones of apartheid legislation. Maart draws on Anton Lembede in asserting the qualities of the Black body – as mind, spirit and body that has needs, desires and aspirations whilst also bringing Lacan into the scene of the

segregated Whites-only beach of Lewis Nkosi's *Mating Birds* in articulating the transgression of desire, the pinnacle of apartheid legislation.

N. Jade Gibson's, 'Decolonising the "Eye" within the "I" – Heterotopias of Self: An Interdisciplinary Exploration of Visual and Material Relationships among and between Space, Body, Memory, Identity and Place', addresses multifaceted heterotopias. Heterotopia is a world within a world. The world projected by the author and/or artist mimics the world in which she lives by problematising it, disturbing its socio-cultural spaces since the subject of ridicule turns the lens on those who 'other' and by so doing exposes the world they live in for the disjuncture that it causes. Gibson draws our attention to the I and the Eye – a gaze that she encounters and one she recreates, participating in a self-critique and performance of the gaze that is inflicted on her viewer. She returns the gaze by presenting her version of the racialised stereotypes inflicted upon her as she questions under which conditions her physical appearance draws the viewer into a form of ownership of her.

Danille Arendse's "'Coloured" Consciousness: Reflecting on How Decoloniality Facilitates Belonging', offers a series of reflections of her Coloured identity from a place of complex existential experiences: she traces these from the place of her birth, early socialisation and education, and then later, as she moves from one province to another upon the completion of her doctoral degree how her understanding of her identity takes on a different shape. Coloured identity is for Arendse, the psychologist-cum-scholar, an imposed legal identity that stems from the period of racial classification in South Africa, which she notes as such, by indicating her choice of expression as 'Coloured' – a term, she addresses as not accepting but which through a series of interactions at the Decolonial Summer School of 2020, forged a path for a deeper engagement as she comes face to face with her decolonial project and comes to grapple with her history of belonging.

Sayan Dey and Rozena Maart's article, 'Decolonisation and Food: The Burden of Colonial Gastronomy – Stories from West Bengal', is a collaborative article, and brings together Dey's work on the food customs of pre-colonial Bengal and Maart's work on food colonisation from Bengal and Java to District Six, the old slave quarter of Cape Town. Bengali families were enslaved by the Dutch and brought to the Cape to serve as cooks in the middle of the 1650s to work for the food supply of the DEIC's passing ships *en route* to India. The authors not only link the act of usurpation and ongoing colonisation to the extraction and cargo of enslaved labour but also to the social

ownership of the means of production, such as culinary skills, expertise and ancestral knowledge of food, as such intellectual property, which the enslaved are not paid for but which the Dutch colonisers relied on and anticipated in advance. Various examples are cited of particular culinary dishes, its preparation, and how colonisation influenced the dishes through ingredients brought from freshly colonised territories into Bengal. Anyone who has a cup of tea and sees the name, Earl Grey or Lady Grey, must know that Britain has never grown tea, or coffee, for that matter, and yet have garnered a reputation for their quaint teashops, which they managed to raise to the level of exquisite, an exercise of elitism borne off the backs of the tea-pickers whose land and culinary histories they stole and continue to take credit for.

The **third segment** in this collection moves from the Model-C school system in South Africa and into the university setting; it has us paging through the texts that continue to serve as primary reading, in the language of the coloniser, upholding the colonial civilisation of the coloniser despite the government-driven transformation policies and the call to decolonise by students in South Africa and around the world.

Christopher Gevers's article, **'South Africa, International Law and "Decolonisation"'**, takes us back to 1962, to the opening of Ghana's Law school where Nkrumah made the opening speech. Gevers is one of South Africa's emerging law scholars, and his participation in projects hosted at UKZN, such as 'Critical Times, Critical Race', and 'Race, Space and the City', fostered a platform for his work to be brought to our attention and also for students and scholars to experience the depth and richness of his analysis as a legal scholar challenging the law academy to interrogate their reliance on schools of thought that does not propel South Africa – a country at the tip of the African continent – into the international arena but maintains the links of coloniality through its teaching practices and choice of outdated curricula. Gevers' article asks questions about the absence of 'Third World' law and why they are still truanting outside of the pages of the academy. Gevers also directs readers to African international legal scholarship vis-a-vis the literary foundational works of Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o.

Sieraaj Francis's article, **'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'**, undertakes an interrogation of his refusal to participate in 'decolonial pedagogical practices' as instructed by

his White line-manager, and the existential journey that ensues. Francis's point of departure is located in the ebb and flow of the university's decolonisation agenda, steered in his view by colonisers who have not questioned their lived experience and as such perpetuate the very racism they claim to be against. Francis's article started as a letter, detailing how he was treated, which he terms a 'less-than' by a White woman line-manager and grew into a historical unpacking of all of the ways in which his multi-dimensional Coloured, Cape Malay, Muslim and Black identity was under attack at this place of work, which he does not name not out of fear but as a means of not drawing attention to one university in South Africa as he believes that racism is rampant everywhere in South African universities. Francis's article offers readers an analysis of the dynamics of racism he experienced in the 'Teaching-and-Learning setting where his curriculum vitae was overlooked but the stereotype of his racialised identity treated as his vitae, which meant that he was not afforded the tasks consistent with a person who went to an ivy-league university in the United States but one that by virtue of this racialisation afforded the gazer the benefit of treating him like an uninformed technician.

Juan Ignacio Solis-Arias's article, '**Acts and Actors: Decolonising the study of Architecture at a South African University**', begins with the author's location as a foreigner from Colombia in South Africa, and within the university setting where he works within the school of architecture, which forms part of a large structure of the School of Built Environment and Development Studies. At first, using an existential approach, Solis-Arias informs readers of his own racialisation in Colombia and how this informed the way in which he entered South Africa. The racialisation that he speaks of, could easily have been anyway; colonised peoples from around the globe show evidence of internalised racism towards themselves and their loved ones, in similar ways, with hierarchies of skin colour playing a crucial role in how they are able to love and shame simultaneously. Solis-Arias offers an account of his place within the setting that he is unfamiliar but quickly observes that the East African architects who enter the university premises as examiners have come equipped to dehumanise the last of the continent's Black students who dared to enter into the domain of architecture – previously reserved for their colonisers.

Philile Langa, in her article, '**Rainbow Schooling Pains: An Auto-Ethnographic account of Model C Schooling in South Africa: In Dialogue with Rozena Maart**', offers an existential account of her schooling years

within the Model-C school system. The author considers herself a political experiment: someone who went to a Model C school, which is a structure that emerged after the formal end of apartheid (1990), with the idea that Black learners would need to be educated by White teachers as a means to address previous inequalities. The notion of imitating White speech, White thoughts and ideas also meant the denunciation of African languages, African cultures and African identity. Langa's article offers an analysis of her decolonial project, which also asks questions about Black presence and the absence of Black teachers as disseminators of Black knowledge.

The **fourth segment** is composed of two articles, by Sukla Chatterjee and Cloris Porto Torquato, and focuses on literature and language. This focus is not one that South Africans or those in the African diaspora can overlook. When Kenyan writer and academic Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o announced that he would only write in Gikuyu in the mid-1970s and, penned his *Decolonising the Mind*, he opened up already ongoing discussion in India but probed the possibility for contemporary writers to think critically about our writing practices and the dissemination of the coloniser's mindset. It is to the latter that Cloris Porto Torquata takes us: a tour-de-coloniality-of-languages, as plurality, as she exposes the many facets of coloniality still maintained and reproduced in Brazil, in the name of modern euro-driven civilisation, which has meant a denunciation of the many African and Indigenous communities of Brazil.

Sukla Chatterjee's 'Redrawing Dystopian Borders: A Decolonial Reading of Vernacular Dystopias through Mahasweta Debi's Short Stories', brings us into the realm of literary dystopias, which is not only on the decolonial agenda in South Africa and in India but across the globe. Starting with Chatterjee's choice of asserting the Bengali spelling of Mahasweta Debi's Bengali identity, and the pronunciation and writtenness of her surname, as Debi, Chatterjee brings the canon of dystopia out of its elitist status and into the world of postcolonial and vernacular Indian literature, which the current decolonial agenda in India, among a handful of scholars, has pushed to the fore. Chatterjee asserts that vernacular dystopias have been the outcome of fears and anxieties, as well as the production of apocalypse scenarios that further entrench the gentrification and regentrification processes, thereby neglecting to address how gentrification reproduces the very inequalities that writers of vernacular dystopias are against.

Cloris Porto Torquato's article, **'Challenging the Coloniality of Languages'**, is focused on a teacher's education as a site through which to

challenge the coloniality of languages, which she addresses as plurality, from the context of Brazil, where she is located. Porto Torquato draws on Fanon, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Bakhtin, Ta-Nehisi Coates and a range of authors, to challenge the coloniality of languages in Brazil, where Portuguese continues to be treated as the main and only language of speech, knowledge production and knowledge dissemination. Porto Torquato is interested in the social and cultural production of knowledge and the limitations that are imposed by the Brazilian government's insistence in continuing a legacy of coloniality long after the coloniser has left, and which continues to have implications for a population, especially those racialised by the cruelty of divide-and-conquer identity politics.

Following the articles, the collection shifts to **two opinion pieces**, the first by Siphso Singiswa and the second by Gillian Schutte.

Siphso Singiswa, 'White Arrogance Tramples Mandela's Legacy for African Self-Determination', addresses the inhumane treatment of Indige-nous peoples of South Africa by White colonials. Singiswa also likens White liberals to Mahatma Gandhi, who in his view was considered a leader yet had no regard for Black people or Indigenous peoples of South Africa. Singiswa is not the only person who holds this view; Gandhi has been outed as a racist and casteist by South Africans and Indians in his homeland and across the African and Indian diaspora. Singiswa offers insight into the fallacy of the Mandela presidency, noting that the masses were duped into believing that self-determination and dignity would be restored after apartheid.

Gillian Schutte's, 'The Fallists and White Male Hegemony' situates the actions of the Fallists as central to her critique of White hegemony in South Africa. Schutte is well-known for her critiques of White South Africans, which she argues are only interested in maintaining apartheid-style White privilege for their exclusive benefit. Schutte argues that the Fallist movement shook the White status quo in South Africa and created a paranoia, which fostered a crisis mode reaction among those who occupy and seek to maintain their occupancy of White bourgeois democracy, a delusion that White men, in particular, she notes, care to cultivate. This is despite the generation of young students who forge ahead with the decolonisation agenda, whether White South Africans approve of their actions or not.

Hereafter, the collection proceeds with two roundtable discussions.

The first roundtable is composed of four contributors all of whom form part of the research group called, ‘Race, Space and the City’. Nandipha Makhaye, Nompumelelo Kubheka and Londiwe Sokhabase were students in Archi-tecture when the group started in 2013, and Rozena Maart, who facilitated this roundtable, was then the Director of the Centre for Critical Research on Race and Identity (CCRRI). The research group was established as a consequence of one of the three women in the group questioning the absence of African identity in their education and training as architects at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, for which she was chastised. The three women as architects in this discussion were in the same year of study, each encountering similar experiences of racism such as shunning, ostracization, punishment for speaking out, and public humiliation for their refusal to participate in colonial practices that have continued to be part of the architecture academic environment. In joining the seminars at CCRRI and engaging with students who were part of ‘Critical Times, Critical Race’, students who were interested in the built environment, were also able to engage their peers on these inter-relationships of land, space and African identity.

The second roundtable is composed of the contributions of five panellists and bring a particular point of view to this collection – they form part of a research group called, ‘Critical Times, Critical Race’, which emerged in 2013 at the University of KwaZulu-Natal’s Centre for Critical Research on Race and Identity (CCRRI): Philile Langa, Ayanda Ndlovu, Phezu Ntetha and Jackie Shandu, share the round-table, chaired by Rozena Maart. When the research group was established all the participants were students. Most have remained students for the past seven years whilst also being involved in various activist work. Ayanda Ndlovu reminded us recently of the activism surrounding #KingGeorgeMustFall in 2014 at Howard College at a time when the statue of Cecil John Rhodes at the University of Cape Town had not made the news. King George V was the King of the United Kingdom and its dominions from 1936 until 1952. As such, he was the last emperor of India until the partition between Pakistan and India in August 1947. The University of KwaZulu- Natal’s Howard College campus where students and alumni in this collection enter, is located on the former King George V drive. The Howard College campus has a King George V statue on display as a reminder of his status as a British imperial and also his position in Natal, as the province was previously called, as the last bastion of the British empire. It is twenty-

seven years after 1994, and our sites of education are still named after these colonisers, the arches that we walk under, flawlessly marbled with the names of colonials who fought in the First World War, sculpted into the fabric of the building, amid the glisten of the violence which remain absent on their breath but very present above our heads.

The **final component** of the collection has three interviews and three book reviews: Sabine Broeck's *Gender and the Abjection of Blackness*, Jane Anna Gordon's third single-authored book, *Statelessness and Contemporary Enslavement*, and Leonard Harris's *A Philosophy of Struggle: the Leonard Harris Reader*, edited by Lee A. McBride III. What makes this segment so important is that so many of the contributors in this collection have been influenced by Broeck, Jane Anna Gordon and Leonard Harris. The work on enslavement carries links to all of the three scholars, and whilst there are distinct paths that each of them focus on, they each offer a unique contribution to the growing dearth of decolonial studies intent on examining the previously neglected histories of enslavement, and statelessness, which Broeck and Jane Anna Gordon argue with depth and effortless persuasion. Leonard Harris's work in the ground-breaking formation of *Philosophy Born of Struggle* as an annual conference that has drawn an international community of scholars, and the collections that he has produced under the same name, for more than three decades, stand as a mark of resilience in a world where philosophy's White mythology, hides behind its inability to articulate a philosophy of justice and a philosophy that brought the history of the masses into the classroom because Harris dared to persevere.

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Unpacking Decoloniality and Decolonial Education: South Africa and the World

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Abstract

In this article I unpack the terms ‘decoloniality’ and ‘decolonial’ as a means to address their respective histories in the South African context whilst also drawing on key examples within the global South. Many countries in the global South share histories of usurpation, coloniality and brutality at the hands of the same European colonisers. So, I offer, with overlaps, examples of the early stages of Portuguese, Dutch, British, Spanish, Italian and German colonialism, and their attempts at enslavement and colonisation. Whilst colonisation was for Europeans an escape from poverty, warfare, famine and disease, the promise of immediate and continued wealth through usurpation, settler-coloniality and the acquisition of raw materials through forced slave labour in Africa and the Americas, it secured their prosperity into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the afterlife of which they remain beneficiaries to, and which historical texts fraudulently offer them praiseworthy mention as empire builders.

Keywords: colony, decolonial, decoloniality, Arab Slave trade, colonialism in South Africa, #MustFall, How Europe Underdeveloped Africa, Black Consciousness, Pan Africanism

Any unpacking of the terms employed in the title, such as ‘decoloniality’ and ‘decolonial education’ requires an understanding of how these terms have been employed, what we understand as their meaning, how we carry out the work in their name, and to which purpose. Decolonial education is always in the present, and as such, our concern is then with the moment of insurgence, interrogation, and resistance to colonisation – the act that is in the moment of, that moment of execution, an in-progress process that is constantly unravelling, a process that involves the undoing of colonisation in the flesh, through thoughts and ideas enacted through the body of the subject(s) who under-

stands and identifies the features of colonialism that hamper the continuity of a dignified lived experience – the subject acts, entrenches its decolonial position, enforces it, breaks with coloniality despite the shunning, the punishment the colonial threatens to inflict, despite the cunning coercion of complicity disguised as collegial congeniality. This in-the-moment process, is also an in-the-present one, a warding off of persistent, vigilant coloniality that has many tentacles, even if it hides under the rubric of democracy, such as in contemporary South Africa where the agents of coloniality draw from a bottomless pit of historical White privilege to refuel their attacks.

Each time I am with a community of scholars in a room where decolonisation and decoloniality are discussed, I generally ask, from the onset of the discussion: what is decolonisation and who are we decolonising from? *What* are we decolonising from? The questions noted here were also the ones I asked at the start of the sessions I presented at the University of South Africa Decolonial Summer School of 2018, 2019 and 2020. Attempting to address them, I drew on key tenets of Black Consciousness both in the analytical tools laid down by proponents such as Frantz Fanon, the Black Panthers under the analytical leadership of Stokely Carmichael, Angela Davis and Huey Newton, and Bantu Stephen Biko, revolutionary and trainee medical doctor from the Eastern Cape of South Africa, one of the founding members of the Black Consciousness Movement of Azania. These thinkers, whose analysis of the colonisation and enslavement of Africans come with rigorous analytical tools, collectively inform my interrogation of coloniality and decoloniality. Here in this collection, as noted earlier, our attention is focused on South Africa and various countries around the world, through the contributions of authors who were born and/or whose racialised identities and lived experience stem from Bhutan, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Germany, India, Ireland, Jamaica, Oman, the Philippines, Senegal, the United States of America and the United Kingdom. These are not only countries where coloniser-colonised relations inform our lived experiences, they are also geographical locations where our agency remains active (for some of us there is one location whilst for others, there are multiple locations), where we engage through various forms of pedagogies, teaching, learning, the sharing of community-based interests as is evidenced by the way that we take a stand, enact our protest politics, write, speak, think, imagine, produce knowledge(s) that come from our histories of struggle and/or our histories of engagement with the world.

As a means to address the interrelated question: ‘what is decolonisa-

tion and what are we decolonising from?’ I now offer a short segment on South Africa’s history of colonisation, which is embedded in its history of enslavement, much like the rest of the African continent, as well as across the Americas, Asia, particularly the Indian subcontinent. It is not only as a consequence of the kind of work undertaken by the authors who come from the above-named regions of the world and their relationship to South Africa, which extend beyond the UNISA Decolonial Summer School but because any commitment that seeks to actively dismantle *how and what* colonisation took from the colonised as a means to dispossess us, disown us, dehumanise us, subjugate and enslave us, has to lay bare the methodical processes through which they were undertaken ... on a world scale. There are, undoubtedly limitations in a text of this kind – it is a short introduction that seeks to lay a foundation but also to actively engage with the context. Despite limitations, one must steer beyond them to offer, if only briefly, some of the historical events that allow us to understand who and what we are indeed decolonising from.

For Europeans, colonisation was an escape from poverty, warfare, famine and disease and the ‘voyage’ to Africa, the Americas, the East, especially India and China, offered them the promise of wealth through the acquisition of raw minerals, spices, land rich in agriculture to grow food for export, the acquisition of silver and gold – all of the above were deemed crucial as a means to acquire wealth which Europeans did not have, and planned to increase upon acquisition. Richard Jobson, in *The Golden Trade*, writes of his 1620 trip to West Africa. ‘Gold was the principal for which we came ... no part of the world abounds with gold and silver in a greater degree than Africa’, he revealed. The wealth of natural resources were the key indicators of how European countries usurped, colonised, exploited and under-developed the African continent, which as Walter Rodney’s *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* systematically reveals, until it was evident that African flesh, once enslaved, could ensure the Europeans their wealth.

Before the Dutch, the Portuguese circumvented the Cape and landed in its waters on the 3 February 1488, guided by Bartholomeu Dias, and named the region, Cabo da Boa Esperança which, as per its English translation, is still today referred to as the Cape of Good Hope. The Portuguese had previously sailed down the west African coastline, and by 1482, under the leadership of Sao Jorge da Mina entered the shores of Ghana, uninvited, and erected Elmina castle, which served as one of their main trafficking centres in the sixteenth century for enslaved Africans they took as cargo to North, South and Central

America. On 12 October, 1492, after a 2-month journey, Christopher Columbus (referred to by his Italian birth name, Cristoforo Colombo and often by his Spanish name, Cristóbal Colón), sponsored by Ferdinand the II, the King of Aragón (known by his Spanish name as Fernando) and Isabella I, Queen of Castile (the husband and wife team known as the Catholic Monarchs), landed on one of the many islands in the Bahamas, although his intended destination was India. Rodrigo de Triana upon seeing a glimmer of land exclaimed, 'Tierra! Tierra!' (Land! Land!). Columbus immediately proclaimed the land and the people as 'San Salvador', which with his Catholic sensibilities, was in honour of Jesus Christ and the salvation that the 'discovery' of the land implied, with a restless crew on the brink of mutiny. Not only was the accidental arrival in the Americas treated as an act of God but one which brought the Europeans into the Americas as saviours, filled with Catholic piety, commissioned by Spanish royalty. Columbus took four transatlantic voyages to the Americas between 1492 and 1502, primarily to the Caribbean, including the Bahamas, Cuba, Santo Domingo and Jamaica – the third largest island in the Caribbean.

Much to the dismay of Columbus, it was Vasco da Gama, the Portuguese usurper known as the first European 'explorer' to reach India by sea, who entered South African waters on the 4 November 1497 in the southwestern coastal waters, which he named Saint Helena Bay, making it the second Portuguese entrance on South African land and sea. Da Gama named this place where he took his first steps on the shores of South Africa, Saint Helena – after the mother of the Roman Emperor, Constantine the Great. The religiosity of colonialism and enslavement, as we see throughout history, was central to the moral consciousness of the coloniser as a usurper and enslaver. Somehow, when met with resistance, the Indigenous peoples were considered the savages and murderers, in fighting back. One such case is when the Khoi attacked the audacious 'explorers' in November of 1497 and wounded Vasco Da Gama in the thigh. Thirteen years later, Francisco de Almeida, the Portuguese Viceroy to the state of India (1505 - 1509) entered South Africa. A series of recurring events set in motion a relationship between South Africa and India, as is evidenced for three centuries among the Dutch, English and Portuguese colonisers of the two countries. In February of 1510 Almeida was met with fierce opposition by the Goringhaicona, an Indigenous Khoi people, who resisted his intrusion, after an exchange of iron for cattle was negotiated and an agreement reached. Instead of returning to their ship Almeida and 12

men thought their thievery would go unnoticed as they took cattle from a village belonging to the Goringhaicona. The Goringhaicona apprehended then attacked them, and they fled to their ship and returned with 150 of their men. Thievery and arrogance cost 64 of these intruders their lives, including that of Almeida and 11 of his captains. And whilst Almeida's defeat is scantily mentioned in history books former president Mbeki, noted the role played by the Goringhaicona in fighting usurpers when addressing the National Assembly on the 26 March 1999, as he bid former president Nelson Mandela well into his retirement.

The Portuguese were the first Europeans to engage in the Atlantic slave trade; they completed their first transatlantic slave voyage to Brazil with enslaved Africans as their cargo in 1526. North-west of its unmarked border sits the country we now know as Colombia, where slavery was practised from the beginning of the sixteenth century when the Spanish usurped Santa Marta in 1525, Cartagena in 1533, and Santiago de Cali in 1536. Indigenous people were the first to be trafficked and enslaved in Colombia, which was soon followed by enslaved Africans. Whilst it is important to note that the cities noted above was not towns or settlements at the time of usurpation, one cannot credit the Spanish (or other European colonisers) as 'founders' when civilisations already existed before they established settlements. Spain usurped and colonised the Philippines for more than 300 years, from 1565 - 1898 firstly under the Mexico-based Viceroyalty of New Spain then directly governed by Spain. When Spain was defeated in the Spanish-American war of 1898 the Philippines became a territory of the United States. Spain was considered the largest empire in history, from the 15th to the 19th century, and was often called, 'the empire on which the sun never sets'¹. The expression 'Spanish West Africa' is not only a contradiction but an indication of the Spanish conquest of North Morocco, Ifni, the Tarfaya region, Western Sahara, and the territories of early 21st century Equatorial Guinea. Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Belize, were among the 35 colonies it once had control of.

Colonialism in South Africa is often dated as beginning in the year

¹ '... [T]he empire on which the sun never sets' (Spanish trans: *el imperio donde nunca se pone el sol*) indicated how vast its empire was and that at any given time of the day or night a territory in their possession was in daylight. See also, 'The British Empire', *Caledonian Mercury* (15619; 15 October 1821. p. 4; and, 'Empire Sunset? Not Just Yet'. *The New York Times* 1 July 1997.

1652 under the command of the Dutch East India Company (DEIC) also known as the Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie, which initially registered itself as a silk company. The year 1652 also marks the history of enslavement and forced labour at the Cape, the first and main port of usurpation and colonisation by the Dutch. Of note, and as an indication of the history of colonialism and enslavement in South Africa, it is important to note that the Dutch usurped and colonised Indonesia in 1595, Mauritius in 1598, Bengal in 1605 and Malaysia in 1641; it is from these regions, proclaimed as Dutch colonies, that the DEIC returned and gathered their strength to continue enslavement and derive greater wealth as they forged the process of enslaved cargo, transporting the enslaved to and from different colonies – Bengal to Java, then from Java to the Cape – in the middle and latter part of the 1650s to set up their planned half-way station from Europe to India, at the Cape. These acts of enslavement, deemed as necessary acts of enforced labour by the Dutch, were envisioned before the usurpation of South Africa, thus premeditated, and as such seen as crucial to the success of DEIC colonialism. Without slave labour, the DEIC could not have established the proposed halfway station to India at the Cape, which included enslaving people from Bengal, Indonesia (mainly Java), Malaysia, and later trading enslaved as cargo with the Portuguese in Mozambique and Angola. Walter Rodney, in his ‘European Activity and African Reaction in Angola’ notes that ‘it was in Angola that the slave trade was conducted with the greatest violence’ (Ranger 1968: 51).

The palate of the coloniser, who slowly became accustomed to food from places they usurped and colonised such as Bengal, Malaysia, Java, among others, were of concern for the DEIC who ensured that whilst the process of usurpation and colonisation was in process, the enslaved peoples from the colonies lived under strict conditions of servitude whilst cooking their meals and flavouring their palate as they plundered, usurped and continued to destroy the livelihood of Indigenous peoples of South Africa. Walter Rodney, in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, makes the point about what a culture is, and what colonisation did to African culture by robbing it of all aspects of its way of life. ‘A culture is a total way of life. It embraces what people ate and what they wore; the way they walked and the way they talked; the manner in which they treated death and greeted the newborn’ (Rodney 1968: 53). And whilst Italians are eager to boast of their cuisine, especially their many varieties of pasta, it was none other than Marco Polo, not the first Italian to travel to China, who arrived in China in 1275 and stayed for 17 years. He took noodles from

China to Italy – a cuisine that the Chinese had cultivated as far back as 3000 B.C. It is no secret that with the spread of Italian conquest in East Africa, the seizing of territories by a massacre in Eritrea, Somalia and Ethiopia, that pasta made its home wherever the Italians usurped and sought to seize land.

The population that the Dutch found at the Cape (before it was divided into the four regions) were the Khoi, San, Griqua (a Khoi Khoi group), Nama (a Khoi Khoi group), the Goringhaicona, many of whom were also part of the *Strandlopers* group (a derogatory term used by the Dutch, which is taken up later in this collection), the Xhosa people a Nguni group primarily from the Eastern Cape. The Zulu peoples, also a Nguni group has lived mainly in the eastern coastal province, which we now call, KwaZulu-Natal, whose livelihoods were affected by colonialism throughout but where we see the effects mainly during the period of British occupation, post-1843.

What we learn from the early history of colonialism in South Africa, is how language played a role in the negotiations between the Dutch coloniser, the enslaved who spoke a Dutch infused language whilst retaining many Javanese, Malay and Bengali words, and the Indigenous Goringhaicona inhabitants, who for a very short period were able to speak all three languages. It is important to note that apartheid education did not introduce learners to Autshumato but referred to this leader of the Goringhaicona as ‘Harry the *strandloper*’ (the term beachcomber, is the closest English translation), which situates the Goringhaicona as a people with no purpose in their life other than combing the beaches of the Cape and enacting various forms of pleasure along the coastal beaches, which is still held against Indigenous people today. Krotoa, his niece, worked in the Van Riebeeck household as a child and could speak the Khoi language, Dutch and the language of the enslaved (later known as *Kaaps*), which is what the enslaved population spoke who were forcibly brought from the Dutch colonies to the Cape (Kaap, as per the Dutch translation and later Afrikaans translation). Krotoa married Danish ‘explorer’ Pieter Meerhof, under her Christianised name Eva, which was given to her once it became clear that she was able to read the bible in Dutch. This was the measure of being human, and the measure that allowed her colonisers to assert their stamp of approval upon her. Krotoa and Pieter lived on Robben Island, as he was in charge of cargo ships of enslaved people between the DEIC and the Portuguese, negotiating the exchange, and on one expedition he was killed leaving Krotoa a widow with several children. Krotoa made her way back to the mainland, where she continued to work, but was later banished to

Robben Island for immoral behaviour and died there. Of note here also is that records show that she is the ancestral mother of Paul Kruger, Jan Smuts and the last apartheid president, F.W. de Klerk (Brand South Africa Reporter 2017). Marike de Klerk, F.W. de Klerk's first wife, once noted that there is no such thing as Coloured identity, and referred to Coloured people as 'oor-skepsels', a term that references the remains of the food that one gives to dogs or four-legged animals, which journalists translated to English as 'leftovers' (McGreal 2021). This is how deep the former first lady and many Afrikaners in South Africa hate Coloured people, most of whom have KhoiSan ancestry, like her husband, children and grandchildren, and a large percentage of the Afrikaners in South Africa. I return to this point later. Christianisation was a key element of colonisation; in this case, the Dutch colonisers fancied themselves as the middle-man between God and the people they colonised and named Krotoa 'Eve' as a means to indicate that she was a 'first', that she reproduced in the image of God (with a European man), thus giving their colonialism a biblical significance. Not only did this act of renaming erase her Indigenous name and attempt to erase her history, but she was also awarded a responsibility to uphold a code of conduct regarding her sexual practice – tied to marriage and relations with Europeans and therefore European culture – that was imposed upon her and for which she was severely punished.

Allow me here to shift the focus to a phenomenon less spoken of among decolonial scholars in South Africa and furnish it with a personal anecdote. In December 2017, I was invited to participate in a roundtable at Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar, Senegal as part of a two-day programme to commemorate the work of Souleymane Bachir Diagne. After the closing panel, where I was a presenter, a participant from the audience raised himself from his chair and delivered a speech on how he had listened to presenters talk about colonialism but had not heard them talk about Senegal's Arab colonisers. The participant had not asked to speak via the chair, and as we listened, it was clear to me that in addressing questions of decoloniality, many today cut corners, not out of ignorance but because it is easier to address European colonialism than talk about the Arab slave trade. The speaker addressed us with fervour and rigour, and whilst he did not use the kind of discourse in English or French that we are familiar with, and under which lay the hidden and forbidden of that which we claim to be against, most of us saw the error of our selective amnesia. The speaker called us out, so to speak, for participating in a process of selection, and avoiding discussions of

the Anti-Black racism exerted by Arabic nations. The Arab slave trade refers to periods in which a slave trade was carried out under the auspices of Arab peoples or Arab countries. The Arab slave trade lasted more than 13 centuries and was a huge component of African history; it began in the early seventh century and lasted in various forms until the middle of the 1960s. Slavery was only officially outlawed in Mauritania in August of 2007. The lands of Islam were considered an important destination, especially the coast of East Africa towards the Middle East; it was characterised by violence, castration and rape and African women and girls were targeted as sex slaves. Abdulazizi Lodhi, a Zanzibari by birth, and Emeritus Professor of Swahili and African Linguistics at the University of Uppsala in Sweden is the author of *The Institution of Slavery in Zanzibar and Pemba* and gives a full account of East African slavery. Lodhi asserts, 'In many African societies, there were no prisons, so people who were captured were sold' (Fröhlich 2019). Palestinian writer, Susan Abulhawa (2013) writing in the twenty-first century, notes that 'the Arab slave trade is a fact of history, and anti-black racism in the region is something that must be addressed'. She continues by stating: '... In a world order that peddles notions of entire continents or regions as irreducible monoliths, the conversation among Arabs becomes a dichotomous "Arab" versus "African", ignoring millennia of shared histories ranging from extensive trade and commerce to the horrors of the Arab slave trade, to the solidarity of African – Arab anti-colonial unity, to the current state of ignorance that does not know the history and cannot connect the dots when it comes to national liberation struggles'. Abulhawa continues: 'And yet when Palestine went to the UN for recognition of statehood, the vast majority of nations who voted yes were southern nations. The same is true when Palestine asked for admission to UNESCO. In fact, when the US cut off funding to UNESCO in response to its members' democratic vote to admit Palestine, it was the African nation of Gabon that immediately stepped up with a \$2m donation to UNESCO to help offset the loss of income. It was not Saudi Arabia, or Kuwait, or Qatar, or Lebanon, or Sweden, or France. It was Gabon. How many Palestinians know that, much less expressed gratitude for it' (see Abulhawa 2013).

The late Muammar Gaddafi, apologised at length for the Arab slave trade at the second Africa - Arab summit held in Sirte, Libya on October 10th, 2010, noting:

On behalf of the Arabs, I'll like to condemn, apologize, and express

deep sorrow for the conduct of some Arabs – especially the wealthy among them – towards their African brothers. The wealthy Arabs treated their African brothers in a disgraceful way in the past. They brought children and took them to North Africa, to the Arabian Peninsula, and to other Arab regions. They subjugated and traded in them. They engaged in slavery and human trafficking in a most abominable fashion, to tell you the truth. We are ashamed, along with our African brothers, when we recall this. We are ashamed of those who behaved in this manner, and especially the wealthy Arabs, who viewed their African brothers as inferior slaves. This is no different from the way the West – America, and Europe – behaved towards the Africans. They would hunt them like animals, treat them like slaves, and act like colonialists. They engaged in colonialism and exploited them, and this continues to this day. We extend our apology and express our sorrow (Chiwanza 2020).

In the past five years, I have encountered several South African academics who have made disparaging remarks about the inconvenience of decolonial teaching and learning practices. Mostly, when confronted, one would hear them make disgruntled remarks such as:

- What is decolonisation anyway?
- Why are we concerned with decolonisation?
- Are we not fine as we are?

In unpacking the terms employed in the title of this collection, our task is as clear as daylight:

de·col·o·nise

verb (used with object), de·col·o·nised, de·col·o·nising.

1. to release from the status of a colony.
2. to allow (a colony) to become self-governing or independent.

verb (used without object), de·col·o·nised, de·col·o·nising.

3. to free a colony to become self-governing or independent.

It is not difficult to comprehend that the word ‘colonial’ sits within the word ‘decolonial’. The *de* in decolonial is a prefix, and its dictionary meaning suggests: ‘removal, to do away with’ (Collins English Dictionary). Thus, to employ the word decolonial is to understand that it means to remove the colo-

nial. The bigger question is, what are we removing the colonial from? Ourselves? Our thinking? Our Being? And what does such a process include: a series of acts that involve an untying from colonial practices? If so, what do these entail as 400 years of colonialism in South Africa covers a broad spectrum of day-to-day activities that starkly reminds us of our history of colonisation every single day. Within the S.A. context of post-apartheid existence, our existential beings are constructed alongside our colonisers. As such, we cannot do away with the colonial – get the settler-colonial to leave or repatriate the settler-colonial to their place of origin – their place in South Africa as a place of their belonging is secured by the South African constitution, the wording of this unreasonable reason is borrowed from the 1955 *Freedom Charter*, which ensures the coloniser a place in the afterlife of apartheid. We, who understand that decolonisation, when employed by the colonised, is first and foremost an inward-looking process, an act of recognition: you have to see yourself, to have self-consciousness before you develop consciousness of your history as part of the colonised. Upon recognition, the colonised moves to the realisation: a process that develops into a practice, an ongoing state of continued interrogation of the many facets of colonisation. The process from recognition to realisation is an accumulation of thoughts and actions that are directed at all of how the criteria for being in the world – thought, speech, writing, the imagination – are examined for the relationship(s) they hold to the coloniser, in the language of the coloniser, and of which the colonised's acceptance of these relations of being, through no fault of our own, have been rewarded.

Decoloniality is the product, embedded in the production of thinking and acts that drives the colonised who have done the recognition, the realisation, and expressed the willingness to detach, to cut, sever, remove all ties that link the colonised to the coloniser. Through the English language, one may know that your body has a colon: a long intestine, an organ that regulates and controls your body. It is therefore not difficult to understand the relationship that the word 'colon', holds to 'coloniser' – the person(s) who regulates and controls its conquest, that is, the colonised. The derivation of the concept colony can be traced to the ancient Roman concept of *colonia*, from the Greek *apoikia*, which means 'home away from home, with reference to territories that settled by ancient Greek city-states².

² See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colony>. Colony also referees to species of insects, etc. See <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/colony>

Yet, what is also apt here, is *colon* from the words ‘colon-isation’ and ‘de-colon-isation’ as referencing a body part – how a fleshed body with body parts that have particular functions, is acted upon; how the psychosocial trauma of colonialism, some of which are not always diagnosed or understood as such, impacts the colonised and the coloniser. Likewise, psychosomatic symptoms of colonisation are not easily detected as directly related to the process of subjugation and control. All bodies experience the social construction of race, gender, class, sexuality and coloniality, among others. Cardinal’s book, *The Words to Say It*, is an autobiographical account of her history of bleeding and seeking out psychoanalysis as a means of addressing the underlying conditions of her symptoms that extended beyond the bleeding. I met Marie Cardinal in July of 1992 at a public event in Ottawa and there was a thorough engagement of colonisation and the body between her and I. Not only was her position as part of the French colonisers in Algeria evident in her history of psychosomatic ‘illnesses’ her relationship with the colonised, ‘the Arabs’ as per her expression, was very clear, as many of her ‘attacks’ were triggered by anti-French protests. Whilst I will not go into detail on the full exchange between us, a close reading of the above-named book situates her realisation of her bodily experience as a coloniser integral to both her symptoms and her recovery.

Decolonisation is a series of acts aimed at undoing colonisation; decoloniality speaks to the process, the in-progress aspect of decolonisation. As such, to decolonise is to take your independence from the coloniser – and to take charge of the process. The coloniser is not afraid of uninformed Black people desperate for their attention. As such, any act of self-governance that the colonised takes as a person guided by the knowledge, conviction and identity as someone who works from a Black consciousness position, usually comes with consequences. There will be shunning, ostracization, shock, dismay, impudence, belittling, your position scoffed at, your actions treated as violence because you’ve called out your coloniser, you’ve named her – you’ve called her a beneficiary and she dislikes it. When you take up Biko’s teaching by connecting the act and the actor, in other words, connecting the act (usurpation) to the actor (the usurper), the act of colonisation to the actor (coloniser) and examine the features that mark these acts of cruelty, such as the actor who benefits from colonialism (the beneficiary), who benefits from racism and colonialism, you as the colonised who leaves little room for the coloniser to undermine the level of understanding you have attained of their acts of colonisation ... you will be the person who ‘has a chip on her shoulder’.

To decolonise is to unpeel and examine each layer of colonialism, each segment that is layered with historical events wherein the history of your people lies buried and forgotten, lodged in, hooked, entrenched, in words, sounds, blood, dreams, gestures, memory, some resurfacing within your body as part of your intergenerational trauma;

To decolonise is to exhale what you have inhaled through repression and coercion within the colony; to release your body from silence is to release your body and take it from silence to speech, to action. It is to remove the layers of inaction, complicity, obedience to the law of racism and coloniality under which your body lived during colonialism and in its afterlife;

To decolonise – the is to open the wounds of the word; the word that has gone flesh from its moment of announcement. To colonise ... the word exists because it has happened, and its cruelty is everywhere: derived from the English word of the colony.

Often what the coloniser fears is the death of coloniality within the colonised, the extinction of the performance of civility for which the applause will always be better than the resistance the colonised who adopts Black consciousness forges. Everywhere around us as the colonised, complicity comes with the reward of likeability, a performance of a fraudulent understanding of uniqueness, that falsely places you into the exclusive position of false comfort, the shower of praise that you are different and not like the other colonised – you are sophisticated, and they are not ... you are more like the coloniser and they can never be. Desperate to believe your coloniser, you smile, adopt a certain degree of security among them, gleeful in the manner in which you have been singled out, then slowly drawn in. There, in an instant, after 400 years of colonialism, you believe you alone can enter the special place created for exclusive Black people who know how to behave (your behaviour, in this case, the many ways in which you've taught yourself to acquiesce) is always a test and this is how you befriend the coloniser, because you have 'moved on', and the rest of the colonised have not. You hint at how different you are, how you have always had White friends, and you wait for their glances of approval, as you arrive to their dinner parties wearing your African dress – the kind that keeps your puppeteering position securely lodged in their anthropological gaze, and your problematic anti-Black sentiment in the master - slave relationship, sustained. This process of exceptionalism is the desperate quest for denial on the part of the coloniser – a denial that pleads, begs, that not all of the colonised have turned against their coloniser for there must be some Black

people, who like Helen Zille, see the benefits of colonialism.

To remove the colonial means to remove the agents, complicit in the colonial exercise who are engaged, engrossed in the empire; it means to remove both the beneficiaries who regret the events that catapulted them to prosperity through the benefits of enslavement, apartheid, racism and those who reap the benefits yet claim to be opposed to coloniality. The liberal colonial has a ready-made and handy list of verbal protestations, but it is never accompanied by a plan of political action, as Albert Memmi warns, in *The Coloniser and the Colonised*. The colonial enjoys every privilege and verbalising it as a guilt trip does not mean she will give it up. There is no nice colonial – there is only the colonial who benefits.

Decolonisation has been on the table for discussion of the Higher Education Learning and Teaching Association of South Africa [HELTASA] since 2016. Between November 27th until November 30th HELTASA held its 2019 annual conference at the University formerly known as Rhodes, in Makhanda, named after the Xhosa warrior and prophet, Mkhanda ka Nxele, a name to which it reverted in 2018, after being called Grahamstown, after Colelen John Graham, a British colonial. The HELTASA organising committee invited me as a keynote speaker and I was listed as the last speaker on the programme. The first speaker, Ahmad Bawa, in line with the title, ‘Pedagogies in Context’, delivered his keynote with a PowerPoint, which was titled, ‘Pedagogies for tomorrow’. His keynote slides were in point form and he elaborated on them as generously as time permitted. Suddenly, as he was talking about the curriculum, he made a remark reflecting on what the country was engaged in and began to talk about the concern with decolonisation. ‘I do not even know what decolonisation means’, he said. Given South Africa’s drive to transformation and decolonisation that came from our government, and certainly the Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], this struck me as rather peculiar for someone who occupies the position of Chief Executive Officer of Universities of South Africa.

It is not the semantics of the word that is not understood nor the action that the word demands, it is rather what the word insists on. The word – decolonisation – evokes immediate implications for addressing the coloniser, the settler-colonial, the White liberal whose smile fades seconds after you open your mouth to address the meeting because she realises her comments on how nice you look had little bearing on the content of your speech. It is the agency of the colonised, that becomes ‘the problem’ and because your agency is a

problem because you have problematised the actions of the settler-colonial, you are a problem!

In HE in South Africa, the colonial is present, always, everywhere, in every meeting to discuss decoloniality and in every event purporting to further the aims of decolonisation. Many scholars in the academy are not bold enough to ask their White settler-colonial colleagues, 'What are you decolonising from? Yourself? Your European thinking on African soil, and if so how? Let's discuss this'. At HELTASA, not only did I see White women's faces drop as I delivered my keynote throughout which I was cheerful, I saw them holding their tissue paper (a handkerchief substitute for modern-day White women who overidentify with the main character in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*) over their mouths. In the corridors of the main building, Black women looked over their shoulder before pulling me aside to thank me for my keynote; as soon as the White woman line manager made her appearance, the affinity to my words, and me as the speaker of those words, was severed ... with a smile. The emotionally, socially and psychologically attached colonised had to return to her master, which I understood; I had to recognise that being seen with me publicly, especially in a manner that showed delight or appreciation of my analysis of coloniality and the candour with which I spoke with a room full of entitled settler colonials wearing African garments or African hand and neck jewellery meant that their future in the academy, tied to the White madam who made their 'position' possible through her thoughtful benevolence on the hiring committee, would be at risk.

The coloniser - colonised relationship is complicated by the attachments of a master - slave relationship that has spanned over four centuries and three decades, produced conditions for complicity, where freedom and democracy are talked about as a proud moment linked to the release of Nelson Mandela but where the conversation quickly turns towards 'but our students have to be trained the same way students are trained overseas', which means that the comparison to Europe and the United States of America is sought as a means to declare the universal when in fact that so-called universal is knowledge from two or three European countries, which the settler - colonial educator refuses to acknowledge. The settler - colonial would be the uneducated if they acknowledged this, and this prospect is too daunting.

Decolonisation in South Africa is not a new phenomenon; it is a progression of political resistance over 400 years grounded in the political thought and activism of the ANC, the Black Consciousness Movement of Azania, and

the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania. Irrespective of one's political affiliation, one has no choice but to credit the activism that has come before one even when the ANC-led charterist position maintained its hegemonic power, as the party who went into negotiations with the apartheid regime's National Party and therefore the party who claimed victory over apartheid for the masses of South Africa. The post-1994 narrative of post-charterist, negotiationist politics, with its celebration of non-racialism has been at the deliberate exclusion of the Black Consciousness and Pan Africanist position and continues to this day. The South Africa of post-1994, is a South Africa with a vibrant student body, much like in the 1960s and 1970s, and as much as the ANC led Ministry of Education has attempted to ignore issues within the Freedom Charter that make direct mention of free education, the student bodies across the country have articulated their needs and their interest in a South Africa way beyond that of the ANC led government's vision.

Today, especially post 2014, as universities in South Africa have seen a generation of students emerge with demands about their education, fees, radical curriculum change as well as the need to remove remnants of colonialism such as statues like the one in the image of Cecil John Rhodes that marked the cruelty of colonisation, for which an upward glance, with tilted heads, against the backdrop of table mountain expected a historical recognition of past bondage and subordination by students climbing the hill of former Whites-only University of Cape Town to a statue of a man who robbed them of their land and dignity, was simply not tolerated. The fact that the statue stood there since 1934 is an indication of what Rhodes meant to the colonials studying at UCT; Afrikaner students requested the removal of the statue in the early 1950s noting that it offended them to study amid a statue of a British imperialist who thought Afrikaners were inferior. Black students have for many years refused to study amid the statue of this glutenous colonial perched on a stone demanding a glorious glance against a postcard-perfect silhouette of blue skies, a mountain, the abundance of crisp air, faeces-free, a good 26 kilometres from children being potty trained on a bucket in Khayelitsha, but which the thoughtful Chumani Maxwele, sought to rectify on March 9th, 2015. Rhodes was not the only figure that young learners found offensive; King George V at UKZN, the statue of Gandhi in Johannesburg and various places in India were met with vehement opposition. In April 2015, several months before Ashwin Desai and GoolamVahed released their book *The South African Gandhi*, Gandhi's statue was vandalised in Johannesburg

by chanting protestors with placards reading 'Racist Gandhi must fall' and the hashtag #GandhiMustFall followed soon thereafter to the next step, which is social media. Ela Gandhi, the Durban born former ANC member has refuted the allegations of those who call her grandfather out for his anti-Black racism and his casteism (cf. for instance Desai 2019).

Much as decolonisation seems to have gained a reputation as a university-based intellectual movement, as soon as student protest politics hit the tarmac of South African universities, students were depicted as either hooligans or ungrateful freedom children who do not appreciate what their predecessors had rewarded them with – a Freedom Charter but no freedom. The politics of decolonisation is not only about the transformation of former apartheid education and curriculum changes that reflect on South Africa's history and culture but about our nation's poverty, our Black population who continue to live below the poverty line, forced removal, shanty towns as a result of forced migration, the accumulation of historical wealth that continues to buy first-class tickets to the sons and daughters of settler-colonials into previously Whites-only universities. It is, first and foremost about the usurpation of the land and the return of the land to the inhabitants from which the land was taken. Fanon makes his position very clear in *The Wretched of the Earth*. He notes, '... For a colonized people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and, above all, dignity' (*Wretched of the Earth* [1963] 2004: 42)³. 'Africa for the Africans' was a term coined by Martin Delaney⁴. This issue of the return of the land has been echoed by Lembede, Sobukwe and Biko and can also be found in the writing of Marcus Garvey, George Padmore, Martin Delaney, Patrice Lumumba, some of which are evidenced in writings from the early 19th century. Indigenous Unangax scholar Eve Tuck and Chinese American scholar K. Wayne Yang, assert in their paper with an unmistakable title, 'Decolonization is not a Metaphor' that decolonisation is about the repatriation of the land, '... it is about the repatriation of Indigenous land and life; it is not a metaphor for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools'. They are asserting the fundamental objective of

³ In this edition of *The Wretched of the Earth*, Homi Bhabha shows his criticism of Jean-Paul Sartre.

⁴ <https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/asia-and-africa/african-history/pan-africanism>

decolonisation: to demand the return of the land⁵.

Biko was enormously influenced by Mangaliso Robert Sobukwe, who in turn was influenced by KwaZulu born, Anton Lembede. Muziwakhe Anton Lembede, known as Lembs to his friends, among whom were Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo, spearheaded African nationalism. Lembede was the founding president of the ANC Youth League, and he had a strong influence on Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, Walter Sisulu and others. Lembede's ideas, especially those considered more radical by the ANC were taken up by Sobukwe and later by Biko. Lembede's writing on the land, agriculture, economics, language, trees and their value to human beings, not only precedes the analysis and writing of decolonial scholars of the twenty-first century but demonstrates the richness of his thought, the diverse and systematic way in which he thought of decolonisation – which he termed 'Africanisation', a process of thinking and being in the world, on the continent, in South Africa, on African terms. Isn't this what decolonisation in South Africa is all about? Are we not striving in our decoloniality to exist in our country on South African terms, fully cognizant of our history of struggle, without the regulation and control of the coloniser? For Lembede it was about Africanisation, in the form of what he expressed as African nationalism – although it has to be said that his African nationalism came at a time that is considered very early on in his life. Lembede drew on the life and work of Booker T. Washington (1856-1915), who is considered the last of the African American leaders born into slavery in the United States, and whose legacy stirs mixed feelings among Black scholars in the United States today. Lembede was attracted to Washington's self-help approach and his ability to conscientise the descendants of the enslaved to stand up and build their own communities.

Bantu Stephen Biko, in *I Write What I Like*, ([1978] 2005) was clear when citing his reliance on Fanon; he formulated his response to *Black Skin White Masks* – 'Black Souls in White Skins', a paper in the collection where he addresses the South African White community of liberals whose main aim, he noted, was to relish in their privilege. In 'White Racism and Black Consciousness', in a subheading, 'The Totality of White Power in South Africa' Biko (2005:69) shows his reliance on Fanon when he notes: 'As Fanon puts it: 'Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the Native's brain of all form and content; by a kind of perverted

⁵ Quote on page 1 of 'Decolonization is not a Metaphor'.

(sic) logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it'. Biko also referred to Césaire as one of the founder members of the Négritude movement, along with co-founders Léon Demas and Leopold Senghor, as instrumental to his formulation of Black Consciousness not only as a philosophy but a politics, and so to were Hegel, Marx, and certainly, German psychiatrist and philosopher Karl Jaspers, who wrote so eloquently on 'Metaphysical Guilt' when addressing the German population and pointing to their being-in-the-world amid, and participating in, the atrocities of the holocaust. It is important to bear in mind, as we travel this journey of decoloniality, that we address African history, come to the realisation of the Namibian holocaust, which some insist should be called a genocide, which took place between 1904 and 1907 under Germany's Second Reich, and killed thousands of Nama and Herero peoples as a means to acquire African land during their colonial conquest but also to test their massacre and extermination methods on Africans, before inflicting them on Jewish peoples in Europe.

The language that students utilise in the #FeesMustFall movement and the many acts of insurgence we have witnessed toward decolonisation, come directly from Fanon, Biko, Sobukwe, Lembede and the interrelationships of their thought throughout the African diaspora. It was not only Biko's assertion that 'The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed' (*I Write What I Like*: 68), that the youth of 1976 rallied around but also the call to Black Consciousness – a call, unlike that of Sobukwe who made a point of drawing our attention to the fallacy of race, which does not, he argued, exist as a biological construct, but which, much to the chagrin of those who embraced Sobukwe in his lifetime and following his death, would have liked to see the intellectual giant grapple with when addressing the materiality of race, which Biko was very clear about and adamant in critiquing the role played by race in the struggle for freedom in South Africa. Mangoliso Robert Sobukwe walked out of the *Freedom Charter* meeting when it was decided that a document of core principles would within its preamble state: 'We, the people of South Africa, declare for all our country and the world to know: that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white ...' (cf. History of the Freedom Charter). Sobukwe was clear in his understanding of the role of usurpation and colonialism and could not fathom how a document purporting to stand as testimony to the need for a liberation struggle would include its colonisers and speak of colonisers at the dawn of liberation as equals. Sobukwe always insisted that the land be returned to the Indigenous people, which is

precisely why he could no longer be part of the ANC. The ANC formed their military wing, uMkhonto we Sizwe, in 1961, and the PAC formed a military organisation Poqo, based on the Xhosa word, meaning Pure, in the early 1960s and set up an underground base in Tanzania.

Our forefathers and foremothers did not sit on their hands, nor did they wait for decolonisation to happen within the university institution – they fought the apartheid regime with every fibre of their bodies and wanted to be liberated from their coloniser before decolonisation was the kind of movement it is known as today: waiting with baited breath for the university leadership to approve a programme of apologetic manoeuvres that does not offend the settler - colonials of South Africa. But I return to Pan Africanism once again: Pan Africanism in South Africa was influenced by Pan Africanism globally, especially from the United States, as shaped by African Americans in the 19th century like Martin Delany and Alexander Crummel, and Caribbean-born Edward Wilmot Blyden, who is often considered the father of Pan Africanism. The previously enslaved in the Caribbean produced many revolutionaries and a great many scholars, some of whom include Black Panther Stokely Carmichael, CLR James, Edoardo Glissant, and Queen Nanny of the Maroons in Jamaica, whose likeness is featured on the Jamaican \$500 banknote. South Africa's young generation of scholars and revolutionaries are likewise inspired by the work of Anta Diop, Lumumba, Nasser, Ngugi, Nkrumah, Nyerere, Senghor, Van Sertima, and others; the work of African scholars that have been denied a presence in our African history studies under apartheid, and even thereafter, when White men at UCT decide that African history, of the calibre taught by esteemed and internationally renowned scholar, Mahmood Mamdani, would not be suitable for South African students. When settler -colonials enjoy the legalised subjugation the apartheid laws secured, they fear an uprising of the truth, and the best way to ensure that the truth does not surface is to forbid the teaching of African history – the kind of history where the Black person is not merely, 'slave', oppressed, downtrodden, massacred, murdered, dispossessed. Biko quotes Fanon to make a larger point about the perverted logic of the study of history: 'Hence the history of the black man in this country is most disappointing to read. It is presented merely as a long succession of defeats' (*I Write What I Like*: 95).

The emergence of the Economic Freedom Fighters [EFF] in 2013, and Black First, Land First [BLF] founded in 2015, has fostered open discussion of their Black Consciousness and Pan-Africanist affiliation along with an

assertion that the return of land should not come with compensation. Both the EFF and the BLF assert the basics, without apology: that the land has to be returned to its owners and the economy should serve the masses. Millions of university students in South Africa have joined the EFF and BLF, and if they are not members, they walk about chanting the ideologies of both.

Guyanese born Walter Rodney played an enormous role in the way that African scholar-cum-activists began to see ‘underdevelopment’. After completing his doctoral degree at the School of Oriental and African Studies, with the working title, ‘A History of the Upper Guinea Coast’, he took his first teaching appointment in Tanzania. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Rodney’s seminal text is considered compulsory reading in many Southern African universities. Rodney was a Pan Africanist, and his critique of how Europe drained Africa of its wealth, is an understanding well entrenched in the work of many Pan Africanists. Fully aware of his transatlantic slave history, Rodney was part of the Tanzanian contingent at the 1974 Pan Africanist Congress held in Tanzania, of which he remained particularly proud.

A matter warranting concern, and which needs mentioning is that of the decolonial tourist to South Africa. Decolonial tourist-cum-scholars have been flooding South Africa, especially after #FeesMustFall, citing their country of birth as part of their biography when introduced to South African scholars, as a means to draw an allegiance to the Fanonian ‘Third World’ whilst drawing on their ‘American’ imperial cultural capital to open doors for meeting with South African student leaders, posing on photos with their freshly acquired poor people – images that I call, without hesitation, pornography of the poor. This photographic evidence of conquest is to indicate that they have rubbed shoulders with the ‘real’ oppressed of the country, much like the colonials did, where they fool themselves into believing that they are needed like a priest needs a sinner ... or as Shanghai native, Irina Patsi Dunn, who grew up in Australia would say when mocking relationships where men believe they are irreplaceable, ‘like a fish needs a bicycle’. For some of the tourist-cum-scholars, a meeting with a handful of South African academics at the Decolonial Summer School in Barcelona in 2012 opened the door to greater narcissistic promises to which a pinch of religiosity sealed the deal of bringing the gospel of decoloniality, as stipulated by an unwritten script of ‘Thou shall Not’, which soon surfaced as a code of conduct as it was later taken up by their South African disciples – the one, resembling the Nicene creed in Christian churches.

The decolonial apostles, created in the image of their narcissism, and

decolonial disciples, have asserted a particular route for decoloniality, steeped in semiotics, European philosophy and mundane poststructuralist arguments, and an unending need to reproduce the very European thinking they claim to be against; for others, it has been about ‘preaching’ the work of Fanon, as though we don’t read Fanon and incapable of interpreting his translated words (French to English) ourselves. Cast in the image of Moses who receives the Ten Commandments, with the promise of leading the previously enslaved to the Promised Land, we have been witness to this performance of discipleship that smacks of anti-Black racism of the worst kind. But scholars of decolonial scholarship, many of whom are not South African, are partly to blame for this phenomenon: many among South African university management use the term ‘African’ as a means to guarantee a university job to Africans and yet do not demand that the claim is accompanied by the knowledge of South African history. Many foreign African nationals, as the legal term notes, working within South African universities as part of the ‘Academic managerial class’ take the route of benefitting from the ‘I’m-African-and-I-am-eligible-for-the-South-African-job-market’ without familiarising themselves with South African history. It is no surprise that many still think that District Six, the old slave quarter at the Cape, is called District Nine, as was gleefully asserted to me to indicate knowledge of my history of forced removal from District Six, which I immediately rectified by drawing out its Hollywoodised vulgarity.

An internet search for information on decolonial thinking brings readers to a Wikipedia page that notes the following, ‘... the work as a school of thought used principally by an emerging Latin American movement which focuses on untangling the production of knowledge from what they claim is a primary Eurocentric episteme’⁶. Shortly after, readers are taken to segments that offer them a list of decolonial scholars. Among these, at the top of the list appear those of Walter D. Mignolo, born in Argentina in 1941, just after the start of the second world war, of Italian parents. Anyone who reads Mignolo’s work soon discovers that he has done little to no engagement with the work of Black scholars, let alone African scholars. A face-to-face meeting with Mignolo in 2011 at the ‘Decolonising Gender’ symposium, at the University of Bremen, in Germany, made the latter very clear. He seemed aghast at the possibility that one could cite Africans other than simply when referencing murder, killing, massacres or protest marches. The following year, at a meeting organised by

⁶ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Decoloniality>

the INPUTS group for scholars working towards setting up a soon-to-be-established Decolonial Summer School, a small group gathered together in the June - July period to offer our respective contributions as a means to ascertain what such a programme would look like. Sabine Broeck as the Director of INPUTS opened the session, and upon her fifteen-minute delivery of the history of the programme and the need to think about a Decolonial Summer School, Mignolo declared himself as the chair of the session. This was a surprise to many. There was an exchange of awkward glances, and of course, silence: the tense, White, middle-class moment I speak so fondly of stages itself with clockwork regularity. There was a raised hand: a woman considered older than any of us in the room, sitting by herself, who looked visibly as though she could fall into a group of retirees asked a question. Her question was met with silence. In my experience, many scholars speak of 'the community' and yet when a member of 'the community' is in an environment with learners, there is a certain measure of discomfort when the person asks a question no one is expecting. The silence bore evidence of not wanting to answer a woman who appeared too old to be asking a question about why we were studying the lives of Black people. I, none the less, not recognising the self-appointed chair, offered a reply to the question that was posed. There was a short silence. The same woman asked another question. There was silence again. Considering that there was no speaker's list among a group of twenty people in a room with ample space, I did not think it out of place to respond the second time again. Mignolo, the self-appointed chair, remarked quite hastily that I could not speak twice. I looked around the room and noted that if I left the room it would not be a decolonial room since I was surrounded by Europeans, who in my view had no place telling me when I could speak or answer questions they were too awkward to answer as neither the person nor her question mattered to them. In both 2011 and 2012, it was clear that Mignolo had not read the work of African scholars or revolutionaries; if and when they were mentioned, for example, such as Bantu Stephen Biko, it was concerning his death. It does not take a meticulous reading of Mignolo's work to grasp the overwhelming restaging of European thought, which he claims to be untangling from, to realise how the work of Fanon, has of late become useful to him and only because if he must play the game of how important he is among the male posse sitting at his feet, he has to ward off climbers on the ladder and thus position himself as knowledgeable of at least one Black scholar.

In 2013 and 2014 I worked with a group of select philosophers who

were recruited by UNESCO to work on a SOUTH – SOUTH PHILOSOPHY textbook. Enrique Dussel, another Wikipedia listed decolonial scholar, was among them. Any search on Dussel shows scant information on his birth in Argentina’s La Paz in 1934, of German parents, with a greater focus on his studies in places such as France, Germany and Spain, and later in Israel/Palestine where he learnt Arabic and Hebrew. Greater emphasis is placed on the content of his work, the vast range of scholarly contributions he is known for, most of which are in theology of liberation, ethics and decolonial scholarship. The UNESCO project noted above also had a scientific committee that formed part of the larger group whose expertise was relied upon to ensure that the collection would be a solid reflection of historical and contemporary philosophy from the four regions. There were two representatives for each region: Africa, the Arab Region, Asia Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean. Enrique Dussel and Magali Mendes de Menezes were the representatives for Latin America and the Caribbean. I can offer further details as to our gathering but I would like to share one particular experience that marks the ethics of a decolonial scholar like Dussel. Magali Mendes de Menezes, came to the meeting exasperated and noted that she was tired of arguing with Dussel as he had refused to include any philosopher she suggested, including those from Brazil, except of course for the work of Paolo Freire. As a member of the group, I raised my hand and asked how he made decisions for his compilation? Discussion among the representatives was encouraged so that there was shared knowledge among all of us. There was silence, the kind I grew accustomed to each time Dussel made a demand with the full knowledge that he would not be challenged – that as scholars schooled in a particular etiquette that showed regard for our elders we would simply not address him in a manner that he might consider challenging. His immediate response to my question was, ‘[citing my name], *?estás enojada conmigo porque no hay negros en esta sección?*’ Translation: [Citing my name], are you angry with me because there are no Blacks in my section? I formulated my response very carefully as the outpour of despair by my Brazilian colleague had given me enough time to consider how I wanted to address Dussel and the matter at hand. I asked him whether he was content with a collection that erased Black people like the conquistadores erased Indigenous knowledge in the Americas, making sure that there was no trace of Black knowledge for South and Central America. ‘How can you live with yourself knowing that you have not even considered the Caribbean, to be more precise, the Black Caribbean?’ He then addressed

me more personally: ‘... [citing my name], are you upset with me because I did not include the work of ... [citing world-renowned scholar of Africana philosophy, born in Jamaica]. I stared at him in disbelief and shook my head. Dussel did not reply. Not only did he allow the newly appointed UNESCO head of the philosophy division (who has now left), to make racist comments, he played right into their hands, and the members of that team allowed him to exclude Black philosophers from the Caribbean. It is interesting to observe how revolutionary thinkers practice silence when racism rears its ugly head. I raise these matters here for not only do they inform how we need to question the anti-Black racism of these ‘esteemed’ decolonial scholars, but we also need to be mindful and vigilant of the pedestals we create for scholars who continue to show disregard towards Black people.

I turn now to another form of Anti-Black racism, and that is, anti-Coloured attitudes in South Africa. In the past two years (2019 - 2020) as the collection took shape, Coloured people(s) in South Africa became the object of ridicule by White university professors once again, who sought to make Coloured people the subject of their lethal arrogance, disguised as research. The term Coloured, is used in very particular ways in South Africa and speaks to apartheid classification and as such a legal definition of a racialised identity and status under the law.⁷ The continued material conditions under which the Coloured population lives, in the afterlife of apartheid, around the country, speaks to the horrific consequences of the dispossession of land, forced removal, overcrowding and continued racial segregation. The term ‘Coloured’ in the South African context cannot be compared to the term ‘Colored’, in United States as they each have distinct histories of origin and continue to hold social and political currency, some of which are considered derogatory both in South Africa and in the United States. On the 26 of April in 2019, a few select telephone calls from colleagues got me on the internet in search of an article, which the Cape Times ran with the heading: ‘Academics want Study on Coloured Women’s Intelligence Removed’ (Adriaanse 2019). The article began by informing its readers that ‘a number of academics have called on the study by Stellenbosch University researchers on cognitive function of “coloured” women to be removed from UK-based academic journal publishing site’. In reading the article then coming to terms with the full scope of the study, I was shocked but not surprised to see what the study was concerned

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnic_groups_in_South_Africa

with. Sixty women between the age of 18 - 64, who the researchers identified as Coloured, were sought, separated into four age groups and two education groups, as subjects of a study. What the researchers deduced was that Coloured women presented with low cognitive development due to the lack of education. On April 30th, the Stellenbosch university leadership issued an apology noting that the study would be investigated for allegations of breaches of research norms. A campaign to have the article retracted was started by South African professors Boswell and Ratele, which received more than 2000 signatures by May 1st, 2019. One has to ask how a research study of this kind received ethical clearance? Did the research ethics office at the University of Stellenbosch not read the ethical clearance application, or did they consider the application a necessary gesture to engage with the Coloured community and not expect the publication of the findings to be accessible to South Africans since the intended place of publication was a UK-based journal? On the 22nd of May 2019, it was reported that Stellenbosch University's Rector and Vice-Chancellor, Wim de Villiers, was 'appalled' after learning of the findings of the study and its publication. What is troubling is the outrage expressed by the Stellenbosch Vice-Chancellor and the university's leadership, each account filled with moral indignation but not one comment on the ethics of treating Coloured and Black peoples (I use the general politicised term Black but make a distinction here for the purpose of the research that focused on Coloured people) as subjects of studies that determine the cognition and education level when: (a) there is widespread knowledge among the Black masses that the material conditions under which we live were created through usurpation and colonialism then furthered by apartheid and continues today in the afterlife of apartheid for the sole benefit of the settler-colonial; and (b) when we speak of the materiality of race, we understand this to mean how racialisation was established by first setting down the grounds for materiality, such as, through usurpation creating dispossession, landlessness, migration, forced migration, forced removal, etc., thus setting the groundwork for the lived experience, which includes all of the ways in which the regime ensured that housing, schooling, medical health, psychological health and every aspect of our being would be contained, and life for Black people would be that of servitude.

How could any White scholar in South Africa research Black people(s) without the slightest understanding that their lived experience was created, crafted, sculpted from the continued and perpetual dehumanisation, mas-

sacre, murder, killing and abuse of Black people, which they participated in so that they could live the ‘Whites-only’, ‘Slegs Blankes’ life they grew so accustomed to? Would ethical clearance be given to a group of researchers, let’s say, White men, who identify as rapists seeking to study White women in the afterlife of their 342 years of patriarchal power which included repeated rape, verbal and psychological abuse, sexual assault, serial killing, massacres, murders, forced removal, dispossession, displacement and expect an outcome other than the one they were instrumental in creating? The blasé manner with which racism is treated, bandaged by a written word to express outrage – a word that is in the moral objective of showing, not in the ethical principle of the living. The written apology does not point to the criminal act of racism nor how serial offenders of racism commit their crimes. ‘We deeply regret the hurt [this article] has caused’, was front and central in the Vice-Chancellor of Stellenbosch’s words (Somdyala 2019). How deep is your regret? Deeper than the wells on farms that were taken unlawfully from Indigenous peoples of South Africa? How deep exactly is the hurt? I was not hurt by the article. There is very little hurt that racism can inflict upon me that has not been done already. There is nothing left of the racism of the agents of White domination who inflict, engrave, stamp, and enact that I have not encountered already. I have over the past four decades allowed myself a continued process of learning of the operation and functioning of White domination so that I can see when it is coming; I have even tried to understand the vulnerability of its agents in clamouring for apartheid-style living because the ushering in of the post-1994 style democracy came at a huge loss to White South Africans because they have not been able to bury apartheid. There was no funeral, there was simply a transition of power by negotiators.

There is, at times, nothing more telling than observing the desperation with which White men and White women will come at Coloured women who dare, by our very presence in this world where we stand firmly, unphased, as living emblems of apartheid’s failure because we are still here, they cannot erase us, and we are still forces to be reckoned with. When one knows why racism is the go-to place for the beneficiaries of colonialism and apartheid who have to descend, climb down, lower themselves into the dire-straits of democracy that the seas of protest cannot send back into the ocean one knows that for the unwilling White man and unwilling White woman, democracy is a lowering, a coming down from. It is a bigger shame, when Black women who have little to no Black Consciousness, act in accordance with what a

liberation struggle paved, claim kinship, which means claim Blackness, and ask for it to be bestowed upon them, selectively. This is how their Blackness comes alive in the convenient aftermath of a realisation that there are rewards to be claimed by entering the door as Black then siding with the coloniser against Black people. The White colonial knows this: all she has to do, is compliment the Black woman and tell her she is wearing a nice dress, invite her home for tea, introduce her to her paid subordinate who she allows to call her by her name, make sure she understands that she's different from Blacks, the plural identity used with intent to suggest that she has been measured against her entire group, and in a small heartbeat, the White woman has won over the convenient Black woman – her lack of Black Consciousness accompanied by a lack of a politicised Black identity, has secured it.

By late May of 2020, an article published in the *South African Journal of Science*, by Nicoli Natrass with the title, 'Why are Black South African Students Less Likely to Consider Studying Biological Sciences?', made the news. The keywords for the paper were: 'socio-economics, conservation, materialist, values, colonial evolution'. The research, noted in the article, suggests (according to Natrass) that Black South African students are less likely to consider studying biological sciences than other students (note: we are not told who the 'other students' are), and that 'this stance was linked primarily with career aspirations (supporting conservation but not wanting a career in it) – and these were associated with materialist values and attitudes to local wildlife'. The summary of the research findings by Natrass notes that Black students, while not opposed to conservation, are not keen on a career in conservation and that 'materialist values' play a role. Natrass continues by saying: 'black South Africans may be interested in careers other than in conservation in part because of their relatively disadvantaged backgrounds which could prime them towards considering primarily the higher paying occupations (accountancy, law)'. What we are facing in the country is a lack of an ethical approach when it comes to addressing the matter of researching people that researchers have usurped, colonised and dehumanised. Therefore, in situating the history of your subject, which you have no qualms identifying as Coloured, situate your history with this person and your racialised group – name it, claim it, own it like you own everything else in the world. Every researcher has a history; we walk into every research environment with our racialised identity, sexuality, sexual practice, class background, cultural and linguistic history.

The Council of the Academy of Science of South Africa posted three note worthy points as part of their ‘respect the author’ position when respect has little to do with it. If, as it were, the researcher seeks to ascertain the reasons why Black people are not enrolled in a course on conservation, how can an ethical clearance certificate be issued for any researcher to conduct any work that speaks directly to the history of conservation as the history of usurpation? Conservation speaks to the care and protection of physical resources, including land, animals, what is generally referred to as nature – in other words where Black people have been forcibly removed from, and where a garden of Eden has been created to preserve Whites-only spaces. Whether one considers Natrass’ position a combination of ignorance or arrogance, is of little significance if one does not see the bigger picture, and that is, the ethical and moral implications of knowledge production that does not recognise that the history of colonialism in South Africa, covers all of the land, flora, fauna, animals, trees, rivers, sea, sand, oceans, mountains, air that envelopes the land that was taken away, and which should be returned to their rightful owners.

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Critical Reflections on UNISA's Decolonial Summer School: In Conversation with Rozena Maart

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Abstract

The call to decolonise the university more broadly, and the curricula in particular, has sparked the need to interrogate what it means to decolonise. In this article I discuss the Decolonial Summer School held at the University of South Africa and offer existential reflections on my role as an educator within the team responsible for its organisation. The methodology employed in this article utilises a question-and-answer format to provide reflections on key questions that were posed to me by Rozena Maart in an attempt to engage me on the purpose, objectives, plans, and my pedagogical stance of the Decolonial Summer School. It is hoped that these reflections will offer insights into the reasons for hosting the Decolonial Summer School, the accomplishments, challenges encountered, and the possibilities for the future. At a time in the world where seeking answers to the question of what it means to be human has become more urgent than ever, a Decolonial Summer School offers the opportunity for those involved to be 'armed' and to sharpen their tools to respond to everyday challenges. The conversational approach in this article focuses on the overall aim of the Decolonial Summer School, which is to highlight its significance in forging ahead with decolonial thinking, not only in terms of thought production or curriculum adjustment and mindset, but rather in developing a language that one can use to challenge the very systems of thought, for example the very Eurocentric language and discourse, that one is against, and which leaves one outside of the process of knowledge production.

Keywords: Decolonial Summer School, decoloniality project, colonialism, coloniality, higher education, University of South Africa

Introduction

The call to decolonise the university more broadly, and the curricula in particular, has sparked the need to interrogate what it means to decolonise. In this article I discuss the Decolonial Summer School (hereafter referred to as the school, except in direct quotations) held at the University of South Africa (UNISA) and offer existential reflections on my role as an educator organising of the school. The methodology employed in this article utilises a question-and-answer format to provide reflections on key questions that were posed to me by Rozena Maart, a professor in the School of Social Sciences at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, in an attempt to engage me on the purpose, objectives, plans, and my pedagogical stance of the school. It is hoped that these reflections will offer insights into the reasons for hosting the school, the accomplishments, challenges encountered, and the possibilities for the future. At a time in the world where questions of what it means to be human have become more urgent than ever, the school offers the opportunity for those involved to be ‘armed’ and to sharpen their tools to respond to everyday challenges. The conversational approach in this article focuses on the overall aim of the school which is to highlight its significance in forging ahead with decolonial thinking, not only in terms of thought production or curriculum adjustment and mindset, but rather in developing a language that one can use to challenge the very systems of thought – for example the very Eurocentric language and discourse – that one is against, and which leaves one outside of the process of knowledge production.

Creating the Platform by which to Carry out a Decolonial Summer School

ROZENA MAART: How did the Decolonial Summer School fit into your portfolio, in terms of your academic experience and expertise, your own work, as well as your position within management as the Head of Research and Graduate Studies?

PULENG SEGALO: The Decolonial Summer School was a project that was started by the College of Human Sciences, at UNISA, in 2014. The project came about as a result of a number of scholars coming together to engage on the ways that academia continues to perpetuate the colonial project through which teaching happens, and how it happens. These were questions that we

needed to address. The decolonial project aims to serve as a platform that offers a space for speaking back to, questioning, challenging and critiquing what we inherited under apartheid and colonialism, and as such is an attempt to interrupt the status quo. The space that was created initially started as a reading group, followed by a select number of academics from UNISA who attended the Decolonial Summer School in Barcelona in 2012. This particular Summer School idea was brought to South Africa, with the hope of it serving as a platform that offers the chance to engage with what it means to decolonise, to ask the crucial question: 'What is decolonisation?' Housed in the College of Human Sciences, the project was assigned to the Office of Research and Graduate Studies, and as the then head of the Office (2016 - 2019), I co-ordinated and oversaw the successful running of the project. I immediately immersed myself in the work and the task at hand. It became easy to lead the project, as I believed in it and because it spoke to my own work, the questions I had been grappling with in my own discipline and the challenges I have with the whole notion of 'the University' as it currently stands. The Office of Research and Graduate Studies is mandated to offer support to all research-related and postgraduate activities. The Office is further tasked with ensuring a smooth journey for all registered postgraduate students in the Human Sciences. As a result of the mandate of the Office, the hosting of the decoloniality project was a great fit, as it is in line with the importance of conducting research and producing knowledge, while also focusing on postgraduate studies as a stage that affords the opportunity for thinking differently and critically. Thinking from a decolonial perspective is in line with the College's transformation agenda. It is also pertinent to highlight that the School is not limited to the Human Sciences as we have participants from other disciplines such as Law, Education, Economics, and the Natural Sciences more broadly.

The Conceptual Understanding of Decolonial and Decoloniality

ROZENA MAART: What kind of conceptual understanding of 'decolonial' and 'decoloniality' did you enter the project with?

PULENG SEGALO: My work is at the intersection of Psychology, and Gender Studies with a specific focus on gender and trauma. My research interest is also in African Psychology, where I focus on what it means to engage

the discipline from an African perspective. The following scholars offered me the theoretical tools to approach African Psychology: Frantz Fanon (1986), Paulo Freire (2007), Chabani Manganyi (2013), Augustine Nwoye (2015; 2017), and Kopano Ratele (2016). The following authors equipped me with a lens to approach decoloniality: Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986), Ramon Grosfoguel (2007), Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2011), Sabelo Ndlovu (2013), and Walter Mignolo (2013) among others; and Oyeronke Oyewumi (1997) and Maria Lugones (2010) assisted with engaging feminism through a decolonial and Africanist lens. I became part of the decoloniality project with [a] minimal understanding of the various ways in which decoloniality had been defined, understood and used to challenge the notion of colonialism and coloniality. Attending the first Decolonial Summer School in Europe, in Spain actually, exposed me to various decolonial scholars who mainly came from South America, although based in North America, and it is through their framing of the key concepts that I started grappling with possible ways to apply what I had grasped in my own context, South Africa.

The Direction of the UNISA Decolonial Summer School, Language and Cultural Identity

ROZENA MAART: Why a School?

PULENG SEGALO: Since its independence in 1994, South Africa has been on a journey to redefine itself and tackle everyday challenges that perpetually confront it. This redefining required reflections from all sectors of society. Coming from a history where black people were subjected to an inferior system of education called 'Bantu Education', it became pertinent to zoom in on the education sector. Education remains one of the pillars of society that provides tools to engage social injustices and inequalities that affect how communities function. Many people continue to suffer from the historical traumas of colonialism and apartheid and as a result there remains a need to find a vocabulary that can assist with articulating the impact of this past and the possible future that could be envisaged. To this end, a School on decoloniality was critical as it was hoped that it could provide a platform for the needed reimagination, reflection, remembering, and rethinking of where we come from and the implications thereof for the present. In his 2009 book *Remembering Africa*, wa Thiong'o reminds us that we cannot put the pieces

together of who we once were if we do not reclaim our languages, our rituals, poems, and cultural symbols. We need to re-learn what these meant to us as Africans before the colonial interruption.

As indicated earlier, hosting the Decolonial Summer School at UNISA, in South Africa, is aimed at allowing a cohort of emerging and established scholars an opportunity to engage with what it means to decolonise. The School aims at affording participants the opportunity to learn, question, critique, learn, un-learn and, hopefully, re-learn. Over the seven years that the school has been in existence, it moved from being one week-long, then two weeks [in length] and, in 2019, it went back to one week. The duration of the school has been determined by the feedback received from participants. The intensive engagements are meant to bring together a diverse group of people, who are at different levels of their academic journeys and careers; to learn from each other, to un-learn some of the toxic 'untruths' that the Euro-Western education system has offered them, as truth and fact. Overall, the School aims at providing the space to breathe outside of the limitations of an academy that still chokes us with European scholarship as many people walk around with immense suffocation.

Education and Training and the Move towards Criticality: Producing Critical Thinkers

ROZENA MAART: Is the focus on education and training or is it broader than that? Is it also about a community of scholars, from across the country, collaborating on a platform in order to establish, develop and produce knowledge?

PULENG SEGALO: The focus of the Summer School, specifically, and the decolonial project, more broadly, is on training and education, but also to produce critical thinkers, who are able to critique their respective disciplines and start rethinking some of the ways they have been taught, and how they, themselves, teach and understand knowledge production. The aim is further to produce a cohort of scholars, not only nationally across institutions but also internationally, with a focus on geographical locations that have suffered colonialism and its remnants through coloniality. The interdisciplinary nature of the school allows the participants to cross-pollinate, see common challenges, collectively think of alternative ways to approach teaching and learning, and

to refute the notion of universality. The School allows for a community of scholars from across the country to contribute to the production and development of knowledge, and to collaborate with scholars through publishing together. To this end, the school has a specific focus and anticipated outcomes which I outline below, in random order:

1. Modernity, Eurocentrism and coloniality: Whilst theoretical shifts in modernity have addressed notions of Eurocentrism and coloniality, the importance of the Summer School where invited presenters grapple with this particular trajectory and share their knowledge with scholars in attendance within the context of South Africa, was an important way to see how this would play out. One of the issues highlighted at the Summer School is the importance of trans-modernity, which aims to create multi-epistemic spaces, and the need to acknowledge multiple ways of knowing and being in the world. Trans-modernity is a notion of epistemic diversity which allows for inter-epistemic dialogue.
2. Epistemic racism/patriarchy/sexism: In the past few years, South Africa has experienced an increase in individual encounters of racism. One either has to page through newspaper articles or watch the news to see just how prevalent reports of racism have been in the country. The fight against racism has been a long overdue struggle, that did not just disappear because of [changes to] formal legislation. It is therefore critical to engage in discussions to better understand the ways in which racism continues to show itself in the everyday experiences of people, in their interaction, in the workplace, within schools and in the streets. There are multiple markers of racism: for example, religion, ethnicity, and language, among others. The Decolonial Summer School aims at showing ways in which colonialists racialised their colonial subjects in many different ways, on many different levels, to achieve their goal of 'divide and rule'. A further highlight is how racialised groups that were given privileges by the colonialists continue to perpetuate injustices along religion, ethnicity, gender, and even class lines. To this end, we draw from feminist scholars such as Oyewumi (1997) who has shown in her work that patriarchy has not always been the norm in some parts of Africa. We also draw from scholars such as Angela Davis (1983) who problematises the category of gender and makes a claim that this category is not universal. Davis further argues that gender is the privilege

of white women since black women were perceived as 'female', almost equated to the status of animals, for the longest time.

3. Zone of being/ zone of non-being: Drawing from scholars such as Fanon (1961) and Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2016), the school engages with what it means to be considered sub-human and the role which coloniality plays in creating these confined lines wherein humanity is defined. The school highlights the material effects of existence at various levels of humanity. Racism plays out violently within these zones of being, where one sees for example, the denial of recognition of an ethical code for those deemed to belong to the zone of non-being. The school further engages the ways in which the dialectic of I and 'Other' collapses in the zone of non-being.
4. Coloniality of being and subjectivity: The school engages with and shows the ways in which the modern world continues to be colonial in nature. We have coloniality at the level of being and knowledge. In modernity, our existence is described in ways that highlight how groups and communities of people are dominated and exploited, which are maintained through power. We further highlight the ways in which coloniality of being, knowledge, and power are equally fundamental and interrelated. The school further provides conceptual tools that attempt to assist us in understanding how coloniality operates. We look at the role of political activism, intellectual work, and artistic creation; we also engage with forms of activity that offer possibilities for concrete change toward decoloniality.
5. Africa and the modern world: Here we focus on the historical perspectives of resistance and nationalism and their legacies on the African continent. It is critical to note the erosion of history and to see the problematic nature in which history is represented. For example, the convention in Berlin where Africa was divided, does not form part of formal conversations or history texts, and this exclusion we see as intentional, so as to obscure the past. We draw from some of the architects of Africa's international relations such as W. E.B. du Bois whose work focused on showing how the problem of the 20th century is the problem of the colour line; secondly, we have C. L. R. James who insisted that in order to understand Africa one needs to understand Europe. We also look at African leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah who reminded us that the independence of his country Ghana,

which was the first country on the continent to gain its independence, is meaningless unless it links with the total liberation of the African continent.

6. Decolonising the university: With regard to decolonising the university, the focus has not only been on curriculum change, the school has also tried to address notions of a mindset change with regards to concepts, theories, pedagogies, and epistemologies, as has been demonstrated by the work delivered by the annual speakers. One of the critical issues the school focuses on is the need to shift from what Lewis Gordon calls ‘disciplinary decadence’ where one is preoccupied with the discipline without paying attention to or acknowledging the challenges faced by communities. To this end, the school also highlights the importance of trans-disciplinarity.

One of the outputs that resulted directly from the school, linked to decolonising the university, was an edited book: *Decolonizing the University, Knowledge Systems and Disciplines in Africa* (2016) edited by Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Siphamandla Zondi, both of whom participated in the Summer School.

Teaching and Learning: Building a Curriculum around Decolonial Scholarship

ROZENA MAART: What kind of work did the presenters send for reading? How did this assist in the further conceptualisation of the project, specifically with regard to the development of the project, the pushing back of barriers, the landscaping and mapping of the project, and the extension of the concept, ‘decolonial’, that you first worked with when the Decolonial Summer School started?

PULENG SEGALO: We sought to invite a diverse group of scholars to facilitate and be presenters at the school. Apart from the South African presenters, several presenters came from various parts of the world, for example, Mexico, the United States of America (USA) and India. Most of the colleagues invited from the USA are all originally from other parts of the world (e.g. West Africa, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, etc.) and they brought that experience and wealth of knowledge with them. While we had a goal in terms of what we would like to achieve, we decided to be non-prescriptive in terms of what the presenters chose to present and prescribe for reading. This worked well as it

allowed presenters the freedom to shape their allocated session, in other words what they deemed useful and relevant to the overall project. This led to various approaches of [to] the notion of what decolonial means being accommodated, and a creative licence with which to approach the seminars being offered. We were hoping for a thinking that is [was] 'outside the box' and one that zooms in on highlighting the multiple-perspectives and the usefulness thereof. A good example of this was Lewis Gordon's seminar on the importance of 'shifting the geography of reason' and creating the possibility by which to establish new forms of reason. His work focuses on ways in which we need to be critical of disciplinary canons and embrace multiple sites of knowledge production. On the other hand, previous speakers such as Oyeronke Oyewumi, Pumla Dineo Gqola and Linda Alcoff reminded us of the complexities of the notion of gender and the problematic ways in which it is often theorised.

From one year to the next, we engage with both presenters and participants on what works and what does not, to continuously reshape the space and allow it to speak to the needs of those who are in attendance. This works well as it allows and shows the importance of multiple voices and perspectives in the shaping and reshaping of the school. Due to time limitations and the set-up of the physical spaces we use, not all recommendations and suggestions could be accommodated all the time. The participants' feedback always plays a critical role in determining and deciding on the relevant speakers to invite. Following the first few Summer Schools hosted, it became clear that participants were yearning for engagements that focused on African experiences. The first few Summer Schools were helpful in laying down the theoretical foundations of what decoloniality means and what it would mean to decolonise. The School offered conceptual and theoretical tools that participants could take back to their studies and the relevant academic departments with which they are affiliated. The School also attracted participants from non-governmental organisations and the corporate environment. It was mostly at this point that voices requesting a more practical focus became audible. While several academics and students called for praxis, to colleagues from outside academia this request seemed more urgent. This led to looking back at how the School is structured and finding ways in which we could engage practical possibilities of how to move decoloniality forward. The project grew to include additional aspects that function independently, but with the same goal. For example, The College of Human Sciences has developed a module in decoloniality, which is offered at honours level and, since it started, the uptake has been

high, to the point that some students are requesting that there should be a full programme in decoloniality. Secondly, the College hosts a biennial international decoloniality conference and, so far, two conferences have been held. The conference offers an opportunity for delegates to share information on their work in progress, the challenges and frustrations they experience within their various institutions, and supervision issues that postgraduate students are confronted with when they use decoloniality as an epistemological framework. These additional parts of the project have opened opportunities to take the work forward in interesting ways.

The Decolonial Academic Agenda in South Africa

MAART: How do you see yourself contributing to the overall agenda of the country?

PULENG SEGALO: From my home department, Psychology, which aims at contributing towards the emotional well-being of people, to the College that puts transformation, decolonisation and re-Africanisation at the core of its mission, to the University that aims to play a pivotal role in being a contributor towards servicing humanity, and a country that has developmental goals that aim at centring social justice through the various individual aspects it highlights, it is my belief that our decoloniality project contributes towards the realisation of the aforementioned objectives. It is also my contention that the UNISA decoloniality project contributed to fuelling the #FeesMustFall movement, a movement that was aimed at highlighting the plight of South African students. While the focus, at least in public, seemed to have been on the unaffordability of fees, the students had also made it clear that there is a need to decolonise the curriculum, linking it to exorbitant fees they have to pay for an education that alienates them from themselves, their histories and knowledge of their people. The decoloniality project contributed towards many universities in South Africa embarking on transformation, decolonisation and re-curriculation processes. Since the project started, I have been invited to speak on decolonisation issues at several local universities, e.g., Rhodes University, Nelson Mandela University and North-West University – both the Potchefstroom and the Vaal campuses. The relevant education agenda continues to be critical for the effective functioning of the country and, through our project, we have carved pathways towards the realisation of an education

system that speaks to and contributes to finding responses to the challenges faced by society.

Decoloniality and Pedagogy

ROZENA MAART: What are some of the pedagogical issues you entered the project with and how has this extended or exceeded what you first had in mind?

PULENG SEGALO: My entry into the decolonial project came about because of several questions I had regarding the academic project more broadly, and knowledge production within my discipline of Psychology in particular. Reflecting on the challenges faced by society due to the oppressive past many of the citizens faced, I felt we needed pedagogical tools to enable us to make sense of what our role is as creators and facilitators of knowledge. Many of our disciplines have not offered us the skills or tools to make sense of our past, our histories, and ways in which we can re-imagine and re-member our fractured existence. For a long time, there seemed to be an over-reliance on imported theories that were imposed and assumed to be universal and, as a result, applicable regardless of context. Some of the epistemological underpinnings and theoretical frameworks we draw from are not applicable to the contexts to which they end up being applied. To give an example of one of the modules I teach, community psychology; in this module we engage extensively with communities around us and, for a long time, there seemed to be a disconnect between the theories that were imposed on both students and communities – theories that were drawn upon to make sense of people's lived experiences. Entering the space of decoloniality and extensively engaging with what it means to decolonise, opened avenues for me; it was as if the oxygen tank was opened and finally, I could breathe.

Trends and Difficulties

ROZENA MAART: What were/ are some of the trends you noticed among the scholars who came to the Decolonial Summer School?

PULENG SEGALO: As I indicated earlier, the School invited a diverse group of scholars whose work, it was hoped, would contribute toward assisting the participants with the conceptual and theoretical grounding of what decoloni-

sation is and what it means to decolonise. The scholars came from various schools of thought and with varied expertise. What I noticed was that they all brought their experiences based on their contexts and understanding of decolonisation from those spaces. They provided a wider view of how they engage the colonialism lineages and ways in which backward tracing assists in working towards decolonial possibilities. The scholars did not necessarily subscribe to the same way of understanding decoloniality and these, sometimes, diverse views allowed for robust debates, critiques, disagreements and heated engagements. Some scholars were more open to critiques from participants, while others were not.

ROZENA MAART: What are some of the unforeseen difficulties that you encountered and that you think or believe the school faced, whether you anticipated these or not?

PULENG SEGALO: The School is open to anyone interested in engaging with issues relating to decolonisation and, as a result, it attracts participants from various contexts such as academics, students, people from non-governmental organisations and people from the private sector. Many participants come with expectations and hopes of what they will gain from the School and sometimes these are unfortunately not met. Several participants, especially those from 'non-academic' sectors, highlighted the absence of a focus on communities and indicated that this is a shortcoming that requires attention. At the same time, participants from various spheres have enriched the content that the School has to offer, as they brought their experiences with them and grappled with ways in which decoloniality is relevant for the work they do. Because the School takes place in January, at the beginning of the academic year, it sometimes coincides with the period during which the University is engaged in the collective bargaining process with labour organisations and this means the possibility of being caught in the middle of protests. This happened on a few occasions, leading to the need for immediate measures to be taken and a venue had to be sought, outside of the University campus, to host the School.

In addition to the above, we have experienced challenges linked to the actual organising of the School, where, on a number of occasions, a committee would be put in place to assist with the planning and organising of the School, but the committee would end up not functioning properly. Lastly, by its nature,

the School ‘forces’ both participants and scholars who lead the discussions to engage with uncomfortable but necessary issues linked to notions of race, class, gender, to name a few, and how these are linked to colonialism. The discussions lend themselves to many people revisiting and being open about their experiences of oppression, discrimination, exclusion, and suffering. Questions such as ‘Whose pain matters?’ and ‘Who decides what gets privileged in the space?’ becomes very contested at times. It is these slippery slopes that one can never anticipate but need a cushion for people to land softly on as they journey into this decolonisation process.

The Way Forward

ROZENA MAART: What is the way forward for the Decolonial Summer School and what has been learnt in the process?

PULENG SEGALO: It is our hope that the School will continue until we have reached as many people – students, academics, and colleagues from outside academia – as possible. Additionally, we would like to see that what people have learnt at the School has been translated into actions in the various spaces they occupy, for instance in their teaching practices, and in the work that they do within communities and in private organisations, where issues of coloniality continue being a challenge. Some of the lessons we have learnt, which are mostly based on the feedback received from participants, is the importance of having facilitators who are familiar with the history of Africa in general and South Africa in particular. There has also been a call to create more space at the school for the role and need for Africanisation. The School will continue to be a space that allows people to reflect, confront and question, where they feel free to ‘burp’ out the traumas that so many of them carry. We have also learnt that more support and follow up might be needed, where people could go back, as it were, to the engagements that took place at the School. For us, the space and process regarding the decoloniality project is a continuous opportunity to learn, re-learn, re-shape and be humble, as we miss steps along the way. Finally, we envisage the School contributing to the overall national agenda of creating a South Africa that nurtures its people and respects the humanity of all through recognising for example, the need for good, [high] quality and relevant education that prepares and inculcates citizens that are geared towards social justice.

Conclusion

This article offered personal reflections of my involvement and participation in the UNISA Decolonial Summer School. The dialogue structure afforded me the opportunity to offer scholarly reflection on the successes, challenges, and possibilities the School has in pushing forward the decolonial agenda. I conclude by drawing from the Ghanaian concept of *Sankofa* which speaks of the importance of looking back in order to move forward; to assert that this reflective article allowed for ‘taking stock’ of where the School comes from, how it came into being, and the way in which it could be taken forward. As South Africa and the world continue to grapple with issues of social justice that have their genesis in colonialism, the decolonisation project offers possibilities of rethinking and re-imagining a future that highlights above all, the importance of all humanity.

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Some Thoughts on Decolonisation, Decoloniality, Racism, and Challenges of Citizenship in Communities of Learning

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Abstract

This article is an examination of challenges posed by decolonial theory for communities of learning in societies in which racism is pervasive. As racism is also an inheritance of colonialism, it draws sustenance from institutions developed for the efficiency and flourishing of colonial practices of disempowerment. Universities are among those institutions. Decolonial responses are dedicated to decolonising everything from curricula to interactions between universities and the wider community and across staff, students, faculty, and administrators. The author explores, critically, some of the metatheoretical debates that distinguish decoloniality from decolonisation in this process that often their ironic impact on expanding the norms of academic norms, in market forms, to the wider society through academic publishing and varieties of social media.

Keywords: decolonisation, decoloniality, epistemic closure, pedagogical imperative, political responsibility, racism, university

Introduction

This discussion examines the challenges that decolonial theory poses for communities of learning and the impact of racism as a political phenomenon of disempowerment. Many universities have become battlefields, so to speak, in which discourses and struggles for decolonisation occur. These efforts are often marked by the avowed practice – or praxis, if we will – of decolonising

everything from curricula to interactions with one another in an order of hierarchies. The roles and structures under contestation range from administrations and faculty to both and students, faculty and students, all the above and staff, and the relationship of the entire constellation to the downtrodden in the rest of society. Amid all this is also the set of metatheoretical debates in which some theorists differentiate decoloniality from decolonisation. These conflicts lead to a form of battle before the battle or struggle onto the struggle in locations of contestation outside of the university but whose consequence is part of academic markets – namely, journals, publishing houses, online forums, and varieties of media¹. For those confused at this point, decolonialists distinguish themselves from agents of decolonisation through the question of the *object* of their practice. Whereas many against decolonisation focus on dismantling vestiges of colonialism, decolonialists argue that more is needed to be done because colonialism produced modes of colonial ways of being in the world. They call this ‘coloniality’.

One could formally dismantle colonial states through practices of decolonisation but then find oneself living in what today is called the ‘after life’ of colonialism in the form of continued coloniality, which some call ‘the coloniality of being’. The practices and theorising that are antidotes to such problematic modes of being are, they argue, *decoloniality*². Curiously, a result of both decolonising and decoloniality is a search for practices of disentanglement similar in form to poststructuralist arguments of the late 1980s

¹ Studies are many. See A. Kayum Ahmed’s dissertation, *The Rise of Fallism: #RhodesMustFall and the Movement to Decolonize the University*, Columbia University Dissertation (2019), which offers a fairly comprehensive bibliography through discussion of the South African and United Kingdom contexts and the inspiration they also drew from African American and Latin American thought.

² In addition to Ahmed’s *The Rise of Fallism* (2019), see also his, ‘On Black Pain/Black Liberation and the Rise of Fallism’ in *Black Issues in Philosophy* (March 19, 2019). <https://blog.apaonline.org/2019/03/19/on-black-pain-black-liberation-and-the-rise-of-fallism/>; as well as Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine Walsh’s *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (2018); and Sayan Dey’s edited, *Different Spaces, Different Voices: A Rendezvous with Decoloniality* (2018).

into the end of the 20th century about persisting orders of knowledge and practices that produce subjugated subjectivities or subjects. As Judith Butler (1990) had argued against discourses premised upon attachments to subjects, exorcisms of discourses through which coloniality fosters and festers must strike many theorists who went through those old debates with a sense of eternal return.

There are, however, differences as decolonial forms of arguments point, at least, to the Global South as the origins of their reflections, primarily through the critical thought of initial dependency and then anti-Eurocentric thought from Samir Amin (1988) to Aníbal Quijano (1995; 2000) and then, through varieties of mediations from Enrique Dussel (1996; 2013) to Walter Dignolo (2018), Ramón Grosfoguel (2013; 2012), Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2016; 2008; 2007), María Lugones (2010; 2008), Catherine Walsh (2018), and varieties of recent proponents such as Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) in South Africa³. Each of these thinkers come to this discussion from very different disciplines – for example, Economics, Philosophy, Literature, Sociology, Religion, Philosophy, Critical Pedagogy and Education, and more, which makes at least the discourse of decoloniality a transdisciplinary one. Yet my observation of at least the poststructural form raises the question of which *kind* of poststructuralism, structuralism, or other kind of theory is manifested here. After all, decolonial theorists could legitimately argue, for the sake of consistency, that poststructuralism is an exemplification of coloniality, which would make at least any effort to subsume their thought under such a rubric an example of coloniality. I would like to stress in responses that I am not arguing here that poststructuralism or any other kind of Euro-animating theory would in any way *legitimate* decolonial theory. My claim here is simply that the *form* decolonial arguments take maps neatly onto poststructuralist thought.

Poststructuralist thought took many forms in the second half of the 20th century as its proponents responded to varieties of structuralism and other forms of knowledge in the Euromodern academy⁴. I will not get into the details

³ As many of the others are included in the texts in the preceding notes, I here add Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni's work in this note: *Coloniality of Power in Postcolonial Africa: Myths of Decolonization* (2013).

⁴ For a historical philosophical overview of structuralism, poststructuralism, and the implications and misunderstandings of both, see Peter Caws, *Structuralism: A Philosophy for the Human Sciences* (1997). For critical

here of the distinction between structuralism and poststructuralism, since unfortunately many poststructuralists are often unaware of their arguments either being poststructural or structural. Many often simply assert their thought as ‘theory’. What structuralism and poststructuralism share is an understanding of the importance of ‘discourse’. This activity – which one could also call ‘performance’ and ‘performativity’ – is enacted through the production of rules and of rules about rules through which whatever is under critique acquires ‘intelligibility’. The structuralists are often unwilling to say in advance what may become manifested from such critique, whereas poststructuralists are often willing to declare in advance their rejection of essence, essentialism, grand narratives, subjects, binaries, and a plethora of other intellectual commitments through which oppressive practices are sustained. Along the way, poststructuralism takes form in varieties of theoretical movements ranging from semiological psychoanalysis to textual critiques, of which Deconstruction is the most famous exemplar, archaeologies of *epistemes* (sciences) and other forms of *gnosis* (knowledges) practices, and genealogical unveiling of relations of power at the heart of discourses in the form of power/knowledge or knowledge/power.

At the level of metatheory – that is, theory about theory – however, important conundrums do arise. Critics have shown, for instance, that there is not only poststructuralist essentialist anti-essentialism but also poststructuralist Eurocentrism at the heart of how poststructuralist critique of Eurocentrism tends to equate theory itself with European thought⁵. In other words, it does

discussions connected to the context of the Global South, see Lewis R. Gordon, *Her Majesty's Other Children: Sketches of Racism in a Neocolonial Age* (1997), Chapter 5; Lewis R. Gordon, *Disciplinary Decadence: Living Thought in Trying Times* (2006); and also by Lewis R. Gordon, *Freedom, Justice, and Decolonization* (2021).

⁵ See Paget Henry, *Caliban's Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy* (2000) and Paget Henry, ‘C.L.R. James and the Orthodoxies of John McClendon and David Scott: A Review Essay’ (2007: 185–186); Eric Nelson, *Chinese and Buddhist Philosophy in Early Twentieth-Century German Thought* (2017); Lewis R. Gordon, *Her Majesty's Other Children* (1997); *Disciplinary Decadence* (2006); and the discussion of such debates along the concerns of interpellation in *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy* (2008), and ‘Essentialist Anti-Essentialism, with Considerations from Other Sides of

not take much to realise that almost exclusively arguing against Eurocentrism through discussing European thinkers results in maintaining European thought at the centre of thought. There is, as well, the political critique, where some proponents, in seeing poststructuralism as liberatory – as in fact *the emancipatory exemplification of theory's potential* – had to account for the flourishing of influence and professional rewards of such forms of thought in hegemonic centres of the dreaded neoliberal academy. It is not only Marxists but also Black liberationists who evoke the spirit of Malcolm X, who would raise the special relationship poststructuralist stars have with wealthy foundations of the establishment as a cause for proverbial pause⁶.

As the unfortunate damned of the earth wallow in more radicalised inequalities, the distance between them and the theorists who focused on discourse has increased. Yet the market commodification of knowledge did not rest, and as others hoped to transform their thought into capital from that model, rebranding became the order of the day. Thus, textual poststructuralism is now 'critical theory'. This is distinct from the Frankfurt School critical theory, which examined problems raised from Kant through to Hegel with social-theoretical analysis from Marx, Weber, and Freud. Genealogical poststructuralism, in contrast, sought more fertile soil along the so-called periphery. A combination of textual poststructuralism and genealogical poststructuralism, with some of the ideas from Black feminist thought and Black existentialism, is now offered under the brand of 'Afropessimism'. The genealogical turn was already there in the analysis of coloniality and the move to decoloniality, and elements from varieties of Indigenous and Black thought also came to the fore in what is now often offered as decolonial thought⁷. Now, my interest here is not to reject or support these movements. It is already clear to me, for instance, that a clear distinction between what is now called 'critical theory' on the one hand and what are called 'Afropessimism' and 'decolonial theory' on the other is easily seen in their audiences. The former speaks almost exclusively to a white, elite academy with at times tokenistic representations of colour. The latter are attractive to varieties of academics and activists in the

Modernity' (2012).

⁶ I discussed some of these back in 1997 in *Her Majesty's Other Children*. See also Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, and Literatures* (1992).

⁷ For elaboration, see Lewis R. Gordon, *Freedom, Justice, and Decolonization* (2021).

Global South⁸. Thus, whether one disagrees with the latter on theoretical grounds, something is at work with such clear demographical difference, even where for the most part the practitioners of all three may be distanced from those suffering material forces of inequality in an age of information receiving more priority than experiences (also a contested term) and degradations of esteem and flesh. As most of the action inevitably coalesces around institutions of learning, I will now offer some thoughts about the virtues of education and schools that may be worth considering as additions to these debates. The focus on these institutions makes sense, after all, since many of their functionaries act under the assumption of their independence even during times of declared colonialism. If independent, why should educational institutions change in postcolonial times or postcolonies?

A Community of Learners

We have already touched on the answer to that question in the ideas of neocolonial institutions and coloniality. So, let us instead move to the idea of these institutions, imagined or otherwise, before at least Euromodern colonisation of much of the planet. In English we speak of the ‘university’, which is very different from how many ancient peoples and those in other languages and cultures today understand places of learning. As the English-speaking institutions are heavily influenced by a Greco-Latin past, let us begin with those, although I by no means want to affirm the fallacy of claiming that

⁸ Readers for whom this may not seem evident should consult A. Kyum Ahmed’s dissertation and ‘On Black Pain/Black Liberation and the Rise of Fallism’, which documents the audiences across social media in Africa and Europe; and Catherine Walsh’s analysis of the role of indigenous activists in articulating more recent exemplifications of decolonial thought, brings those audiences to the fore. See her, ‘The Decolonial *For*: Resurgences, Shifts, and Movements’, in Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (2018: 15–32). And, for a discussion of concerns of textualism from perspectives of black thought, outside of the framework of Afropessimism, see Rozena Maart, ‘Exordium: Writing and the Relation: From Textual Coloniality to South African Black Consciousness’, in Monica Michlin and Jean-Paul Rocchi (eds.): *Black Intersectionalities: A Critique for the 21st Century* (2013: 21–33).

all roads of thought lead back to the Greek and Latin languages. Oddly enough, as my colleague Mogobe Ramose reflected in the 2019 Decolonial Summer School at the University of South Africa, if one were to go to Athens today and head to what we would consider its universities, we would have to look for the *To Πανεπιστήμιο* (*Panepistemio*), which literally means ‘pan-sciences’, though some might interpret it as ‘pan-knowledges’. We already see here a model that is very different from the understanding of places of learning we have acquired from histories of colonisation and imperialism. Such a history demands only one prevailing, whereas the notion of pan-knowledges and pan-sciences suggests a meeting of different ways of thinking and doing thinking. It requires a commitment not only to co-existence but also communicating – in other words, learning from each other. We could call this a community of learners. Thought of as a community of learners, this means that places of learning must think of students, professors, staff, visitors – anyone in its community – as interconnected and part of something ultimately greater than themselves. For instance, I begin my classes by asking students to define a professor. The students often offer hierarchical models that make professors seem like Moses at Mount Sinai with the sacred tablets. I then offer my two cents. A professor, as I see it, is someone who fell in love with learning and continued to learn. The learning over the years takes the form of research, but it is not limited to that. In short, a professor is an advanced student who has continued learning. A student, then, is simply a beginner or a person earlier in her educational journey. Some professors become jaded and forget what sparked their intellectual pursuits, but this does not change their status of being advanced students. And still there are others who may have entered the profession without any concern for learning but instead the narcissistic pursuit of ‘prestige’. Even so, to get where they are required some kind of learning, which makes their advanced student status also evident. It does not follow that all students are good students in the sense of commitment to the pursuit of learning.

The crucial point is that this understanding of professors and students requires the virtue of humility. The reason is that no one comes to learning without different experiences to bring to the subject. Thus, an advanced learner could learn from the experiences of a student at a beginner stage. As well, a beginner student can learn not only from the advanced accumulation of knowledge of the advanced learner but also from the different experiences that the learner or professor bring to the subject. We could call this the relational and functional model of learning. From this point of view, learning is not

something one carries as one would water in a vessel. It requires understanding even ourselves as open possibilities through which, in relationships with others, we discover – through active engagement – new things about ourselves, others, and the world in which we live⁹.

Some people discourage other people from changing when they seek an education. This is a silly path to take. Education, after all, requires growth, and how can one grow without changing? This brings us to an important element of places of learning. We have many names for them, but the one that prevails in the English language is ‘schools’. As with the discussion of what is a professor, I begin courses with a conversation as well on what is a school, even during my years as a secondary school teacher in the mid-1980s.

Readers could imagine what my adolescent students’ responses to that question were. Among them was, simply, “School sucks!” Others would say it’s a place they were *forced* to attend. I would then offer some input. The origin of the word ‘school’ is the Greek word σχολή (*‘skholē’*). It means leisure time. You could imagine their response. I would explain that it was not only Greek-speaking people but also many others from all over the world who realised the unusual circumstance of what is achieved in not having to spend all of one’s waking life searching for food, water, shelter, and in addition, to avoid becoming other creatures’ next meal. Freed now and then from exigency, our ancestors discovered they could devote their time to uniquely human things. Among those activities was the pursuit of knowledge. And this was acquired through the ‘lecture’, which is another word for σχολή, and which would lead to our English word ‘school’. In the ancient African language Mtw Ntr (‘divine speech’, spoken by the ancient peoples of Kmt/Egypt), for instance, the word for what we now call ‘school’ is *sbA*. That word also means ‘student’. Relatedly what occurs in a *sbA* is *sbAyt*, which means ‘written teaching or instruction’. A connection here is also to the quality of instruction one hopes

⁹ These are ideas argued for, in one form or another, in the thought of many theorists. They are in Frantz Fanon’s *Les Damnés de la terre* (1961) and Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1981). The specific forms offered here are what Jane Anna Gordon and I call ‘the pedagogical imperative’. For related discussion also at work here, see Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire: The Coming of Age of Epistemologies of the South* (2018); Catherine Walsh, ‘The Decolonial For: Resurgences, Shifts and Movements’ (2018); Lewis R. Gordon, *Freedom, Justice, and Decolonization* (2021).

will be manifested. *SbAyt* also means ‘wise teachings’. It is an idea later transformed among Greek speaking students, who eventually changed the ‘*b*’ to ‘*ph*’, as they pronounced it with what was close to the English ‘*f*’, to give us *sophia* – namely, ‘wisdom’.

In a way, understanding that school enables us to devote our time to uniquely human things makes the current divisions of learning institutions into the humanities, sciences, and professional schools both artificial and misleading. After all, every one of these is a uniquely human activity. Institutions of learning *are*, ultimately, the humanities. This is because everything that takes place in them – including activities such as sports, fraternities and sororities, political and other forms of clubs – are not only human but also what is involved in helping us learn to become more so. In other words, what many people discovered is that with leisure time, we can devote ourselves to *becoming human*. This idea of becoming human is paradoxical, since it requires many of us being human beings and actively becoming human beings. We could expand this idea beyond the mechanical understandings of learning to the larger one of cultivation and communication and the power that brings us together in what is called *citizenship*. In citizenship, we develop our ability to make things happen, which is what ‘power’ actually means. The growth occasioned by education, is also empowerment¹⁰.

Of course, this is not to say that these ideas are without need of critique. After all, who is afforded leisure time depends on the organisation of the society in which it is proffered. Many of the Greek-speaking people were organised into polities in which at times four-fifths of the population were enslaved for the luxury of others’ leisure. In others, such as in ancient Axum, Kush and various periods of Kemet, either there was sufficient collective labour to facilitate shared leisure or at least smaller numbers of those on whose labours others depend. We need not romanticise the past to realise that human beings, as opposed to other animals, generally found time to do uniquely human things emerging from the cultivation of culture. I have been focusing on Greek etymologies because the context in which these reflections have come to print is a primarily English-speaking audience. We should remember, however, that Greek is actually a fairly recent language in the life of a species that is about 220 000 years old. There are African language origins of many

¹⁰ For elaboration, especially with regard to citizenship, see Lewis R. Gordon, ‘Cities and Citizenship’ (2017: 36–43).

Greek and Latin words because of the obvious fact that African languages are older and the continent's northern shores are primarily of the Mediterranean¹¹.

I have already shown a more ancient African origin of the word *sophia*. Another is the word 'power', whose etymological accounts often point to the Latin '*potis*'. Yet if one were to dig deeper into the past, one would discover that that word in turn is from the Mtw Ntr word *pHty*, which refers to godlike or divine strength. Think of how today we perceived ultimate divinity as omnipotent. I could imagine the many insights on this idea that could be offered by many readers whose indigenous language is one other than English or any other European language. Indigenous Africans may find connections in their various languages connected to such insights¹². Indigenous peoples of Abya Yala (the Kuna-Tule people's name for what is now called 'the Americas') may offer other elaborations as their diversion from communication with peoples of Africa, Asia, and Europe may be more ancient. Still, the commitment to keep learning to learn is, we should remember, an endless task, as those who have taken up those other elaborations attest¹³.

Decolonising and the Decolonial Foci on Institutions of Learning: Racism

Let us now turn to another critical consideration of decolonising and decolonial foci on institutions of learning: racism. It is not only that institutions of learning during colonial times drew sustenance from practices of colonisation but that

¹¹ See Cheikh Anta Diop's *Parenté Génétique de L'Égyptien Pharaonique et des Langues Negro-Africaines* (1977) and *Cheikh Anta Diop: L'homme et l'oeuvres* (2003); Charles Finch, III, *Echoes of the Old Darkland* (1991); Gerald Massey, *The Natural Genesis* ([1883] 1998, and Anténor Firmin, *De l'égalité des races humaines: anthropologie positive* (1885).

¹² See, for instance, Nkiru Uwechia Nzegwu, *Family Matters: Feminist Concepts in African Philosophy of Culture* (2006); *His Majesty Nnaemeka Alfred Ugochukwu Achebe: A Ten-Year Milestone* (2013); Oyèrónké Oyewùmí, *What Gender is Motherhood? Changing Yorùbá Ideals of Power, Procreation, and Identity in the Age of Modernity* (2015).

¹³ See, for example, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide* (2014) and Julia Suárez-Krabbe, *Race, Rights and Rebels: Alternatives beyond Human Rights and Development* (2015).

they also produced an understanding of who could learn and who supposedly could not that was blatantly racist. A difficulty with talking about racism is that we are taught, in racist societies, from birth to grave, to pretend it either does not exist or is always irrelevant. It would take too much time here to address the details of why this is so. Among the many reasons is the focus on racists instead of racism. In other words, more people are worried these days about being called or identified as racists than about the ongoing effects of racial inequality and the institutions that foster it. Worried about being accused of being racist, the easiest path for them is to deny racism, as though racists and racism must be identical. This may seem counter-intuitive, but the logic of being racist and that of racism are not the same.

Look at it this way: a racist is an individual with racist beliefs; that person could believe that her race is superior to other races, or she may consider her race inferior to other races and thus support the other races. Now, imagine that person has very limited power. In other words, her racist beliefs will have no impact on the world beyond the insult she may directly unleash upon groups she dislikes. For the most part, her being a racist is irrelevant to the lives of the people she hates – unless, of course, she has the power of a goddess. Now, consider a society in which no individual people believe in the superiority or inferiority of their race but all the institutions are designed to assure that a specific group's race is placed at an advantage over others or that a particular race or group of races is at a disadvantage. Let us imagine that the society does not question its legitimacy. This would affect how evidence is interpreted in that society. What could their advantages be but evidence of one group's supposed excellence and others' limitations?

Racism is the institutional investment of power in one race of people over others. This requires, as well, the institutional *divestment* of power from certain groups. In other words, racism depends on empowering one race and disempowering others. To support racism, rationalisations of how such institutions function becomes necessary. I call these 'pleasing falsehoods'¹⁴. Of course, where there are pleasing falsehoods (such as the non-humanity of black and indigenous peoples), there are also displeasing truths (such as black and indigenous peoples *are human beings* living under institutional conditions

¹⁴ See, for example, Lewis R. Gordon, *Bad Faith and Antiracist Racism* [1995] (1999); *Existential Africana: Understanding Africana Existential Thought* (2000); and, more recently, *Freedom, Justice, and Decolonization* (2021).

of human degradation). Racism thus requires avoiding or hiding from the truth, which is the set of falsehoods on which racist societies rest. This is one of the reasons why disciplines whose purpose is to unveil such lies are often attacked in racist societies. I recall a debate I had with a black conservative nearly two decades ago in which my opponent argued that Black Studies should not be taught in American universities because it supposedly makes students ‘angry’. (I am sure similar objections are made in other countries across the globe.) My response was at first cheeky: “And what’s wrong with that?” But then I got to the central point. Many people think disciplines such as African Studies, Black Studies, Ethnic Studies, Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, and Indigenous Studies exist for people to see themselves in the curriculum. This is partially true; but there is an additional element. Without these disciplines, students often receive a very lopsided version of the world in which they live.

So much is kept out that what is left is, as dominant groups would have it, pretty cosy and sterile. That offers little, if any, room for critique of past governors, epistemological or otherwise, who persist and thus continue to rule. For example, whenever I teach Contemporary African Philosophy, students often notice something peculiar. Because that area of philosophy is not hegemonic, I must explain why it is philosophical, which means explaining what understanding philosophy is, with which the class would be working. This involves being accountable for everything that is taught. It is similar to what I have already mentioned about education, schooling, and what it means to be a professor. The students learn not only about philosophical movements outside of the European traditions of analytical and Eurocontinental practitioners but also about elements of the European tradition often taken for granted and thus offered without accountability. The students tend to get appropriately angry at the realisation of how miseducated they are in so-called generic or ‘pure’ philosophy classes. Their anger is not against what is called ‘Western philosophy’. Their anger is against not being offered a fuller picture of what philosophy proposes. They become upset *because they seek education* instead of being spoon-fed a particular worldview cloaks of avowed universality. Now, an excuse often given when they return to their other professors is that African, Native American, Asian, and many other philosophical offerings are not those instructors’ areas of specialisation. The problem there is that the students are not asking for their professors to be experts in those areas but instead – and at least – for them to exemplify the virtue of a commitment to continued learning. Gaining some competence could

go a long way. Jane Anna Gordon and I call this *the pedagogical imperative*¹⁵. It means to continue learning while one teaches. When I teach Contemporary African Philosophy, I do not only place that subject in conversation with European philosophy but also put it in conversation with what is offered across the globe. It is clear to the students that the incarnation of the course they encounter is but one and that it will change over time as I continue to learn. Why not receive something similar in their other classes?

When I teach existentialism, I examine problems of existence as posed and addressed across the globe – among African, Asian, Australasian, and Indigenous thinkers of Abya Yala and existential thinkers to their north. Students leave such courses realising that all people think and offer ideas for our common humanity's effort to grow. Anger, where it comes from a desire to learn, is actually, as Frantz Fanon showed in some of his psychiatric and political writings, healthy¹⁶. It is different from the anger premised upon rage against others. Put differently, the first kind of anger is ironically an expression of virtue. It is the same kind that is animated from being moved against injustice. The second kind is a vice. It is vicious because it is motivated against the dignity and empowerment of others. Racism is connected to the second kind. Now, although I am talking about racism, for the sake of time and space, I am going to shift to some critical remarks about how we engage in such talk. Many of us – I say 'us' because racism is a global phenomenon – are accustomed to talking about concepts and ideas in ways that separate their connection to what makes them possible. Yet, if human beings are creatures born of relationships, then it follows that efforts to disempower us are connected to blocking our capacity for growth through such relationships.

¹⁵ See Lewis R. Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon, 'On Working through a Most Difficult Terrain: Introducing A Companion to African-American Studies', in *A Companion to African-American Studies* (2006: xx - xxxv); Jane Anna Gordon, 'Beyond Anti-Elitism: Black Studies and the Pedagogical Imperative' (2010:1 - 16); Lewis R. Gordon, 'A Pedagogical Imperative of Pedagogical Imperatives' (2010: 27 - 35). For related discussion of critical pedagogy in the context of critical thought in contemporary feminist theory, see Rozena Maart, 'Race and Pedagogical Practices: When Race Takes Center Stage in Philosophy' (2014:205 - 220).

¹⁶ See Frantz Fanon, *Alienation and Freedom*, edited and compiled by Jean Khalfa and Robert J. C. Young (2018).

This is one of the harms of racism, but racism never manifests this by itself.

I have over the years taught a semester-long seminar called ‘Race in the Formation of the Human Sciences’. Our readings during the third week of that course focus on writings from François Bernier in the 17th century through to Immanuel Kant in the 18th century and then all the way through to Francis Galton, the eugenicist, in the 19th century. The students are often shocked at the racism they see at work in how many of the human sciences were formed. Much of this is because they are used to studying their intellectual heroes as gods instead of as human beings, with all the imperfections of such. It is a form of theodicy that permeates much thinking, not only in the academy but also in most people’s relationship to society.

Theodicy is the kind of rationalisation in which one attempts to preserve the goodness of an omnipotent and omniscient being in a world marked by injustice. If such a being or Being is good and just, why does it not intervene? Why does it let terrible things happen? There are many classic responses from antiquity through to the Middle Ages to recent times – see the African philosopher St. Augustine for some examples, the German 17th century philosopher (and many things else) Gottfried Leibniz and the recently late Ghanaian philosopher Kwame Gyekye for other critiques – in which two responses dominate: (1) human finitude limits understanding the omnipotent and omniscient being or Being’s ultimate plan; and (2) the love from such a being or Being entailing not standing in the way of human freedom which messes things up¹⁷.

I won’t address the fallacies of (1) and (2) here¹⁸. What is crucial for the purposes of this discussion is the observation that theodicean

¹⁷ See, for example, St. Augustine, *The City of God* (1950); Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Theodicy* (1952); and Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme* (1987). John Hicks’s *Evil and the God of Love* (1978); William R. Jones’s, *Is God a White Racist: A Preamble to Black Theology* (1997); Sherman A. Jackson, *Islam and Black Suffering* (2009); and Anthony B. Pinn, *Why, Lord? Suffering and Evil in Black Theology* (1999). See also Lewis R. Gordon, *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy* (2008) and *Freedom, Justice, and Decolonization* (2021).

¹⁸ Gyekye offers an excellent critique in *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought* (1987). See also Hicks’s *Evil and the God of Love* (1978). I offer critical discussion in many contexts, including *Freedom, Justice, and*

rationalisations take the prized being/Being off the hook. If we secularise it, we would see the same kinds of rationalisation at work in the defence of, say, South Africa, the United States of America (USA), and their Constitutions to models of knowledge through which the degradations of excluded peoples are cultivated¹⁹. When it comes to the study of the writings of canonical thinkers, I call this *theodicy of the text*, where they are treated like gods who have produced perfect works. Yes, it is a form of idolatry. We should bear in mind that this theodicy is also at work in the contrary position, where such authors are demonised.

In both cases, the result is the erasure of their humanity. This is not to excuse those canonical European thinkers. It is to point out that it is our responsibility to address the imperfections of thought – in a word, to really read what any author has written – and offer better alternatives. When we move to the seemingly nonracist elements of their thought, we do find some elements on which ironically their racist elements depend. Here are some examples. First, there is an obsession with the ‘origins’ of humankind in a way that leads to considering other groups of human beings as ‘deviations’ from those origins. Second, there is the presumption that the ‘original’ must be ‘pure’. Third, there is concern with reproduction – or repetition – as law. All this is abstract, but much of it is familiar. The first often presumes that the person doing the theorising belongs to the original group. Thus, Kant argued that human beings must have evolved in geographical and climactic conditions similar to the German/Prussian world of his day. Second, many of those thinkers presumed that diversity was deviation and origins were pure. As many of us know today, it turns out that at least biological origins point to places of maximum genetic diversity. And the obsession with reproduction for those thinkers was premised on the idea of male sources of progeny. Thus, control of female reproductive behaviour was central, and this led to an obsession with blocking certain males,

Decolonization (2021) and, with Jane Anna Gordon, *Of Divine Warning: Reading Disaster in the Modern Age* (2009).

¹⁹ In South Africa and the USA, constitutionalism has become forms of idolatry through which the larger picture of their constitutions often stopping short, where the lives of the damned of the earth are concerned, are often ignored. I discuss this problem in *Freedom, Justice, and Decolonization* (2021); see also Rozena Maart, ‘Philosophy Born of Massacres. Marikana, the Theatre of Cruelty: The Killing of the “kaffir”’ (2014).

now racialised, from sexual reproduction²⁰.

Much of this comes along with a long history that, again, I cannot spell out here for sake of space but have done so elsewhere in my books and articles. The short of it is the long history of how Christianity is linked to those ways of thinking about origins and purity and how the rise of global capitalism during the period of such reflections required a group of people who were linked to it as its benefactors²¹. Placing all these things together, one not only has the notion of white supremacy but also the psychological and sociological elements that support it. All this means, as I hope the readers will be realising, that addressing racism is complicated because it is connected to so many elements of the world in which we now live.

There are scholars and theorists today who call this ‘intersectional’²². I prefer to call it ‘multidimensional’. Both are connected to a basic insight. No human being is one-dimensional. In fact, one-dimensionality is one of the goals of racism. It is the oversimplification of what people are and how people live. Has anyone ever seen a ‘race’ walking? How about a ‘gender’? A ‘sexuality’? A ‘class’? The list goes on. These abstractions eliminate other elements of people to achieve a ‘pure essence’ of what is sought. That is why so many make the mistake of looking for pure origins. They don’t realise that the emergence of human beings is so profoundly existential that there is always ‘other-than’ added to any appeal to a singular element to which human beings supposedly conform or belong. Realising this, we should instead move from elimination to

²⁰ For a compilation of the relevant literature, from Bernier through to Galton, see Robert Bernasconi and Tommy Lott (eds.), *The Idea of Race* (2000).

²¹ Among the books in which I discuss the formation of white supremacy and anti-black racism is *Fear of Black Consciousness* (2021).

²² See, for example, Kimberlé Crenshaw, ‘Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Colour’ (1991: 1241 - 1299) and, interviewed by Bim Adewunmi, ‘Kimberlé Crenshaw on Intersectionality: ‘I wanted to come up with an everyday metaphor that anyone could use’ (2014); and Evelyn Simien and Ange-Marie Hancock, ‘Intersectionality Research’ (2011: 185 - 243). For elaboration in ways connecting to my point about multidimensionality, see Rozena Maart, ‘Exordium: Writing and the Relation: From Textual Coloniality to South African Black Consciousness’ and Lewis R. Gordon, *Fear of Black Consciousness* (2021).

connections. This is another way of using the grand term ‘relationality’. So, let us do that. Let us look at various ways in which human beings attempt to force other human beings outside of relationality with the consequence of disempowerment²³.

Disempowerment and Invisibility

For now, for the purpose of brevity, I will call this disempowerment ‘oppression’ and place ‘invisibility’ into the long list of its many consequences. The first disconnection is to reject the right to exist *numerically* or *quantitatively*. This one tags onto race immediately. Where there is racism, there is always the claim that there are too many members of the rejected group around. Although any group could be made into such – as we see happening right now with the hatred being fomented against immigrants in many countries across the globe – the historic signifier of this one is black people. There are supposedly always too many black people around, even in countries where black people are actually a near-negligible number of the population. This is why many institutions think they achieve diversity by having one black person in any given context. *One*. This might be understandable in some Scandinavian countries, but, as many know, such an attitude develops in professional institutions in countries such as Brazil and South Africa where the black population far exceeds their representation in institutions of power. To make the inclusion of *one* count as diversification is absurd. That makes blackness potent stuff. It makes such people exponential. The second is *temporal*. This is a tricky one. It is linked to how we think of what it means to be ‘modern’. The word ‘modern’ is from the Latin *modo* (which means ‘just now’). How do you know ‘now’ except through anticipation of the future? If one does not enter the future, then one’s ‘now’ belongs to a past. But which past? If it is not that one that immediately precedes us – because of being linked to where we are going – then it must be to one that ceased to go anywhere. Thus, in effect, to be modern is to belong to where humanity is going, which means to be linked to the future, which retroactively legitimates one’s now and, through that, one’s past. Here, disempowerment becomes linked to land. In settler colonial societies, the settlers conclude that indigenous peoples belong

²³ I offer here a summary of the discussion of these features elaborated in *Fear of Black Consciousness* (2022).

to the past since the future is supposedly ‘settled’ for the settlers whose relationship to land is premised on its transformation into ‘property’.

Most (if not all) Indigenous people’s conceptions of land are as many Indigenous scholars across the globe have argued, based on understanding at least its relationship to life in which people are more like custodians instead of property owners. The idea that those linked to land in this way leads to the construction of ‘primitives’ and other notions of people who supposedly do not belong to the future. This is what many Indigenous people fight against across the globe. From the perspective of settlers, such people are not legitimate, even ‘now’. What do we call someone who belongs to the past but stands before us in the present? The word in English is ‘ghost’. Such people are thus treated as ‘haunting’ the present. Think here of the tendency many non-indigenous people have of leaping quickly to spiritual concepts and metaphors whenever Indigenous people are mentioned. In Africa and Australia, where Indigenous people are also black, one notices oscillation between quantity (race) and temporality (haunting) depending on the focus. When many non-Africans discuss Africans as ‘indigenous’, spiritual language is soon to follow.

The third regards *speech*. This one is peculiarly gendered in European and Asian societies. It is there in ancient myths of mute women. If one were to peruse women’s writings, one would notice the large presence of titles with the word ‘voice’ in them. Here is a short list: Anna Julia Cooper (1892), *A Voice from the South*; Carol Gilligan (1982), *In a Different Voice*; Michelle Walker (1993), ‘Silence and Reason: Woman’s Voice in Philosophy’; Kathryn Lasky’s (2005) biography of African American poet Phillis Wheatley, *A Voice of Her Own*; Mike River’s (2005) *Listen to Her Voice: Women in the Hebrew Bible*; Judy Yung’s (1999) documentary history of Chinese American women, *Unbound Voices*; Emily Honig and Gail Hershatter’s (1988) book on Chinese women in the 1980s, *Personal Voices*; the subtitle of Xinran’s (2003), *The Good Women of China* is *Hidden Voices*.

I refer to these authors because they are in the European and Asian contexts and their extension in their colonies. The crucial point here is that speech is a required element for political participation. To appear politically – to have power – is to have a voice. But what this means is not simply that one speaks but also that one is either not *heard* or heard without being listened to. If one is not heard, then one’s mouth is moving but the effect is silence. These are expressions of a basic fact. Disempowerment demands being politically mute. The final one is *epistemological*. Epistemology refers to theories of

knowledge. I will not belabour this one since it is clearly a consequence of the other three: If one should not exist, if one does not belong to the future, and if one is voiceless, then what one offers epistemologically becomes void. The consequence is what I call *epistemic closure*²⁴. This means that there is a form of invisibility that occurs ironically when one is ‘seen’ because one’s appearance is illicit. This means that to see people in these groups is to see all that needs to be seen; there is supposedly nothing more to know. Learning is shut down. There is no question. There is no inquiry. The door is epistemologically closed.

It should be clear that any group could be placed into these four categories depending upon the conditions placed on them. And this is the point. All of these are *human-created forms of disempowerment*. It is thus the responsibility of the human world to fix them. It is also crucial to bear in mind that this typography is not exhaustive. For instance, I did not mention here how disability is often equated with inability. ‘Disabled’ and ‘unable’ are different considerations, and there are many forms of epistemic closure that elide lived reality and the range of what is at work in the lives of those labelled ‘disabled’. We come, then, to my concluding – and I must stress *non-exhaustive* – remarks. There is much more that I can say on what is at work with all of these, but the main consideration I would like to make connects to the idea of political responsibility.

These are all human manifestations of power. Power, I should like to reiterate, is the ability to make things happen. We could use that ability to enable others to make things happen. Or we can use our ability to block others from being able to do the same. This is what disempowerment means.

Towards a Conclusion

Too many of us want to restrict our analyses of racism, sexism, homophobia, class inequalities, and settler colonisation to moral forms of discourse. In doing so, we individualise what are in fact political issues. Why does this pose a problem? If such problems really depend on individuals *as individuals*, such individuals would have to be gods if they held such power to change the world. With morality, one can point to who is responsible and who is not. Political

²⁴ For elaboration, see, for example, Lewis R. Gordon, *Existential Africana* (2000: 65, 88–90, 151–158, 162).

responsibility, however, is very different. First, it is always about *us*. This is because the jurisdiction of political power is over all within its jurisdiction. Second, because it applies to all within its domain, it pertains to those who are no longer here and those to come into its ambit. This means, then, that it applies as well to the anonymous. Third, unlike moral responsibility, where one could be innocent or guilty, such a notion is irrelevant when it comes to political responsibility. What matters is that one is a member of the polity. This is why it does not work to protest that one did not vote for those in power.

Everyone will bear the burden of the actions of their government and those entrusted with its function. It also explains why language of purging oneself of coloniality, while commendable, achieves very little, if anything, politically²⁵. Take, for example, debates on reparations. When people discuss this in the USA as what white people owe black people, they miss the point. Black people are, after all, members of that society. This means those historically and presently harmed and everyone else will share its obligations – including its penalties. Whose tax revenue and other resources would such compensation come from? This is why white people who go to the USA and reject reparations on the grounds of not being the historical white people involved in the enslavement of African people miss the point. They share with recent immigrant black people the same burden. Becoming a member of a society entails also taking on its debts. This applies as well to the responsibility for the unfortunate, dehumanising activities happening at borders and other areas of the USA and similar countries across the globe. No society lasts forever; no government is ‘on top’ forever. At some point, its people will be held accountable.

The German philosopher Karl Jaspers, who lived through Nazi Germany and courageously fought against the machinations of that government and his fellow citizens, had a chilling observation on what follows their being vanquished: Has such a society behaved in a way deserving of mercy?²⁶ ‘But what can *I* do?’ each reader may be tempted to ask. Or worse, ‘There is nothing I can do’. On this score, there is much to be learned from so many who faced what in their times seemed impossible. The ancestors of

²⁵ For elaboration, see *Freedom, Justice, and Decolonization* (2021); and *Fear of Black Consciousness* (2021). And for similar discussion, see Iris Marion Young, ‘Responsibility and Global Labor Justice’ (2004: 365–88).

²⁶ Karl Jaspers, *The Question of German Guilt* (2000).

Indigenous people faced an eliminated future. So, too, did many enslaved people. The list can go on. All the circumstances around them offered one message: any effort to alleviate their condition will fail. So, we should ask, why did they act? We know they acted, because if they had not, many of us – their descendants among the damned of the earth – would not be here. They acted without forecast. They acted without guarantee. They acted, however, out of commitment. This many of them were able to do because they understood the importance of the relationship of ancestors to descendants; they knew, in other words, that their actions were not about *them* but about *us* as understood as generations over all time, of the witnesses gone and those to come. We have an opportunity, then, in places of learning, and the broader ‘here’ beyond them. This involves examining the vices of degradation and anti-truths or pleasing falsehoods that challenge communication and our imaginative capacity to build institutions of integrity and human flourishing. It also involves thinking anew about questions of what it means to be human, free, and reasonable in an age in which proverbially all is at stake. Eradicating the ‘what’s in it for *me*’ mentality would open the door to what is to be done to build better places of learning and, by extension, better societies. These debates on decolonisation and decoloniality may not be original in form, but in content they do expand the scope of what all of us should consider. A question we could ask ourselves, through such action, is whether, politically considered, our descendants’ response would be, upon looking back upon us, ‘We are so fortunate they acted’ instead of, ‘Why, O why, did they not act?’

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Decoloniality and Enslavism

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Abstract

In this article, I propose an overdue connection between the critical concept of decoloniality, and the framework of what I call *enslavism*, as a term for the human abjective practices of enslavement of Black life during the hundreds of years of the transatlantic slave trade, New World slavery and its ongoing afterlives. It seems to me that much of recent decolonial theory has – beyond making nods to the event of transatlantic slavery – not extensively addressed the specific history and present of enslavist anti-Black violence in its connection to the history of imperial coloniality.

Keywords: slavery, imperial coloniality, settler colonialism, enslavism, human abjective practices

Introduction

In this article, I propose an overdue connection between the critical concept of decoloniality, and the framework of what I call enslavism, as a term for the human abjective practices of enslavement of Black life during the hundreds of years of the transatlantic slave trade, New World slavery and its ongoing afterlives. It seems to me that much of recent decolonial theory has – beyond making nods to the event of transatlantic slavery – not extensively addressed the specific history and present of enslavist anti-Black violence in its connection to the history of imperial coloniality. There seem to be quite separate strands of debates about settler colonialism, as well as strands about post-slavery racism against Black diasporic life. I agree with the current afro-pessimist approach (Wilderson 2010; Sexton 2008; Hartman 2007, if in a different register) to see different structures of violence employed against, respectively, indigenous populations and Black people, a difference not in scale but in quality as one between white human practices of contingent violence occasioned by

theft of land and sovereignty, on the one hand, and gratuitous violence against Black life which keeps re-producing ‘social death’ (Patterson’s by now well-established term from 2000), on the other. I see the production of Black social death as one of the mainstays of ongoing coloniality – in that it overlaps with white (post)imperial domination, as in the case of South Africa (Maart 2014b). In addition, the embeddedness of gratuitous anti-Black violence at the center of post-Enlightenment Western formations of *humanity* has to be seen more clearly. I suggest, as the mainstay of ongoing metropolitan regimes of coloniality which critics like Wynter (2005); James (2017); Dussel (1996); Mignolo (2009; 2018); Lewis Gordon (2000; 2007a; 2007b), Jane Gordon (2014) and Trouillot (1995) foreground. Others, who represent a spatially and temporally wide decolonial project, one could say, with respectively different interests and foci – too many to reference here –, have introduced and disseminated important work around the millennial turn, such as de Sousa Santos, Vasquez, Shilliam, Tlostanova, Lugones, Spivak, Tuhiwahi Smith, Bagues, Maldonado-Torres, Bhambra, Randeria, Mbembe, and Martineau.

And recent collections, monographs, and websites exploring the current state of decolonial studies, extensive bibliographies that may be fruitfully explored, include, Broeck & Junker (2014); Jackson, Manthalu & Waghid (2017); Tamdgigi *et al.* (2015); Stingl, Mignolo & Walsh (2015); Dey (2019); Rivas-Triana *et al.* (2017); and Franzki & Aikins (2010).

At this point, one cannot address this rich cluster of contributions as homogeneously, let alone harmoniously assembled intervention; the field at large has been exploding, and has expanded its reach exponentially over the last few years, as a quick search on *academia.edu* or other platforms will amply demonstrate. This proliferation is being met with massive ultra-right resistance by actors like the AFD (an extreme-right party now present in the German Bundestag and on regional and local levels, known for intense connections to the fascist militant organisations) as was made manifest by a recent debate in the German parliament where the political right intervened to stop or undermine even those most harmless attempts in German politics to address the history of German colonialism¹.

¹ Cf. https://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2020/kw47-de-koloniales-sammlungsgut-804236?fbclid=IwAR0S_hNG1zge0DbRk5zZ5p_kfE7aykwvayrk71FXc2UqdhYGHVpHVQBCjE4

The debate has developed in the context, most recently, of attempts by the German government – in response to the pressure generated nationally by the restitution of ‘human remains’ – campaigns and the public debates around the restoration of the *Humboldt-Forum* in Berlin, and internationally by the legal claims against genocide and for reparations of the Herero and Nama – to change their public tune and to fund decolonising events, research activities, and changes in public space like city locations, streets and museums. One also assumes that these current activities to top-down decolonise in the discursive realm have something to do with a kind of renewed scramble for the African continent, given the rapidly growing influence of China, and the USA, but also of countries like Turkey, in African countries. For a radically anti-colonial reading of this more than problematic context I urgently recommend watching the recorded video of Kenyan writer Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor’s keynote address at the controversial conference *Colonialism As Shared History: Past and Present*, organised by the German government and the German Research Foundation (DFG), in which she scathingly destructs these benevolent ways to re-monopolise the discourse for white Western readings of coloniality’s ‘entangled’ histories.

Cf. https://lisa.gerda-henkel-stiftung.de/sharedhistory_keynote_owuor,

Note on Methodology and Location

This piece of work, like my most recent publications, comes out of a sustained effort to let myself be addressed by Black epistemology, to become a ‘spoken-to’, as it were. It is possible because of the work of contemporary thinkers. Most important among them for my work are the following:

Sylvia Wynter (2003); Orlando Patterson (1985); Toni Morrison (1993); Paul Gilroy (1995); Hortense Spillers (1987); Saidiya Hartman (1997; 2007); Lewis Gordon again (2000; 2007a; 2007b); Charles Mills (1999); Rinaldo Walcott (2014); Fred Moten (2013); Frank Wilderson (2000); Rozena Maart (2014a; 2014b); Kwame Nimako (2011); Katherine Mc Kittrick (2013); Egbert Martina (2014); Grada Kilomba (2008); Françoise Vergès (2004); Nell Painter (1995); Jared Sexton (2008); Brand (2020); Christina Sharpe (2010; 2016); and as earlier presences, Fanon (1970) and Césaire (2001).

My scholarly work could not be articulated without engagement with decades of Black intellectual and epistemic labour antecedent to it, and generative of it. In keeping with this trajectory, my article proposes a meta-critical look at current discourses and practices of decoloniality that have been activated in the last few years, specifically in the German context which has been, of course connected to and impacted by, the international rise of *decoloniality* as a critical paradigm to read the global modern world. For reasons of space and time constraints, this article cannot deliver an exhaustive investigation of those discourses; it works by way of an assemblage of notes addressing what I consider paradigmatic discursive instances of my present moment. I conclude with some suggestions as to the urgency of an anti-enslavist pedagogy for the Humanities. My position is that of a white senior scholar at a North-Western German university, the academic and scientific prerogatives of which have remained anchored in the largely unexamined framework of post-Enlightenment Humanities, and the Natural and Technical Sciences with their inherently white and racist premises unimpeded, even though in the last years, as in other German institutions, post and decolonial interventions have begun to erode the silent understood-ness of Enlightenment conceptions of the world.

As a scholar of the crucial role transatlantic enslavement played for the constitution of contemporary European societies, not just for the USA, the Caribbean region and the African continent, with my work, I wanted to contribute to an overdue critique of the systemic agnotology which has kept anti-Black enslavement safely ensconced in subfields of historiography, instead of acknowledging the political, cultural and social function transatlantic enslavement, inseparable from modernity's coloniality, assumed for European societies. We live globally, to paraphrase Hartman (2007), in the future slavery has made.

Bottom-up Struggle versus Top-down 'Decolonisation'

Decolonial initiatives, Black German and Black migrant intellectuals, scholars and activists, as well as white supporters in universities, museums, and political environments) have as of late speedily gained traction in German mainstream media and politics, and have managed to overcome the obscurity to which they used to be relegated, in a society keeping itself over-determined by the historic responsibility of coming to terms with the Shoah, at the expense

of taking any account of the history and culture of German coloniality. They have thus managed to draw attention – if aggressively contested by conservatives and the new right-wing populist extremist, to hitherto almost completely suppressed parts of German history, most prominently the German genocidal war in Namibia, and the political campaigns for financial reparations to its victims and their descendants, but also the cultural activism around the repatriation of so-called ‘human remains’ from German ethnological collections, or the overdue critique of the coloniality of artefact collections in German museums and art institutions. This wider context has been created by political and intellectual pressure generated in Germany by Afro-European and international Black diaspora communities’ critical re-articulations of European post-Enlightenment hubris.

Much of this work has begun to circulate on websites (cf. the excellent critical contributions by Martina 2014) as well as in a number of recent publications in German². For texts on Black Europe published in English, readers may consult Opitz *et al.* (1992), also Hesse, Pitts, Wekker (2009) as well as Florvil and Plumly (2018).

I also refer readers to a number of online interventions:

<https://advocate-europe.eu/stories/when-will-eu-put-black-europeans-political-agenda/>, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/de/press-room/20190321IPR32133/end-racist-discrimination-against-afro-european-people-in-the-eu>;

<http://isdonline.de/projekte/>;

www.berlin-postkolonial.de;

www.hamburg-postkolonial.de/willkommen.html;

<https://www.eoto-archiv.de/leadership-und-advocacy/#netzwerk-schwarzer-forscher>; <https://decolonizationinaction.com/2019/10/11/episode-1-part-2-decolonizing-berlin/>;

² See Florvil (2018) for a more extensive bibliography.

<https://www.institut-fuer-menschenrechte.de/themen/schutz-vor-rassismus/int-dekade-fuer-menschen-afrikanischer-abstammung/>.

Thus, the white German liberal public, backed by recent decolonial historiography appearing in leaps and bounds, has begun to take notice of, and steps against the silencing of German colonial history and colonialist culture in the metropolis.

Cf. <https://zeitgeschichte-online.de/thema/dekolonisierung-und-postkoloniale-gesellschaften-afrika>; <http://www.kulturrat-shop.de/Kolonialismus-Debatte-Aus-Politik-Kultur-17>.

Not all of this work has appeared in English. Cf. Zantop *et al.* (1998); Osterhammel (2000); Hund (2011); as well as Naranch & Eley (2014), and most prominently in the German contemporary context, the recent work and activism of German historian Jürgen Zimmerer (2014).

<https://www.geschichte.uni-hamburg.de/arbeitsbereiche/globalgeschichte/forschung/forschungsstelle-hamburgs-postkoloniales-erbe.html>

In Bremen, the town where I live and work, this accelerating discourse has led to a number of exhibitions, events, public workshops and political interventions, which has been initiated and supported by Black-led grass roots activist groups like. See for instance, <https://www.decolonizebremen.com/>;

and,

<https://www.rosalux.de/stiftung/projektfoerderung/projekte/projekt/info/7183/decolonize-bremen-politische-bildung-zu-kolonialen-spuren-rassismus-und-widerstand/>.

At the same time, it has taken the shape of a top-down discursive process which functions largely to contain post, de- and anti-colonial resistance, energy and intellectual input within the prerogatives of white political control. This political process, organised by the City of Bremen's senate as a series of open forum debates with stakeholders interested in working through, as the media speak has it, the 'legacy' of colonialism, has resulted in an extensive

proposal to frame future decolonial activities of the city, the university, grassroots groups and other actors.

Cf. <https://www.kultur.bremen.de/service/kolonialismus-13508>.

Some years ago, I also used the word ‘legacy’, which I have come to reject, having realised the transgression involved in appointing violent anti-Black history to a ‘legacy’ for the Humanities. Euphemistically calling a century-long practice of anti-Black abjection ‘our Erbe’ (legacy, or inheritance) has moved the public from a ground zero of utterly silencing the history and presence of German colonialism to enthusiastic, high-speed and upbeat confessions of ‘our’ responsibility for the past as if that would not require any material, social and political cost and a revolutionary end to present day extractive policies vis-à-vis African countries.

This critique, it bears repeating, should not at all be taken as a comment on Black and allied grassroots activist, and intellectual struggles for decolonisation. Quite the contrary, it wants to claim some reservations vis-à-vis all too facile practices of decolonisation in a declarative mode of white benevolence. It is striking, if not surprising, to see the wide array of immigrant communities from the African continent largely absented from this discursive overhaul project to re-invent the City of Bremen as a host and motor of decoloniality. This, as one may safely assume, has reasons not only in language difficulties, which isolate those communities, and in their insecure legal status as refugees, or as paper-holders of only temporarily granted staying permits, which prevents them from participation in civic action, but also in anti-Black racism of a mainstream white community who cannot even see them as agents of change in their own right. What these injunctions infer is the challenge to theoretically think through critical decoloniality in the tension between the eventual arrival of white mainstream interest in ‘the issue’ of the colonial German past and the growing, if rarely acknowledged pressure on the liberal mainstream by African, Afro-European and Black diasporic agents and discourses. Even though there are a handful of exceptions, as in the recent massive interest in Felwine Sarr’s (2016) intervention against *Beutekunst* (looted artefacts) in European institutions, the default option is still and again to re-create and disseminate decolonial consciousness as somewhat of a white virgin birth (cf. Sarr’s recent contribution to the decoloniality debate).

Thus, as another recent addition to these discourses, the highly regard-

ed and visible German weekly *DIE ZEIT* produced a special feature issue on German Colonialism (cf. Werner 2019) which assembles state-of-the art German scholarship in the field. Except for a one-page contribution, aptly subtitled ‘Zwischenruf’ (interjection) by an Afro-European journalist and curator, Arlette-Louise Ndaokozé (2019) in this 40-page dossier about the history of German colonialism, and for an article by a Chinese author, all the contributions are by German historians. Ndaokozé angrily protests against ongoing European racism in the guise of mythically employed European ‘Humanität’ (the ideal of lived and shared humanness). With the above exceptions, the magazine consists of white-authored scholarly articles on various facets of German colonial involvements and their present afterlives which altogether manage to create the impression of white discovery of these issues. This issue seems to be one of the visible results of the pressure campaign which German historian Zimmerer and his research cluster at the University of Hamburg has mounted within academic circles, and beyond, in liberal media. However, there is not a single mention of Black diasporic scholarship and activism dating back to the early days of transatlantic enslavement which has laboured and struggled for anti-enslavist and decolonial epistemologies for centuries, from the freedom narratives (traditionally called ‘slave’- narratives) to the 20th century thinkers ranging from James to Wynter, from Williams through Rodney to Biko and recently to contemporary academic interventions like the present collection.

Thus, the issue creates a bitter aftertaste in the mouth of this reader at least: are we to believe that decolonialism is, with a guilty twist, no longer the white man’s (and white woman’s) burden but their self-owned achievement? In the same vein, and reminding at least this reader of self-congratulatory British events and publications that, in 2007, celebrated 200 years of the abolition of slavery as a white achievement, the hundreds of years of the transatlantic enslavement trade and economy appear in *Europa zwischen Kolonialismus und Dekolonisierung*, the official publication of the German Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung, compressed into the ‘transnational event’ of the trade’s legal abolition, and focused on abolition campaigns as proof, that ‘the debate about participation, equality and human rights had achieved global dimensions in the 19th century’ (Metzler 2018:11).

Paraphrasing Rosalind Morris, Black life here becomes ‘the site of primal conflicts and violence *and of* radical social justice’, due to a white ‘desire for the possibility of a forgiveness of colonial violence’ (Morris 2019).

Black life, in the similar approach of Nsabimana (2019), excluded ‘from the category of the human for so long and whose exclusion legitimated the institutions of slavery, now come back as the bearers of the human, as the shining representatives of its most exemplary promise: forgiveness’ (Nsabimana). She names this ‘moral racialised extractivism’ (Nsabimana). This is an apt phrasing for many of the white impulses driving the current wave of decolonisation debates, which seem to dream of coloniality as a legacy transcendable by way of benevolent discursive relations. The question I am thinking through is: how are these practices of framing decolonial discourse as an issue of a white recreation of self-consciousness connected to the anti-Black violence of what I call enslavism?

There is epistemic anti-Black violence at work in the extensive denial of discursive leadership and authority which has muted Black diasporic interventions other than as ethnographic spectacles of suffering, which Hartman (1997) has named ‘scenes of subjection’ in the continuation of slavery’s accumulation and fungibility of Black life for human societies. How endemic these processes of epistemic appropriation are for white scholars is something I myself had to realise by way of a sharp critique by Afro-German scholars and activists who rightfully criticised our work at Bremen, in INPUTS and in CAAR (Collegium for African American Research). They objected massively to us illegitimately calling our research group – composed of white PhD and post-doctoral students – ‘Black Studies’, and bolstering white academics’ careers in research of the Black diaspora, instead of pushing for anti-white supremacist change by way of strategic hiring/supporting of Black people in the academic body. The group was disbanded. At this point in time, there is still not a single Black Studies degree programme nor a department in any German university. At the point of writing this, the Berlin-based organisation EOTO has begun a campaign for massive changes in the German system of higher education, calling for substantial structural interventions into universities’ agendas and for the implementation of Black Studies, and Black knowledges – focused on anti-racist teaching, research, and funding practices.

Methodologically, what follows therefore is a series of notes which represent a work-in-progress combination of previous writing with some observations of decolonial constellations in my local and national environment. These notes are meant to suggest an ensemble of questions much in need of further debate.

Decoloniality in Process

Decoloniality has become the new social media buzz, and it seems as if – from one day to the next – European institutions are eager to admit to their colonial past (if not to their neo-colonial present, necessarily) and to decolonise from the top down. As an overdue response (often not acknowledged as such) to years of widely ignored work of Afro-German individuals and collectives, as well as white and Black postcolonial diasporic initiatives inside and beyond the academy, this version of ‘decolonise!’ appears to be a kind of white cultural imperative to become better citizens by looking at the legacy of colonialism, as it is being framed now in mainstream media. As such, whilst one need not doubt the emphatically righteous motivation of at least some of those white discourse movers and participants, the driving premise of these top-down decolonisation efforts seems to suggest a form of damage control: to limit the potential threat of resistance and demands by Black people in the here and now for a change in the costly realm of the social and the political. It is the creation of a broad liberal, open discourse on all possible venues, a so-called ‘civil forum’ policy as in Bremen which creates the illusion of participation and impact, and of a bottom-up surge, because everybody, such is the mantra, will be ‘heard’.

‘Everybody’ involved, in most cases, agents of white civil society have been spurred to action (in the first place) by grassroots communities of Afro-German activism, and some white post-colonial engagement. They then assumed leadership positions within those campaigns almost immediately. As a result of the semi-public debates, there now exists an extensive proposal:

[https://www.kultur.bremen.de/service/kolonialismus-13508\)%20%20%20%20%20%20%20.e](https://www.kultur.bremen.de/service/kolonialismus-13508)%20%20%20%20%20%20%20.e)

Such documents are telling in that they predominantly list cultural issues, which may be addressed *without* allotting much additional financial and/or manpower resources to the so-called decolonisation process. The recommendations for action include alternative renaming of streets against the colonialist public memory embedded in names like Lüderitz-Strasse, in keeping with Black led campaigns in other German cities

<https://www.kolonialismus.uni-hamburg.de/2016/12/01/6-nachwort-joshua-kwesi-aikins-diedekolonisierung-des-stadtbildes-strassennamen-zwischen-kolonialnostalgie-und-perspektivumkehr/>.

They also suggest a revamping of museum artefacts and expositions. In keeping with the spirit of this state-moderated process the mode of this endeavour is rather upbeat, and connects this recent development, which started in 2016, with an idealised history of responsibility that Bremen has supposedly performed ever since the 1970s. What goes unnoticed in this optimistic narrative of doable top-down decolonisation is the fact that the first wave of anticolonial activity in Bremen in the 1970s, which led to an anti-colonial commemorative plaque on the city's colonialist *Elephant memorial* was the result of a fierce struggle of leftist, anti-imperialist activists, students, leftist university actors and grassroots activists.

Cf. <https://www.bremen-sehenswert.de/anti-kolonial-denkmal-elefant.htm>

This local battle supported an international solidarity campaign with the liberation struggle in Namibia, and it was won against the powers that were: a struggle that was shunned and pushed to archival silence by the city's and the university's more recent collective memory.

What also goes unnoticed in this current decolonisation programme is Bremen's long-lasting involvement in slavery and its extensive role in it as an early beneficiary and profiteer of the enslavist plantation economy via their international finance connections, their trade in sugar, in linen for slave clothing, cotton, cocoa and tobacco, and as one of the major enslavist port cities. Thirdly, the process is almost always focused on the past as past. On the part of state-loyal white actors in these campaigns there is no connection made between a critical examination of the so-called colonial 'legacy' and the enslavist racism in discourses, practices and policies of our present.

Effective changes in the racist composition of state systems of discursive and material power and control, as in immigrant legal status, as in schools, universities, museums, media have not been adequately forthcoming, even though a series of proactive measures modelled on the Equal Rights Amendment in the USA might be easily imaginable. Instead everyday anti-blackness prevails and different forms of racist violence against non-white Germans, migrants and refugees, including state policing and fascist attacks accelerate. In this context of white benevolence and its flipside, anti-black agnotology and violence, I see the surge of sudden interest in decolonisation – as laudable as it might be compared to its non-existence in mainstream liberal German consciousness until about five years ago – as a massive effort

to co-opt actors into a discourse that frames actions like the change of street names from colonial slaughterers to activists/scholars/thinkers or potentates of the Black diaspora as a kind of end result of decolonisation instead of a useful reformist step in the realm of everyday, mundane lives of Black life in Germany, however urgent. Bringing ‘everybody’ into an open forum, except in rare instances, does not include Black migrants and refugees in a city like Bremen.

As such, this top-down decolonisation stands in a jarring, and quite astounding disconnect to grassroots activities with their demands for better living conditions, health care and immigration status of Black people in Germany as the survivors of the ravages of ongoing colonialist policies of arms’ deals, climate destruction, wealth extraction and support of politically degenerated elites. There is now a deluge of discourse, after decades of silence on German colonialism and the massive refusal to accept what many white Germans have seen as a second shaming about the past, mobilised beyond the Shoah, but the problem remains that white breast-beating cannot be a substitute for anti-colonialist politics against anti-Black violence in the present. The current discursive decolonisation push into the mainstream works to the same effect the white women’s feminism, gay and queer struggles and other white liberation efforts have achieved in the last few decades, which have successfully ‘civilised’ the western European white human’s image of themselves for some factions of the white populace. The already mentioned Yvonne Owuor succinctly and radically critiqued these discourses in her fierce keynote, culminating in the call to the younger generation of scholars and activists, to destruct the white imperial canon and its manifold reincarnations, reminding us of Césaire’s dictum that white Europe is (and remains) rotten to the core. (cf. Césaire’s essay ‘Discourse on Colonialism’ originally written in 1950).

At present, we witness a struggle between populist right and fascist forces who want unchecked violence and white power back, and the liberals who are willing to accept – on the level of cultural politics – the ‘legacy’ of colonialism. While this kind of basic acknowledgment of European ravages is of course a step forward from the previously dominant agnotological denial of the past, it remains a limited and also overall bad-faith response because it assigns coloniality to a moral guilt, the acceptance of which will create improved white citizenship in the present and therefore heal the wounds of history in a kind retro-active promise. This approach, however, is at best a

kind of helpless ‘*ersatz*’-move: it shies away from an acceptance of Black knowledge and authority, calling for an end of the world as we know it. If we follow Fanon, Wynter, Césaire and recent post-Fanonian philosophers and intellectuals, like Wilderson, Gordon, Maart and many others, the human is because the Black is not. That insight requires an analysis of ongoing anti-Black colonialist-capitalist white power *in the present tense*. It will require white support of struggles against white human politics, economies and military systems that aim far beyond white civil acceptance of ethical guilt for the past. I suggest also to think against ethnography: part of the problem with this ‘new’ white decoloniality is that – while its theoretical impulses could be and have been mobilised for a critique of modernity as a system of white power, as a critique of humanism, and the state apparatus – such kind of radical mode of critique has all but disappeared from interventions bespeaking an attitude that amounts to a white ethnography of suffering.

The most prominent example of this can be seen in the recent white self-satisfaction widely spread in the ‘human remains’ campaigns, in which bones are being looked at to clear their former belonging, atrocities are being gauged by numbers of objects in museum collections, and ownership has to be forensically attached to individual sufferers of colonialist interventions because otherwise a recognition of that suffering in material terms is considered impossible. The currency here is white outrage; the collateral benefits of this outrage flow back in forms of kudos to white humanist liberal players (quite comparable to 18th and 19th century white abolition’s pornotroping that Wood, Spillers and Hartman, among others, have stridently destructed), thus resulting in a kind of narcissistic ownership of the cruelties of past regimes of knowledge and power.

I am not claiming an easy way out of the conundrum of white re-coloniality and constant incorporation into enslavism, at all. However, any posture of white innocence in benefaction, as our Bremen group have learned, needs to be given up. A turn is necessary, away from a documentation of Black suffering (which has become the standard currency in much postcolonial and decolonial practices in higher education) from the point of view of benevolent, proto-abolitionist feeling for the victims of such violence, towards a Black-authorised, and led critique of the white subject’s position whose well-being has been conditioned, and for some people, staked on just such practices of abjection. We need to learn how to go beyond ethnographic benevolence, as well as beyond modish buzz as white European teachers, students, intellect-

tuals, and how to practice disloyalty to white abjectorship and its ongoing power. Beyond suggesting this theoretical perspective, I also offer some thoughts on the urgency of decolonial, anti-enslavist transdisciplinary research and institutional pedagogy, because the abjection of Blackness is closely tied – in political, cultural, social, and philosophical terms – to the European politics of white identity, of which the European academic landscape is one of the remaining bastions. In our institutions which regularly draw rather uneven numbers of eager Black European students to instruction, but mostly attract more or less naïve white European students, a research-oriented pedagogy needs to be put in place that, in order to counter anti-Blackness, will have to teach white humans to live with the unaccustomed and unexpected urgency of loss, or surrender, of European white entitlement – beginning with their ownership of history, culture, and philosophy – which needs to be the prerequisite for anti-racist, and decolonial discourses that respect Black knowledges, on and in Europe, and its academies.

Why Enslavism?

Black Diaspora Studies have produced a wealth of historiography of Euro-American modernity with respect to the productive function the transatlantic enslavement trade and New World slavery took on in its constitution, development, and constant economic, social, cultural, and philosophical (re)articulation. This relatively recent critical discourse has only of late slowly trickled into adjacent humanities' disciplines and – to a surprisingly hesitant degree – into European philosophy, and critical theory. Thus, even though New World enslavement as an object of historiography has become one of among the best-researched phenomena of the Western world, other disciplines have been largely resistant to engage the connection between enslavement, modernity's Enlightenment, and its transatlantic history. By way of carefully maintained disciplinary boundaries, an examination of this connection has hardly reached beyond scattered admissions of modernity's so-called paradox. A transdisciplinary field able to address the manifold political, cultural, and epistemic questions arising from an observation of this intricate interdependency, beyond national canons and boundaries marked by Area Studies and their linguistic limitations, still awaits its realisation. Moreover, in order to critique the durable nexus of transatlantic enslavement practices and discourses, and not keep 'slavery' safely entombed in the Humanities'

archives as deplorable events in the past, we need a term; a term that puts theoretical-critical thinking about modernity as a regime of slavery (to turn Hartman upside down, who amply discusses slavery as a regime of modernity in *Lose Your Mother*) on an 'equal footing' with established generalising critical terms as anti-semitism, racism, colonialism that allow us to see structures, patterns, and power systems, instead of singular and isolated events.

That kind of term, and I suggest here to say *enslavism*, will make it possible to criticise a structure and a set of discourses and practices embedded in the 'afterlife' of slavery, to say it with Hartman, again. It is a telling fact that humanist education, including recent so-called avant-garde theory, has so utterly abjected modern transatlantic enslavement from its purview to not even have a generalisable term for it. Slavery, as a term descriptive of a limited temporal and spatial sequence, at best, relegates the practice of enslavement to the realm of a phenomenological particular which may or may not be included in versions of history. If retrievable at all, then it functions again only as event, as having come and gone, not as a structure-generative systematic practice, including its genealogical function; as object of historiography that is, which is by definition, as a string of particulars, not able to generate meta-critical, epistemic potential. We have the concept of militarism, so we can theorise wars. Without that frame which then points research to generalisable insight into patterns of imperial designs, capital investments, technological destruction, psychology of war, and other components of war-making, particular instances of war, say, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, would not be theorisable. We have been able to theorise colonialism as a practice of subjection, exploitation, and dominance in the modern arsenal of European power, beyond its various particular instantiations in and by respective countries, because we have a term, even though it had to be re-appropriated from imperial historiography critically and agonistically. *Slavery*, by contrast, exists in the Western intellectual critical imaginary only as an isolated event, since our very language has axed it from our inner and outer worlds of critical thought.

The 'event' can be described, and historiography, at this point, fills libraries, but it does not translate into a cause for and lever of theorisation, and that is not happenstance, but has method, and purpose. The humanist white subject has been moved to remember, address, articulate, empathise with, rejoice in, question the brutality of, and elicit other particularly emotional responses to the specific situation, to the imagined 'event' of being a slave in *slavery*. Thus, the image of *slavery* as traumatic occurrence, situated often

beyond the frame of human rational understanding, that limit event – in an act of perverse theft – has given metaphorical heft to modern and postmodern protest against white human suffering and bondage. The idea of *slavery* as ‘event,’ and of *the slave* as a generic, naturalised term for a being held in slavery, however, has never put the white subject’s practice of forcing Black being into enslavement and/or of parasitically profiting on any conceivable level from Black abjection, sustained for centuries, on the agenda. On the contrary, the enlightened outrage at the event of *slavery* has served to screen perpetual white practices of enslavement off from view.

There is a second severe problem with non-generalisability: the event may elicit only affect vis-à-vis the victimised – as ad hoc white pity, terror, or revulsion – meaning white responses to *slavery* are all still in the realm of Christian emotions, have never passed beyond the abolitionist empathy Marcus Wood has so adroitly deconstructed (Wood). Moreover, the event of *slavery*, as such, always remains the isolated disembodied entity *apart* from, outside the white subject’s abjectivising agency on and against Black being, that which does not and cannot speak about the white subject’s active role in the very production of abjection. In Western white modes of thinking, the making of *slavery* into an event has thus successfully pre-empted theoretical cognition, as well as epistemic leverage.

Enslavism as a term, as a horizon of common reference from disciplines as varied as History, Philosophy, Modern Literatures, Cultural Anthropology, Law, and Social and Political Sciences, could also facilitate the necessary transdisciplinary research and pedagogy we urgently have to put in place. This is particularly urgent for the European academy, still a bastion of white subjectivity, where the humanities have been drained towards remaining atoms of individual de-colonial, de-enslavist scholars working away in isolation at their institutes, never commanding enough critical mass to garner attention and possible support of the national and supranational research funding apparatuses, and not willing to dilute their own research to the point of non-recognisability in research networks with positivist, presentist, philological, or other idealist multi-, inter-, and even some decolonial agendas, which disconnect their critique of Western subjugation of Indigenous populations and the ravages of their lands and resources from a systemic critique of white power, the mechanics of which were forged, tested, written and rewritten, mobilised and legitimised by and in enslavism’s historically founding practice of Black enslavement.

Beyond Disciplines: Toward a Hermeneutics of Absence and a Pedagogy of the Trace

Such necessary transdisciplinarity would require a *hermeneutic of absence* and a *pedagogy of the trace* (Broeck 2013). In my own work I have addressed the impact of modern enslavism in those areas that more classical transatlantic ‘slave’-trade and New World slavery historiography has either not extensively addressed, or which has been silenced. Beginning with my very first questions, for example, of John Locke’s philosophy, the history of gardening, the implication of gender in enslavism, or the overall denial of interracial contact in Europe, going through the regimes of modern enslavism suppressed in 19th and 20th century theories of liberation, and ending up, literally, in the German hinterland of enslavism, in a project to assess the impact of enslavement and the ‘slave’-trade on the city of Bremen this *hermeneutic of absence* has brought me up against the confines of established methodologies, research, and dissemination.

Cf. https://urbanpolitical.podigee.io/39-hinterlands_slavery),

Ongoing constraints of disciplinarity within the academy’s subdivided humanities serve to prevent the creation and pursuit of research questions and teaching curricula which lie outside the realms of national, and/or disciplinary purviews. This is particularly true with respect to producing an overdue durable epistemology of enslavism even though in very recent years individual scholars have, as renegades to their disciplines, made advances towards more interdisciplinary and transnational methodologies. However, the results of research on modern enslavement in (cultural) historiography, metropolitan ethnography, historical sociology, philosophy, or other pertinent disciplines oftentimes fall entirely outside the teachable agendas and remain all too marginal to the canons the academy has created. This, then, becomes a massive problem for the dissemination of knowledge, and thus for a necessary generalisation and pedagogical availability of this epistemology of enslavism. Heavily indebted to Toni Morrison’s *Playing in the Dark*, I argue therefore for practices of reading and argumentation, which necessarily run counter to the canonical positivism of the disciplinary archive. I want to think about early modern enslavism as that which if one could do something like a socio-psycho-gram of white capitalist empowerment – needs to be analysed as the major propeller of modern capitalist mental and psychic

constituencies. If commodification and propertisation, the learning, grasping, and materialising 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 package-able, shippable, transportable, and possess-able and as such usable, itemisable, and fungible bodily entities was its constitutive practice.

As the primary site of financial networking, crediting, speculation, insuring, of profit and calculation – as we know most graphically from Ian Baucom’s *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery and the Philosophy of History* – the practice of enslavism must also be considered as the primary psychosocial and cultural, collective, and individual training site for capitalist white human sociability. To learn – directly and indirectly – how to commodify an always already resistant being needs to be considered the primary threshold exercise for the modern human to become, to empower him/herself as subject. If human society could achieve that kind of transport and handling (in the physical and metaphorical sense) of more than ten million sentient beings as things, and then could manage to abject this practice successfully from a collective memory of the history of human freedom, it must have passed the test of its own emerging system’s demands in the most generic way, and nothing could stop that sociability from further world commodification. This must be considered as the founding practice of the European human subject: the global transacting of a shippable sentient species consisting of Black people. This insight begs to be much more consistently incorporated into many of the local decolonial campaigns that have developed over the last decade, including the one in Bremen I have discussed above. There is a history of Bremen’s massive involvement in and profiteering – in economic, political and social terms – from the Black transatlantic enslavement in the late 17th and 18th century waiting to be written, which obviously predates, and over determines the colonialist structures and policies of the 19th century, and which have shaped Bremen’s might and wealth as a city, as well as that of individual families still among the powers-that-be (Beckert 2014). Recent activities against the shamelessly anti-black public self-representation of the *Bremer Baumwollbörse* to promote the international cotton industry have put this history on the agenda, once more, and initiatives like *Decolonize Bremen*, and the newly founded *Black Community Foundation* will not let Bremen’s political and economic elites off the hook.

Cf. <https://taz.de/Bloss-keine-Geschichte/!5716162/> ; and <https://www.facebook.com/blackcommunityfoundationbremen/>

Enslavement differs fundamentally from other traditions of human bondage; it entailed not only Black death, it also created the globally negotiable, transferable and competitive profitability, for the human, of Black *social death* in a generative way. The crucial difference between, say, warlords that kept prisoners as slaves on their grounds, and the transatlantic modern production of social death was the achievement of an abstraction of non-personalised property, item mobility and thus global marketisation, and the capitalist inheritability of social death. One could, as a human, inherit social death as capital – financially and otherwise, directly and indirectly – as one could inherit other forms of wealth, which of course entailed a constant and structural reproduce-ability of Black socially dead sentient beings. I am interested in finding out what capacities the human, as a group, trained him/herself to exert, to be able to carry out such a historically crucial endeavour. What needs to be stressed in this context is the structural impasse of comparison, the impossibility of analogy, between modern enslavement and forms of colonial, and/ or patriarchal and classist subjugation, domination, or conquest of ‘the Other’ by which a prior humanity of population groups was called into question, and suppressed (Wilderson 2010). That impasse lies in the purposeful and concerted production of accumulation and fungibility to use Hartman’s (1997) terms again, of Blackness as something which categorically lies outside the realm of the human, without land, without gender, without a position within the nexus of free labour and capital, an enforced state of sentience next to the human world without a relation to and within it. It lies in practices of abstract and concrete marketable creation of Black serviceable flesh, as Spillers has argued. That impasse worked in enslavement, as well as it has been working in its afterlife. Thingification and the itemisation of Black life as fungible for whatever only seemingly contradictory purposes suits the human world as we know it, is not a thing of the past; it lives on as enslavism.

If one acknowledges enslavism as a white supra-individual practice, what has it meant for white European empowerment, not just in the economic, political, or social sense, but also in the psycho-cultural, and psycho-historical sense? The problem is how to figure that out in retrospect, particularly, if it has functioned as one of the best kept inner sanctums of white (postmodern)

consciousness. What we need is a psychoanalysis of the meaning of abjectification (in the sense of the race-fiction based itemisation, and the absenting of human relationality for Black sentient beings) for *the white European subject* who has used the very results of those practices of abjectification, perversely, as the threatening border of their own entitlement to self-possession. Thus, the most ubiquitous European post-Enlightenment liberation metaphors: ‘We shall never, never, be slaves!’ or ‘I am not your n---!’ mark that white horizon precisely. What I mean to get at is the challenge to think about white self-possession as trained and (ac)knowledged not only in a process of defense and advance against feudal interpellation by the powers of the aristocracy and church rule, that is as a cluster of ideologies emblematising the European subject’s liberation from overwhelming and restrictive powers—which translates in the 19th and 20th century into further rebellions against subjectivation by the state, the factory, patriarchal power, and the tyranny of the symbolic. Instead, from an anti-enslavist perspective, these discourses and practices become visible as acquired, and trained and drilled into collective memory as the collective direct and indirect production of Black social death.

Suggestion: Protocols of White Abjectorship

From here one can move back to the contemporary Black social and civil death that has been produced by the European subject as a late consequence of this kind of abjectorship. Active mainstream ideology these days, ranging in its proclamations from leftists and liberal perspectives through many factions in European white feminism way over to the advocates of the political right, hinges on the imperative to defend Europeanness – culturally, socially, economically, politically, and for some, by various means of warfare – against the perceived threats of Blackness. My point, on the contrary, requires learning to read Europe as the afterlife of enslavism, and thus its internal fictions and practices as always already rotten to the core. The production of movable thingness re-occurs in the Mediterranean today: a new, necropolitical entity has been put, in the most literal sense, into circulation: crucially not a recognised Other to the European self, the ‘it,’ the drowned Black, is entirely abjected by the categories of European white subjectivity: a transportable, politically and economically usable, but also dispose-able self-generative item.

The Black migrant, both in the metropolises and in the hinterlands, has been denied any dwelling in the realm of ‘difference,’ and ‘otherness’ (postcolonialism’s key signifiers) but has become registered only as abandonable item-ness. We need a language to talk about the material, political, and cultural interests of the postmodern European subject in this white production and circulation of the Black migrant’s social and civil death: to interrupt the white gaze on pitiful suffering, even to disturb the waves of spectacular white media empathy, washing up when things get all too obviously horrible for Black so-called illegal fugitives as in the shock and surprise registered in German media at the time of this writing, geared towards the gratuitous brutalisation of homeless Black migrants by the state apparatus in German cities. Instead, it will be necessary to listen to the radical critique of white abjectorship that political representatives of Black diasporic communities have articulated in various venues, yet without substantial echo in the critical academy. The various Black manifestos and catalogues of demands, and reports of struggles like *Lampedusa in Hamburg* (see Lampedusa 2014), the work of the ISD and EOTO, the wide range of Black feminist interventions (Florvil 2018; 2020) and the *Catalogue of Demands by People of African Descent and Black Europeans* are not only responses to particular constraints, violent abuses and discrimination. They all rally against the fundamental momentum of white anti-Blackness: the un-humanisation of Black being. Hearing that critique could, as Spillers has phrased it, lead to the production of *protocols* of white self-disruption within the academic world. This process has been unconditionally demanded by Black critique: to submit to a Black gaze on the white European practices of re-abjection of Black life which have been mechanised, propelled, and organised by state apparatuses, institutions like the university, and the mainstream media. Attention needs to be directed to anti-racist, anti-fascist investigations into the discourses and practices of a white enslavist continuum, which connects seemingly far extreme ends of the political spectrum.

That attention needs to address the dangerous political mainstream populism raging across European metropolitan cities, and the only seemingly random mob and state violence, oftentimes lethal, against dark-skinned migrants all across Europe, including lynch murders in Southern Italian villages, street violence in Moscow, no-go areas for Black Europeans in European cities, and fascist successes in national and regional elections all over Europe. Moreover, FRONTEX policies of Fortress Europe carried out

with high and prioritised budgets reaching far into African countries, for military cooperation arrangements on the highest level of command need to be battled against. The white media savvy to promote Europe's sanctity against the so-called 'waves of intrusion' from overexploited Black countries needs to be loudly rejected and undermined. In my reading of the situation, without an analysis of white abjectorship and enslavism the structural European violence against Black being cannot become fully cognitive, and decolonisation remains an impaired analytical frame.

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The Spirit of Seriousness and Decolonisation

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Abstract

This article seeks to examine ‘the spirit of seriousness’, as articulated by Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, as a problem for decolonial theory and philosophy. It gives an account of the spirit of seriousness from the vantage of existential phenomenology in general and then works through its relevance, by way of W.E.B. Du Bois, Lewis Gordon, and Sylvia Wynter, for a diagnosis of the colonial condition and Euromodern man. Thus, it argues that decolonisation is necessarily opposed to *a* spirit of seriousness, the one manifest in the attitude of the coloniser which various colonial forms seek to impose upon the colonised. It then explores the seeming paradox that decolonisation calls for *taking seriously* commitments that might amount to a form of decolonisation that adopts the spirit of seriousness. Through a discussion of Frantz Fanon, this article argues that the project of decolonisation requires serious commitments that nonetheless reject the spirit of seriousness.

Keywords: Philosophical problems, existential attitude, Euromodern colonisation, racism

The Spirit of Seriousness

This article seeks to examine philosophical problems both descriptive and normative in nature regarding decolonisation. In order to do so, it examines a concept with both descriptive and normative significance in the existential phenomenology of Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir: namely, the spirit of seriousness. I will give an account of the spirit of seriousness in order to try to spell out why an understanding of this existential attitude is significant for projects of decolonisation. The spirit of seriousness is an orientation toward values that treats them as ready-made, external impositions, rather than as

productions of human freedom. Hence, the spirit of seriousness is a form of bad faith (in the Sartrean sense of *mauvaise foi*) about one's responsibility for what one values. Drawing upon Sartre, de Beauvoir, W.E.B. Du Bois, Lewis Gordon, Sylvia Wynter, and Frantz Fanon, I will explore how Euromodern colonialism and racism involve a form of the spirit of seriousness. Hence, I will contend that decolonisation is opposed to a spirit of seriousness. However, this raises a thornier matter: decolonisation calls for taking seriously commitments that, in turn, pose acute tendencies toward indulging the possibility or temptation of a retreat to the spirit of seriousness. These commitments I will thematise in terms of *the anti-colonial* and *the decolonial*. I conclude by suggesting that this means that the project of decolonisation is an anguished one that, paradoxically, must be taken seriously while nonetheless rejecting the spirit of seriousness.

The two primary texts from which I derive my conception of the spirit of seriousness are Sartre's *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology* ([1943] 1992) and de Beauvoir's *The Ethics of Ambiguity* ([1947] 2015). We can start, then, with Sartre's phenomenological ontology of the irreducibility of being-for-itself into being-in-itself. Put in simpler terms, we may view the issue as pointing to this matter: the difference between what consciousness is – that is, the 'being' of consciousness – and what an object of consciousness is – that is, the 'being' of which consciousness is conscious.

The key ontological point is expressed by Sartre roughly along these lines: being-in-itself *is what it is* ([1943] 1992: 29). The being of an inkwell, to use Sartre's oft-repeated example, is not a matter of concern to the inkwell. The inkwell is what it is; its being is in the modality of being-in-itself. Human existence, though, raises the possibility of a different mode of being. What I do gives rise to what I am. This type of being Sartre terms being-for-itself. Being-for-itself, according to Sartre, is not what it is and is what it is not ([1943] 1992: 28): when I answer the question of what I am, in addition to whatever answer I give, I am also the being that is giving this answer, and by virtue of that 'giving', I am more than the answer given. Hence, the ontological characteristic of my consciousness is that of being-for-itself. My consciousness confronts the question of what it shall be. For Sartre, being-in-itself and being-for-itself are ontologically incommensurable; they cannot be synthesised into a coherent whole. On this point, Sartre diverges from G.W.F. Hegel, from whom he takes the language of being-in-itself and being-for-itself. As Lewis Gordon points out, for Hegel, 'the in-itself-for-itself – *Geist*, interpreted as

Absolute Spirit – is achievable not only ontologically but historically’ ([1995] 1999: 27).

The Absolute in the Hegelian framework is that which by all appearances must be contradictory but is, through internal resolutions that remain opaque to us, coherent nonetheless. For Sartre, though, being-in-itself-for-itself remains an irremediable contradiction; it is an impossibility ([1943] 1992: 145n12). The Absolute is impossible – though human freedom can nonetheless imagine this impossibility as if it were not only possible but actual. Sartre is famous for expressing this point in terms of the impossibility of *God* ([1943] 1992: 140). The God who is the subject of Christian theodicy, for instance, would seem to manifest the ontological characteristics of being-in-itself-for-itself. In theodicy, God is understood to be both omnipotent and omnibenevolent – that is, at once all-powerful and capable only of good. To be a powerful agent is, ontologically, in the terrain of the for-itself: power implies choice, and the being of one who chooses what to be is being-for-itself. But to *only* be good would seem to imply the register of being-in-itself. If God is good, it would seem that God is good in the way that an inkwell is an inkwell. God’s goodness is not a matter of choice or even concern for God. This would seem to present a paradox, though, if God is understood to be omnipotent. Is not an all-powerful being powerful enough that it may choose to be bad?

The theodicean conclusion that God may be both omnipotent and omnibenevolent would seem to imply that God’s being is such that it resolves the ontological tension between limitless power and invariant benevolence.

God is an Absolute in which apparent contradictions are opaquely resolved. Consciousness of God, of course, can nonetheless treat God as an in-itself-for-itself, regardless of whether one rationally avows the logical coherence thereof. Such consciousness we can term faith. Indeed, faith of some sort – as Immanuel Kant ([1787] 2007) sought to show – may be a necessary foundation for knowledge. But by the same token, faith may function as an assault on knowledge: I may regard what I know to be true as if it were false and what I know to be false as if it were true. This is what Sartre terms *mauvaise foi* or *bad faith* ([1943] 1992: 86 - 116). In bad faith, I am conscious of evidence in such a way that it functions non-persuasively *despite* the presence of adequate evidence (Sartre [1943] 1992: 113). I know my faith to be at odds with reality. Why would I do this? The Sartrean answer is that my freedom presents the ubiquity of *anguish*. In anguish, I am reflectively conscious of my freedom ([1943] 1992: 64 - 85). I realise that it is up to me to

decide what to do and who to become. If I shrink from the responsibility this entails, then I may opt for a path of self-deception in which I deny the reality of my freedom. In bad faith, I may regard myself as merely a being-in-itself, and this offers the possibility of relief from anguish as the pain or discomfort of responsibility to choose can be evaded insofar as I may imagine myself to be beyond choice in the way that the inkwell is beyond choice. However, I still may confront persistent reminders of my capacity to choose.

An antidote can be found, though, in a further dialectical development of bad faith wherein I regard myself as a being-in-itself-for-itself. In such bad faith I define myself through a theodicean logic in which my capacity to make choices is avowed at the same time that certain choices are regarded as intrinsically impossible. In defining myself as if I were a being-in-itself-for-itself, I believe I *am* good, or that I *am* bad, or that I *am* youthful or that I *am* philosophical, that I *am* artistic or I *am* scientific, and behold: each of my actions, chosen on the basis of this self-definition, appears plainly to be a manifestation of my identity. I *am* good, and each of my acts is good; I *am* scientific, and each of my beliefs are scientific; I *am* youthful, and each attitude I adopt must properly be the attitude of those who are youthful. My ontological prophecy can function in self-fulfilling fashion.

It would be a different matter, however, for me to express these characteristics as desired ones: I want to be youthful, I want to be scientific, I want to be good, etc. Such desire invites an anguished reflection: *how* can I be youthful, or scientific, or good? In bad faith, though, I may assert that I am what I desire to be, such that the choices through which this is manifest are not anguished ones but are simply my fulfilments of a fixed and unavoidable essence. The path to overcoming bad faith would seem, then, to call for me to understand myself as driven by desires to be this or that: I could defeat the tendency toward bad faith by insisting on understanding my acts as chosen in relation to values that are themselves chosen.

It is here where we can clearly outline the spirit of seriousness in its particularity: the spirit of seriousness is a form of bad faith about what is valued or desired. The spirit of seriousness treats values as if they were unchosen. In the spirit of seriousness, I treat what I value as if it were something that I *must* value. I would not be *me* if I didn't value it, or I would not be *human* if I didn't value it, etc. Sartre gives the example of bread: the 'serious man' eats bread not because he values its taste or nutritional facets but, simply, because to him bread is necessary for human life. We can point to much empirical evidence –

of those from communities that do not consume bread, or persons who have adjusted their diets because of coeliac disease, for instance – to show that it simply is not the case; our serious man is lying to himself about the necessity of bread.

For Sartre, he does so in order to evade anguish: to take responsibility for what he values displeases him, so he opts to regard his values as matters that are not up for debate. He values what he values, and there is nothing more to say on the matter – or so he claims. From the perspective of a Sartrean ontology, a being-for-itself is condemned to make choices shaped by values that are themselves chosen. There are no unchosen values, nor are there acts that do not reflect one's values in some way. The spirit of seriousness, then, in regarding its values as unchosen, is in bad faith. Rather than being the contingent products of my ongoing axiological agency, in the spirit of seriousness I regard my values as if they simply are what they are. The spirit of seriousness is thus a sophisticated effort to define oneself in relation to the in-itself-for-itself. In bad faith, I may define myself directly as God or as a similarly Absolute mode of being, e.g. a demonic embodiment of a 'pure evil'.

Yet I may also define myself indirectly as one who is *judged* by God. Bad faith can appeal to the in-itself-for-itself by manifesting its desire for *fealty* to God. In doing so, bad faith can manifest a form of what I call *Ideal Shame* (Meagher 2018: 117). I capitalise this term because it is ultimately neither normatively ideal nor actually shame. For Sartre, shame occurs when I see myself being seen. In shame, I see myself as a being-in-itself because I see what I am to another. I see myself as an object of another's consciousness. You see me as lazy, and seeing myself seen as lazy, I see this laziness that I am *for you*. This implies that, read rigorously, shame in the Sartrean sense is normatively neutral: shame is equally present where I see myself through your loving gaze as when I see myself through your despising gaze. Crucially, shame may thus function as an antidote to bad faith: if I have persisted in believing in my superior productivity despite all evidence to the contrary, the shameful apprehension of my laziness through an encounter with someone who regards me as lazy may snap me out of my stupor. Shame can spur me on to pay attention to the evidence. But by the same token, I can appeal to shame to maintain my self-deception: I can seek out being seen by you because I know that you will see me in the way that I want to see myself. Shame, thus, can serve either an interruptive or a reinforcing function with regard to bad faith.

If we move from shame to Ideal Shame, this involves a shift from seeing myself as seen by another to seeing myself as seen by an *imagined* other. The other that judges me is not, then, a fellow being-for-itself but is a projected being-in-itself or a projected in-itself-for-itself. In Ideal Shame, I sit in judgment by God. In shame, my adjudicator is free, and I would be wise to remember that it is the values chosen by this other that shape how she or he sees me. In Ideal Shame, though, my adjudicator is *dictated* by values. Such dictation implies a corruption of the notion of value, though, since values become material features of the world, beings-in-themselves. Ideal Shame is thus a masquerade in which I project a God who can judge me, so that I can be relieved of the anguish of judging myself. The problem, though, is that I have projected this God, such that I have not taken leave of that anguish but have merely disguised it. In the spirit of seriousness, I adopt the perspective of Ideal Shame, in which I am always judged by an absolute standard of value that I regard as external to me, though it is ultimately my own choices that make this standard function as if it were absolute. Values internally and contingently adopted are regarded as if they were externally and inescapably imposed.

How does such seriousness manifest? In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, de Beauvoir provides an existential typology given in terms of five figures: the serious man, the sub-man, the nihilist, the adventurer, and the passionate man. The serious man we have already sketched through Sartre: in de Beauvoir's words,

The serious man gets rid of his freedom by claiming to subordinate it to values which would be unconditioned. He imagines that the accession to these values likewise permanently confers value upon himself. Shielded with 'rights,' he fulfils himself as a being who is escaping from the stress of existence ([1947] 2015: 49 - 50).

He is emboldened by a sense of Ideal Shame that, by positing an external God-figure that stands in judgment of him, relieves him of the anguish of working out values of his own. The God-figure of the serious man, though, need not be a theological or religious conception of the divine, since the function of Ideal Shame can be converted into secular terms. Hence, the serious man may stand in relation to secular ideals of right, of patriotism, capitalism, colonialism, and so on.

The sub-man is a variation on the serious man. For the sub-man, the

source of Ideal Shame lies not in the transcendent (God, nation, race, etc.) as it does for the serious man, but lies instead in the figure of a concrete other. The sub-man yearns for a reality in which a fascist or totalitarian leader ascends and can function as 'dictator' not only of a state but of the values of the sub-man. He is suffused with a masochistic desire for an indispensable hegemon, because this presence will relieve him of the anguish of his acting freely upon the world. Yet the sub-man's embrace of a concrete other, a leader or an abuser, implies the projection of divine characteristics onto this other, such that they function for him as does God or the projection of transcendent values for the serious man.

The nihilist is the ironic counterpart to the serious man, and often evolves out of an existential position of seriousness. The nihilist finds no validity in the transcendent and from this concludes that all values are valueless. Because there is no value in values, the nihilist rejects all values, and is thus thrust into a project of negation that seeks, in some sense, to annihilate the world. The serious man who confronts, through failure or calamity, the limits of his beliefs often spirals into nihilism, concluding that, because *his* values proved to be rubbish, all values must be so. The nihilist, then, embraces his freedom insofar as he does not, like the serious or the sub-man, regard himself as yoked to this or that source of value, but his embrace is circumscribed by his inability to establish positive values of his own.

The foil of the nihilist is the adventurer. The adventurer is like the nihilist in rejecting seriousness; the adventurer does not see himself as serving transcendent ideals. The adventurer regards life as a journey that is worthwhile for the experience, for its swashbuckling exploits, even if in the end there are no values to be served, no destination by which to judge the journey. The problem with the adventurer, as de Beauvoir lays it out, is that his passion for adventure values the experience of freedom rather than freedom itself. As such, the adventurer becomes the useful idiot of the powerful, who are willing to bankroll his exploits so that he can enjoy the journey and that they can enjoy the fruits thereof. He rejects the project of arriving at a chosen destination, but in so doing has his destination chosen for him.

The passionate man appears, at first, to embrace his freedom. He does not shy from the anguish of choosing what to value: rather, he defines all others in terms of their value to him. For the passionate man, what is valuable in the world is whatever is valuable to him. Whereas the serious man finds value in the external and transcendent, value for the passionate man is an internal

production. Rather than standing in judgment from a source of Ideal Shame, the passionate man regards himself as if *he* were the source of Ideal Shame. It is in the eyes of the passionate man that others should locate their true value. Hence, the passionate man is the existential type who most literally manifests the desire to be God: his perspective is the ideal perspective not because of the value of his choices but because his being necessitates as such.

What each of these existential types – the serious man, the sub-man, the nihilist, the adventurer, and the passionate man – holds in common is an attitude toward values in which a responsibility for values vacates the scene. They are in bad faith about their capacity to choose what to value. The serious man and the sub-man do so by holding an external source of value as inevitable; the nihilist and the adventurer do so by holding a valid source of values as impossible; and the passionate man does so by regarding himself as an intrinsically sufficient source of values, such that it is indifferent which values he has chosen because the point is that *he* has adopted them. Although of these five types only one is named with explicit reference to seriousness, as I interpret it, all five are different manifestations of the spirit of seriousness. Each evinces a bad faith denial of axiological responsibility.

The Seriousness of Colonial Man

One of the paradigmatic examples given by de Beauvoir of the serious man is the colonial administrator.

The colonial administrator who has raised the highway to the stature of an idol will have no scruple about assuring its construction at the price of a great number of lives of the natives; for, what value has the life of a native who is incompetent, lazy, and clumsy when it comes to building highways? ([1943] 2015: 53).

He is one who *must* build the highway; his acts are imagined to be governed by absolute imperatives of values that lie beyond him, despite the reality that he is one who ultimately chooses to regard those values as absolute. He acts for ‘Civilisation’, or for Europe, or for Mother England or France or the United States of America (USA), or for Science or for Democracy, or even simply for God or for Christ. He colonises in the name of serious, unconditioned values that, he asserts, lie external to him and dictate what his acts would ideally be.

This portrait accords with those given by a variety of theorists of racism, colonialism, and decolonisation. For instance, an attitude of seriousness is diagnosed by W.E.B. Du Bois in his classic essay, ‘The Souls of White Folk’ included in *Darkwater* ([1920] 1999: 17 - 29). There whiteness is defined as ‘the ownership of the earth forever and ever, Amen!’ (18). Indeed, Du Bois worries there that the national culture of the USA tends toward taking whiteness as an axiological absolute. Whiteness, he contends, is an ideal that lowers and demeans humankind; but societies premised on service of this ideal function so as to generate a form of hegemony or overlapping consensus for which whiteness is, simply, God.

This dynamic was manifest in the problem of double consciousness. For Du Bois, as stated clearly in ‘*The Conservation of the Races*’ ([1897] 1971), race is a matter not of phenotype but of shared ideals. If race is a ‘social construction’, it is one constructed in reference to posited ideals of what the society ought to be – ideals, in Euromodern contexts, in which whiteness figures as divine and blackness as demonic. Double consciousness as experienced in the USA emerges through a situation of warring ideals: to have been educated and cultivated such that one sees oneself as a typical person abiding by the society’s typical ideals and mores – hence, abiding by a white normativity – but to also experience oneself as black in relation to the demands of whiteness, and hence, to be pushed toward an existential conflict as to the desirability or undesirability of whiteness (Du Bois [1903] 2018: 3; Henry 2016: 34–7). In short, such double consciousness confronts whiteness as a source of Ideal Shame and must deal with the apparent contradiction that, on the one hand, one ought to do as whiteness prescribes but that, on the other hand, as a black person one may never fulfil whiteness’s demands since one remains black and hence antithetical to the ideal.

Lewis Gordon, in *Bad Faith and Antiblack Racism* ([1995] 1999) reinforces this analysis. There, he contends that racism is a form of the spirit of seriousness in which the white anti-black racism is manifesting the desire to be God. He is asserting himself as an Absolute source of value. As in Du Boisian double consciousness, a consequence is the production of black-based anti-black consciousness: because the social world is one premised on an aversion to the freedom of black consciousness – including the freedom to construct and fulfil values – black people develop ways of seeing the world and themselves through a projected white consciousness.

In short, colonialism seeks to build a world in which the perspective

of the coloniser is treated as Absolute. Hence, colonialism colonises both the freedom of the coloniser and the freedom of the colonised. Each becomes an instrument of the colonial perspective. In terms of Beauvoir's existential typology, the fundamental relation of colonialism could be characterised in terms of producing the coloniser as the serious man and the colonised as the sub-man. The ideal of colonialism is to produce colonisers who regard themselves as *needing* to advance the colonial project and colonised people who regard themselves as *needing* to acquiesce to it, savages who have finally encountered the God for whom they had laid in wait.¹

It would be superficial, though, to regard colonialism as only desiring the production of these two types. To begin with, the framework of colonialism suggests in some sense the presence of the passionate man, although perhaps one collectivised in crucial senses. That is to say, if the serious man sees the colonial project as necessitated by the value of civilisation, he may nonetheless be in league with those who see the colonial projected as necessitated by the whim of European Man, a passion project, as it were. How to make sense of Euromodern colonialism, after all, without accounting for the way in which at the bottom it rests upon asserting the actual desires of concretely existing white people as mattering, to the exclusion of the desires of people of colour? Colonialism, in that sense, can be understood as a project to bring about a serious world governed by a coalition of passionate men. This effort, though, need not rest upon a strict division of the world wherein all the colonisers are serious and all of the colonised are sub-men. For one, we know that it is not disruptive to the colonial project for there to be sub-men among the colonising societies. Fascist and totalitarian configurations within the colonial powers are compatible with their colonial ambitions; the production of white sub-men is compatible with colonial aims. For two, the type characterised by Beauvoir as the adventurer can be seen as part and parcel of the colonial endeavour.

Indeed, the colonial project desires not only to have adventurers culled from the colonising society but ones drawn from the colonised society as well: colonised people willing to enlist in the armies and forces of the colonisers are welcome, regardless of whether or not they take the colonial project seriously. Likewise, the production of nihilism among the colonised is clearly

¹ Indeed, even avowedly anti-colonial readings of the colonial situations may presuppose the latter, as Frantz Fanon shows in chapter four of *Black Skin White Masks* ([1952] 1967: 83 - 108).

commensurate with the colonial project. In short, then, while the seriousness of the colonial administrator may be an ideal type for colonialism, colonialism benefits across the board from a variety of dispositions of seriousness so long as they do not upset the colonial apple cart. We can thus state that colonialism rests upon a spirit of seriousness, and it follows, then, that decolonisation must at least be opposed to *a* spirit of seriousness. Colonisation is the effort to impose a symbolic expression of the in-itself-for-itself, an aesthetic rendering of a God who, by a colonisation of the quotidian axiology of the lifeworld, is to serve as a source of Ideal Shame for all.

Here we may note that the process of colonisation is a multifaceted and *longue durée* process. Hence, as Sylvia Wynter (2003) argues, this process involves a ‘transumption’ of earlier Gods into newer ones. By ‘transume’ we mean here to carry over through a transformative preservation; God is, as it were, given a series of successive makeovers as colonisation unfolds. Hence, we have a transformation from

- (1) an earlier period in which the axiology of Christendom mandated wars of evangelisation by appeal to God as a theological absolute; to
- (2) a middle period in which Christendom becomes ‘Europe’, driven by the mandate of wars of colonisation through appeals to the rationality of *homo politicus* as a philosophical absolute; to
- (3) a later period in which Europe is globalised and fights wars for coloniality through appeals to the natural selection of *homo oeconomicus* as a scientific absolute.

Each of these is a form of the spirit of seriousness: ‘Man’, to use Wynter’s term, functions as the in-itself-for-itself who can be regarded as a source of Ideal Shame. ‘Man’ functions as the secular God-figure anchoring a Euromodern spirit of seriousness, and the serious man functions as an acolyte of this Man.

Yet at the same time, there is an apparent contradiction insofar as Euromodern man is taken to be *instantiation* of Man and not merely servant. Hence, there is a theodicean logic – one that Wynter terms ‘biodicean’ (Wynter 2006; Gordon 2013) – in which Euromodern man functions as both God and servant, a fusion of the serious and the passionate understood by himself and his society on the model of the Absolute.

Colonialism thus stands in relation to the very core of the spirit of seri-

ousness. The spirit of seriousness is concerned, most fundamentally, with denying human freedom to construct values. This does not mean that the spirit of seriousness *pre-empts* such construction: indeed, the serious man is constantly at work articulating the rationalisations for his acts. The key, though, is that he does so through an obscurantist logic in which these values he synthesises are regarded as emerging from outside of him. So, too, for a serious *society*: it is hard at work producing values, all the while it seeks to articulate how such values are transcendent. The serious man is not afraid of values, nor of the responsibility of fulfilling them, but is afraid of *responsibility for constructing them*. The coloniser thus acts in the name of God, or civilisation, or the flag; the coloniser sets up social and economic systems in which it is not these administrators or those agents of capital who are choosing to value human degradation, but ‘The Market’ – neoliberals always acting, it would seem, on the basis of a distant divinity. Colonialism proper is premised on regarding the autonomy of one nation as if it were transcendent: colonialism seeks to produce a serious world governed by the dictates of the Passionate Nation. In its Euromodern incarnation, this is given a peculiarly political expression, as the coalition of colonisers sought to erect compacts recognising each other’s right to colonial power.

Euromodernity emerges as the serious project of passionate nations, working in concert to colonise the globe. At the meta-level, this amounts, as Wynter’s argument (2003; 2006) suggests, to the construction of a passionate man *par excellence* – European man, white man, modern man, etc. He is here the autonomous individual, licensed to inflict his passions upon a servile world, and he is there the transcendent value (civilisation, reason, science, philosophy, modernity, market) to which all agents must seriously subscribe. He is, in short, the Absolute – and his contradictions are to be apprehended in the wondrous aesthetic consciousness of religious belief rather than the sober rationality of a critical philosophy. He is Colonial Man, serious in the project of building a world governed by the passions of colonial *men*, yet imbued with the narcissism of the passionate man such that his seriousness is above all a matter of serving himself.

Coloniality and Decolonisation

The antidote to this colonial spirit of seriousness would thus seem to lie in decolonisation. In decolonisation, the autonomy of the individual nation gives

way to a heteronomy of interests and agents. In decolonisation, the colonised acts upon the coloniser; the colonised inflict their will. Decolonisation thus is only coherent on the grounds of its opposing the seriousness of the coloniser, and taken to its radical conclusion, decolonisation seeks to build a world in which the seriousness of Colonial Man becomes impossible. Decolonisation, as Frantz Fanon writes, ‘is quite simply the replacing of a certain ‘species’ of men by another ‘species’ of men’ ([1961] 1963: 35). Decolonisation obliterates the serious Colonial Man and any vestiges of the Colonised sub-man that he had managed to erect. Seriousness – a bad faith about one’s responsibility for values – is thus part and parcel of the colonial project, and the spirit of seriousness undergirding the colonial project is one that decolonisation must oppose.

But this raises a crucial question: can opposition to a spirit of seriousness avoid becoming a spirit of seriousness in its own right, or is seriousness an intractable existential problem? Must decolonisation, in short, replace the serious Colonial Man with the serious Decolonial Man? Fanon’s detailed phenomenology of decolonisation in *The Wretched of the Earth* ([1961] 1963) complicates and unsettles such a claim. The anti-colonial struggle, we find, involves a seriousness parallel to that of the coloniser. The colonised commit to a violent project of displacing the coloniser, one undertaken in light of the utmost seriousness of bringing about the coloniser’s exit. If the coloniser seeks to bring about the serious world of the passionate man, then the anti-colonial struggle is governed by the serious imperatives of the passion of the colonised.

The look that the native turns on the settler’s town is a look of lust, a look of envy; it expresses his dreams of possession – all manner of possession: to sit at the settler’s table, to sleep in the settler’s bed, with his wife if possible. The colonised man is an envious man. ...[T]here is no native who does not dream at least once a day of setting himself up in the settler’s place ([1961] 1963:39).

As the dialectics of decolonisation evolve, dynamics of nation and class emerge or are reconfigured so as to recapitulate these matters. The birth of the postcolonial nation, Fanon shows, becomes yoked to the rise of a *petit-bourgeoisie*, who are empowered, in turn, to cut deals with the coloniser in the guise of a serious project – for the national economy, say – that is, in essence, a ruse for the passionate project of the mutual enrichment of elites. The new

nation is caught up in the vicious cycle of trying to equal and surpass Europe, precisely through mechanisms of collaborating with a Europe hell-bent on retaining its status. Ironically, it is in these dynamics that the hardened seriousness of the coloniser begins to wane. The coloniser comes to accept that he need not be installed absolutely as sovereign. The coloniser recognises the postcolonial elites not as snivelling toadies but as fellow businessmen, entitled to negotiate a deal. The passion of Colonial Man for capital, for power, and for control does not subside, but it accepts a configuration in which this passion cannot function as an unconditioned, supraordinate value governing the sum total of all transactions in the developed world-system. Reading *The Wretched of the Earth* as a Fanonian work in the existential phenomenology of decolonisation, we may say that the issue it raises acutely is that of the relationship between colonialism and colonality. Fanon called for leaving Europe behind, for abandoning its 'Greco-Latin pedestal' ([1961] 1963: 46). He sought, in short, a movement beyond not only colonialism but colonality, where the latter speaks to a broader configuration of values inaugurated by colonialism but durable enough to persist after the formal transfer of sovereignty. One might conclude, then, that decolonisation implies a double opposition: decolonisation is against both colonialism *and* colonality. This may at first blush seem a simple matter, given the clear relationship between colonialism and colonality. Let us try, though, to demonstrate the complications such a double opposition suggests.

Colonialism involves the structure of the Absolute. It seeks to impose the will of the coloniser, or of the colonial nation, such that trespassing upon his desired ends and means is equivalent to a violation of the transcendent. The coloniser ascends, in the values of the world colonialism creates, to the status of the divine. Opposition to colonialism thus must take the form of what I will call here *the anti-colonial*. The anti-colonial is given over to the project of displacing the colonial power. The displacement of the coloniser functions for it as an absolute value: as Fanon writes,

the primary Manicheism which governed colonial society is preserved intact during the period of decolonisation; that is to say that the settler never ceases to be the enemy, the opponent, the foe that must be overthrown ([1961] 1963: 50 - 51).

The absolute nature of this opposition is non-negotiable for the anti-colonial.

Calls are made, of course, for a moderation of strategies and tactics; there is a moral appeal to humanistic values, to the imperative of a non-violent approach. The problem, though, is that once such appeals are taken seriously, we have ventured out of the territory of the anti-colonial. The moral cleanliness of the colonised is afforded greater value than the overthrow of the colonial system. For the anti-colonial, the demand of the coloniser's ouster functions as Absolute; it is the source of Ideal Shame against which all acts must be judged.

Coloniality, though, is more insidious than colonialism. Colonialism proffers a well-ordered social world in which all and sundry understand that it is the coloniser who is to rule. Coloniality, by contrast, involves a world structured by colonial ends but confused about their meaning in the present. On the one hand, coloniality involves the agents of those who avow the value of coloniality. There are those who take relatively seriously that it is Euro-modern Man who ought to continue to rule, and although they are softer in their approach than Colonial Man had been – they are conducive to compromise and to recognising the humanity of those embodying darker hues – they nonetheless take up the bulk of the serious values of their colonialist predecessors. On the other hand, coloniality also involves agents who reject and repudiate colonialism, who are shaped by a genuine existential commitment to build the world anew. Coloniality seeks, in short, to configure relations in such a way that even those explicitly committed to decolonisation nonetheless maintain the system of coloniality. Hence, the existential problem confronting those committed to decolonisation within conditions of coloniality is that it is not necessarily the case that one committed to overturning the colonial is clear on the precise contours of the colonial landscape or on the precise ways in which the colonial past shapes their efforts to build a post-colonial future.

The tragedy of 'man' – as both Fanon ([1952] 1967: 10, 231) and de Beauvoir contended ([1947] 2015: 37) – is that he was once a child, and hence confronts the melancholia of being shaped by desires that the adult cannot fully grasp. The tragedy of the post-colonial adult stems, as it were, from the trauma of a colonial childhood. There is a psychological drama here wherein the one who is committed to overcoming a past of colonialism and a present of coloniality may nonetheless have been shaped and structured by colonial values.

It is in this drama that the impulse of *the decolonial* emerges. The decolonial lives a commitment to revolutionise the values of the world. The decolonial does not seek to return the world to a pre-colonial past, but the decolonial is nonetheless absolutely committed to the project of building a *non-colonial*

future. Such a future is one in which, as Fanon puts it, ‘the tool [shall] never possess the man’ ([1952] 1967: 231). Coloniality, as colonialism’s residue, is that which the decolonial is hell-bent on removing. The decolonial must take seriously, then, the project of building a world in which the power of Colonial Man has been diminished to zero. And because the power of Colonial Man has resided in a revolution of values – in ‘his’ ability to spread the gospel, to reconfigure what human beings the world over want – the decolonial lives an Absolute commitment to overthrowing the values of the colonial. If these are, respectively, the natures of the anti-colonial and the decolonial, then what is the precise relationship between these two terms and the broader one under discussion thus far, decolonisation? It would appear the anti-colonial and the decolonial are jointly necessary for decolonisation. If there is simply the persistence and victory of the anti-colonial impulse, then the coloniser is displaced from sovereignty, but the coloniser’s influence – in shaping the nature of post-colonial states and, indeed, worlds – remains. That is to say, the anti-colonial is insufficient for decolonisation if decolonisation demands a revolution in values.

The anti-colonial is, tragically, compatible with residual coloniality. This would suggest that the decolonial is necessary for decolonisation. Indeed, where colonialism has subsided and only coloniality remains, it may appear that the decolonial suffices for decolonisation: it brings about the clean-up where the anti-colonial has killed the beast, and at this point, the anti-colonial may simply be dismissed from the scene. A problem, though: the shift from colonialism to coloniality does not by necessity bring with it the finality of such a shift. Indeed, coloniality’s affection for a colonialist past makes it conducive to a revival. In this regard, the purity of the decolonial impulse can be an impediment to its underlying mission. The decolonial confronts a drama akin to that of the adolescent or adult who resolves, ‘I will never be like my parents!’ The decolonial resists whatsoever shall appear to be a recapitulation of the values of the coloniser. Colonial Man was violent, so the decolonial announces its commitment to non-violence; Colonial Man spoke of Civilisation, of Science, of Democracy, so the decolonial announces its wholesale rejection of these ideals; Colonial Man said that he and his affiliates retained the exclusive right to speak and be heard, so the decolonial comes to respect the right of all to be heard with eager and approving ears. The decolonial takes up, in brief, the serious project of abandoning the values of Colonial Man altogether.

The pitfalls of the decolonial can thus be summarised in terms of two categories. First, the decolonial may create the conditions for the exacerbation of colonality and/or the return of dimensions of outright colonialism. By repudiating colonial values, the decolonial forswears many of the tools that the anti-colonial may effectively be able to take up in order to counter neo-colonial encroachments. Second, the decolonial may find itself unintentionally manifesting precisely the characteristics of Colonial Man; the decolonial confronts the possibility of the return of the repressed. In brief, because Colonial Man is serious about retaining colonality and taking up every possible avenue of return toward colonialism, the anti-colonial is indispensable to decolonisation, and cannot be dissolved in the seriousness of the decolonial. But the seriousness of the anti-colonial is a near-guarantee of a return to the values of Colonial Man, insofar as it must – by means of being a steadfast project of opposition – be subject to the modes of intentional manipulation to which Colonial Man may always make recourse in order to reinforce his position. The temptation, then, would be to simplify the meaning of decolonisation by developing a configuration of the anti-colonial and the decolonial wherein they can be neatly synthesised, wherein they can be fused into the ideal embodiment of decolonisation. But is not such a call, ultimately, a demand for the Absolute – for the impossible synthesis of two characteristics that nonetheless bear an ineffaceable tension?

The tragedy of decolonisation is that it is drawn to desire a pure, authentic opposition to the coloniser – to the coloniser's power, as in the anti-colonial, or to the coloniser's values, as in the decolonial. Yet colonialism is precisely a force engineered to nullify the purity and authenticity of its victims, let alone its perpetrators. Colonialism seeks to produce a world in which all who live are complicit in colonial power. To live in such a world is to serve, whether as volunteer or conscript, at its discretion. Colonality, in turn, seeks to sublimate this complicity into an incessant relation of profitability for the few, wherein the denial of an ongoing project of colonialism functions to ensure the persistence of colonial outcomes.

In short, what decolonisation must critically confront is the issue of a desire for either the anti-colonial or the decolonial – or an imagined, impossible synthesis of the two – to function as a source of Ideal Shame. To hear many proponents of decolonisation speak, the function of decolonisation is akin to the function of the divine. Decolonisation calls, on that model, for the utmost seriousness: to be non-colonial functions as a transcendent ideal, impervious

to philosophical attack. Within that framework, we are called upon to build the serious world of the decolonial passion. The desire to be non-colonial is regarded as unassailable. A simple criticism may be issued: if this is the function of decolonisation, then it remains a recapitulation of a crucial element of colonialism.

Conclusion – Toward Decolonisation, Against the Spirit of Seriousness

I submit, then, the following conclusion: that not only is decolonisation opposed to *a* spirit of seriousness – the seriousness of Colonial Man – but that decolonisation is opposed to the spirit of seriousness in general. The paradox that this would seem to present is that one cannot engage in successful projects of decolonisation without *taking seriously* anti-colonial and/or decolonial commitments. For the purposes of this or those acts of decolonisation, the anti-colonial impulse must be regarded as sufficiently justified, or the decolonial impulse must be regarded as sufficiently justified. This suggests that essential to the project of decolonisation is a sense of *maturity* in which, I have argued, one must take commitments seriously without a collapse into the spirit of seriousness (Meagher 2018).

Paradoxically, then, the commitment to decolonisation calls for a commitment to discovering and synthesising values that would call for the teleological suspension of decolonisation. To have achieved decolonisation means to have put in place values whereby other things could matter more than the continued imperative of effacing colonial residues. But, crucially, this does not entail that the project of decolonisation can be done away with altogether and replaced with the project or projects that would be its successors – for, indeed, to accept that conclusion would be to accept that one knows, in advance, which values are the sticky remains of colonialism and coloniality and which are not; it would be to recapitulate the path that besets the decolonial. If the destination of decolonisation points to a further destination beyond it, this does not imply the irrelevance of the journey itself.

If this conclusion is correct, then it means that decolonisation is necessarily an *anguished* project. The spirit of seriousness offers relief from anguish: one knows that one is right, or that one has fulfilled one's duties, and need not take responsibility for evaluating the schema of rights and duties that has animated one's acts. The scam of colonialism is that it at once would seem

to take on a profound responsibility for the world – by installing Colonial Man as undisputed ruler and hegemon – and yet to discount such responsibility by the same stroke, since Colonial Man may always appeal to transcendent values that mean he is merely enjoying what is rightfully his and discharging his rightful duties. His structure is one of domination, in which the acts of the master are a matter of *license* and are thus up to his arbitrary, passionate whims. The master and the coloniser may speak of ‘taking responsibility’ for the slave and the world, respectively, but through a trick of bad faith, each takes this to mean a reduction rather than intensification of anguish. They are emancipated to do as they please, regardless of the values of the dominated, who for them do not function as sources of shame.

The project of decolonisation would be more comforting if it could re-enact these dynamics. It would be comforting if the anti-colonial impulse meant one was *licensed* to revolt by all means necessary without responsibility for what one wreaks. It would be comforting if the decolonial impulse meant that one was *licensed* to live through the purity of unassailable values that preserve one’s goodness and innocence even as neo-colonial tempests erupt all around. To bring about a world that is no longer colonial, though, means to bring about a world in which humanity seizes responsibility for its values. Such a project is an anguished one – and it is this grappling with the anguish of decolonisation that each of us must take up in order to fulfil Fanon’s call ([1961] 1963: 316) to set afoot a new humanity.

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From Recolonised to Decolonised South African Economics

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Abstract

Replacing a neocolonial project of financial control by neoliberal forces, with one that represents genuine economic decolonisation has never been more urgent in South Africa and everywhere. The essence of the critique we offer is that the intellectual roots of a decolonising analysis and strategy can be found not only in the classical anti-colonial/capitalist/imperialist analysis of Marx and Luxemburg, but also in works by Africa's leading decolonial political economist, Samir Amin, as well as by some of the South African writers who specified race-class-gender-environmental oppressions. The main problem in changing economic policy, though, is the ongoing power of a local agent of economic colonisation, the Treasury (regardless of who happens to be Finance Minister). In one recent exception, however, students demanded an extra R40 billion be added to the annual budget, and their power of protest was sufficient to defeat Treasury neoliberals. In other sectoral struggles, the students' lessons about broader-based coalitions and national targets, as well as the need for much deeper-reaching and militant critique (in the spirit of Amin) have yet to be learned. Ultimately a much more comprehensive critique of how South Africa was economically recolonised may well be necessary, one based on ideologies that link other intellectual and activist campaigns for economic justice.

Keywords: delinking, decolonisation, economics, political economy, South Africa, neocolonialism

The limits of bourgeois nationalism are essentially defined not just by its underlying loyalty to the institutional structures inherited from colonialism, but also by the belief of colonial elites that capitalism remains valid despite the state of their underdeveloped and impoverished societies Neocolonialism necessitates that the petty bourgeoisie be given enough cards to play, their authority with their own people depending upon it (Ben Magubane, *African Sociology*, 2000).

Introduction

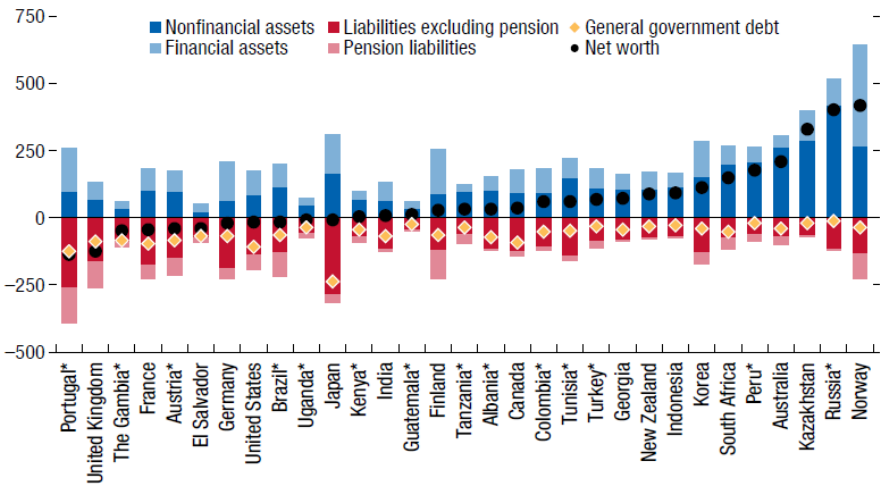
Replacing a neocolonial project of financial control by neoliberal forces, with one that represents genuine economic decolonisation has never been more urgent in South Africa and everywhere. The essence of the critique we offer is that the intellectual roots of a decolonising analysis and strategy can be found not only in the classical anti-colonial/capitalist/imperialist analysis of Marx and Luxemburg, but also in works by Africa's leading decolonial political economist, Samir Amin, as well as by some of the South African writers who specified race-class-gender-environmental oppressions. The main problem in changing economic policy, though, is the ongoing power of a local agent of economic colonisation, the Treasury (regardless of who happens to be Finance Minister or the political party in power). In one recent exception, however, students demanded an extra R40 billion be added to the annual budget, and their power of protest was sufficient to defeat Treasury neoliberals. In other sectoral struggles, the students' lessons about broader-based coalitions and national targets, as well as the need for much deeper-reaching and militant critique (in the spirit of Amin) have yet to be learned. Ultimately, a much more comprehensive critique of how South Africa was economically recolonised may well be necessary, one based on ideologies that link other intellectual and activist campaigns for economic justice.

Seen as a full-cost-accounted, public-sector balance sheet, South Africa is an extremely wealthy country; its vast state-owned assets should permit a decolonisation drive in society to be enhanced and nurtured by a ruling class defending genuine economic sovereignty. Indeed, a 2018 International

Monetary Fund (IMF) survey of public sector wealth in many leading states (i.e. those with reliable data) determined that once not only net financial assets (i.e. budget surpluses/deficits and public pension funds, minus public debts including state pension liabilities) are calculated, as is standard in public finance, so too should other non-financial assets be included, such as state-owned natural resources. In that survey, only five countries highlighted in the IMF's main graphic – Norway, Russia, Kazakhstan, Australia and Peru – could boast a higher state-owned 'non-financial asset' wealth ratio than South Africa's 240 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), although many other countries with oil or mineral-based economies did not provide data (Figure 1). In contrast, South Africa's coloniser Great Britain shoulders a *negative* 120 percent net worth in relation to GDP.

Figure 1.1. Public Sector Balance Sheets
(Percent of GDP 2016)

Public sector assets and liabilities are large and present insights beyond general government debt.



Source: IMF staff estimates.

Note: *Based on a single year of data, in most cases compiled as part of a Fiscal Transparency Evaluation: Albania, 2013; Austria, 2015; Brazil, 2014; Colombia, 2016; The Gambia, 2016; Guatemala, 2014; Kenya, 2013; Peru, 2013; Portugal, 2012; Russia, 2012; Tanzania, 2014; Tunisia, 2013; Turkey, 2013; Uganda, 2015.

Figure 1: The wealth of selected states: public sector balance sheets, as a % of GDP (2016)

Source: IMF (2018:4)

In 2002, parliament confirmed that this wealth is now at least technically state-owned, within the scope of the Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act. In practice, mining rights vest effective ownership in corporate hands, so South Africa's wealth depletion is worsening (Bond 2021a). This is due to what we consider to be an extreme case of economic recolonisation, favouring the local white bourgeoisie and multinational capital, with an insignificant share going to an aspiring black bourgeoisie and very little to the workers who produce economic value. There is, too, a tokenistic level of state social spending directed at the majority; it is fourth lowest (as a share of GDP) among the world's 40 largest economies (OECD 2016).

Evidence of this recolonisation is obvious. Since the early 1990s, South Africa has suffered worsening unemployment, inequality, and poverty. Environmental degradation and climate chaos – both cause and effect – accompany worsening food insecurity and severe water shortages. This suffering is the result of a complex history of colonialism and apartheid, but it also reflects the route taken out of apartheid during the 1980s and early 1990s in the context of South Africa's capitalist crisis, in which capital played a facilitative role. Among others, Chris Malikané (2017: 2) argues that institutions responsible for this complex history of colonialism and apartheid were integral to South Africa's racialised process of capital accumulation. The persistence of these problems in post-apartheid South Africa is not only because capital continues – and expands – super-exploitative processes such as (highly gendered) migrant labour, but also can partly be explained by the fiscal, monetary and international-economic policy choices of the ruling African National Congress (ANC) government (Bond & Malikané 2019).

This article considers renewed demands for a decolonial South African economy – and economics discipline – within two contexts: first, *intellectual trends* in political economy starting with the anti-colonial theories of capitalism developed by Karl Marx and Rosa Luxemburg, moving through African dependency theory's contributions, especially Samir Amin's, and ending with some of the main South African analyses of race, class, gender and ecology; and second, consideration of the *concrete forces through which a 'recolonised' post-apartheid economy* – especially policies popularly known as 'neoliberalism' – took root. The aim is to contribute to strategising a reversal: an economy that carefully 'delinks' from the most destructive circuits of world capitalism, in the spirit of Africa's lead economic decoloniser, Amin. To do so, we draw on lessons from the 2015–17 student movement's campaign

to decolonise tertiary education, in part through gaining dramatic increases in budget allotments from the National Treasury to pay for tuition fees and also for ‘insourced’ labour. As we will explain, Treasury is the central agent of economic recolonisation, so this was a highly significant recent victory, arguably on par with defeating apartheid and ending AIDS-denialist policies by delinking South Africa from the tyranny of multinational corporate patents on AIDS medicines.

In his 2010 book, *From Capitalism to Civilisation: Reconstructing the Socialist Perspective*, Samir Amin (1931 - 2018) was critical of the ANC government’s inability to break apartheid’s structural legacy, in part because the party’s leaders embraced economic recolonisation instead of genuine sovereignty:

In South Africa, the first settler-colonisation – the one of the Boers – led to the creation of a ‘purely White’ State involving expulsion or extermination of Africans. In contrast, the initial objective of the British conquest was to forcibly submit Africans to the requirements of the metropolis’ imperialist expansion primarily for the exploitation of the minerals. Neither the first colonisers (the Boers) nor the new ones (the British) were capable of standing as autonomous centres. The Apartheid State of the post-war period attempted to do so, basing its power on its internal colony – Black for the essential part – but did not reach its ends owing to an unfavourable numerical balance and to the growing resistance of the dominated populations who will finally be victorious. The powers in place after the end of Apartheid have inherited that issue of internal colonisation without having, up to now, brought in its radical solution (Amin 2010: 86).

Amin’s long-standing critique of both South Africa’s unreconstructed race - class relations and its post-1994 recolonisation due to adverse international forces is ever more vital, in part because a ‘Rethinking Economics for Africa’ movement emerged in South Africa in 2018. Both the strengths and limitations of student-driven decolonising politics *within* (not yet fully *against*) this tortured discipline are already evident. It is likely that opportunities to engage in genuinely decolonising intellectual work will not emerge from inside the ossified economics profession (especially in academia), but will instead follow two other processes:

- first, social and environmental activists turning to much more radical modes of contesting economic power, including against a foe – the Treasury – that until recently many progressives believed was essential to defeating Zuma-era looting; and
- second, a revived intellectual commitment to *political economy* (based in various academic disciplines but generally *outside* formal economics) that attempts to keep race, gender, ecological and class critiques in synthetic, mutually-reinforcing balance, while drawing upon capitalist crisis tendencies as a central feature of South African neoliberalism and super-exploitation.

Decolonial political economy will naturally conjoin these processes, seeking a praxis epistemology in which *social struggle produces knowledge*. To that end, the main merit of Marxist analysis, Amin (2016: 518) argued, is its ‘claim simultaneously to understand the world, our capitalist global world at each stage of its deployment, and provide the tools which make it possible for the working classes and the oppressed peoples, i.e., the victims of that system, to change it’. Amin endorsed knowledge produced in these struggles, not based upon participatory action research, but instead, upon conflict-seeking research:

Marxism does not separate theory from practice; Marxist praxis associates both. Marxists try to understand the world through the processes of action to change it. You do not understand first through a process of academic research developed in isolation and then eventually try to modify reality by making use of the theory. No. Marxist praxis is a process which involves simultaneously theory and practice, mobilising all ordinary people, the working classes and the oppressed nations. While you progress in your struggles, you understand better the reality that you are fighting against (Amin 2016: 518).

The mix of ‘structure’ and ‘agency’, always so difficult to work out properly in both intellectual and practical terms, can come into better focus with this perspective on the recolonisation and decolonisation of South African economics, especially if we draw on the wisdom of prior critics of capitalist/non-capitalist power relations.

Economic Colonisation as Super-exploitative Capitalist/ Non-capitalist Relations

Dating initially to the Dutch mercantile conquest in 1652, the occupation of the Cape Colony resulted in 150 years of a settler-based ‘previous accumulation’, a term Adam Smith coined for pre-capitalist wealth. Marx relabelled this process ‘original accumulation’ and others translated it as ‘primitive accumulation’, so as to specify a variety of *dispossession* strategies that capital deployed against non-capitalist social relations and natural life (Harvey 2003). Britain’s takeover of the Cape as a spoil of the Napoleonic Wars in 1806 was followed by the banning of slavery as the new rulers imposed wage-labour relations, thus beginning to replace racial feudalism with a more efficient racialised capitalism (Saul & Bond 2014). That was a major factor compelling the Dutch settlers’ descendants, the Afrikaners, to leave the Cape, embarking on the Great Trek in 1835 to establish their own quasi-states and super-exploitative petty-commodity mode of production as far north as the border of present-day Zimbabwe.

The capitalist mode of surplus value extraction that Marx would have recognised only prospered at scale with the birth of the black migrant proletariat in the late 1860s, after diamonds were discovered at Kimberley and a coercive recruitment system was established for 50 000 workers. The black working class was, for the next century, rooted within a rural-urban migration system still mixing capitalist and pre-capitalist relations, as colonial and then apartheid-era control of rural labour drew male ‘temporary sojourners’ to the white-owned mines, fields and factories, subsidised by social reproduction especially drawing on rural black women’s unpaid labour. They looked after the pre-working-age youth, injured and ill workers, and retirees who lacked pensions (Kuhn & Wolpe 1978).

How relevant is Marx to South Africa (Bond 2021b)? He wrote only a few passages in *Capital* aimed at reconciling contradictory laws of accumulation between capitalism and pre-capitalist tributary power structures; he would have gleaned insights when, shortly before finishing Volume I in 1867, his brother-in-law Jan Juta visited from Cape Town (after establishing South Africa’s first publishing house). In Volume 1 (Chapter 26), Marx remarked, ironically, about how ‘... the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins signaled the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production’. In Volume 2, Marx explained the longevity of the slave

mode of production, which allowed a fusion of capital's internal laws of motion and the extra-economic coercion associated with slavery and colonialism. And in the final pages of Volume 3 ('Supplement'), in which an original capitalist *crisis theory* is proposed, the very last words of *Capital* concern the colonial conquest of Africa, termed (by Marx's collaborator Engels) 'purely a subsidiary of the stock exchange' so as to reflect the era's rising *financial* power. The 1885 'Scramble for Africa' – the full codification of colonial land grabs – had transpired in a Berlin conference's carve-up of the continent just after Marx's death, as systemic capitalist overproduction and excess capital within the London and Paris stock markets contributed to the colonial push (Phimister 1992).

Scholarship on the racist character of imperialist capitalism in Africa began in 1902 with John Hobson (1902), a British liberal critic. But within South Africa, at least two prominent writer-activists, although moderate in advocacy tactics and assimilationist with respect to race politics, were simultaneously advancing anti-colonial, political-economic reasoning. Solomon Tshekisho Plaatje, while editing *Koranta ea Becoana* (1901 - 1908) and *Tsala ea Becoana* (1910 - 1915), was often in solidarity with South African capitalism's working-class and women victims (notwithstanding periodic arguments in favour of the Empire) (Ndebele 1993; Limb 2007). And Olive Schreiner (1897) was firmly anti-imperialist (Krebs 1997) even while advancing the 'civilising' race politics of colony, for example in criticising her former friend Cecil John Rhodes sarcastically in *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland*:

if it should come to pass that you should obtain those lands you have desired, and you should obtain black men to labour on them and make to yourself great wealth; or should you create that company and fools should buy from you, so that you became the richest man in the land; and if you should take to yourself wide lands, and raise to yourself great palaces, so that princes and great men of earth crept up to you and laid their hands against yours, so that you might slip gold into them – what would it profit you? (Schreiner 1897).

But it was in 1913 that a decisive anti-imperialist analysis of South African capitalism was first elaborated in theoretical form, in Rosa Luxemburg's (1968) *The Accumulation of Capital* (Bond 2019; 2021a). She described

Rhodes' formalised settler colonialism after his 1870s diamond mine consolidation. Notwithstanding how severely this system repressed black people, it was not until the 1910s that a widespread movement of urban socialists emerged at the core site of accumulation: Johannesburg's vibrant gold mines, where more than a third of the world's store of the metal has been dug since 1884. The Witwatersrand mining and associated industrial complex boasted the African continent's greatest number of organised workers, and the most militancy, although this initially emerged from the white immigrant socialist cadre (hailing especially from Britain and Eastern Europe, from which Lithuania stood out).

In spite of the 1921 establishment of the Communist Party South Africa (in 1953 renamed the SACP), white workers failed to make common cause with black counterparts, instead witnessing their unions calling out, 'Workers of the World Unite for a White South Africa!' This division was debilitating during the 1922 Rand Rebellion strike of more than 20 000 white mineworkers. As capital and the state regrouped by making concessions to white workers, and as blacks organised within Clements Kadalie's (1970) syndicalist-influenced Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa, SACP leader Sidney Bunting took orders from Moscow, in 1928 shifting the party to support an 'Independent Native Republic', not explicitly socialism. Only after a victory over colonialism would the SACP be encouraged to wave the red anti-capitalist flag in the struggle's 'second stage' (as opposed to immediately organising workers with more socialist aims). But in 1950, the SACP was banned by the apartheid regime, forcing socialist discussions and literature deep underground (Drew 1996; 2019). By the time of its emergence in 1990 as one of the world's most Soviet-centric communist parties, there were very few official documents which carried theoretical insights beyond those of the ANC's National Democratic Revolution.

In contrast, the critique of colonial-imperial-capitalist racism emerged at first gradually then explosively in academia, especially safe sites in British exile. The University of Essex hosted the leading SACP intellectual, Harold Wolpe (1972; 1980), whose adaptation of the French Marxist anthropological theory of 'articulations of modes of production' explains how apartheid subsidised big business, hence suggesting a need to address race and class simultaneously (see also Legassick 1974). Nearby at Sussex, a Poulantzian interpretation of South African capitalist fractions became dominant, including the doctoral thesis of Rob Davies (1980), subsequently the South African

Minister of Trade and Industry from 2009–19. On the one hand, Simon Clarke (1978) considered it ‘the best ‘neo-Marxist’ work on the state that has blossomed in recent years’, but on the other, he attacked the Poulantzians for reducing Marxism to liberal interest-group analysis.

That critique could be extended to some scholars who adopted neo-Marxism by throwing out the very core of the argument, e.g. the leading labour scholar Eddie Webster (1985; 1987) who was explicit: ‘I begin my account of the labour process at Chapter 7 of Volume 1 of *Capital* in order to *deliberately* avoid the labour theory of value’. Whether SACP or New Left, the majority of internal and exiled political economists – mostly white – simply could not grapple with *Capital*’s deeper-rooted explanations for uneven development, especially capitalist crisis tendencies based on overproduction (Bond 2021b). Exceptions included notable books and papers of the era by Ben Magubane (1979); Duncan Innes (1984); Colin Bundy (1988); Charles Meth (1990); and Baruch Hirson (1991). Later, some of Magubane’s (2001) work was dedicated to correlating differential characteristics of racism and epochs of capital accumulation, distinguishing between periods of land dispossession, labour mobilisation, workforce management and consumption.

Thus armed primarily with a critique of capitalism based on the articulations of modes of production, specifically the apartheid Bantustans’ race-gender-ecological intersections with high-profit capital accumulation, the independent left spent the years prior to 1985 insisting, mistakenly, that to end apartheid would also require a transition to socialism, since capital *needed* the state’s formal racial restrictions to sustain super-profitability. More attention to *Capital*’s crisis theory – and also to neoliberal economic policy as a universal bourgeois response to the falling rate of profit, beginning in Chile in 1973 – would have allowed apartheid’s critics to anticipate the durable overaccumulation tendencies, culminating in the 1985 financial meltdown. That event, in turn, broke the intra-white alliance between the racist Afrikaner-dominated state and the big English-speaking capitalists in the mining, manufacturing, retail, and finance sectors.

This lack of foresight drove the half-dozen central neo-Marxist intellectuals – especially those (mainly white males) based in Durban and affiliated to industrial trade unions (Desai & Bohmke 1997) – towards a whimsical engagement with a ‘Regulation Theory’ derived from a very different conjuncture in French political economy (Bond 2014). The diversion was centred upon a fantasy: the apartheid-capitalist super-exploitation they had

earlier criticised – renamed as ‘racial Fordism’ in a nod to Antonio Gramsci via the Regulation School (since mass production and mass consumption occurred not in a virtuous cycle in which working-class labourers could consume their own product, as Henry Ford’s model suggested worked in the North, but in South Africa along racially-distinct, super-exploitative lines characteristic of world capitalism’s unequal periphery) could be reformed into post-apartheid ‘non-racial post-Fordism’ (Gelb 1991). Extensive analysis was undertaken especially by the Economic Trends group that served the black union movement (Padayachee & van Niekerk 2019: 80 - 84). Yet the intellectual weaknesses associated with the critique of economic colonisation left these analysts and union-movement strategists with the mistaken impression that a renewed export-orientation along with the deregulation of international financial, trade and investment relationships would profitably align South African capitalism with corporate-dominated globalisation. This re-alignment would also allegedly shift white South African capital from super-exploitation to a more harmonious model, replete with deracialised Team Concept and Quality Circle human resource management trends, thus allowing labour to flourish and the economy to become more internationally competitive (Gelb 1991). Instead, the result was deindustrialisation, an even more desperate proletariat, and economic recolonisation.

However, not only did that 1985 conjuncture once again split the white elites, between the English running business and Afrikaners running the state, but the latter group themselves divided into bitter-end ‘*verkrampes*’ and ‘securocrats’ who soon lost their earlier hegemony, on the one hand, and on the other, neoliberal ‘*verligtes*’ and ‘econocrats’ led by F.W. de Klerk. He wrestled the presidency from P.W. Botha in 1989 and six months later freed Nelson Mandela and unbanned the ANC, SACP and other smaller liberation movements. Although de Klerk left the active political scene in 1997 after serving as Mandela’s deputy president from 1994–96, he retired knowing that the econocrats, big business and the core institutions of neoliberalism he had empowered during the early 1990s negotiations, culminating in the 1996 Constitution, would remain durable for decades (Bond 2014). The two exemplary institutions reflecting this power were the Treasury and Reserve Bank, which were during the transition process already beholden to international credit rating agencies (once South Africa recovered investment-grade level in 1994) and the lenders who helped call the shots during post-apartheid economic recolonisation.

Treasury as the Primary Local Agent of South Africa's Economic Recolonisation

To foreground the argument that during the 1980s, South Africa's financial delinking from the world economy *could have provided the potential for a decolonised, self-reliant, post-apartheid balancing along race, class, gender and environmental lines*, we must first recall the traditional role of the main agent of *recolonisation*. The South African 'Treasury' refers to the Ministry of Finance and the Departments of Finance and State Expenditure. There are other aspects of the Treasury which include fiscal responsibility for national, provincial, metropolitan and municipal bodies and state-owned enterprises, especially where they collect taxes or fees, borrow, budget and spend money. But South Africa's economic recolonisation is most explicit in Treasury's relations with lenders, credit rating agencies, the World Bank and the IMF, and other global and national financial actors. While the Reserve Bank has received public attention especially because of its extreme monetary policy, generous bailouts (to white-owned institutions but not black) and lax regulatory capacity, South Africa's main economic policy decisions, budgetary allocations, international economic relations and financial sector politics were the responsibility of Treasury (Terreblanche 2014).

Across the world, including most African countries, the rise of Treasury ministries dates to early patterns of colonisation. Sampie Terreblanche (2014: 53) traces the foundation of the British Treasury to the late 1600s when the Gentry Parliament of London institutionalised executive powers to decide on taxation, borrowing and public expenditure. Since the era of neoliberalism began during the 1970s, as older social-democratic and national-liberation traditions have faded away, most Treasuries have insisted upon both imposing fiscal restraints and liberalising capital flows (Terreblanche 2014). The latter instil discipline via a country's international financial reputation and hence the interest rate at which a Treasury, Reserve Bank and local banks and firms can borrow (Bond 2003). Reflecting the older traditions, the apartheid regime generally did not restrain spending, especially from the late 1950s until the mid-1970s, and again in the transition period when the deficit rose to nearly 10 percent of GDP. During the 1980s, government had increased unjustifiable spending on defence and former homelands (including subsidies for business relocation to industrial deconcentration points), while continuing to allocate resources along racial lines, with more funding going to

white constituencies, periodically undermining fiscal discipline.

However, as South Africa began to face more serious sanctions pressure in 1985, Botha revamped the Central Economic Advisory Services (CEAS), an autonomous institution with broader functions compared to the Treasury, with more proximity to the government's securocrats. CEAS' first report recommended privatisation, commercialisation or private financing of public services, as well as relaxing statutory monopolies, all of which laid the foundation for the transition to neoliberalism. CEAS was moved to report to Finance Minister Barend du Plessis, as power shifted to Treasury econocrats. Networks and relationships strengthening the econocrats' influence were generated during the transition to democracy, with the aim of not only co-opting key liberation movement cadres (skillfully managed by Derek Keys from 1992 - 1994), but re-establishing international economic relations following Botha's traumatic default.

That 'debt repayment standstill' occurred because US\$13 billion of short-term foreign debt which became due in mid-1985 could not be repaid, after international banks decided to refuse their rollover. This was preceded by the crash of the gold price from US\$850/oz (1981) to US\$250/oz (1983), several years of economic downturn and a major oil crisis (Padayachee, 1989: 104). The United States Federal Reserve Board's rise in interest rates from 6 to 16 percent in 1979–80 caused debt crises in South Africa and across the Third World (Bond 2003). The South African debt crisis was also a function of increasingly militant domestic politics, including the rise in anti-apartheid, labour, community and student protest during the mid-1980s. This followed the revival of resistance after political parties were banned in the early 1960s, notably the Durban dock worker strikes of 1973 and the 1976 Soweto uprising.

Monetary policy was also changing, initially zigzagging between sharply negative real interest rates after the debt crisis, and extremely high interest rates starting in 1988. A decade earlier, the De Kock Commission advocated a more independent South African Reserve Bank (SARB) with control over interest rates, exchange control, bank supervision and money supply unhindered by accountability to parliament. Reflecting the neoliberal bloc's increasing power, the 1993 interim constitution made the SARB a formally independent institution. One otherwise critical South African political economist, Ben Turok, in 1998 led a parliamentary commission on the SARB that endorsed the point of view that formal independence was essential to carrying out its mission of currency stabilisation – a bizarre conclusion given

that the SARB was a strong advocate of exchange control liberalisation, which had an adverse impact on currency volatility. The independence of the SARB meant it was not necessary to subject such financial liberalisation – with its pro-white implications in allowing the expatriation of historic wealth drawn from the (black) working class – to democratic parliamentary debate.

Such economic recolonisation was not the only route for South Africa, given how weak the financial system had become by the late 1980s, as international economic relations waned. Had political will existed in the liberation movement, instead of despondency following the Soviet Union's collapse, a more critical perspective on economic imperialism might have gained traction and defined policy. After all, to finally defeat apartheid, ending new bank loans had become a central political mobilising strategy, starting with a United States of America (USA) congressional ban on the IMF lending to South Africa, following a 1982 bailout of Pretoria after the gold price crashed (Bond 2003). After the United Democratic Front (UDF) was formed in 1983 and began organising nationally-coordinated protests – while joining the ANC's call for international boycotts, as did the trade unions in 1985 – foreign lenders realised that South Africa was becoming unbankable. The chairman of Chase Manhattan Bank, Willard Butcher, was the first to pull the plug in August 1985, just after Botha's Rubicon speech (Bond 2003). Botha declared a temporary moratorium on short-term debt repayment of US\$13 billion, closed the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) and imposed tough new exchange controls (Hirsch 1989:31).

The anti-apartheid movement used the opportunity to deepen the contradictions between white capital and the state. The Commonwealth's Eminent Persons Group sent by the United Kingdom's Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, working with US President Ronald Reagan, aimed to protect capital accumulation by advocating minor reforms, in contrast to 'one person, one vote in a unitary state' demanded by the ANC and UDF.

The solidarity movements in the USA and Europe eventually forced their governments to impose economic sanctions during the mid-1980s – an indication of the international potential for decolonisation allies, both then and potentially in future, too. Of course, notwithstanding sanctions and oil embargos, the Western powers, Latin America and some countries in Asia continued to trade armaments and oil with South Africa throughout the 1980s (Van Vuuren 2017). Whereas opportunities were presented by the sanctions strategy to decolonise South Africa and weaken its links to major multinational

corporations, thus raising the potential for post-apartheid economic sovereignty, these were not acted upon.

Botha's debt standstill and imposition of exchange controls to prevent capital flight allowed some funds to circulate within South Africa that would otherwise have been moved abroad, and initially the SARB lowered interest rates to stimulate demand. But after that policy failed, as a result of the persistent crisis of capital overaccumulation (Bond & Malikane 2019), economic pressures rose. Visiting IMF missions firmly advocated neoliberal policies during the late 1980s. Thus, the foundation for the transition to neoliberalism is closely associated with the phasing out of apartheid. One such policy was a dramatic rise in interest rates in 1988, which pushed the economy into a four-year depression, leading to half a million new unemployed workers and the rise of domestic public debt to new heights.

As already discussed, even in the most sophisticated neo-Marxist circuits of South African political-economic research – for example, the Economic Trends Group, Industrial Strategy Project and ANC Economic Policy Desk (supported by University of London radical economists) – there was insufficient research into either the core processes behind the capitalist crisis or the subsequent role of the Treasury, with the exception of an analysis by Ben Fine and Zav Rustomjee (1996: 248). (The latter changed course, however, and became the first democratic Trade and Industry Director General at a time his ministers – Trevor Manuel and Alec Erwin – endorsed excessively rapid trade liberalisation, thus destroying many local labour-intensive sectors, including clothing, textiles, footwear, appliances and electronics.) By the early 1990s, South Africa had entered a period of economic policy negotiations that would shape all spheres of life for decades to come. Amongst the range of issues agreed upon during the negotiated settlement were the repayment of the US\$25 billion apartheid foreign debt, the constitutionally-confirmed independence of the SARB, and accession to the World Trade Organization on disadvantageous terms (Bond 2014).

One of the other main signals or imminent economic recolonisation was Pretoria's secret deal with the IMF in December 1993. ANC leaders supported government's 'Statement of Economic Policy Intent' as part of the motivation needed by then Minister of Finance, Keys, to apply for a US\$850 million loan. The Statement included public-sector wage restrictions, high real interest rates and budget deficit cuts. These neoliberal policies were later accompanied by World Bank strategies including market-orientated housing

policy and land reform, and a shift to commercialisation of essential services (i.e. water and electricity cut-offs for those unable to pay). While this was just one of many instances of economic recolonisation, it is often considered decisive (e.g. Kasrils 2013), although Vishnu Padayachee and Fine (2018) argue that the IMF did not overtly influence post-apartheid policy, since the adoption of neoliberal policies by the ANC had already occurred, a fair point. Still, the IMF's view was that it was their influence that convinced the ANC of the need for neoliberal macroeconomic policies.

Today, similarly, the most dangerous reflection of power enjoyed by international financiers to continue South Africa's recolonisation, must be the country's foreign debt: US\$180 billion in mid-2019, up from US\$25 billion in 1994 (SARB 2019). At 51 percent of GDP, this is far higher than in 1985 when Botha defaulted (at 41 percent of GDP). The mid-2019 decision by Treasury and the SARB to authorise Naspers' share relisting (in Amsterdam) of its main income earner, the Chinese IT firm Tencent, will redirect hard currency away from the JSE and worsen an already dire balance-of-payments deficit (Figure 2).

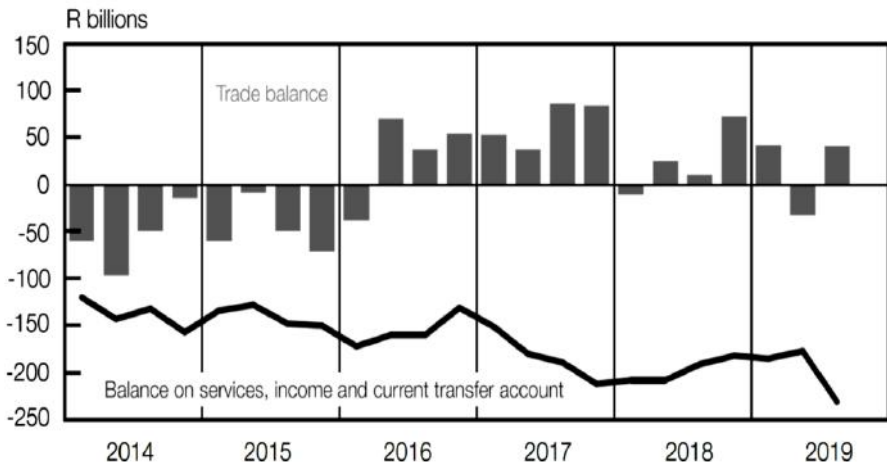


Figure 2. Current account of the balance of payments

Source: SARB 2019: 38.

With both foreign debt owed by the country as a whole (mainly private sector borrowers, but channelled through the SARB) and domestic public debt at

levels above 50 percent of GDP, bourgeois economists and financiers are more vocally demanding fiscal austerity. At the core of this philosophy is the belief that government should avoid crowding out private investment. In South Africa, this belief persists in spite of a ‘capital strike’ and overwhelming evidence of economic underperformance and growing unemployment, and hence the need for Keynesian-style state stimulation through greater expenditure. The one post-apartheid exception was from 2009–11, when the Treasury complied with a temporary world consensus along these lines, encouraged by the G20 and IMF – then led by Dominique Strauss-Kahn – to expand fiscal deficits so as to help avoid a 1930s-style global depression. South Africa’s debt to GDP ratio rose to new, post-apartheid heights, as did that of many other countries, which led to even greater economic recolonisation, this time by international credit ratings agencies whose 2017 junk rating of South African securities followed Jacob Zuma’s attack on the Treasury and the replacement of Pravin Gordhan with Malusi Gigaba.

That exceptional period of global capitalist crisis aside, the costs of the neoliberal policies are resented. Since 1994, the Treasury has been seen, in some political circles, as ‘too powerful’ (Pillay & Pearson 2016). Complicating matters, the Treasury is often credited with defending against reckless expenditure by the 2009–18 Zuma regime, even when a ‘Gupta-aligned’ minister briefly took charge: Gigaba, for less than a year in 2017–18. Moreover, reflecting its durability, Treasury’s post-apartheid power included what can be considered as neoliberal state-building: constructing internal institutional capacities coupled with outsourcing of government services, ostensibly so as to cut spending (Pillay & Pearson 2016; Brunette *et al.* 2017). Procurement was not only a matter of allowing white-owned firms and multinational corporations to generate massive, often unrestricted profits – e.g. the construction industry’s notorious collusion – but also became tied into Black Economic Empowerment patronage systems. One internal Treasury estimate, by former chief procurement officer Kenneth Brown, is that as much as 40 percent of such contracting (i.e. R240 billion per annum) amounted to wasteful and fruitless expenditure due to corporate overpricing (Mkokeli 2016). No substantive progress was subsequently reported in shrinking this, the single largest budget item.

Nor has there been noticeable progress by Treasury in addressing several of the most important vehicles of economic recolonisation: corporate criminality. South African businesses are persistently the world leaders in biannual PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC 2018) ‘Economic Crime’ reports,

which survey money-laundering, cybercrime, bribery and corruption. Lax stock market regulation allowed fraud-filled firms like Steinhoff and Tongaat Hulett to regularly issue bogus financial reports. The world's main auditing firms gained the confidence in South Africa to issue either corrupt or incompetent audits proclaiming clean-bills-of-health for a variety of deviant companies, including many associated with the Gupta empire.

Treasury was often to blame. The senior operations manager of its Financial Intelligence Centre admitted in October 2019, 'South Africa is still losing anything between US\$10 billion and US\$25 billion annually in illicit financial flows' (Planting 2019). The embarrassment of Treasury addressing this head on was obvious, for prior to becoming Deputy President of South Africa in 2014, Cyril Ramaphosa oversaw firms in which billions of rands of such flows have been documented (at Lonmin, MTN and Shanduka) (McKune & Makinane 2014; AmaBhungane 2015). In one case, the Treasury's closely-related Financial Sector Conduct Authority was unveiled to be state-captured by the third largest insurance company, Liberty Life (Open Secrets 2019). Another example was the collusion in the manipulation of the South African currency, to which major international banks including Citigroup and Standard Chartered pleaded guilty, *but in US court proceedings, not in South Africa*. Asked by the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF – the country's third largest political party) in parliament about why Treasury had not prosecuted, Finance Minister Tito Mboweni replied nonchalantly:

It is important for members to differentiate between the impact of any transaction on consumers and the impact on the value of the rand – the investigation before the Competition Commission appears to be related more to the conduct of bank traders towards clients, rather than providing evidence of their [actions] affecting the actual value of the Rand (Phakathi 2019).

Since the EFF were unable to hold Mboweni to account using democratic parliamentary powers, and since pronouncements and mobilisations by the EFF, trade unionists and other progressives did not persuade Mboweni to change course, then could heterodox political economists persuade him of the merits of decolonial economic ideas? In early 2019, an impressive collection of critical thinkers led by Turok had complained to Mboweni about Treasury's ideological bias towards economic recolonisation, for example in the form of

a recent colloquium Mboweni had hosted featuring Harvard's notorious neoliberal Ricardo Hausmann. Turok *et al.* (2019: 2) reminded Mboweni of a prior – 1996 *Growth, Employment and Redistribution* – home-grown structural adjustment programme influenced by 17 World Bank and white pro-corporate economists, and made five mild-mannered requests for the next one, these being:

1. There be greater transparency and coherence in relation to government economic policy formulation, and that government ensures that processes include proper representation of key role players both inside and outside government.
2. The list of invitees be entirely reconsidered in order to take the above into account.
3. The above should include a reconsideration of the balance of international invited guests and their role within the colloquia.
4. Progressive economists be given a meaningful platform to present alternative policy proposals at the Colloquia.
5. That documentation prepared for the Colloquia be made public (Turok *et al.* 2019: 2).

Mboweni (2019) was mildly apologetic in an email reply: 'We will endeavour in future to reach out to as inclusive a group as possible. It is a good practice to be inclusive'. Yet his high-profile August 2019 economic strategy document – *Economic Transformation, Inclusive Growth and Competitiveness* – included no prior consultation process outside Cabinet. Notwithstanding substantial evidence of deglobalisation then underway (Bond & Malikane 2019), the document was based upon the economic recolonisation philosophy:

South Africa needs to promote export competitiveness and actively pursue regional growth opportunities in order to leverage global and regional value chains for export growth. Exports have been identified as a key driver of economic growth. Technologically sophisticated exports, in particular, are crucial to structural transformation as it enables an economy to move from low- to high-productivity activities (Treasury 2019: 3).

It is in this context, in which alternative decolonising ideas mean very little on

their own, no matter how gently they are introduced, that it is vital to look at the social struggles over public policy. Such struggles reveal how demands made by oppressed people often take the form of financing disputes, in which Treasury holds the line against what it understands to be dangerous fiscal degeneration. The critical question typically asked by those in society comfortable with recolonisation, is, ‘Where will the money come from?’ There are typically two kinds of answers provided by those activists in society opposed to fiscal austerity: reformist and radical. The first is exemplified in October 2019 demands made by the non-governmental organisation-dominated Budget Justice Coalition (2019):

- Increase personal income tax for the highest earners;
- Increase taxes on wealth, and the income that comes from having wealth;
- Reduce tax breaks such as medical aid credits that high earners currently enjoy;
- Cut at least some of the tax breaks to companies;
- Gradually increase corporate income tax back to levels similar to that of the early 2000s;
- Improve the South African Revenue Service’s (SARS) capacity to collect taxes; and
- Combat illicit financial flows and tax evasions.

(Budget Justice Coalition 2019)

All of these logical reforms were simply too ambitious for Mboweni. But beyond these, were much more radical demands made by the South African Federation of Trade Unions (2019) and other critics of neoliberalism:

- Halt the two main state-subsidised high-carbon mega-projects – R800 billion for exporting 18 billion tons of coal, and R250 billion for the Durban port-petrochemical expansion – that are both now underway (and which in any case face strong opposition in communities ranging from the coal fields to South Durban);
- Insource the R800 billion+ of state and parastatal annual procurement, thus saving the 35–40 percent (R300 billion) that Treasury well knows is stolen from every rand spent, by exceptionally corrupt companies;

- Refuse to repay multilateral creditors the R200 billion+ in corrupt, odious, climate-catastrophic debt taken on by Eskom to finance Medupi and Kusile (thus inconveniencing supposedly-‘public’ lenders including the World Bank, European Investment Bank, African Development Bank, China Development Bank and BRICS New Development Bank);
- Lower interest rates, starting with a 3 percent cut, by first imposing much tighter exchange controls so as to prevent capital flight, thus lowering the massive debt repayment burden (now 4 percent of GDP – thus saving tens of billions of rand);
- Cease the R27 billion/year [investment] in ‘robot-making automobile’ subsidies; and
- With prescribed asset requirements, protect the working-class victims-to-be of the JSE – which is the world’s second most overvalued (using the Buffett Indicator) – by compelling investment managers to balance their portfolios with state securities (South African Federation of Trade Unions 2019).

Still, the prestige of Treasury remained intact, so no matter how many strong ideas were proposed to loosen the fiscal constraints, the central question that had emerged in the 21st century, is what kind of social activist pressure can rise up to the point that state rulers must concede, and begin to reverse the economic recolonisation process, even momentarily and incrementally. Before austerity was decisively imposed in the Covid-19 era – in spite of what was falsely advertised as a fiscal stimulus in 2020 – creeping budget constraints were introduced during the 2010s. But in spite of that, tertiary-level students demanding that #FeesMustFall and then winning free schooling for most has vital lessons for a broader economic decolonisation movement, including pressure points and cross-class progressive alliances.

Treasury’s Power Wilts before Students Demanding Decolonisation of Higher Education

On 21 October 2015, several thousand students began national #FeesMustFall advocacy by protesting in the parliamentary precinct in Cape Town. It was the day of the budgetary mid-term review. Prior to Gordhan, the 2014 - 2015 Finance Minister was Nhlanhla Nene, whose response that day – formally

articulated in his Budget Speech – was that student protests were ‘unconstructive’ (Reuters 2015). The word was perhaps chosen by the Treasury’s neoliberal speechwriters; it scornfully revealed a vast distance between those championing the austerity logic in Treasury on the one hand, and on the other, the society’s ascendant leadership at the elite universities (much less the 63 percent of society living below the poverty line, as measured by Budlender *et al.* 2015). Nene was fired by Zuma in December 2015 but mainly because he refused to countenance nuclear energy spending involving the Guptas and the Russian firm Rosatom, and then in 2018 was rehired briefly once Ramaphosa came to power but soon resigned in disgrace because of lying about other meetings he had with the Guptas.

Reuters (2015) reported that Nene ‘downplayed the effect of university students storming parliament as he delivered his medium term budget on the credit rating of Africa’s most advanced economy. ‘What matters for the ratings agencies is our response as government in addressing these challenges’, he said about the students’ demands to keep tuition fees unchanged’. Revealing ‘what matters’ in terms of the economic recolonisation agenda, in February 2015 Nene had relaxed exchange controls, allowing wealthy individuals to take R10 million out of the country each year, an increase from the previous R4 million limit, while at the same time cutting monthly social grants to poor people by 3 percent in real terms (Bond & Malikane 2019).

Having made this powerful statement to Treasury and parliament, the students then marched in their thousands to the Johannesburg and Durban headquarters of the ANC on October 22 and 23, and then demonstrated – more than ten thousand strong – at the Union Buildings in Pretoria on October 23, leaving Zuma too frightened to appear before the crowd. But he did agree to two immediate demands that day: a zero percent tuition increase for 2016 and the insourcing of low-paid service workers. Conceded University of the Witwatersrand Vice Chancellor Adam Habib and the leader of Universities South Africa, Ahmed Bawa, ‘the students achieved more in 10 days than vice-chancellors achieved in 10 years’ (Habib & Bawa 2016).

The students had also spun their wheels for many years prior to 2015, protesting annually and with great passion (albeit mostly the media covered the traditionally white campuses, ignoring the majority of campus protests). What transpired that year was new: *alliances between students and low-paid campus workers* who, fifteen years earlier, had suffered outsourcing and the destruction of their unions; and a *national* not merely local-campus-based

protest coordination, allowing a scale-jump to much more appropriate targets, including Treasury and top politicians like Zuma.

Treasury was certainly overdue for protest, because in November 2015 it was revealed that Higher Education Minister Blade Nzimande had two years earlier commissioned a major study of how to finance the students' demands, but then buried it. His spokesperson explained: 'It is a public document, but due to the nature of the report, we decided not to make it public. *Obviously we would have been setting the finance minister up against the public if that decision and report was released*' (e.a.) (Petersen 2015). It was increasingly obvious that decolonising educational visions were being snuffed out by Treasury. As student leader Kgotsi Chikane (2016) put it in October 2016,

The struggle for free education is not new to many of us. In fact, it has been our rallying call before some even entered university. However, a call for Free Decolonised Education is one that is new and with it comes a new form of politic. A politic that requires you to be relentless because you are challenging a system that doesn't even view you as truly human (Chikane 2016).

Treasury was just as relentless, deploying as its most aggressive public spokesperson a University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) academic (and Treasury consultant), Ivor Chipkin (2016). In October 2016, Chipkin condemned his university's Student Representative Council (SRC) because it 'called for a march on 'national and provincial sites of government'. Why was National Treasury the target? It would be too easy to see in the position of the SRC the cynical manipulation of Zuma-aligned agitators'. One such 'agitator', whom Wits Vice Chancellor Adam Habib deemed part of a 'Pol Pot Brigade', was Wits Anthropology Department chair Kelly Gillespie. A few days before Chipkin's critique, she had written to Finance Minister Gordhan:

... your department is structurally responsible for the violence that I witnessed on campus today, that my colleagues and I must face in dealing with the very real lives and bodies of young people in our institutions. While I am furious with Wits management for its role in the militarisation of campus that exacerbates and flares this conflict, they have no power to change the underlying structural conditions that fuel campus violence. You do The only thing that will stop this

antagonism at our institutions is the amplification of state funding to universities to keep them public, accessible and providing quality teaching and research. If you don't want to tax the super-rich, which we've been arguing is your political responsibility, then take the money from the defence budget or the unnecessary mega-projects, or the budgets for state pomp and ceremony. How can you not be willing to fund free education? It is not even a radical demand, but one that has been part of the tradition of liberal democracies for generations (Gillespie 2016).

By November 2017, Zuma had overruled a report by his own Heher Commission (set up to investigate university finances), specifically recommendations for a loan-based tertiary financing system, following input from Mukovhe Morris Masutha (an educational consultant who dated Zuma's daughter, and had been both a Wits student leader and an alleged spy for state security in 2016) (Serrao 2017). With an apparent disregard for Treasury, then run by his ally Gigaba, Zuma promised not only a R40 billion grant increase to tertiary institutions, and to permanently raise their budget from 0.68 percent of GDP to 1 percent, but free tuition for those tertiary learners whose parents earned less than R350 000 per year (an estimated 90 percent of all tertiary education level students) (Hall 2018).

Resistance emerged even before the formal announcement in December 2017. In spite of the 47 percent increase in state funding (in real terms) that would be coming to universities, Bawa complained, 'We are annoyed that we were not consulted before the decision was made. We needed at least a year to go through the strategy and implement' (Masweneng 2017). In reality, less than a month's notice was given and the 2018 first-year students were catered for by virtue of tertiary institutions simply billing a national student finance agency, which cut administrative and debt-collection costs massively. Even more powerfully, reported journalist Greg Nicolson (2017):

Michael Sachs, the Treasury's deputy director general of budgeting, threatened to resign if forced to implement the plan... Those students who marched on the Union Buildings, their institutions, civil society organisations and government departments probably spent weeks preparing their submissions to the Heher Commission. The judge dutifully interrogated dozens of submissions in public hearings. His

report runs to 748 pages. But Zuma placed his future son-in-law's advice above Heher's recommendations and those submissions (Nicolson 2017).

As it became clear Zuma was serious, Sachs did resign in mid-November (Basson & le Cordeur 2017), although there was no apparent fallout as a result. Nicolson also has a point insofar as the Wits student submission to Heher was, like the Budget Justice Coalition's to Mboweni in 2019, quite moderate, calling only for a 2 percent corporate income tax increase and an apartheid-windfall wealth levy. There was, in that document (which was not circulated throughout the student movement), no questioning of the broader framework in which Treasury maintains South Africa's recolonised economy, even though the current students' generation would become the main victims of climate change fuelled by the fossil fuel-centric megaprojects which Treasury apparently did not mind guaranteeing to the tune of hundreds of billions of rands. In any case, such submissions are ultimately irrelevant, compared to the more profound pressure exerted by activists.

Zuma himself had, at a Security Cluster meeting in 2016, advocated an 'uncompromising' approach to student protesters, including 'maximum sentences for those involved in violence' (*BusinessTech* 2016). But once he was out of power in mid-2018, he admitted why he had succumbed late in 2017: 'The protests were very destructive and property was damaged. We knew that every year protests were coming, but we had no solution, and it was getting worse' (Hans 2018). How destructive? An estimated *R786 million* in damage to universities was tallied up for the 2015–17 protests (Kahn 2018). But the annual 'payoff' in the form of rising student grants was approximately *R40 billion* annually.

Looking back less than a year after their victory, on 16 June 2018 (at an Apartheid Museum seminar), student activists were sober about the 'many objectives' of the 'decolonisation project' and the shared ideals with the youth of 1976, stated as: increased access to affordable if not free, high quality, higher education; rethinking curricula; dismantling exclusionary institutional norms and cultures; effecting staff and leadership changes to reflect society-at-large; and connecting this activism with a range of economic and political struggles for a more just South Africa (Mabasa 2018). Student protest was sufficiently powerful in 2015–17 that it compelled from Pretoria a partial decolonisation, one particularly painful to the Treasury, which in turn amplified its

own austerity plan in the 2018 and 2019 budgets. So it is to the last point that we turn to conclude: the relationship of this and other sector-specific movements to the larger agenda of economic decolonisation. And that agenda must initially address the most dangerous circuits of capital, which are the international financial institutions that Amin feared would exert the most pressure.

Conclusion: The Decolonising Conditions Needed to ‘Delink’

The main arbiter of whether South Africa’s economic recolonisation continues to the satisfaction of international financiers remain the ‘three brothers’ who state-captured Treasury in the mid-1990s: Standard & Poors, Fitch and Moody’s. Fiscal austerity is intensifying as Mboweni moves forward with the demand repeatedly made by the credit rating agencies: to cut the budget deficit to the standard neoliberal gauge of 3 percent of GDP as soon as possible, or otherwise suffer a final junk rating on securities.

Mboweni can justifiably claim that he is not an economic recoloniser, insofar as the single main budget-busting problem for Treasury is the Eskom loan guarantee of R450 billion, granted to the electricity parastatal by his predecessors Gordhan and Nene. But to deal with that debt, a decoloniser would start by questioning whether creditors don’t deserve some degree of lender liability on especially the corrupt loans to build the largest coal-fired power plants under construction anywhere in the world today: Medupi and Kusile. The World Bank is the largest such lender, at US\$3.75 billion, even though the loan was granted when its then-president, Robert Zoellick, knew a Western multinational corporation had bribed the ANC’s investment arm, Chancellor House, to get the R60 billion boiler contract.

If Mboweni authorises the repayment of such loans, that in turn will require amplifying the austerity strategy he embarked upon in October 2019, which targeted already-impoverished municipalities. This will be a signal for potential urban-based social unrest. It may escalate to the point that it proves correct Moeletsi Mbeki’s (2011) prophesy, that ‘Tunisia Day’ will arrive in South Africa in 2020. If protest does again rise to new heights, the 2015–17 students’ lessons in contesting Treasury are vital, including the scale-jump associated with the #FeesMustFall struggle: away from atomistic, community-based, shop-floor or sectorally-limited sites, towards alliances, coalitions and ultimately an integrated movement of decolonisers, rising in increased activist coordination to national prominence.

There are also at least two intellectual lessons drawn from the arguments above: the need to maintain a wide-ranging approach, capable of incorporating analysis of – and resistance to – race, class, gender and ecological super-exploitations. To illustrate, Amin (2018: 86) pointed out:

Capitalist accumulation is founded on the destruction of the bases of all wealth: human beings and their natural environment. It took a wait lasting a century and a half until our environmentalists rediscovered that reality, now become blindingly clear. It is true that historical Marxisms had largely passed an eraser over the analyses advanced by Marx on this subject and taken the point of view of the bourgeoisie – equated to an atemporal ‘rational’ point of view – in regard to the exploitation of natural resources.

In other words, the critique of the recolonising economy that South Africa exemplifies, is the ability and ‘right to say no!’ to extractivism, by not only those immediately affected (often grassroots feminists), but by all citizens who understand that multinational corporations are generating net wealth *depletion* in Africa, which even the World Bank admits now occurs at a net loss rate of more than US\$100 billion annually in Africa (Lange *et al.* 2018). That in turn leads to a broader critique of capitalist economic strategies associated with ‘neoliberal nature’, including the argument that to save the planet from climate change, states like South Africa’s should essentially privatise the air, through carbon trading. This was the strategy that South African Environment Minister Barbara Creecy (2019) most publicly prioritised at the Madrid climate summit, and is a classic example of a recolonising-economics strategy. As former US Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summers (1991) once argued while justifying emissions trading, ‘The economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste on the lowest-wage country is impeccable, and we [the World Bank] should face up to that... Africa is vastly under-polluted’.

Similarly, the second lesson is that given global capitalist crisis conditions, a country like South Africa should more aggressively ‘delink’ from global circuits. As Amin put it:

The fundamental – fatal – contradiction of capitalism resulted into continuous overaccumulation and therefore, faced a problem of outlet for capitalist production. On that ground Luxemburg is certainly right.

How has this contradiction been overcome in history? Here also Luxemburg is right: capitalism expanded by destroying pre-capitalist modes of production both within the societies of the dominant centers and the dominated peripheries. Handicrafts are replaced by manufacturing industries, small shops by supermarkets etc. This process of accumulation by dispossession still goes on with the current privatisation of former public services (Amin 2016).

Amin (1990) advocated a selective delinking from those international circuits that were most damaging, especially financiers, and indeed any global force – i.e. most multilateral institutions and global credit ratings agencies – that maintained a recolonising agenda of imposing capitalist power on non-capitalist social and natural life. Given the economic deglobalisation processes now underway, there are a great many opportunities to do just that.

To illustrate, the level of new foreign direct investment (FDI) across the world fell by nearly 20 percent to US\$1.2 trillion in 2018, after three successive years of decline from the 2015 peak of just over US\$2 trillion (UNCTAD 2019: 1). From peak levels in 2007, FDI profitability, trade/GDP ratios, and even cross-border financial flows all dropped markedly. Although there was a recorded rise in South African incoming foreign investment, it turned out to be ‘phantom’, i.e. ‘mainly’ intra-company loans, with transnational corporations seeking the country’s extremely high real interest rates as a means of earning quick profits and offshoring assets (UNCTAD 2019). Not only has global FDI been crashing, from the 4.5% of GDP peak level of 2006–07 to 2.4% in 2017, so too have cross-border financial flows (from 16.1% to 4.5% of GDP in the same period) and relative trade rates. The Baltic Dry Index, the world’s main measure of shipping, plummeted from a level of 11 500 in 2008 to below 1 500 the next year and has remained there since. The 2008–09 collapse of trade and its subsequent slow decline was similar to two prior episodes of rapid deglobalisation, in which one measure – world imports/GDP – fell during roughly 15-year periods, from 1880–97 and from 1929–45. Along with other indicators, this suggests that a deglobalisation (or as *The Economist* now prefers, ‘slowbalisation’) era began after the 1980–2007 era of rapid globalisation.

It is true that the Trump regime amplified deglobalisation tendencies with his trade war against China, India, Brazil, Argentina, Europe and also South Africa. In the 2009–17 period, there were an annual average of 436

‘discriminatory commercial policy interventions’ recorded by the World Trade Organization, but in 2018–19 the amount rose to 1 049 annually. But ironically, long before Trump came to power, the decline in world trade/GDP ratios was led by the Brazil–Russia–India–China–South Africa group; i.e. the economies that once were considered by Goldman Sachs manager Jim O’Neil to be the ‘building BRICS’ of 21st century capitalism. South Africa was hit hardest, as trade fell from 73 percent of GDP in 2007 to 59 percent in 2018, compared to a world trade/GDP decline over that period from 61 percent of GDP to 55 percent. All the BRICS countries witnessed reduced trade in much greater degrees than the global norm, and three spent parts of 2015–18 in recession: Brazil, Russia and South Africa, with the latter recording a negative GDP again in the first quarter of 2019. McKinsey Global Institute’s (2019: 1) latest ‘global flows’ analysis confirms that ‘...a smaller share of the goods rolling off the world’s assembly lines is now traded across borders. Between 2007 and 2017, exports declined from 28.1 to 22.5% of gross output in goods-producing value chains’. The decline in trade intensity is led by China, where gross exports as a share of gross output in goods fell from 18% to 10% from 2007–17 (McKinsey Global Institute 2019: 1).

The most spectacular example of trade and production delinking in South Africa and perhaps anywhere was the activist-driven Treatment Action Campaign that, during the early 2000s, successfully contested monopoly patent power over AIDS medicines, in alliance with groups all over the world. At the time, a typical annual treatment regime cost US\$10 000, making life itself unaffordable to the vast majority of five million South Africans who desperately needed the treatment. In 2005, at its trough, South Africa’s life expectancy was 52 years; but after the battle was won, by 2019 it had risen to 65. The primary reason was the roll-out of free medicines to several million people through the public sector. Drug production has since then been accomplished locally at generic pharmaceutical manufacturing facilities in Midrand, and indeed these now exist across Africa. This is the essence of deglobalising capital and globalising people, an antidote to the economics of recolonisation which tends to seek precisely the opposite (Bond 2014).

So, it is here, not in academia’s economics profession – which generally adheres religiously to Intellectual Property rights, hence lining up with Big Pharma against the citizenry – that we can identify a praxis epistemology that opens up many new doors to decolonising the economy and society. The current inability of these activists to link up their campaigns across

sectors, spaces and scales, however, raises another thorny question: whether a new generation of progressive scholars and researchers who often serve as strategic and networking support agents to the activists, can rapidly emerge and build a genuinely decolonising political economy. Since 2018, the Rethinking Economics for Africa (REFA) movement explicitly aimed to decolonise the economics discipline, and judging by the great energy and diversity within REFA's 2018 and 2019 festivals (both held at Wits University), there are grounds for optimism. The variety of panels dedicated to wide-ranging race, class, gender and ecological discussions was inspiring.

What pessimistic signs must decolonisers in REFA pay attention to, however? One example is careerism amidst disciplinary loyalty, especially in a South African competitive-university setting that seeks from its faculty members *only* Scopus-accredited articles as the commodity-type output of scholarly research, no matter that the average academic journal article gets just five views. Publishing in academic journals within the economics profession is arduous for decolonisers, since the ideological gate-keeping is formidable. Far too many thriving intellectual communities have degenerated due to obeying the kinds of pseudo-scientific standards of rigour imposed. As for remaining loyal to a discipline that intrinsically despises decolonisers, there are many lessons to consider from scholarly societies of heterodox economists across the world. At the 2018 50th anniversary of the US Union for Radical Political Economics, for example, one author's informal discussions with life-long economists confirmed the essential mistake made by many, if not the majority present: developing a career located principally within a stultifying economics profession. There, the decolonisation agenda rapidly ran out of steam. Preferable are the wide variety of (non-economics) disciplines where expertise in political economy is appreciated.

A last example of a dangerous tendency in REFA – one that one of the authors has recently encountered within the group's senior-academic support network – is a predictable fear that (we) *petit-bourgeois* professionals have in relation to activists. The latter can be, sometimes, dishonest and hackish, because they have often realised, as did some 2015–17 #FeesMustFall student leaders, that their enemies play dishonest politics; so they, conclude, they too are self-empowered to exaggerate or 'tell lies and claim easy victories', as well.

The danger here is, that like other 'sins' committed by allied intellectuals (Bond *et al.* 2016 - 2017), the scholar-activist is drawn into various kinds of analyses, strategies, tactics and alliances that are ultimately

self-defeating. But the overarching lesson we take is not to fear treading in areas of political controversy, but instead, to maintain high ethical standards, and to genuinely adopt a decoloniser's perspective *that it is the knowledge produced when illegitimate power is challenged*, that makes both the activism and the associated scholarship so rewarding. Those are, at least, orientations that we as scholar-activist political economists are intent on pursuing, with the responsibility to continue striving to be economic decolonisers.

Postscript: As Covid-19 Contradictions Rise, Decolonisers Demand a Treasury U-turn

The economic decolonisation process was derailed during the Covid-19 crisis, during the months after this essay was drafted in February 2020. But many voices of resistance emerged, including the initial 'Cry of the Xcluded' combination of the SA Federation of Trade Unions and numerous social and environmental movements who protested against the 2020 budget, followed by a series of protests against hunger, water shortages and corruption in the distribution of emergency funds. Ongoing labour strikes increasingly targeted not only particular grievances – e.g. health workers without sufficient protective equipment – but the more general way Treasury and the Presidency privileged corporate and rich South Africans' interests.

To illustrate this anger on a variety of fronts in September 2020, the following are some of the most explicit concerns, as articulated in a workshop held with the country's largest trade union (the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa), based on Mboweni's continued – and even more robust – adoption of policies characterised by neoliberalism, privatisation, austerity and the 'Washington Consensus':

- 1) *Mboweni lied about the fiscal stimulus, thus causing the 2020 Depression and exposed the President's incompetence.* It is now well known that virtually all the April - June statements made by Mboweni about a fiscal stimulus of R500 billion were lies. He knew full well that the kinds of interventions he had in mind would entail budget cuts, and he also was party to programme design – such as for a R200 billion loan guarantee, a tiny fraction of which was actually implemented – that proved to be incompetent. The failure to ensure rapid delivery of unemployment benefits to millions, and the absurd approach to making available a tiny (R350/

month) emergency grant to workers suddenly unemployed and without insurance, have been universally condemned. The likelihood of South Africa's crash in GDP for 2020 exceeding 10% – i.e. a formal depression, not just a long recession – is largely due to the lack of a genuine R500 billion fiscal stimulus. Most countries attempt to manage a pandemic-crash by injecting major fiscal boosts equivalent to or higher than the anticipated loss of GDP, given that lockdown crippled the private sector. But in South Africa, the impact of fiscal policy is *pro-cyclical not counter-cyclical*, i.e. turning a terrible recession into a depression due to lack of budgetary support.

- 2) *Mboweni has threatened the contractual integrity of the South African government by renegeing on a three-year wage deal.* His decision in February to halt payments for civil servant salaries estimated at R161 billion (including R39 billion in 2020 - 2021 that were contractually due) – especially for frontline health workers who risk their lives treating Covid-19 patients – is now in court, with trade unions attempting to prevent this catastrophic breach of trust between organised labour and the country's single largest employer.
- 3) *Mboweni's IMF, BRICS New Development Bank, World Bank and other foreign borrowings threaten our country's sovereignty.* The roughly R100 billion in foreign-currency financing arranged in mid-2020 was not needed, even his own leading Treasury expert acknowledged in April. The economy's contraction resulted in the first current account surplus in 17 years in the prior quarter and the US\$50 billion in foreign reserves were boosted by a rising gold price. And worse, South Africa's foreign debt is already higher than at any other level in the country's history (reaching 53% of GDP in late 2019, before the Covid-19 crisis). There is a genuine fear among experts and activists alike, that the IMF loan will turn over economic policy to a Bretton Woods Institution regime in Washington, DC that is notorious for its anti-African economic impact.
- 4) *Mboweni's austerity strategies will sabotage the rebuilding of South Africa's economy.* Just as the Covid-19 crisis hit the world hard, in late February, Mboweni chose to cut R3.9 billion in state funding to the healthcare sector. Then, as a *Business Maverick* reporter recently noted, 'Budgets that were slashed in June include, among others, building schools,

support for maths and science initiatives in basic education, provincial road maintenance, allocation of human settlements to the poor, the land reform and rural development programme and allocations towards SA's gender-based violence crisis. Further cuts in similar areas are expected, including in President Cyril Ramaphosa's state-funded initiatives to create jobs'.

- 5) *Mboweni failed to explore and promote alternative approaches to revenue.* The finance ministries and central banks cooperate to ensure Quantitative Easing provides more fiscal space in the U.S.-UK-EU-Japan, where since 2009 the technique was used frequently to prevent economic calamity. There are many other countries in South Africa's league – Thailand, Korea, Uganda, Nigeria, Malawi, Cuba – which during 2020 turned to stimulative strategies that combine fiscal stimulus and monetary easing.
- 6) *Mboweni's spending bias – against social programmes – is continuing South Africa's notoriously low level of fiscal redistribution.* As defined by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), social spending as a share of GDP has remained in the post-apartheid range of 5–8%, compared to a 22% average of the world's 40 largest economies (only four countries were lower – India, Indonesia, Mexico and China – while France and Finland maintained social spending of more than 30% of GDP). Mboweni has maintained other biases in fiscal policy such as health spending, where the wealthy receive tax deductions for private medical expenses, as well as corporate concessions on municipal services tariffs and electricity (Special Pricing Agreements are especially generous to two giant smelting firms, BHP Billiton and Anglo American, whose per unit cost of power is one tenth the rest of society). The extractive-industry corporates are also lightly taxed – through royalties and income taxes – on their depletion of non-renewable resources, which also exceeds US\$20 billion per annum. These are just some of the ways that 'corporate welfare' exceeds the state's social spending.
- 7) *Mboweni continues to insist that state spending has no meaningful positive 'multiplier' impact on society and economy.* The Treasury position is that, as his representatives said at Nedlac in August 2020, 'Overall, data for SA indicates that fiscal multipliers are zero or negative'. It is this willful blindness to distinguish the huge impact of a small grant to poor people,

whose multiplier effect is very high (their spending is nearly entirely on local products such as basic foodstuffs, utilities and rent), and the multipliers associated with generous subsidisation of corrupt transnational corporations.

- 8) *Mboweni has made no attempt to prosecute the firms engaged in looting the South African fiscus by over-charging on contracts.* According to former Treasury chief procurement officer Kenneth Brown, this private sector profiteering occurs to the extent of 35–40% on average, yet Mboweni has done nothing to bring this to the society's attention, much less to use his own power to bring this crisis to an end. He has made no meaningful progress in ending the role of corrupt parallel-state agencies from the USA and Europe, such as KPMG, Deloitte, PwC, SAP, etc.
- 9) *Mboweni's Treasury is state-captured by three brothers whose interests have nothing in common with the majority: Standard & Poors, Fitch and Moody's.* Repeatedly, the state has served the interests of the global creditor tyrants, whose incompetence was proven by their very friendly investment grade ratings for the likes of Lehman Brothers, Bear Stearns, AIG and other 2008–09 world financial crisis catalysts, just before they crashed.
- 10) *Mboweni has turned a blind eye to Illicit Financial Flows, even though his own colleagues agree it is a pandemic.* Treasury's Financial Intelligence Centre admits, 'South Africa is still losing anything between [US]\$10-billion and [US]\$25-billion annually in illicit financial flows [IFFs]' – yet failure to prosecute such tax dodging is notorious in South Africa, and likewise, the liberalisation of exchange controls continues. The combination of IFFs and exchange-control liberalisation leaves South Africa very vulnerable to massive outflows of speculative hot-money finance, such as occurred in March, leading to a 38% stock market crash. But in addition, it forces the Reserve Bank to maintain extremely high interest rates, so as to continue attracting international finance. In addition, there are massive outflows of profits and dividends to formerly South African firms that relocated to London, Amsterdam, Melbourne, New York and other global financial centres.
- 11) *Mboweni has been party to corporate tax cuts that are as generous as*

any. When Donald Trump lowered the corporate tax base rate from 31 to 18% in 2018, he was considered wildly irresponsible. With Mboweni as a central player in South African economic policy making since the early 1990s, the corporate tax rate has fallen from its late-apartheid peak of 52% to today's 28%. South African corporate taxation ranks 172nd lowest out of 213 countries, and fifth lowest in Africa. The expected increase in Gross Fixed Capital Formation (especially private sector investment) never resulted, and instead, corporate profits soared to among the world's highest levels, along with the massive flight of capital abroad. He has made no effort to reverse this, since taking over as Finance Minister in 2018. He has failed to raise taxes on the wealthy in spite of the extreme inequality – usually measured as the world's worst – that Covid-19 has amplified.

- 12) *Mboweni's hatred of State-Owned Enterprise subsidies is counter-productive.* Like all working-class organisations protecting our members, we want to see state spending directed towards improving the lives of our members and the mass of poor and working people, so we are not opposed to Mboweni's attacks on corruption and incompetence associated with SOEs, especially those state-captured by the 'Zuptas', such as Eskom, Transnet, SAA, Prasa and Denel. But the critical step is class analysis, and in many cases Mboweni's recovery strategy is simply starvation, especially where that affects working-class and poor South Africans. The electricity disconnections, collapse of commuter railways and loss of jobs at dysfunctional parastatals should not result in punishment for workers, as a result of the *managers'* corrupt acts that helped to ruin many of them, especially with the likes of Brian Molefe and Siyabonga Gama still not yet prosecuted. Mboweni's hatred of SOEs and consistent demands to privatise or push them into bankruptcy indicate a Finance Minister operating without the ability or desire to distinguish who caused the problems, and how they can be fixed – with genuine worker participation.
- 13) *Mboweni's new Zero-Based Budgeting strategy is an even more rapid route to austerity.* Wielded with the same kind of blunt force that was used in the 1980s when the concept was popular in Ronald Reagan's USA government, this is yet another strategy Mboweni has adopted from neoliberals to chop the state, and to reduce the broader, integrated functions of government – creating or delivering public goods we all desperately

need, such as healthcare, water and sanitation and other basic-needs infrastructure – to a banal cost-benefit analysis.

- 14) *Mboweni has coddled corrupt lenders, even those so crooked that they are successfully prosecuted by the United States government.* Mboweni has consistently rewarded corrupt banks by authorising repayment of loans known to have facilitated corruption associated with the Zuma years or even with the pre-Zuma ruling party's interest. Most egregiously, he has allowed repayment to the World Bank and other lenders which financed the Medupi and Kusile power plants, even though in 2015 the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act prosecution of Hitachi for bribing the ANC through Chancellor House (so as to be awarded massive contracts at both facilities), led to the Japanese firm paying a US\$19 million fine (to Washington, not Pretoria). The bribery was well understood in 2010 when the loan was made, with the Public Prosecutor already the year before (prior to Zuma's ascent to power) identifying Eskom chair and ANC Finance Committee member Valli Moosa – who oversaw the Hitachi tender award – as having an 'improper' conflict of interest. Yet the World Bank's largest loan ever, for US\$3.75 billion, was made in 2010 and has been drawn down and partially repaid since, instead of being investigated for corruption and the status of 'Odious Debt', whose repayment rewards ruling-party corruption. The same is true for what in 2018 was reported as a US\$5 billion China Development Bank loan, as well as transparently corrupt loans associated with the BRICS New Development Bank, to Eskom and Transnet.
- 15) *Mboweni has ignored corrupt bankers who manipulate the South African currency.* In Parliament in July 2019, he patronisingly responded to MPs who questioned why 17 major international banks – clearly guilty of manipulating the currency for their own institutions' profit, were not being prosecuted. He replied that there was no evidence of this manipulation affecting the rand's value. Not only was this incorrect, in the USA several of the banks were already paying more than R1 billion in fines (to the US government, not South Africa's) for Rand manipulation.
- 16) *Mboweni has sabotaged the only policy interventions the ANC has proposed that will help the masses.* The need for thorough-going land reform, the urgency of ending the class-apartheid system in healthcare

financing through a National Health Insurance, and the nationalisation of the SA Reserve Bank so it serves society, are all vital to not only the ruling party but the broader mass of poor and working-class people. Mboweni has consistently failed to allocate funding required for these initiatives.

- 17) *Mboweni is a privatiser of everything that moves, from road usage to air travel.* In 2019 he used Twitter to attack critics of a corruption-riddled parastatal, Sanral, which by all accounts did not do proper consultations on e-tolling and used an Austrian supplier whose technology and billing system is extremely inappropriate for local conditions. But by insinuating that ‘the working class’ is entirely dependent on minibus taxis (exempt from e-tolls), Mboweni showed his ignorance about local transport, where many workers must use automobiles, and where the vast distances caused by apartheid’s location of working-class townships far from our jobs, requires much more highway transport than people commuting from traditional white areas: ‘I don’t know why the middle and upper classes in Gauteng want to complicate our lives. The working class do not pay e-tolls! Public transport! Hello’.
- 18) *Mboweni has taken upon himself the responsibility for policing neoliberalism – in this case, central bank independence (which diminishes democratic input and increases financial market control of monetary policy) – not only in South Africa, but among neighbouring countries.* This was most outrageously obvious when in August he used Twitter to interfere in the affairs of the Zambian government and openly threaten blackmail: ‘Presidents in Africa must stop this nonsense of waking up in the morning and fire (sic) a Central Bank Governor! You cannot do that. This is not some fiefdom of yours! Your personal property?! No! That Governor was a good fella (sic). Why do we do these things as Africans.[?] The President of Zambia must give us the reasons why he dismissed The Governor – or else hell is on its way. I will mobilize!’... ‘Looks like I am in trouble about my statement on the dismissal of the Bank of Zambia Governor! I stand by my statement. Central Bank independence is key. Not negotiable. Let all central bankers speak out!’ (Fihlani 2020).
- 19) *Mboweni’s xenophobia and lack of touch with reality were witnessed in April 2020.* That month, in discussing the impact of Covid-19 – which

especially devastated the incomes of precarious migrant workers, all of whom need to send remittances home to their impoverished families across the country and region – Mboweni argued without any proof, ‘Today, almost 100% [of restaurant workers] are non-South African. The new economy that we are getting into after the lifting of the lockdown must answer that question’ (Vuk’uzenzele 2020). Not long after, legislation was tabled which, probably unconstitutionally, will penalise non-South Africans who are asylum seekers or refugees (i.e. not permanent residents) and prevent them from earning even a survival livelihood in low-income residential areas.

- 20) *Mboweni represents South Africa in major multilateral fora, but not to the benefit of the majority, here or across the continent.* One recent example was Mboweni’s failure to promote the cancellation of unpayable debt by African countries, by demanding fairer treatment of the continent and poor countries more generally. It is vital for South Africa to return to traditions of liberation, in which we oppose the neoliberal, anti-labour, anti-people, anti-environmental role of both Western and emerging powers – including Mboweni’s colleagues at the G20, BRICS and the Bretton Woods Institutions where he sits on important leadership bodies. He has never uttered any statements or been party to any struggles – such as debt cancellation for poor countries – where he sides with the world’s masses.

(Source: notes from workshop conducted by one of the authors with leaders from the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa, Johannesburg, 27 September 2020.)

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The Socialism of Frantz Fanon: A Theory for the Rehabilitation of Subjugated People

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Abstract

From Fanon's perspective of deconstructing the logics of expropriation and alienation specific to the colonial system, it is first of all a question of showing that the struggle for independence has not escaped the problematic of the class struggle. Thus, on the strength of this observation, Fanon's socialism mobilizes the socialist project for the total liberation of colonized societies. Suddenly Fanon's thought appears as a complex and powerless arsenal capable of decompartmentalising territories, bodies, minds, concepts and knowledge, and of unlocking the frameworks of Marxist Analysis confined in the prism of bourgeoisie / proletariat domination to open up to a humanism built around the nation, independence and freedom.

Keywords: Colonised people, independent nations, colonised countries, modernity

Introduction

There is, in Frantz Fanon's thought, a specific historicity that characterises the formerly colonised people and which should push them to the invention of a new historical subject capable of carrying, in all its radicality, the work necessary for the survival of the newly independent nations. This is why there is a break, in colonised countries, especially in Africa, from the form of modernity with the West wanted to impose on the rest of the world.

Euromodernity has turned out to be a system of dispossession that destroys all the creative potentials of the subordinated people. In other words,

this modernity, which found its champions in the Enlightenment movement and which was to be not only the framework of liberation but also of human development, gave birth, in the colonised regions, to a violent and iniquitous system of exploitation and negation of subjected populations. In short, these were all the things that socialism combats in its fundamental principles, whatever the referents or the theoretical obedience. Although in general, during the colonial period, the apathy of Africans against the orderly system of Euromodern administration was seen by the colonists and their specialists as a characteristic trait of the savage, poorly educated and lazy, we can today, with hindsight, see it as, a strategy of resistance, an anti-system attitude specific to Africans.

For Fanon, because of this particular historical weight, radicalism must be the framework from which the subject societies struggle and build their freedom; a creative freedom of a new humanity. He explains this point of view, in a programmatic way, in his speech, presented at the Second Congress of Black Writers and Artists of March - April 1959. He said:

In a colonised country the most elementary, the most brutal, the most undifferentiated is the most fervent and most effective form of defense of national culture.

Thus, throughout the decades of independence that began at the end of the 1950s, the dominant feature of societal dynamics in Africa is the struggle, as Achille Mbembe says, which,

aims to produce life, to overthrow the hierarchies instituted by those who have become accustomed to winning without being right, 'absolute violence' playing, in this work, a detoxifying and instituting function.

We can, therefore, say that Fanon's position on socialism finds its foundation in the need to fight for the values and cultures specific to the dominated people. Philippe Lucas (1971) speaks of 'betting on the spontaneity of the masses' through a framework that does not necessarily have to follow the contours of socialist systems such as a certain interpretation or 'application' of Marxism [that proponents] wanted to impose in Africa. Amady Aly Dieng (2011: 188), with Fanon, castigates,

a whole host of socialists in Black Africa for disguising the thought of Karl Marx to sing to us about the saving virtues of their African ways of socialism which are in reality the different ways of a colonial capitalism that no longer dares to speak its name.

In this article, I will start from the Fanonian analysis of the colonial system, which he considers as a violent and iniquitous system of expropriation, and negation of the humanity of the colonised people, to show how Fanon's radical position and his socialist perspective find their explanation in his humanism through the project of liberation and rehabilitation of colonised people.

Colonialism as a Violent System of Expropriation, Alienation and Dispossession of Colonised People

Colonisation as a system of domination is undoubtedly one of the projects of subjugation that has most influenced historical experiences and social practices in Africa. Both its breadth and depth were a powerful marker in the history of the Continent. Maurice Kamto (1987: 207) speaks of historical experiences and particular social practices that 'are still developing their effects today'. To this, we should add: its perverse effects. Even if the colonial policy, from its beginnings to the Second World War, developed in a wobbly balance between the theory of assimilation and that of association, between direct administration and a permanent recourse to traditional hierarchies, all under the iron fist of a highly centralised administration, it has always been clear about the status of African populations.

For the colonial policy, the natives should remain administered willy-nilly. It has never been in favour of the advent of African social movements, let alone the awakening of a political consciousness among Africans. It has always stifled all forms of action, whether protest or other forms of political activity that could lead to revolts or questioning the operating system in place, even in the most trivial aspects. In other words, despite the ideology of its promoters who defended a civilising mission, colonialism in fact has revealed itself as a powerful alienating and expropriating system for subjugated societies. It is from this perspective that Thierry Michalon (1984: 136) writes about the colonial heritage:

This heritage is surely one of the most serious handicaps that the countries of Africa still suffer. Like a bicycle without half its chain, the state cannot turn because it lacks the political half of the belt. Reduced to a simple administration, the state is surprised at its powerlessness, when this is not surprising: men find it difficult to comply with rules they did not help to develop!

Indeed, in addition to the negation of the being of the colonised, in particular the black person (Fanon 2011), the colonial system denies the existence of specifically indigenous political referents of the subject societies. The Negro does not have the same human dignity as the white settler, but local societies also do not enjoy any political consideration. Thus, the defeated traditional chief and his descendants do not enjoy considerable political recognition. They have mere auxiliary roles that reduce them to mere performers of lesser tasks in the overall management of the company.

Faced with the poverty of the political perspective of the colonised people of Africa that he saw, as The Provincial Government of the Algerian Republic (GPRA) ambassador, Fanon worries, gets angry, and takes a firm stand against the internal autonomy proposed by General de Gaulle. This is why, after participating in the struggle for the emancipation of black people through the negritude movement, Fanon takes a new path for the liberation of colonised societies. It is thus part of a Third World perspective that allows it, on the theoretical and practical levels, to take charge of the problems linked to the liberation of people, to racial segregation, to colonialism in Africa, Asia and, South America. This new positioning allows it to go beyond the perspective of the black individual (the 'I' of *Black Skin, White Masks*) to be liberated or de-alienated in order to move towards the collective consciousness (the 'We' of the *Damned of the Earth*) that must promote the advent of the political nation, the one and only liberating framework. This is the meaning of his fight on Algerian soil.

In *Sociology of a Revolution*, Fanon gave himself a well-defined political objective: to bring about a new world through [the struggle for] freedom: 'We want to show ... that on Algerian soil a new society was born' (Mbembe in Fanon 2011: 13). Breaking with the movement of negritude, Fanon is in search of an 'authentic community' and combatant, from which will spring, as Achille Mbembé notes,

an unprecedented human subject capable of inhabiting the world and of sharing it so that the possibilities of communication and reciprocity – without which neither the dialectic of recognition nor human language – can be restored (in Fanon 2011:10).

In this new world, the peasantry, as an authentic community and fighting force, is the spearhead capable of destroying the system of domination in place. The revolt thus becomes the creation of a new man, continues Mbembé, ‘an almost indefinable subject, always left behind because never finished, like a gap that resists the law, even any limit’ (in Fanon 2011:10).

It is this liberation project that allows Fanon to become part of posterity through the creation of this new man who is characterised by creative openness as his life was; he who was born in Martinique and died as an Algerian national hero. Fanon, due to his biography, did not have enough time to dwell on conceptual circumscriptions. Rather, he had strong intuitions that secured his place in posterity in terms of understanding the existing world and exploring the future of colonised societies and colonial heritage. Thus, from Fanon’s point of view, one of the most significant aspects of the colonial heritage in Africa is the legacy of a personalised power built around what Yves Bénot (1975: 76) called ‘a lower middle class’. This bourgeois woman, made her own the struggle for the independence of the former colonial territories, which, despite her peculiarity, would not escape the problem of class domination. Moreover, it is at this level that Frantz Fanon’s analysis takes on its full meaning and vigour through the refusal to reduce the colonial question to the sole dimension of the class struggle such as a certain Marxist vulgate wanted and whose sterile formulation can be found in Lenin’s formula: ‘imperialism as the supreme stage of capitalism’.

Fanon’s Radicalism: A Renewed Bet on the Human

Fanon starts from an observation that founds his radicalism, the Manichean nature of the colonial system, which he describes as follows: The colonial world is a Manichaean world. It is not enough for the colonist to limit physically, that is to say with the help of his police and his gendarmerie, the space of the colonised. As if to illustrate the totalitarian character of colonial exploitation, the colonist makes the colonised a sort of quintessential evil. Colonised society is not only described as a society without values. It is not

enough for the settler to assert that values have deserted, or better never inhabited, the colonised world. The native is declared impermeable to ethics, not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values (Fanon, 2011: 455 - 456). With Fanon there is a form of radicalism necessary to get the colonised people out of the iniquitous system of subjugation and negation in which they are immersed. And for that, all the means are good: 'all the revolts, all the desperate acts, all the attempts aborted or drowned in blood' (Fanon 1961: 142). The power of the outburst of revolt of the colonised is commensurate with 'the aggressiveness which permeated the victorious confrontation of these values with the ways of life or thought of the colonised' (Fanon 2011: 457).

Fanon is part of a form of radicalism that operates within a historical context where insubordination, whatever it may be, becomes a liberating value in that it allows, dialectically through negation, the advent of a new world. For there is a need to supplant the colonial world with a world where the colonised, who discovers the fullness of their long denied humanity, assume themselves as masters of their own destiny through the existence of an independent nation.

With Fanon, the revolution, which reaches beyond socialism in Africa and elsewhere, demands overcoming the opposition/ contradiction between the individual and the common, between the particular and the collective. Because for him, from the point of view of the African, he speaks of the 'African spirit', life and death, the real and the imaginary, the high and the low, the past and the future cease to exist, to be perceived contradictorily. This position allows the revolt to become part of the action by taking charge of a multitude of referents that are contradictory only in appearance. On the contrary, all these references find their ferment and their common basis in the radical nature of the action to be taken to liberate humanity through the struggle of the oppressed people.

Fanon thus justifies his radical perspective by his perception of the colonial system, which he considers to be a framework of total violence where the individual is there only for the need for its perpetuation. In this system, the black person is discredited even in his or her own consciousness, as Fanon (2011: 66) explains in this connection:

- If there is an inferiority complex, it is as a result of a double process:
- economically first; and
 - by internalisation or, better, epidermisation of this inferiority, then.

Fanon does not analyse, as in Engels, the foundations of violence solely from an economic point of view. It places them in a global and complex framework in which a multitude of factors intertwine without necessarily contradicting each other. Better still, it gives a nodal value to violence in the structuring of dominated societies; it is both ‘average and done’ (Fanon, 2011: 451–506). For him, the system of violence put in place, which is at the beginning and throughout the colonial practice, must be turned against the latter to overcome it and in the same dynamic bring about a new world. Amadou Aly Dieng (2011: 185) describes this weight of violence in Fanon’s analysis, not without criticising it. He notes, as follows:

Fanon brings very interesting views on the forms that violence takes over the course of history of oppressed countries. During the first phase, violence characterised the colonial period. In the second phase, it is internalised and directed against the colonised themselves in incessant tribal struggles. In the third phase, it is directed against the coloniser.

It is true that Fanon did not take care to go all the way in his analysis of violence to bring out all the consequences in the structuring of colonised societies and in their future. But there is this determination to deconstruct the totalitarian logic of the system, which relies on end-to-end violence. Fanon is not unaware of the question of social relations and its impact on the phenomenon of violence. In all his work, the phenomenon of violence is approached from the many hats Fanon wears: a Martinican, therefore born colonised; a psychiatrist, therefore analyst, phenomenologist, therefore Hegelian dialectician then Marxist and a little Sartrean; an Algerian liberation fighter, therefore Third-Worldist and universalist. All these dimensions of his character meant that Fanon did not have the time for, and also did not want to get bogged down in, theoretical over-determinations that would prevent him from making his pen a weapon against oppression, a tool of liberation, and an instrument in the service of the human cause. Fanon, by setting in motion the phagocyte of revolt and all creative energies, blocked all dark points (alienation, assimilation, the inferiority complex, defeatism, identity withdrawal, racism, reformism) and opened all the prospects for the new man (disalienation, open-mindedness, multiculturalism, Third Worldism, universalism).

For Fanon, everything must be mobilised, including our own being, for the only cause that is worthwhile is that of freedom, as noted by Alice Cherki (2011: 292), who reported this statement by Fanon, made from his hospital bed – in the process of throwing his last pawn in the fight of his life: ‘We are nothing on earth if we are not first of all the slaves of a cause, of the cause of the peoples, the cause of justice and of freedom’. From then on with Fanon everything is held together, revolt, rejection, indignation, revolution, liberation, creation; everything refers to freedom. Because man, who has known this world, where people have been oppressed for so long, can only be renewed through freedom.

Socialism as a Means of Struggle for the Values and Cultures Specific to the Dominated People

To understand Fanon’s socialist perspective, his work must be read from a perspective that allows for an analysis grid of the ‘social question’ with theoretical and political tools capable of shedding light on the complex interweaving of multiple social relations between class, gender, background (city centre versus suburb, city versus countryside, workers versus peasants) in a context of colonial domination. Today, with the heavy colonial liabilities, in globalised urban centres as well as in the peripheral suburbs of the former colonies, especially in Africa, social relations of an economic, religious, gender-based and sometimes racial nature (with the regrouping of populations in certain residential neighbourhoods) seem more than ever to fit into this dominant/dominated pattern well circumscribed by Fanon. The characteristics of the situations of domination and the dynamics that are set up give a certain topicality to Fanon, through for example, the process of politicisation of the forms of resistance of subordinate groups (resistance passing through religion, sports, music, popular culture, defence of the land).

Fanon, as an integral thinker in the sense that his writings testify to the desire to decompartmentalise territories, bodies, concepts, and knowledge, allows us to unlock the frameworks of Marxist analysis confined in the prism of bourgeoisie/proletariat schema. There is, thus, the peasantry in the colonies of Africa, which is numerically the most important category and whose combat experience, as was the case in Algeria, can be decisive in the liberation struggle and the constitution of the nation. And beyond the theoretical borders of popularised Marxism, today other lines of demarcation appear that cross urban

areas (city centre/suburbs), bodies (young/old or male/female), territories (cities/campaigns), disciplines (football/wrestling), knowledge (Westernised/Arabist intellectuals). We can, therefore, speak of new categories with Fanon in the understanding of social reality and unprecedented dynamics, in any case specific to African societies, for political practice on which no dogmatic and rigid analysis of Marxism can shed light.

More than any other revolutionary theory, Fanon's thought is an anti-system surgically directed against the colonial operating system. This, moreover, explains the importance he attaches to the peasantry, as the spearhead of the Algerian revolution, through their numerical importance and their weight in the liberation struggle. We can speak of a new reinterpretation of the eleventh thesis on Feuerbach as Fanon posed it in these terms by postulating a tumble of the 'steps of History': 'It is no longer a question of knowing the world, but to transform it' (2011: 71). According to Fanon, such a situation requires taking charge of a culture, not fixed but relieved of the weight of fixations of identity and oriented towards 'invention in existence' (2011: 250). In other words, as Fanon says in the last lines of *Black Skin, White Masks*: 'it is by going beyond historical, instrumental data, that I introduce the cycle of my freedom' (ibid). The question of freedom is therefore inseparable from the question of social justice and, this, certain social groups (the Algerian peasants in particular) understood well and integrated it in their modes of popular action, through concrete initiatives ranging from: raising awareness for registration on the electoral rolls to lucrative activities organised around urban music; from the struggle through to the defence of human rights, monitoring of the conduct of elections, to villagers who defend their land against multinational corporation and other businessmen.

Through the peasantry, it is in the people that we trust to carry out the revolution and the appropriate reforms for the establishment of the new nation. Fanon (2011: 574) explains and gives the example of Algeria in this regard: 'However, it turns out that the people, when they are invited to lead the country, do not delay but accelerate the movement We Algerians, during this war, had the opportunity, the happiness to put our finger on a number of things'. With the revolution, Fanon's goal is no longer just to deal with an insane subject and free him from the bourgeois capitalist system. Now it is a matter of liberating the entire colonised society and building a free nation through the disalienation of the submissive people of all continents. And for this project his only certainty is the path of total revolution, the radical change that will

‘break the backs of colonialism’. For Fanon, there is only national liberation which involves total revolution. Because, he maintains:

Colonial domination, as it was total and simplifying, dramatically disrupted the cultural existence of the submissive people. The negation of national reality, the new legal relations introduced by the occupying power, the rejection of the periphery by the colonial society of the natives and their customs, the expropriation, the systematic enslavement of men and women make this cultural obliteration possible (Fanon 2011: 613).

From a materialist perspective, Fanon broadens the question of domination to include relations specific to indigenous societies, giving racial and sexual questions a theoretical dignity alongside that of class struggle. The scope of Fanon’s reflection is to have restored, to its proper extent, the political dimension of these acts of domination that run through colonised African societies that are not systematically arranged by colonial logic. Thus, through the formulation of the eleventh Marxian thesis on Feuerbach, from the first lines of *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon (2011: 63 - 251) reintegrates the question of the transformation of colonised societies for an authentic liberation of the African who must not come out of the colonial yoke to enter a more underhanded formation, because keeping the inherent flaws of the capitalist system of exploitation without retaining the ‘fallout’ of a viable formal system. Indeed, the history of social demands, in the former French colonies of black Africa, is incomprehensible if it is not integrated into the general framework of the movements of struggle for political emancipation, even if or when the struggle is not immediately apparent. Because, if the social demands were originally the work of settlers who, although attached to African soil, made no allusion to local autonomy, later, with the arrival of black leaders, they gradually took on a turn of struggle for independence. To understand the importance and role of these movements in the socio-political evolution of Africa, each of these two aspects of the advent of the protest phenomenon should be considered as objectively as possible¹.

However, beyond this double dimension, it is the congenital incapacity of this *bourgeoisie* that attracts Fanon’s attention in the liberation struggle. This *bourgeoisie* is characterised by the umbilical link it maintains with the colonial system. It is unable to free itself from the logic of

¹ On this question, we can cite Girardet, R. 1972. *L’idée coloniale en France*. Paris: Ed. La Table Ronde.

intermediation that made it appear in the colonial context. And in general, the elites from this *bourgeoisie* or the indigenous proletariat remain frozen in the predatory frameworks built by the colonial system to the detriment of a real policy of liberation and national construction. It is ‘businessism’, through schemes and intrigues, which constitutes its *modus operandi* and not the entrepreneurial spirit likely to lead a country towards social and economic development. Fanon describes this *bourgeoisie*, which seized power in Africa at the time of independence, as an ‘underdeveloped bourgeoisie’ essentially oriented towards the economy of intermediaries and not of radical transformation of the economic structure². He sees in this *bourgeoisie* a retrograde and pernicious force in that it constitutes, under the aegis of the imperial powers that provide it with money, arms, technicians, and training, a brake against ‘the masses’ revolutionary aspirations’ (Dieng 2011: 192). For Fanon, it is only a specific social layer, which he qualifies as ‘honest intellectuals, without very precise political ideas who instinctively mistrust this race for posts and prebends’ (2011). *Les Damnés de la Terre* will be able to carry the decisive combat to the popular masses through a healthy orientation of the nation. Here his approach is close to that of Lenin on the organisation of a revolutionary leadership capable of raising the people, broadening their thinking and organising them (Azar 2014: 84)³.

Socialism, according to Fanon is therefore not a scientific affair, much less of a political apparatus sclerotic in ideological certainties. Rather, there needs to be an awareness of the need for liberation by a few determined elements that, in doing so, descend on popular ground. Philippe Lucas (1971: 150) circumscribes it as follows:

It is this real movement grasped by Fanon that socially founds the We-Comrades-of-the-Three-Continents, which designates in the bourgeois castes its immediate enemy and makes the critical unity of Fanon’s analysis. The exaltation of the spontaneous means the rehabilitation of

² Without having exact data, we can cite the residential districts of Mamelles and Almadies in Dakar where the presence of large numbers of Westerners and mixed couples is quite visible.

³ Lenin’s text, published in 1917, later published in French in 1925: Lenin, 1925, *Imperialism, the Last Stage of Capitalism*, Paris, Librairie de l’Humanité.

a praxis of struggle against a nationalism without content: that of the traditional nationalist parties, that of the bourgeois castes – even of an opportunist urban proletariat; in doing so, it only represents a moment of Fanon's approach in *The Damned of the Earth*. The final phase, not to say stage, is the movement that allows the intellectual, aware of his historical role, to adhere to the spontaneous revolt of the masses, to achieve self-recognition (by rehabilitating its culture without shutting itself in) and to become a historical subject by bringing about a new humanism around the nation, freedom and independence⁴.

Conclusion

In total, it appears in Fanon's work, as Michael Azar (2014: 90) points out, a deep tension between the concepts belonging to the Hegelian-Marxist tradition (alienation, dialectics, fraternity, recognition, the new man, atonement, action, etc.) and notions relating to psychoanalysis (the unconscious, envy, desire, imitation, ambivalence, etc.), all never really well circumscribed. Fanon is a phenomenologist through his strong intuitions and his keen sense of the facts, existentialist through the weight he gives to action, analyst through his profession and his study of the mechanisms of alienation as pathologies of civilisation (Renault: 2012), and dialectical Marxist by the creative role that he confers on the revolution. But above all, a freedom fighter he is, and this is what makes him an integral thinker who will espouse socialism, a socialism that will have as its spear the peasant masses through the revolution. One can challenge this point of view, like Amady Aly Dieng (2011: 195), as weak who protests that 'Fanon cannot quote us a revolution with peasant direction which succeeded in the past or the present'. But once again, as someone very close to Sartre, he inscribes being in the existent accomplished by act, by actions. And Fanon, noting the embryonic and opportunist aspect of the proletariat of the

⁴ On socialism itself, it is more prudent, with Fanon, to speak of a socialist perspective because, as with all the other aspects of his work, his life and his struggle, which are as one, he passes without too much focus on definitional frameworks. The priority for him is action because it is action that determines reality, especially social reality. It is not surprising that he is close to Sartre who, more than a mentor, was an accomplice in this life built around the quest for freedom.

African colonies at the same time, set his sights on the category that is numerically most important to make history and create new humanity. As an integral man, Fanon's political struggle is at the same time his theoretical work and his psychiatric practice. It is about liberating oppressed people, especially Africans. But in his vision, national independence, as it began, was heading straight for a fiasco, emptying itself of its emancipatory and liberating dimensions.

History today seems to prove him right in terms of liberation and the building of viable economic and social structures on a nationwide scale. Indeed, his work, *The Damned of the Earth*, seems to be a premonitory book in the face of the struggles for power, tribalism, and regionalism of all kinds that are in the news in Africa. Fanon is indeed an integral thinker in that his thought and his action are one. If he did not explore all areas that affect man and society, it is because he was in a hurry. He was pressed by the urgency to decolonise minds and facts; he was also pressed by existence, which he knew to be fleeting and brief. He aimed to fully decolonise man through the liberation of oppressed people, a huge and enduring mission. Yet he knew he was dying; he lived for only 36 years. A short life, it could be argued, but a full life. He wrote *Black Skin, White Masks*, at only 25 and his powerful plea for humanity, *The Damned of the Earth*, at 35, an age when the individual is still usually only looking out for himself. Young, he was and has remained, but tall and visionary, he will continue to be by the force of his arguments and his intuitions. Revolutionary, he remains through his testament that constitutes this powerful work which allows today, and certainly tomorrow, to invigorate the revolutionary potential of the popular dynamics of certain social categories, until then left stranded by the locomotive of globalisation: the youth and African women who die by the thousands in the oceans and deserts of the world, the peasant women who continue to collapse under the drudgery of the harsh countryside, the African peasants who are deprived of their land, simply living the fate of the 'damned of the Earth'.

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Fanon's 'The Negro and Hegel' or How to Appropriately the 'Miraculous Weapons' Found in the Oppressor

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Abstract

Hegel is the thinker who has given one of the most decisive philosophical guarantees to Western domination. Yet, Fanon, known to be one of the greatest theorists and activists for the independence of colonised people, found the conceptual tools which enabled him to develop his theory of liberation of people enslaved by and to the West. By relying critically on the Hegelian analysis of domination and servitude popularised by Kojève under the name of master-slave dialectics, Fanon produced a theory of liberation adapted to the system of colonial dependence and, therefore, different in its prerequisites to that of Hegel. While the latter makes labour the main source of the emancipation of slaves, Fanon presented mental decolonisation of the colonised and the violent overthrow of the colonial and neocolonial system as prerequisites to the full liberation of people under Western domination and, in particular, Africans.

Keywords: Alienation, self-consciousness, decolonisation, domination, liberation, labour, servitude

Introduction

Hegel (1939) is the thinker who has given one of the most decisive philosophical guarantees to Western domination. Yet, Fanon, known to be one of the greatest theorists and activists for the independence of colonised people, found the conceptual tools which enabled him to develop his theory of liberation of peoples enslaved by and to the West. By relying critically on the

Hegelian analysis of domination and servitude popularised by Kojève (1939) under the name of master-slave dialectics, Fanon produced a theory of liberation adapted to the system of colonial dependence and, therefore, different in its prerequisites to that of Hegel. While the latter makes labour the main source of the emancipation of slaves, Fanon, presented mental decolonisation of the colonised and the violent overthrow of the colonial and neocolonial system as prerequisites to the full liberation of people under Western domination and, in particular, Africans.

Hegel is generally perceived by certain intellectual circles in societies that have been under colonial and neocolonial domination as the Western thinker who gave one of the most decisive ideological guarantees for Western domination; the one in whom the history and philosophy of all mankind have found themselves confused and reduced to those of Europe alone¹. Therefore, it would not have been incoherent to expect from the thinkers and theorists of the liberation of people enslaved by and to the West, a rejection of this Eurocentric philosopher. When one is a victim of the horrors of imperialism and of the systematic dehumanisation that characterises it, it is only normal that one rejects the system of thought that endorses it or serves as its theoretical justification. Yet, liberation theorists and activists fighting for liberation from colonial dependence approached the official philosopher of Western imperialism, namely Hegel, differently.

To propose a possible path to liberation, Frantz Fanon, the least complacent towards the theories of imperialist domination, clearly relied on philosophical concepts forged by Hegel. Here, I aim to show that Fanon's theory of liberation springs from what I call a subordinate appropriation – *appropriation subalterne* – of Hegel's analysis on domination and servitude contained in the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* that Kojève popularised as the name of the dialectic of master and slave.

It was on the basis of these Hegelian analyses that Fanon produced an original theory of liberation which continues to challenge us today as we are still not liberated from the Western imperialist system of domination. Contain-

¹ In his *Lessons on the Philosophy of History*, translated by J. Gibelin, Paris, 1965 and his *Lessons on the History of Philosophy*, translated by P. Garniron, Paris, Vrin, 1993, Hegel retraces a universal history and a history of philosophy which correspond simultaneously and which are both essentially dominated by the Western civilisation within which they culminate.

ing both the poison of Western imperialist domination and its antidote, Hegel's philosophical system lent itself perfectly to such revolutionary appropriation. Fanon, in line with the inferiorised or the colonised who 'brings into play all his resources, all his acquisitions, old and new, his and those of the occupier' (2001: 54) with a view to his total liberation, did not hesitate to extract from the enemy Hegel one of his most revolutionary philosophical ideas and turn it against the Western imperialist system of domination.

Domination and Servitude in Hegel

It was in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, that Hegel set forth one of his philosophical theories which had the most far-reaching influence. This theory refers to the figure of consciousness corresponding to the phenomena of domination and servitude. The Hegelian Phenomenology is understood perhaps to be defined as the science of experiences or of the experience of consciousness. It is therefore the path taken by consciousness to gain access to truth, to science².

In its journey to gain access to truth or absolute knowledge, the spirit goes through three great moments. The first great moment (sub-divided into three sub-parts – sensitive certainty, perception and understanding) is that of the primacy of the object over the subject; the second moment, manifesting itself in the form of desire, domination and servitude and pure thought is that of the primacy of the subject over the object; and finally, the third moment or reason subdivided into subjective reason, objective reason and religion is that of equalisation or coincidence between subject and object.

Fanon was inspired by the second sub-moment of the second part of the work, one that Kojève advertised as the dialectical expression of master and slave. What is it all about? After the impasse of desire where no one was satisfied with being recognised simply on the basis of their sex, that is to say strictly as male or female, there followed the aspiration to be recognised abstractly or metaphysically as true consciousness of oneself, that is to say as a human being whose dignity is above any consideration of a physical or carnal order.

² This approach of Hegel makes his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by Jean Hyppolite, Paris, Aubier, 1941 a propaedeutic or an introduction to science, that is to say in its philosophical system to its *Science of Logic*, trad. Bernard Bourgeois, Paris, Vrin, 2015.

But for Hegel, this desire for abstract or metaphysical recognition as self-consciousness finds satisfaction only in the individual who has put his or her life and that of their counterpart at stake, posing to them a threat of death, physical existence and that of others. This is what he writes about (1939: 159 - 160):

The individual who has not put his life on the line may well be recognised as a person; but he did not attain the truth of this recognition as recognition of an independent self-awareness. Likewise, each individual must strive for the death of the other when he risks his own life; because the other is not worth more to him than himself

By bringing into play its own life and that of the other, self-consciousness proves that it is beyond all naturalness, all exclusive concern for biological preservation, all subservience to the flesh and the body. But if the relationship of combat, of struggle to the death for recognition is carried to the end, the result is not the recognition to which the two opposing consciousnesses aspired but their death. This definitively rules out any possibility of recognition because only a living being can be recognised as having self-consciousness. For there to be recognition, it is necessary that the fight does not go to the end, that is to say that one of the protagonists says to himself at a time that even a servile life is preferable to death and gives up the fight. This is how the relationship of mastery and slave is established; the master being the one who was not afraid of dying in combat, who assumed the risk on his life and that of his protagonist until the end; the slave, on the other hand, being the one who was afraid of dying, the one who did not go through with the risk, the one who begged the master to save his life in exchange for his service. Regarding this way in which the relationship of mastery and slavery came into being, Hegel writes (1939: 161):

By this experience are [is] posed on the one hand a pure consciousness of self (that of the master, who has been the furthest, closest to death) and, on the other hand, a consciousness which is not purely for – so, but which is for another consciousness, that is to say a consciousness in the element of being or in the form of thingity (Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*).

At the end of the fight, the one who braved death, i.e. the master, is recognized as possessing pure self-consciousness. The slave, who preferred life to death is not a consciousness of oneself strictly speaking but a consciousness for another. But the slave is consciousness for another only in a purely external way. Through his experience of the fear of death, the slave discovers himself, in his interiority, as authentic self-consciousness. The experience of the fear of death is what Hegel says will confer on the vanquished, on the slave, superiority over the master. In reality, the fear of death is the result of extreme courage: that of not dodging but of fixing and facing this terrible reality which ends up causing everything that is stable in us to waver.

This exceptional experience of the vanquished in the face of death and which leads him to gain genuine self-awareness is linked to the fact that she has:

.... Precisely felt the anguish not about this or that thing, not during this or that moment, but she felt the anguish about the entirety of her essence because she felt the fear of death, the absolute master. In this anguish, she was dissolved intimately, trembled in the depths of herself, and all that was fixed wavered within her. But such a movement, pure and universal, such an absolute fluidification of all subsistence, this is the simple essence of self-consciousness, the absolute negativity, the pure being-for-itself, which is therefore in this consciousness. This moment of pure being-for-itself is also for her, because, in the master, this moment is his object (Hegel 1939: 164).

This terrible face to face between the vanquished, that is to say the slave and death marks a decisive turning point in the dialectic of master and slave. Contrary to what one might think, the slave who was afraid of death and who was not as far in staking his life as the master, in reality had a deeper experience than the master. If the slave was afraid of death, it was because he did not avoid it; he faced it. And through this experience, his whole being vacillated, bringing him to an inner awareness of himself. Authentically therefore, being for oneself is not the master but the slave. The other factor that ensures the slave superiority over the one who apparently dominates him and that therefore gives him a decisive advantage in the process of self-consciousness, is that he works, he transforms the world, he imprints on it the mark of his mind by giving it a human and technical form; while the master, on the other hand, only enjoys,

consumes and destroys the products of his laborious activity. The master and the slave have different relationships with nature, with the world. For the master, negativity consists of enjoying and therefore immediately suppressing the object about which he knows nothing, from the process of transformation; whereas in the working slave it always takes the form of a deferred negation. The negative character of *jouissance* (contentment) differs from that of work insofar as the latter,

... on the contrary [of *jouissance*], is restrained desire, delayed disappearance: work forms. The negative relation to the object becomes the form of this very object, it becomes something permanent, since precisely, with regard to the worker, the object has an independence (Hegel 1939: 165).

In work, negation does not consist of immediately suppressing and making the object disappear, but in transforming it. It is through this form of negation – fundamentally different from that of *jouissance* – that the human world was born, which is according to Hegel a technical world.

Having transformed the world which now bears the mark of his mind, the slave cannot be presented as totally alien to the products of his labour. Strictly, the alienation that we tend to attach to him is only relative because he recognises himself in his products, in his creations. In this respect, his situation may seem fundamentally more enviable than that of his master. The latter, having its content only in the slave, will neither find itself nor recognise itself in the world which now bears the imprint of that which it had subjected to its domination. In fact, a stranger to the world, the master now has only two possible outcomes: recognise that he is dependent on his slave and draw the consequence of accepting the role reversal that is, placing him under the latter's tutelage; or not accept to recognise this real dependence by renouncing to enjoy anything in the world and to commit suicide. Placed in this untenable situation, the master is obliged either to carry the sacrifice to the limit and kill himself or continue to live a life in slavery because he is dependent on the slave. The Hegelian dialectic of master and slave therefore does indeed lead to an inversion of roles and positions. The lesson to be drawn from the causes of this reversal is that the aristocratic but idle master does not progress while the slave evolves by working. Unable to progress, 'idle mastery' ends up being 'a dead end' while 'laborious servitude' asserts itself as 'the only source of progress'

(Kojève 1939: 113).

This is how the phenomenological moment of domination and servitude in Hegel ends, the end of which coincides with the disappearance of the figures of master and slave. With the fainting or disappearance of these figures, only the inner life, only thought, remains. This Hegelian dialectic, the outcome of which was, as we have seen, the disappearance of the figures of domination (master) and servitude (slave), had a flourishing posterity because it was regularly mobilised in the service of the causes of the emancipation of humans. Moreover, it is on this dialectic that a thinker and activist for the emancipation of people under colonial and neocolonial Western domination, such as Fanon in his theory of liberation, relied.

Fanon's Relationship to Hegel or the Art of Using the Enemy's Weapons to Break Free

Fanon's relationship to Hegel is an ambivalent relationship, made both of rupture and of appropriation, as attested to by his critique of Western colonial domination, which draws from the source of the Hegelian dialectic of master and slave. Having come into contact with Hegel through the mediation of Kojève's reading-interpretation, Fanon found in the Hegelian dialectic of master and slave an adequate conceptual framework for not only analysing the relations of domination in the colonial system, but also proposing a possible way of liberation.

There is still an important point of clarification at this level: unlike Hegel who inserted it into the global course of consciousness where it corresponds to a precise moment, Kojève, for his part, disinserted the dialectic of the master and the slave of the phenomenological process by making it a moment independent of the rest of the Hegelian narrative. Kojève's way of proceeding still has an advantage even if it also departs from Hegel's authentic approach in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: by empowering it from the other moments of the course of consciousness, Kojève has conferred on the dialectic of master and slave the most adequate form possible for its mobilisation in the service of theories of emancipation and liberation. This is exactly the reason for which it was used by Fanon.

Given its power of 'formalisation' of the relations of domination which occur between humans, as a conceptual framework, Hegel's dialectic of master and slave compelled Fanon to articulate a theory of liberation to be opposed to

Western imperialism. The Hegelian abstraction of the figures of the master and the slave was therefore not an obstacle for him but rather an opportunity to think about the relations of domination and servitude in a colonial context fundamentally different to firstly, feudal Europe and then Hegel's revolutionary Europe³. Fanon's relation to Hegel consists, on the part of the West Indian revolutionary, of applying an abstract general scheme of intersubjectivity – the Hegelian scheme in this case – to a particular colonial situation where the relation between master and slave is translated into the relationship between 'White and Black'.

Taking up again, in the chapter 'The Negro and Hegel' in *Black Skin, White Masks*, the Hegelian analysis of the relations of domination and servitude, Fanon insists on the unprecedented way with which they are experienced in colonial societies. Within these, the dehumanisation and alienation of the colonised are beyond measure. They are total and systematic. Moreover, their magnitude is such that it introduces a real difference between the situation of the Hegelian slave and that of the colonised black Fanonian. For this reason, refraining from completely confusing them in the same situation, Fanon writes ([1952] 1971: 217): 'work the source of his liberation ...'. In Hegel, the slave turns away from the master and turns towards the object. Here the slave turns to the master and abandons the object. If dehumanisation is something common to both the Hegelian slave and the Fanonian colonised subject, it must be recognised that the prospect of liberation, that is to say of a reconquest of their humanity does not appear the same to both. The alienation of the Hegelian slave, we had seen, was only relative inasmuch as his reconquest of himself as self-consciousness was promised to him anyway through his work. On the other hand, such a prospect is not open to the colonised 'negro' of Fanon. A victim of systematic dehumanisation and concretely reduced to non-human status, he can neither hope nor consider freeing himself through work. Access to self-consciousness through work is

³ In her book *Hegel, Haiti and Universal history*, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009, Susan Buck-Morss defends the idea that it was the Saint Domingue Slave Revolution of 1791 that inspired Hegel's analysis of the phenomena of domination and bondage. This idea seems impossible because it is rather the history of feudal Europe and the French Revolution that seems to form the background of Hegelian analyses of the relationship between domination and servitude.

therefore not valid for all the oppressed. It is only for the Hegelian slave, and not for the colonised Fanonian black person, that work plays a decisive role in the process of awakening self-consciousness. The situation of systematic dehumanisation in which the colonised black person lives, in any case closes off any possibility of awakening self-awareness.

In a colonial context, it is not work that leads to the liberation of the oppressed but rather the violent overthrow of the system of domination in place. In the colonies, Fanon writes 'the Negro is not a human' ([1952] 1971: 179). What Hegel therefore considers as 'surrender to the object' on the part of the working slave is nothing more than pathological desubjectification projected onto the colonised by colonial society. For Fanon, a free subjective experience is not possible in all situations. When Hegel affirms the reality of such an experience by writing 'to embed this freedom in the content, to let this content move according to its own nature (...) and to contemplate this movement' (1939: 36), he seems to just ignore or omit what makes this possible only if the agent of this movement is himself unconstrained. In reality, there is a great contrast between the formal Hegelian context of the emergence of self-awareness and that of societies under Western colonial rule. In the context of West Indian colonialism, for example, the subject – unlike the Hegelian slave – is systematically alienated: language, culture, economy, politics, etc. He cannot therefore, for this reason, recognise the objective world as the product of his own labour. In a colonial context, the reversal of roles between the dominant and the dominated cannot be achieved through work as was the case in the Hegelian dialectic of master and slave. If work had enabled the Hegelian slave to free himself from the domination of his master, it must be recognised that he is not in a position to play such an emancipatory role among colonised blacks. In the latter, the breadth and depth of alienation is such that it is only through a revolution resulting from total disalienation that it is possible to break free. *Black Skin, White Masks* reveals, through the critique of ideology, the extent of this alienation by analysing the blockages, both psychological and material, that a dominant colonial society projects on its subjects.

If, for Hegel, the relation to the other can be either a relation of domination and servitude or a relation of equal and reciprocal recognition, for Fanon such an alternative does not exist in colonial societies. In a colonial context, the relationship to others is exclusively a relationship of domination and servitude. For the colonised black person says Fanon ([1952] 1971: 112),

‘the White is not only the Other but the master’. There is nothing abstract about the relationship of domination and servitude in colonial societies. It is not only massive but it is also experienced concretely and daily by billions of natives as Sartre already indicated in his preface to the *Wretched of the Earth* (Fanon 1961, 1991: 17). Fanon could not therefore, like Sartre interpreting Hegel in *Being and Nothingness*, adhere to the idea that the relation to the other is fundamentally a relation of servitude (Sartre 1996: 307). It matters little whether Sartre interprets Hegel correctly or not on this particular point: such an idea has the particularity of presenting a phenomenon like slavery not as ‘a historical result capable of being ‘overcome’ but as ‘a fundamental condition of human existence’ (Sartre 1996: 412). To this dehistoricising approach of Sartre, which he rightly or wrongly imputes to Hegel, Fanon opposes a rehistoricising approach of the dialectic of the master and the slave which in no way consists of reproducing Hegel who projected the entire responsibility of his situation on the slave but to present this dialectic differently by adapting it to the system of domination at work in the colonies. If the dialectic of master and slave has been the subject of variations between Hegel and Fanon, its end is however the same with both thinkers: it is recognition. It is useful to remember that for Fanon ([1961] 1991: 66), it is the negrophobe who makes the ‘negro’; it is ‘the colonist who made and continues to make the colonised.’ It is therefore the negrophobe and the colonist who deprive the black person and the colonised person of recognition. By fixing the negro in his ‘race’ while ‘the fate of man is not to be fixed but to be let go’ (Fanon [1952] 1971: 228) colonial society condemns him to be not for himself but for the white person. The white person’s ‘other absolute’ presented as an absolute standard and reference, the black person is not only deprived of recognition but is also judged as naturally incapable of fighting for it. The Hegelian slave, even when he was not yet recognised, was nonetheless engaged in a process of recognition. The Hegelian slave’s engagement in a process of recognition contrasts with the situation of the colonised Fanonian black person, totally excluded from the field of white subjectivity-otherness. When Fanon writes: ‘We hope we have shown that the master here differs essentially from that described by Hegel. With Hegel, there is reciprocity, here the master makes fun of the slave’s ‘conscience’’, he does nothing other than highlight the fact that, structurally, the colonial system excludes the colonised black [person] from the field of mutual and reciprocal recognition of self-consciousness (Fanon [1952] 1971: 179, note 9).

Reserved exclusively for white people, the reality of recognition as self-consciousness in the colonies departs from the universal vocation conferred on it by Hegel. In a passage from *Black Skin, White Masks* cited above, Fanon expresses himself on the corollary induced by a situation where recognition is not granted to all but only to white people. If 'in Hegel, the slave turns away from the master and turns to the object', in a colonial context it is rather the reverse which occurs because 'the slave turns to the master and abandons the object' ([1952] 1971: 217). What explains this different attitude of the 'negro' is that he 'wants to be like the white master' ([1952] 1971: 217). Detecting among the colonised a very strong desire to identify with white people and aware that this desire for assimilation is the main obstacle to any serious project of liberation struggle, Fanon draws the consequence by working to deconstruct the alienated perception that the colonised have of themselves. The latter, incapable of judging for themselves because mentally enslaved to the idea that the colonist has on them and on himself, deprived of his own and autonomous point of view because having adopted that which the colonist makes for himself of them and of himself, can only undertake a struggle to reconquer their denied humanity if they are completely free from the prejudices which have long dominated them. As long as the colonised (dominated) identifies with the colonist (dominator) and feels love for him, he will not perceive him as an enemy and therefore will do nothing to break the colonial and neocolonial system that keeps him under domination. While it is obvious that there is a need for a violent liberation struggle in Fanon, it cannot but be preceded or carried out at the same time as a mental decolonisation of the colonised. It is only after this mental decolonisation followed by the necessary violent struggle founded in Hegel as the relations of domination, which will lead, in Fanon's view, to the total liberation of the oppressed, *the damned of the earth*.

As a Conclusion

Fanon's work, which we can situate from a 'decolonisation of knowledge' perspective preceding and leading to the true emancipation of people under Western imperialist domination, has borrowed some of its theoretical weapons from European philosophers who nevertheless strived to theoretically justify the hegemony of their continent over other parts of the world and particularly over Africa. Such an approach, clearly attested to in his report to Hegel, consisted of his part in mobilising the dialectic of master and slave in the

service of the struggle against Western colonialism. But this critical appropriation of Hegelian philosophical concepts was not an abstract nor an out-of-context appropriation. By appropriating them, Fanon transformed them somewhat by articulating them in the colonial context, the mechanisms of which had to be understood and unravelled in order to lead to an emancipatory revolution of the colonised people. If Fanon relied on concepts from Hegel, he refrained from reproducing the identical Hegelian diagram that led to the disappearance of the figures of domination (master) and servitude (slave).

In Hegel, the liberation of the enslaved individual necessarily requires work, while in Fanon it first requires a mental decolonisation by the colonised and a violent overthrow of the colonial system of European domination. The Fanonian theory of liberation therefore boils down to the mental revolution of the alienated colonised and the violent and revolutionary overthrow of the system of oppression put in place by colonialism. But what has been the political impact, especially in Africa, of this Fanonian theory of liberation? A simple observation of the current situation in Africa allows us to say that this African continent has still not yet freed itself from Western imperialist domination. Perhaps the cause of such prolonged dependence on Africa is to be found in the recurrent attitude of its leaders to always postpone radical and perhaps painful choices capable of freeing them/us from Western imperialist domination. Analysing the notion of crisis and extending it to the political field in an interview with Hourya Bentouhami in 'Fanon, critique of 'methodological fetishism'', Lewis Gordon states (2014: 50):

Likewise, when we talk about ... 'political crises', it points to the fact that many of us try to escape these vital decisions. There then occurs a futile effort to postpone the timing of the decision, which maintains the state of crisis. Taking responsibility, making a decision, is a way out of this critical state.

What can we take away from these words of Lewis Gordon if we interpret them in the light of Africa's prolonged dependence? Basically, the idea that the indecision of African leaders would be the main obstacle to the African revolution and therefore to the independence of the continent. Hence the urgency to return to Fanon and his revolutionary project to complete the process of total decolonisation of Africa. As this does not accommodate the slightest indecision, you must immediately resolve to:

- Continue the Fanonian work of building a decolonised subject who is truly aware of him/ herself and of the issues of the moment;
- Rebuild, on revolutionary bases, a strong Africa capable of defending its children on the continent and in the diaspora; and
- Be ready to defend and protect at all times the revolution that will bring this project against the inevitable assaults of the current system of domination and exploitation.

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Black Bodies on South African Beaches: *Lus en smaak jou lekkerding*¹

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Abstract

This article examines the outbursts of Penny Sparrow and Vanessa Hartley on social media, both of whom directed theirs at the Black beachgoers of South Africa in late December 2015 and the early days of January 2016. The article recognises the events of #KingGeorgeMustFall at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and later #RhodesMustFall, which began in March 2015 as one of the

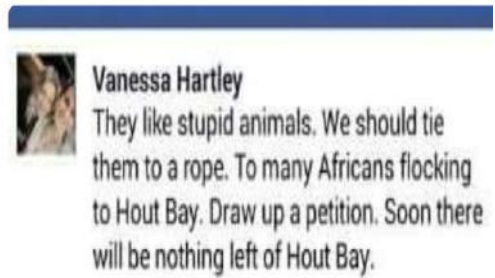
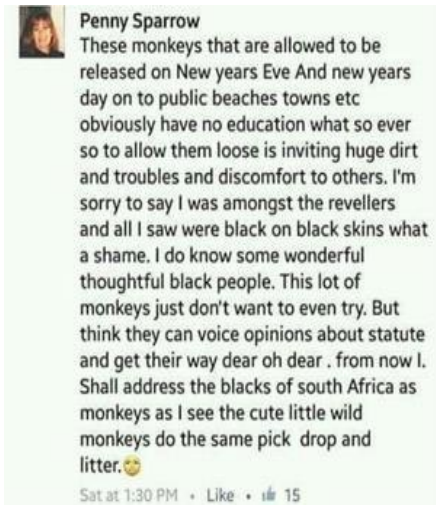
¹ *Lus en smaak, jou lekkerding*, as per the subtitle of this paper, contain four distinct words that are not of the English language, and have their particular meaning outside of its culture, expression and discourse of desire; they are expressions in *Kaaps*, a vernacular that developed during the period of the enslavement of people forcibly brought to the Cape by the Dutch from Java and Malaysia in the 1600s and the Xhosa from the Eastern Cape, and is still spoken today by people from this previously enslaved community. Both *lus* and *smaak*, as expressions of desire are unpacked in the second part of this paper. For the present, it is important to note since the article is written in English – one of the two colonial languages in South Africa – that *lus* when translated in English as *wish* especially with regards to one's appetite for food (wishing for a piece of freshly fried snoek...) and yet not limited to it can never find full expression in the English language. Likewise, *smaak* is used to refer to *the desire* for another . . . of the sexual and libidinal kind. *Jou*, addresses the person, as in 'you' and 'your' as one would direct oneself to another in the English language. *Lekkerding* does not exist in the old Dutch dictionary and was retained by the previously enslaved community to refer to a person who one is sexually attracted to and who one finds sexually arousing. One could translate it in more colloquial terms in English, if one must, as 'you sexything'.

backdrops of this discussion on physical space as politicised space and assert here the crucial components of flora and fauna such as the sea, sand, and the beach within a larger discussion on decolonisation. Discussions on decolonisation in South Africa have to include a critique of beaches as sites of enjoyment, which considering its colonial and apartheid history has since South Africa's transition towards a democracy² brought about an annual outpour of racist outbursts on social media, more particularly in the past decade, that foregrounded its racism by attacking Black bodies. In unpacking the content of Sparrow's first posting, mainly, and her subsequent published apologies during interviews with journalists, the article moves towards a discussion of the Hegelian master and slave dialectic with a focus on desire, enjoyment and pleasure. It follows on with Lacanian *jouissance*, which is merged through the use of a South African language of desire drawn from the

² I take exception to the notion that one person, one vote, which took place on the 27th of April 1994, after 342 years of settler colonialism, constitutes a democracy. *Demos* – the people, and *kratia* – power, rule, as such, *the rule of the people*, did not happen, and is still not in operation in South Africa. Likewise, I have similarly spoken against the concept of 'freedom's children', that is, the common expression that April 27th, 1994 heralded in the era of freedom and children born then, and shortly after, were born into freedom. Various scholars refer to the period immediately after April 27th, 1994 as the period of transition; others assert that one vote offers democracy its definition. Not only does South Africa's Constitution not hold its usurpers and colonisers accountable for four centuries of plundering and unlawful extraction of minerals to accumulate wealth, but the land also has not been given back to the Indigenous people and those colonised in the process through different forms of enslavement. Currently, the material conditions under which the coloniser and the colonised live remain unequal, with the former constituting ten percent of the population and still maintaining eighty-nine percent of the country's wealth. Equality under the law suggests personhood is granted and equality extended across the designated region because those to whom he, she or they have been made equal to, in other words, the backdrop of the White experience against which equality has been granted, extended and offered, suggests equality of living conditions. This is the furthest from the truth in South Africa. Settlers draw from their Whiteness as property, forging a disproportionate setting for the colonised to live as equal under the law.

Kaaps vernacular (see footnote 1), with a Fanonian, Derridean and Bikoesque lens in addressing Black bodies on South African beaches as subjects who are agents and carriers of pleasure, surplus pleasure and orgasmic pleasure.

Keywords: Black bodies, beaches, simianisation, desire, envy, enjoyment, pleasure, *jouissance*, lus, *smaak*



Introduction

This article forms part of a collection of essays from my forthcoming book, *Black Consciousness and the Politics of the Flesh*, where a more elaborate account of some of the contents discussed here can be found. It examines the outbursts of Penny Sparrow and Vanessa Hartley, on social media, both of whom directed theirs at the Black beachgoers of South Africa in late December 2015 and the early days of January 2016. Sparrow commented on Black people on the beaches of Durban and Hartley regarding Black people on beaches in the Hout Bay area, a seaside town on the Atlantic seaboard of the larger Cape Town area. Due to the limitations of papers of this kind, Vanessa Hartley's

social media postings and subsequent action is not offered here for critique but have been drawn into the discussion to show the liberty with which White women have exercised their ‘freedom of speech’ when it comes to Black bodies. This article recognises the events of #KingGeorgeMustFall at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) and #RhodesMustFall, which began in December 2014 and March 2015, respectively, as two of the backdrops of this discussion on physical space as politicised space and assert here the crucial components of fauna and flora such as the sea, sand, and the beach within a more extensive discussion on decolonisation.

The University of Cape Town (UCT) student, Maxwele Chumani, took it upon himself to bring human faeces from Khayelitsha, which he threw on the Cecil John Rhodes statue. The statue stood as a reminder of Rhodes’ actions as a colonial, displayed with reverence at higher learning institutions and constructed by slave labourers drawn from the Cape, which students did not want to see. Discussions on decolonisation in South Africa have to include a critique of beaches as sites of enjoyment, which considering its colonial and apartheid history has since South Africa’s transition towards a democracy brought about an annual outpour of racist outbursts on social media, more particularly in the past decade, which focused on attacking Black bodies. In unpacking the content of Sparrow’s first posting and her subsequent published apologies during interviews with journalists, the article moves towards a discussion of the Hegelian master and slave dialectic with a focus on desire, enjoyment and pleasure. It follows on with Lacanian *jouissance*, which is merged through the use of a South African language of desire drawn from the *Kaaps* vernacular, with a Fanonian, Bikoeseque and Derridean lens in addressing Black bodies on South African beaches that the reader is acquainted with the *Kaaps* discourse, as utilised herein.

The White Woman Subject Declares her Written Text as Reason

The deconstruction of the White woman subject who offers her speech as text, as the location of reason, must take place most methodically. What makes Sparrow a White subject is her relationship to the system of White domination as agent, beneficiary and reproducer of White domination: upon being racialised within the family context of her birth and socialisation that set the material conditions of her existence, she enacts, maintains, and reproduces the

system of White domination through her agency – physical, bodily, fleshed ability to act, intervene, interject, through speech, writing, bodily presence, and convey thoughts and ideas that she enacts. Whilst a grotesque outburst, Sparrow, the author of the first inscription (hereafter referred to as Sparrow ‘Post One’) and Hartley, the author of the second posting noted above, declare their public writing as a necessity by revealing the anatomy of their thoughts. In this article I focus primarily on Sparrow’s posting: it is one of discontent – a disgruntled, displeasure – that starts with the depiction of Black people as monkeys then unfolds as a discourse of disgust by situating the presence of ‘... dirt and trouble and discomfort...’ Sparrow’s White subject identity, much like Hartley’s, is affirmed by the photographic display of an image of herself beside her name as per the protocol of Facebook and privileges her discontent to her White readers; it also acts as an accomplice to her outburst as a performance of reason besides her reasonable White face, which seals the assertion. For one, such reason appears, as it does above, forcefully, piercingly because one can see who exactly the disgruntled White subject is. One cannot by the content of the White subject’s text above, riddled with grammatical and syntax errors assume that it is not worthy of the attention of decolonial scholars and as such irrelevant for any form of philosophical inquiry because it does not resemble the inscriptions we have been taught to value as scholarly. I undertake a revelation of Sparrow’s careful wording with precision – grammatical errors included – not only because it made the headlines and sparked country-wide debate but due to its content. Sparrow’s ‘Post One’, displayed above, went viral and received more than 200 000 citations within 24 hours after it was posted.

In March 2020 I presented some of the work noted in this article at the African Phenomenology conference held in Chintsa, some 35 kilometres outside of East London on the east coast of South Africa. One of two of the White women who were asked to read and comment on my article (who incidentally holds a senior position in a philosophy department at a former Whites-only university in South Africa), noted that it was difficult for her to read it, and that she was bothered that I had cast all White women as ‘Penny Sparrows’. In questioning the organisers of the conference about why they sent my article to the abovementioned White woman, I was told of her benevolence and how, of late, she has started to do work on race. The alleged work for which they praised her, which marked her as a worthwhile reader of the kind of work that I produce, I read as textual work – the kind where the white woman scholar applies herself to the text and wilfully removes herself from any form of

responsibility for racism, especially under the watchful eye of critical race scholars. White women did not organise mass protests to take a stand against Penny Sparrow's racism. Instead, Sparrow was ridiculed for her lower-middle class sensibility and mocked for not being sophisticated enough to hide her racism.

Sparrow's 'Post One' has to be understood word for word – as it offers insight into the anatomy of her thought process, her consciousness of self and consciousness of the other – Black people – as is revealed in her vocabulary of choice. The approach I employ here as a philosopher who merges Black Consciousness, Derridean deconstruction and psychoanalysis, is to address the relationship between text and meaning, between consciousness and politics, between the scene of the crime – the sea, as both the site of usurpation and uninvited docking of carrier ships performing their enslavement and transport of the very Black bodies now reviled – and the shores, the beach, the space between the sea and the land, between the waves that allow frolicking permitted by the law, and the sand that allows a site for gathering, a space to enact leisure with friends and family, where the labourer, the enslaved, the colonised, of interlocking identities, are transformed from worker to sunbather. Biko's Black Consciousness focused on the mind, as did his predecessors, Sobukwe and Lembede. 'Man is body, mind and spirit with needs, desires, aspirations in all three elements of his nature' (Lembede 2015: 129). The mind is part of the body; the mind is the seat of consciousness, and the body the stage upon which consciousness exerts itself.

The attempt undertaken here is to reveal the salient features of Sparrow's text; a text that sought to inflict cruelty, tried but failed to curb the enjoyment of Black people on South African beaches, which up until 1989 only the coloniser had been privileged to enjoy. I now revisit the opening sentence of Penny Sparrow's 'Post One'.

These ...

A declaration, a dissociation from the self. The depiction of the 'the other' . . . a thing, a nameless item that does not deserve a name. *These* – the word – is usually accompanied by 'them' and 'they'... the words depicting distance from the speaker. The subject who speaks, distances, scoffs, calls people *these*. We see the full sentence, the criminal sentence, the line of punishment, as the speaker utters *these* at the start of her sentence... at the start of the writing from

left to right that says, not me, not I, and scoffs, scolds, laments. We take out, extract, and examine it before we place it alongside the words that come after it. The word *these* when declared against other subjects, subjects whose identity, we learn, will be uttered shortly after. The word *these* is the start of her scolding words, scathing words, her words against the law, against the law of expected human civility towards the previously enslaved, the previously oppressed... her words are spoken against the burial of apartheid. *These* – the subject, term, phrase, expression that says ‘you are not me’... I keep you away from me.

These monkeys ...

To repeat the first word – *these* – and place it with its accompaniment – *monkeys*. This is the subject of her text, a subject that is written as a concern. *These monkeys ...* Sparrow begins. Sparrow addresses her readers and informs them of the subject of her discontent. We know that she is not addressing the vervet monkey species of Durban. There is a photo of Sparrow beside her text. The pairing puts any reader of the text who is Black in the picture immediately. You are now in the frame. You move from reader to being read. You are being looked at as a monkey. There is a frame; you are within it and Sparrow as your uninvited gazer has now invited her ilk into a viewing. If you’re a Black person, you are *these monkeys*. You are the monkey – the object of her gaze; the gaze of this White woman and her White Facebook friends who she draws upon as viewers and listeners. You are being looked at. As you read, Sparrow’s words draw the picture. You are looking at Black people; you are looking at an image of yourself. You cringe in anticipation of what is to come. As a Black person reading, you know that Sparrow is referring to you, to Black people whether they look like you or not. You are in the know because experience determined this kind of knowledge; the experience of being called a monkey and being witness to family members – your uncle, your grandfather, your sister, your friends – being called monkeys. You are not only in the know because you have information of this act of cruelty but this kind of taunting remark, accusation, clear and outright no-need-for-a-dictionary-interpretation-of-racism has come knocking at your door and hit you in the stomach before, twisted your colon, spat in your face, reduced you to a breadcrumb, kept you from the dinner table, kept you in anticipation of what was to follow... The bile in your stomach became more acid, you could not control the anatomical reaction of your body, much as your thoughts and your command of the English language begged you

to. Reviled, angered, you spoke out in defence of the cruelty, but your trips to the toilet could not be contained. You are familiar with it because it forced itself onto you before, uninvited, it now thrusts itself upon you again – just like that. The last time, the stamp of racism, yesterday, the day before, last week, has not faded. Your memories of racism are retrieved; they return, in an instant. You remember. You recall. You retrieve again from the trace of the last memory. The images flash upon your mental screen. You are, in that very moment of the reading of the phrase ... *these monkeys*, the animal, the vile animal, the unintelligent non-human animal. You know that Sparrow is not writing to Black people; she is writing about Black people with the understanding, however peculiar, that she is writing to White people, who are not *these monkeys*. There are only two sides to the phrase *these monkeys*, and if you are Black, you are on the side where scrutiny is about to fall. And as such, you continue with the reading.

that are allowed ...

To be *allowed* means that someone had to give permission for you to gain entrance, be permitted to a place; someone who had ownership of your whereabouts, of your existence. To exist as a person who needs to be *allowed* means that you exist under erasure, having been cautioned, you live under *kanala*³ – a word from the *Kaaps*⁴ diction that asks [with the word] please, and

³ The word *kanala* is used among the Cape Malay and Cape Coloured population and resembles the English expression of ‘do me a favour’. Most people at the Cape credit the word as one that is Cape Muslim. The word *kanala* has Indonesian origins, where it was formerly expressed as *Karna Allah*. Before District Six got its formal name in the middle of the 1860s, it was affectionately called *kanala town* due to the term *kanala* being in regular use among the enslaved population. It is as such a word considered to be part of the *Kaaps* vernacular.

⁴ *Kaaps* is a language that developed quite distinctly from Dutch, although most of the language can be traced to a 17th century Dutch injected with various diction brought into the language by the previously enslaved, spoken among the enslaved from Java and Malaysia primarily then the KhoiSan, enslaved people from Madagascar and coastal African countries. It is still

does so under protest. Sparrow situates the prohibition – the apartheid laws of ownership, who is *allowed* and who is not, who will be *allowed*, and who will do the *allowing*. *Allowed* speaks of granting permission to movement, of being permitted to go somewhere, of transporting your forbidden body to a place because someone other than you had access to it, to land, to space and had the ability to situate Black presence within it. The *allower* was your master; the *allower* reminds you and other masters... masters who *allowed* you. The notion of *allowed* is brought into the opening sentence of Sparrow's complaint. It is a reminder of what was before – what was a state of disallowance, of prohibition, of impossibility and restriction of movement being a law created first under slavery at the Cape in 1709 where the enslaved carried passes, then close to the end of the 1700s the Khoisan were forced to carry permission documents. Thereafter, over the decades, into the 1900s, old laws were amended, and new laws were designed, into the formal period of apartheid to keep Black people out, away from, barred; the objective: to prohibit, to throttle the possibility of movement. The only *allowance* for the enslaved and Indigenous people of South Africa was that of servitude⁵.

By 1948, when the National Party came into power, three strategic acts of prohibition paved the way for apartheid: the Population Registration Act of 1950 Act, the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949 and the Group Areas Act of 1950⁶. When Black women were *allowed* to enter the city-centre, it was to work as domestic workers – paid subordinates. The *allower*, was the master, and the master mastered the law. Just two months after assuming the presidency, F.W. de Klerk *allowed* Black people to swim at previously classified White beaches. The desegregation of beaches was part of his gesture of goodwill, and on the 16th November 1989, the apartheid negotiator declared that beaches were no longer to be segregated. The *allower* who *allowed*... this

spoken at the Cape today, and around the country by those who were influenced by it, and now live in other provinces.

<http://capeafrikaans.blogspot.com/p/what-is-Kaaps.html>

⁵ I am here alluding to the history of pass laws in South Africa

<https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/pass-laws-south-africa-1800-1994>

⁶ I am here speaking to the three main laws of apartheid.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/africa/features/storyofafrica/12chapter7.shtml>

allower Sparrow indirectly speaks of dates back much further than F.W. De Klerk's 'noble' gesture in 1989.

allowed to be released ...

And I shall backtrack to the start of her sentence. '*These monkeys that are allowed to be released..*'. Sparrow places the responsibility of Black people's presence on something and someone that did both the allowing and the release. The *allowing*, in turn, led to the release. Two acts were brought into play; two acts of illegality were brought into action: one which *allowed*; the latter, led to the second act of illegality – *the release*. De Klerk *allowed* for Mandela to be released; de Klerk did the *allowing*, only on the condition that Mandela promised not to fight his master. Mandela had to negotiate his freedom from his *baas*, his master . . . the master who owned him. The middleman, between God and 'the Natives', Bishop Desmond Tutu, was called upon to ensure that the previously enslaved 'behave' and agree to the *baas*' terms established during negotiations so that he *allows* the release of Mandela into the hands of God, into the hands of forgiveness – with no resistance. *Allowed* – is as such, an act, an event, which was righted from a wrong but as Sparrow determines, was wrong. And since it was wrong there must have been a reason for it to be wrong. It was wrong because Sparrow suggests that the *allower* (De Klerk and his political party) have been proven wrong. There is the *allowed* (the act) and there is the released (the objects); the latter as though the *allowed* were in captivity, secluded, isolated, damned. *Damned* – there it is again. The Fanonian damned, Césaire the poet, Fanon's mentor used the term on several occasions – *damnés*. There have been many translations of the French word, but I shall venture to assert condemnation, a sentencing, a lifetime condemnation, the ultimate punishment for being Black.

For Sparrow – *allowed* is an act, an event, an allowance, a gesture of goodwill only because the decision-maker of the released acted on behalf of the captive and released them! It is both a gesture and a decision that only an *allower* can make... *allowed to be released... let it ring in your ear... allowed to be released ... to be permitted, to have your permitter* – the one who rewrites the law, removes the shackles around your body, and issues you the permit prescribing your movement – allow you to escape from the prison of your home, your ravished land he sentenced you to ... you are permitted to leave your confinement. You may leave. Do not be mistaken – you have not been

set free – you have only been released. There is no freedom, there is only the memory of enslavement, until. . .

on new years eve and new years day ...

Written with grammatical errors, with little care for the rules of her colonising language, Sparrow notes the days that mark the event. Here the days of the year, the precise dates, their significance, is key to the disgruntled Sparrow. Sparrow indicates the significance of the holiday dates – *new year's eve* (sic) *and new year's day* – considered the most significant of the entire year for holidaymakers and vacationers. These are days marked by the knowledge of holiday, a celebration, an opportunity for leisure. Sparrow could easily have written or abbreviated the dates as December 31st or January 1st. For it is the significance of the days most noted for holiday celebration – masters and the enslaved, masters and the previously enslaved – that she situates as reason one, the first reason for her discontent: the days marked as leisure that she is disgruntled about because those two days were taken away from her; she has to celebrate in her home. The paid subordinates, the factory workers, the mineworkers, the supermarket workers, all of the exploited and downtrodden who do not work on this day have been *allowed to be released* onto the beach.

Sparrow did not stop with her first written post; she did several interviews with local newspapers thereafter, each time offering justifications for the content of her first post (Sparrow 'Post One'). On each occasion, she supplemented them with various forms of reasoning, some of which included backtracking, and only seconds later as though unrelated to her earlier remarks, she reinforced the very act of racism for which she had just sought pardon. In an interview with *News24* on January 4th, 2016, Sparrow revealed several sets of details, which allow us to understand the extent of her disapproval of Black bodies on beaches. Following the initial quote, four segments of Sparrow's response are cited here as a means to unravel both the journalists' critiques of Sparrow's 'Post One', and to unpack Sparrow's responses to their questions .

Reporting on the matter, the *News24* journalist introduced the matter as follows:

Embattled KwaZulu-Natal realtor Penny Sparrow, at the centre of a race-row that has gripped the country, has said that she was merely 'stating the facts'. She had taken to Facebook and described black

beachgoers as ‘monkeys’, in an apparent reaction to litter left behind after New Year’s celebrations. There has been a mass reaction to her statement across social media platforms, as well as from political quarters. Speaking to *News24*, she revealed what had driven her to compare black revellers to monkeys.

Every year it is the same story; it’s their [black people’s] day and we don’t go in [to] the beach, we don’t interfere, we let it be. We all know it and there is nothing wrong. We stay out of the way and stay at home’, she said. ‘It is their day’.

<https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/its-just-the-facts-penny-sparrow-breaks-her-silence-20160104>

i. Sparrow, as though in reverence to the colonial frame of the 1800s, reminds us that the enslaved have been given the day off from their masters. In the Cape, it is coon carnival time – treated by many ignorant White liberal scholars today as contentious due to interpretations of the history of Blackface that was popular in the United States of America (USA); it is easier for modern-day White liberals in South Africa to be acquainted with the history of Blackface in the USA than the history of slavery at the Cape. In the Cape, the coon carnival started as a celebration to commemorate the end of slavery. In the Cape, we have *Nuwe Jaar* (New Year), and we have *Tweede Nuwe Jaar* (Second New Year, the day after New Year), since the middle of the 1900s and has been in operation and with more than 13 000 people in attendance at this celebration. Under colonialism, slaves got the day off on the 2nd of January and were allowed to celebrate in a manner of their choosing. Slavery was officially abolished in the Cape on 1st December 1834 but the first carnival was only hosted in 1887. The official abolition of slavery at the Cape did not prevent White colonials from drawing the enslaved into building the Whites-only UCT, where recently the remains of bodies that date back to the middle of 1800s were found. Ancestral remains as evidence have a way of slapping the face of the colonisers just when they think they have rid themselves of their history as enslavers... their Whites-only university is turned into a crime scene, yet again.

Sparrow’s condescending historical reminder is her means of referencing the past where Black people form part of the previously enslaved,

previously oppressed, previously colonised. ‘It is their day’, speaks to the knowledge of Black people’s timely exercise of pleasure – that it is reserved, planned, calendarised, contained, limited, timed, like so many aspects of Dutch coloniality including the surnames (also known as last names), of so many of us at the Cape forced upon us to note our month of enslavement, mine included, which are both September and Maart. Even the word carnival, from the Latin expression *carne levare*, the removal of the meat, later adapted to the Christian guilt-laden expression of ‘indulgence of the flesh’, the ‘pleasure of the flesh’, before the month of Lent. As such, carnivals were generally held in February or March, before Lent, as in Brazil, and *Mardi gras* – in French already utilised in English as ‘Fat Tuesday’, the Tuesday before Lent. It is on these dates where indulgence of food and flesh are allowed, as celebrated in the French quarters around the globe, particularly in New Orleans but also in Cape Town, where it is usually held in February. From 6th April 1952, to commemorate 300 years of settler colonialism in honour of Jan Van Riebeeck, the whole country was given the day off to celebrate the man who robbed us of our land and plotted our demise. We were expected to celebrate our colonisation, enjoy it with a braai, enjoy ourselves with alcohol, the remuneration offered to farmworkers’ under the *tot system*⁷ – our pleasure had to be linked to our enslavement and our colonisation. Thereafter, from 1980 Van Riebeeck’s day was called ‘Founder’s Day’ until 1994.

In the second segment of her response, Sparrow notes the following:

ii. ‘I am sorry that it has taken such a viral turn, but it was just a statement of how it was. I made the mistake of comparing them [black people] with monkeys. Monkeys are cute and they’re naughty, but they [black people] don’t see it that way, but I do because I love animals ... I wasn’t being nasty or rude or horrible, but it’s just that they [black people] make a mess. It is just how they are’.

⁷ The tot system, also known as ‘*die dop stelsel*’, referring to how alcohol is consumed, with a glass known as a tot, legally allowed wine farmers to pay their workers in alcohol, with little to no money, certainly not a living wage. Although the tot system was outlawed in 1960, the practice was carried out for more than 30 years into the 1990s, with warning letters to farm owners that the practice had become illegal.

<https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/its-just-the-facts-penny-sparrow-breaks-her-silence-20160104>

Sparrow justifies her comparison and partakes in the history of simianisation of Black people – From *King Kong* to the *tokoloshe* and the *boogeyman* (Maart 2014). Simianisation infantilises. It also exaggerates: the Black man is usually the target, both the creature of depravity where he wants the White woman, and where he cannot control his animal lust. Sparrow's deep-rooted racism by far outweighs any possibility for reason. Sparrow does not read the newspapers, she has not read the responses by members of political parties; she speaks as though apartheid is alive and well, and her frame of reference in offering both an apology and a reason for the ill-fated text, all points to the Trump-style racism that got the latter elected in 2016 as president of the largest democracy in the world. The belief was, and remains, that Sparrow's ignorance, much like Trump's, is in fact, the voice of the [White] people. There are two particular sympathetic approaches: a. the voice of the joker, and b. the voice of the underdog. I proceed here with the former before addressing the latter.

- A. **The voice of the joker.** Sparrow's 'Post One' was posted on Facebook, where a photo showing a younger, slightly glamorous Sparrow stood boldly beside her outburst. Newspaper articles one week later constructed Sparrow as the 'old White lady' with her 'funny wig' and a 'funny hat' both of which were noted to convey her age and to convey to readers that she was in hiding. We had walked straight into Freud's *Jokes and the Relation to the Unconscious* ([1905] 1966 led by Sparrow's actions, and the actions of Trump. A joker's appearance – hair, facial features, and general appearance – speaks to the seriousness of their actions, and here both Trump and Sparrow, with the focus on their hair, seal the deal. Sparrow's appearance was meant to force us into pity or mockery rather than tackle the content and magnitude of her grammatological dissemination and the harm it had done across the country. Two years after Penny Sparrow's 'Post One', which had the country talking for months on end even after she was found guilty of hate speech by the Equality Court and instructed to pay R150 000 to the Adelaide and Oliver Tambo foundation, and later charged with *crimen injuria* (under South African common law

defined as unlawfully impairing the dignity or privacy of another person), Adam Catzavelos, while on holiday in Greece, gave his family and friends a weather and surrounding report: ‘Let me give you a weather forecast here. Blue skies, beautiful day, amazing sea, and not one k***** in sight, (it’s) f***** heaven on earth, you cannot beat this’, he said in the video. In a nutshell, Catzavelos took delight in being at a beach without Black South Africans but used the historically loaded word to refer to Black South Africans. In 2016, like Catzavelos in 2019, Sparrow had not entered the gates of democracy, even after a ‘one person, one vote’ was put in place and the country’s constitution hailed as one of the most liberated in the world.

<https://www.iol.co.za/the-star/news/soweto-pensioners-lend-support-to-racist-adam-catzavelos-in-court-42646472>

- B. **The voice of the underdog.** The underdogs in the context of South Africa at the time of Mandela’s release were the Afrikaners, who consider themselves the underprivileged and have drawn a similarity with the Québécois in Canada, thus asserting the need for land allocation within which their culture, language and history can survive. The Québécois assert their ‘right’ against the English coloniser, who they see as overlooking their rights for self-determination in the province of Québec. This is still the voice of ‘the poor White’ in South Africa, and the voice of ‘middle America’ in the USA (where the term working class is considered an insult), that scholars are chastised for criticising. There is an assumption that the underdog, that is, the unintelligent, ignorant, uneducated, uncouth Afrikaner Weerstand Beweging [AWB] supporter, the Ku Klux Klan supporter in the USA, who often suggest that they are poor because Black people are taking ‘their jobs’; in the South African case, the enjoyment of Black bodies on ‘their beaches’ drove the underdog to racism.

Sparrow continues:

- iii. ‘I put an apology up to say I didn’t mean it personally. That day on that beach it was all black people, I’m sorry to say it, but it is a fact of life. I said it as I felt it and I know it was wrong to do it on a public thing [Facebook]

like that. I don't know how it got out and we were all saying it', Sparrow added.

<https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/its-just-the-facts-penny-sparrow-breaks-her-silence-20160104>

Sparrow apologised for her post being public; She remained oblivious to disseminating words and ideas through social media and the fact that everyone around the country had access to her words, Black people included.

Reason: Sparrow establishes the presence of others.

White reason: reason by racial affiliation to, and membership of, the system of White domination.

Sparrow exclaims: 'we were all saying it'.

Sparrow seeks out her ilk in producing her reasoning.

iv. 'I realise now that they [blacks] obviously hate that. I don't recall putting it like that. I just remember saying that there were so many black people like monkeys dropping things everywhere... making love in the bushes is, you know, fine if that is what they want to do, but the dirt was just terrible', she said.

<https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2016-01-04-penny-sparrow-breaks-her-silence-monkeys-are-cute-and-theyre-naughty/>

We see here, Sparrow referring to 'making love in the bushes', and the plot thickens. Sparrow offers another component for us to understand the reason(s) for her discontent.

But it is the closing statement below, as part of the lengthy interview that was conducted by *The Witness*, that puts the full range of her colonial upbringing into the frame, and Sparrow as the one seeking familiarity with Blackness as a means to redeem herself. The latter, a gesture whereby we see many White women these days try to claim kin – suggesting their emergence within Black culture, that they have Black heritage, a Black language, an affinity to Blackness, a Black paid subordinate such as a nanny who was 'like a mother' to them, and they are therefore, not as White as their White privilege suggests.

Sparrow continues:

v. 'It was an absolute mistake. I didn't mean to hurt anybody or to be racist. In fact, I am very good and kind to black people and help those in need. I was born in East Africa and I grew up with them. My first language was a black language. Swahili. My post wasn't a personal threat against anybody. It was just a comment on the state of the beaches and town' (*The Witness* 05 January 2016).

And as such, we now learn the following: Sparrow did not mean to be racist. Sparrow is now an East African. Sparrow is now a Swahili speaker. Sparrow wants us to know of her benevolent character – she is the good White settler who is kind to the natives. Sparrow retrieves the domestic, the paid subordinate, takes them out to be revealed. Sparrow now claims Swahili as her language, her first language. Nothing says it clearer: Sparrow's 'first language was a black language'. Sparrow knows Black people more than we know ourselves. When the White woman fails at being White and let out some of the unspoken tenets of racism, reserved for gin and gossip, oftentimes referred to as tea-time and trashing of the natives, that take place in seclusion, at tightly-knit tables in the White suburbs, none of their ilk defend them. Sparrow spoke publicly and betrayed liberal White South Africans because she did not have the political savvy to hide it as well as English-identified Whites. Sparrow, the White woman now digs a place for herself within Blackness. Jacques Derrida's insight into Sparrow's actions says it loud and clear: 'If Being is in effect a process of reappropriation, the "question of Being" of a new type can never be percussed without being measured against the absolutely coextensive question of the proper' (Derrida 1982: xiv).

Unpacking Sparrow's Discontent through Black Consciousness, Psychoanalysis and Derridean Deconstruction

To enjoy, one needs a body ...
Even those who promise eternal bliss
Cannot do so without involving the body:
Glorious or not, it must be there ...
Because for the body, the dimension of *jouissance*
Is the dimension of its descent into death.

(Lacan Unpublished 1971.)

As a means of thinking through Sparrow's discontent with:

- (i) the Black subject's capacity for enjoyment;
- (ii) the enjoyment of Black bodies by Black people;
- (iii) the capacity Black people have for enjoyment on previously White beaches – the site of White privilege as White leisure, the very site of exclusion for which legalised White privilege was created in order for White South Africans to perform enjoyment as masterdom over the usurped, enslaved and the colonised – I turn to a psychoanalytic approach that I position within my Black Consciousness lens, both through Fanon and Biko, vis-à-vis Lacan.

The psychoanalysis that I employ traces its fundamental tenets – consciousness, the unconsciousness, consciousness and its relationship to materiality, as such consciousness and politics, language as speech, writing and the imagination, particularly the interpretation of dreams – as key, not limited to but directly related – to Egypt, which much to the chagrin of the empires in Europe and the USA prefer to classify Egyptians as White⁸. Joseph, the dreamer, the second youngest son of Jacob, the son of Canaan who interprets the dreams of Pharaoh and saves Egypt and her people, offers us one of the first psychoanalytic moments in my conceptualisation of psychoanalysis. As such, it forms part of what I consider the ancestral history of psychoanalysis. This moment brings together the history of Black Consciousness, the plight of Joseph who is sold into Egyptian slavery as a young Jewish man, who was when retrieved from prison on the recommendation of Potiphar, interprets Pharaoh's dreams and brings dream interpretation into the realm of politics:

⁸ 'On Aug. 8, 2012, in a public lecture, Dr Mostafa Hefny, an Egyptian immigrant who lives in Detroit indicated that he wanted the U.S. government to classify him as black, not white. The Egypt-born Hefny, 61, says he's easily identifiable as a black man, but when he was admitted to the U.S. decades ago, he was classified on government papers as a White person. Hefny says he's a Nubian, an ancient group of Egyptians considered more African than Arab. According to a government directive, a White person is defined as "a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, North Africa or the Middle East"' (AP Photo/Detroit News, Max Ortiz) Detroit Free Press; Huffington Post.

Egypt's people were saved, food rationing and planning were put in place, and the masses did not die from starvation. It is important to acknowledge Egypt's vastness when dream interpretation was installed as a political act, and the foresight of planning prevented hunger, famine, and possible mass death. People were fed along the Nile, and in neighbouring countries outside of what we now consider the African continent's parameters.

It is not to Freud's Vienna that my childhood and adolescent thoughts raced as I try to deal with my psychosomatic hives which appeared annually on the anniversary of our forced removal from District Six in 1973, and for which I had no words to name their annual pilgrimage, which staged themselves on my body – the home of my psyche – as it drew the blood of my being, but to Joseph the dream interpreter who I learnt about at Sunday School. I am not religious in any way; I also grew up with Muslim cousins with whom I attended madrassa and drew from these experiences of consciousness and the unconsciousness as they best describe my psychoanalytic history.

I turn to Jacques Lacan in this segment. One cannot overlook Jacques Lacan's work on desire even if one writes on South Africa. Lacan refers to enjoyment as *jouissance*. There are, however, many layers to *jouissance*, some of which I undress in the process of this paper.

Lacan designates seven versions of *jouissance* and it is my contention that *smaak* – as a word and expression that speaks to and extends beyond the English word desire – a word spoken in *Kaaps* with roots in 17th century Dutch, Malay and the Khoisan languages as a direct result of our history of enslavement, spoken firstly at the Cape then over time due to migration across South Africa, surpasses *jouissance* and extends the limited parameters of expressions of enjoyment within the French language. Despite its weight, the word *jouissance* leans towards enjoyment and desire is always named within its containment. Likewise, the English word 'desire' is fraught with similar limitations never quite capturing the anticipation of enjoyment nor the salivating, lip-licking, mouth gaping effect of the word *smaak* that the mere utterance of the word generates, in a blink of an eye. Néstor A. Braunstein in 'Desire and Jouissance in the Teachings of Lacan, when referencing *jouissance* notes, 'The French word is difficult to translate in English. Lacan himself was aware of this problem ...'. And I will assert, so too was Fanon: 'To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilisation' (Fanon [1952] 1970: 13).

The loose translation of *lus* and *smaak* offered here are crucial at the start of the article as they inform the reader of what is lost in the English language when referring to Black bodies at the backdrop of a language rooted in the history of English civilisation. When I presented a small segment of my work on *smaak* as part of a larger discourse of desire within the Black South African context at the 2020 UNISA Decolonial Summer school, the mention of the word *smaak* had Black women in the room giggling with their entire body. It was not simply that I was talking about sex or sexuality but *smaak*, as all of the women who responded with smiles understood.

In this segment, I will tackle enjoyment: firstly, as *jouissance*: as the concept Jacques Lacan introduces briefly in seminar one and seminar two (Lacan 1991 [1953–1954], and Lacan [1954 - 1955] 1991), where his focus is rooted in the Hegelian master and slave dialectic (still applicable to South Africa today); then over a period of 20 years Lacan shifts his focus to various components of the libidinal economy, leading us to excess enjoyment. This paper's scope limits an in-depth engagement of the said concepts; readers will have a much lengthier engagement of a broad range of case studies in my forthcoming title, *Black Consciousness and the Politics of the Flesh*.

It is the responses that Sparrow offers, limited to two strategic selections noted in this text, where we see the full extent of her discontent, which I suggest, among others, is rooted in her envy of Black bodies. Sparrow is dismayed at how Black bodies take to the sun, sand, and sea – a site from which Black people were legally prohibited, starting from the massacre of the Khoikhoi descended Goringhaicona people after Van Riebeeck and his settlers usurped the Cape and its beaches, to which Black people then, and still today, flock to for sustenance and enjoyment. The eyes of Sparrow, in observing Black people on the beach smack so loudly of the identification of her lack that she calls pleasure to a halt on her Facebook page by debasing Black people. I bring forth the term *lack* here, to suggest that Sparrow identifies a loss when recognising, through the Other, the symbolic loss of a sexuality she does not possess. In Seminar II, *The Ego I Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954 - 1955*, Lacan speaks of lack for the first time, thankfully not the last: 'Desire is a relation of being to lack. This lack is the lack of being properly speaking. It isn't the lack of this or that, but lack of being whereby the being exists' Lacan [1955] 1991, 223). Whiteness, as the property of her racialised personhood, does not allow Sparrow the ability to exercise freedom over the body and its' senses the way that she sees Black

people exhibit. It is an exhibition to the see-er; it is not an exhibition to the do-er ... not to the Black bodies who express enjoyment.

Whilst examining the presence of enjoyment with connotations that *Kaaps* allows, one has to address the physicality of desire, the manner in which the verbal utterances match the hand gestures, bodily gesticulations, primal sounds that have lived outside of the contamination of European languages. One *smaaks* with your whole body; one does not *smaak* in the privacy of your mind. Thought and expression are paired; expression is the cornerstone of *smaak*.

The English language does not offer its speakers the fully nuanced, suggestive, flavourful, mouth-watering, anticipation of seduction and lovemaking mainly because the English language of desire developed through the tight-lipped dissemination of erotic prose among the upper-class poets who borrowed words from the French language to allow themselves the elevated expression of the pleasures of sexuality that they enjoyed and kept within their class affiliation off the coast of rainy England. Words such as ‘debauched’ and ‘debauchery’ were among the most pertinent that brought the act’s enjoyment to the actors, who relied on the French language to fill their tongue-tied lips with a more extensive vocabulary. The upper classes had to borrow words that were not within the English language to give expression to desire that they owned but for which words were absent. The 19th century English working classes were referred to as breeders, and they were not afforded a sexuality. Any form of sexual relations that was evident, mainly through the process of reproduction, was viewed against the backdrop of poverty, overcrowding, children with dirty faces working in the soot-ridden environment of London, where class bore the stamp of poverty and lasciviousness (from Middle French and Late Latin), a stamp of illegality. Charles Dickens, writing in the early to middle 1800s notes this with great precision (Dickens 1838), at a time when the poor were criminalised through the New Poor Law of 1834, a year after the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833.

It is as a consequence of my lived experience as a child born in District Six, the old slave quarter of the Cape, where the previously enslaved community who were enslaved by the Dutch and forcibly brought from Bengal, Malaysia and Indonesia, the region of Java in particular, and the enslaved Xhosa from the Eastern Cape, spoke, disseminated and further developed the 17th century language to their own needs, own desires, mostly clandestinely, away from the ears of their masters – Dutch to Kaaps. Over the

years *Kaaps* became infused with the lust and desire that the enslaved maintained for our flavourful food, Javanese coffee, rose water in desserts and the bathwater, and our desire for the fragrances of the flesh. I am, as a consequence of my command of both my home *Kaaps* vernacular, fused with Cape Malay and the formal Afrikaans language, drawn to expressions like *lus* and *smaak*, which by far have more sensual connotations than English words like enjoyment, pleasure, lust or desire. As such, whilst I strongly assert that I do not wish to overlook the scholarly contributions of Jacques Lacan in this regard: I am here cross-referencing a Lacanian type of enjoyment, which spans a larger spectrum of enjoyment as articulated by Freud since Lacan includes, pleasure, desire, surplus pleasure and orgasmic pleasure.

I shall address both Lacan's concept of *jouissance* and my reliance on *lus* and *smaak* in examining Sparrow's 'Post One' and her subsequent responses wherein she references dirt, sex in the bushes, enjoyment, etc.

Lus en smaak, jou lekkerding

Smaak – a word of the *Kaaps* language – is referred to by linguists as a colloquial term. *Kaaps* is spoken primarily by the people of the Cape although its meaning, along with particular nuances that pertain to sexuality and desire have been disseminated across the country not in the absence of, or detriment to, a broad range of South African languages and/or dialects, and as such the term *smaak* is known, if not used as part of a verbal expression, by Black people all around South Africa to suggest, as per its derivation – libidinal desire. *Smaak* is a word spoken with particular delight, a word that makes you as a speaker of a language that traces your history, your spirit, your desire that lingered despite the infringement of enslavement, live forever on the tongue that speaks and performs this *smaak*. The Afrikaans word *smaak* suggests taste and crave, as would be its formal English translation, and used in the latter much like it is used in English, with particular civility. *Begeer*, in Afrikaans is more formal and does not have the carnal voracity of *smaak*. In formal Afrikaans, *smaak* is also a term of regularity to express a taste for food. *Smaak* as an expression by a *Kaaps* speaker refers to urges, desire, libidinal anticipation, orgasmic longing. Saying the word *smaak* arouses your lips, your mouth, your tongue, you salivate the minute you hear the word used in relation to a lover – yours or another – and smile when you hear the word used in reference to someone expressing their desire for another. You know it, you've been

there, you know exactly what *smaak* can do, and so did Penny Sparrow. *Smaak* is to be tasted, the knowledge of it shared, told to another, delight taken in your desire for another, and the knowledge that the word has no brim, no border, for it overflows, and thus exceeds all notions of desire as expressed in the English language. You never have to say I *smaak* you with [something] or [because] ... or [like] ... there is no need for similarity or comparison. There is no reason to be declared because *smaak* is *smaak*. It says everything, and it says more than everything. If you *smaak* someone, it is often with a sense of hunger, 'I *smaak* you like a piece of bread',... bread being your primal source of nourishment that conveys the depth and the intensity of the hunger you have for that person.

Lus, also an Afrikaans word, used to describe a desire for food and a craving for a particular food, permeates from all your pores the minute you utter the word. If you're a *Kaaps* speaker your desire for food cannot be expressed in English as well as in *Kaaps* nor as intentionally as when expressed in Afrikaans. *Begeerte* being more directly a translation of the English word desire, speaks to your urges, but can also be used to describe cravings. In the local *Kaaps* vernacular, you are permitted to lick your lips, make soft murmurings, primal sounds ... mmmmm, mmmmm, low and deep, matching the object of your *lus*. *Lus* can also be lust; it is lust that is declared, not hidden. It is demonstrated; you are allowed actions, gestures, to make your *lus* known. Sparrow is looking for a reason why Black people can enjoy ourselves – especially at a historical crime scene – the sea and its beaches – whereupon the previously enslaved were transported, where the usurpation of the land took place, and from which we were barred, prohibited, and with the same body, through the same body, which enslavement and dehumanisation took place. And yet, our bodily Blackness, still remains a source of enjoyment despite the illogical reasoning of apartheid, the cruelty of coloniality, the forbiddenness of Black flesh as pleasure, the robbing of rights, which could never effectively legislate against desire. How can this be history? Sparrow asks. How can progress of the consciousness of freedom – a rewording of the Hegelian articulation of history – come in this form where Black people disrobe from apartheid and enjoy their bodies, enjoy with such excess, and enjoy to the point of sexual pleasure with orgasmic leisure?

World history, the development of spirit in time, not only as per the articulations put forward by Hegel but as the enactment of a democracy – even if it is White women's fake orgasm – that is declared, that offers the oppressed

the possibility of freedom on the assumption that the oppressed has earned its freedom; that suffering, in the midst of observing the master, learning the ways of the master, that it would provide the basis for imitation as human. Here, however, the master as White madam learns from the enslaved; she learns with her lack (as a bodily instrument), and of her lack (as a loss). The master learns that the enslaved does not contain, suppress, withhold, denounce or bar the very fabric of a sexual identity that was denied – that is, the many qualities of enjoyment, love, desire, pleasure, orgasmic pleasure, and surplus pleasure. We know that reason requires judgement: it is not a pure algorithm that can be set up and left to run by itself to produce true conclusions because one has to produce the content against which one is casting judgment and Sparrow cannot. Sparrow cannot produce true conclusions because she has not offered reasons for its foundation, nor the means to establish it.

Penny Sparrow and Vanessa Hartley draw from their knowledge of the enslaved—along with the knowledge of Black people and Africans to rationalise why Black people should not be on beaches. In their articulations of racism as reason, Black skin is reason enough. In Hartley's articulation – the action to prevent Black skin from expanding on beaches – ‘tie them up with a rope’, she writes, is her action, her justification: to save Hout Bay, the bay that was never hers, the bay along with many bays that were usurped so that she could experience masterdom as enjoyment and deny it to the ‘African’ as referenced in her posting. It is, after all, the settler who wants what the Indigenous inhabitants have as a lifestyle; it is the settler who has to usurp, rob, steal, maim, massacre, legislate and isolate ... to have what the Indigenous has as life, living, continuity, enjoyment, sustenance. It is the envy of the settler of the enjoyment of the native that drives coloniality.

In Lacan's seminar seven (Lacan 1998), *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959 - 1960*, we see a much more extensive elaboration of *jouissance*:

- i. In seminar seven, Lacan discusses *jouissance* as inscribed within the law. I shall here bring forth South African writer Lewis Nkosi's *Mating Birds*, set in early 1980s apartheid South Africa, to further Lacan's articulation. In *Mating Birds*, the White woman has desire for the Black man whose only transgression is the apartheid law of prohibition, which does not allow him to be on the legally assigned ‘Whites Only’ beach. *Mating Birds* is apt when examining this component of *jouissance* and the law. Nkosi's book draws attention to a young Black man who wanders about the city

of Durban, jobless and aimless, strolls on the beach and crosses over into the Whites-only section, where he sees a scantily clad young White woman lying on the beach and observes her body with bewilderment, only to find her playing along. Not only did Nkosi choose a topic such as the segregated beach as the plot for his first novel, the beach and its mapping of segregation with the undercurrent of forbidden desire placed under the rule of the body politic of the 1980s, the law seemed to be begging for sexual and literary transgressions. *Smaak* is articulated here as the desire that emerges out of transgression ignited when the Black man demands that the White woman recognises him and recognises his physical presence instead of ignoring him. 'She lay there in my path like a jibe, a monstrous provocation, and yet she was not really aware of my presence. People like her never are' (Nkosi 1987: 7). In the novel, it is the White woman who when caught in the illegal act turns to the law for she cannot admit her desire for the Black man, and calls out rape. She has to justify the law of apartheid, which is the law of forbidden desire. She denounces her desire and relies on the law of racism to punish the man she has just had consensual sex with, in order to punish him for letting her see ... see herself, with him as her lover, and experience her desire for him. It is after all his fault. If he did not show himself, she would not have broken the law or known why it was there – which I contend was designed to protect herself against herself; that it was designed to protect her against seeing the Black man and coming face-to-face with her desire for him. In the chapter titled, 'The Jouissance of Transgression' (Lacan [1986] 1992: 191ff), Lacan makes this clear. 'The resistance to the commandment, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself' and the resistance that is exercised to prevent his access to *jouissance* are one and the same thing' (Lacan 1992: 194). Indeed, we learn much about psychoanalysis from the architects of apartheid who would not allow White women to have Black men as neighbours!

- ii. What Lacan describes as 'uninhibited jouissance which is not threatened ...'. Lacan suggests that it is the law's *jouissance*, in other words *lus* and *smaak* have to be put under the law, which as we know, was legislated across the colonised world as part of the containment of the native, the Black, the African, the Indigenous. The South African Immorality Act of 1927 (Act No. 5 of 1927) forbade sexual relations between White people

and Black people and was amended by the South African Immorality Amendment Act of 1950 (Act No. 21 of 1950) that forbade sexual relations between White people and people of other races; the Population Registration Act No 30 of 1950 ensured that racialised identities were classified and registered; the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act, Act No 49 of 1953, the Group Areas Act of 1950 and the forced removals based on the latter, among others, were all attempts by the law of the land – at the time, the Apartheid regime.

- iii. Lacan's second argument in seminar seven asserts that *jouissance* is evil. As such, 'the *jouissance* of the enslaved causes the master his suffering'. The master suffers because the master is not able to contain, suppress, deny, what the enslaved brings to the landscape of recognition. The master, in order to assert and convince herself of difference, conceives of the slave as the personification of lust and desire. Sparrow has given us an indication of this in every argument she articulated in her many responses. It is therefore evil because it cannot be circumscribed to any law, any God, any religion, and speaks to an animality that speaks *Kaaps*, that speaks Zulu, that speaks Xhosa, that speaks the language of the people – and as such this language of desire cannot be translated into English, for the English coloniser. Sparrow's monkey is not just one that litters, it is an animality that shows its *lus*, spreads its *smaak*, unashamedly, everywhere, food, fornication, imagined bushes, flora, are part of Sparrow's imagination; it is forced outside of the apartheid mapping, the geographical fake orgasm of the White woman and into the libidinal economy of the Black person who feeds and fornicates with a pleasure that haunts the settler.
- iv. The second articulation is linked to the first, quite strongly, in the sense that the master suffers when there is face-to-face with the *jouissance* of the formerly enslaved and previously disadvantaged. I use the latter with some contempt because the colonised has been disadvantaged, cut off from, *smaak* as the mastery of desire. The master's suffering is the lament but also the freedom, rapidity, omnipotence, of the *lus* and *smaak*, for which the laws of the superego do not apply. *Lus* and *smaak* defy history, because it cannot be spoken or written in the language that prescribes its limitation or its prohibition.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have drawn on Penny Sparrow's outburst on her social media page to examine how Black bodies are treated when on South African beaches during the summer months, and the cruelty of these narratives, which have come from White women, primarily. In foregrounding Sparrow's post over Hartley's, which received less coverage as her engagement was shorter on the subject matter, I unpack the vocabulary with which Sparrow engraved her discontent as a White woman who has to share the lily-white KwaZulu-Natal shore with Black people on new year's day. The unpacking of Sparrow's post raised questions about the White gaze upon the Black body when Blackness is revealed in acts of enjoyment and pleasure, not labour or servitude.

Part of doing this unpacking of Sparrow's text, and setting the broader context by referencing Hartley from Hout Bay and Catzavelos from Gauteng, is to show how narratives of cruelty become 'master narratives' – racists speeches, in written texts, shared and disseminated, directed at Black bodies by White people who still consider this outpour of disgust as their right, their 'right to ridicule'. Thus, these narratives of embodiment and disembodiment that appear on public platforms that decolonial scholars have to face, as we come to terms with the larger and perhaps more personal landscape of the decolonial project, are crucial for unpacking as they define social discourses on race and coloniality in ways that the academy does not. None of the work that we do as scholars of decoloniality can overlook embodiment or disembodiment nor can we overlook public platforms such as social media where these are expressed and reproduced.

In South Africa, with #KingGeorgeMustFall, at UKZN, #RhodesMustFall, which started at UCT, the students at the time asked: how can we be in a space, a supposedly post-apartheid space, with grotesque statues that drive home the point of colonial embodiment in stone, a reminder of the memory of colonisation that lasted longer than flesh or time itself? Students, the small group that I saw protesting and defacing King George V's statue, did not want to be reminded of all the things King George V had done in their province – indirectly to some, directly to others. Not only does South Africa have the highest population of people from India on the African continent, many of whom were brought to the KZN province as indentured labourers, 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. The

defacing that I speak of is one that saw King George V's face strewn with paint, mocking his presence on a now primarily Black university, where the entrance to Memorial Tower Building just a few feet away, the arch under which I walk to enter this tower of memory, still has the names of the World War II 'heroes' neatly inscribed on the marble that engraved their victory for the British empire. The embodiment of King George V and Cecil John Rhodes, now deceased, come in the form of statues: they are reminders of colonialism, conquest, subjugation and usurpation. The coloniser needs the statue to mark a victory for itself and for the colonial who stays. The coloniser wants to see, with deeply narcissistic interest, 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 engraving of acts of cruelty into stone with the head of the victor as the main emblem of pride for the coloniser. This preoccupation with statues made of stone is very much an act that 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. Statues of colonisers are not only acts of embodiment but acts of memorialised fantasies, put on display, so that we the colonised are reminded, daily, of our defeat.

As scholars embroiled in the decolonial project of learning to 'undo' and learning to understand *what* there is to decolonise, we have to pay attention to our surrounding, to our minds and bodies, and also to what our minds and bodies have been robbed, have been forbidden to enjoy.

It is the process of understanding the layers of apartheid, the beaches and its prohibition of Black bodies that lead us to the significance of laws that barred and prevented, and the purpose they served. In doing so, we come face to face with a politics of desire, of an outpour of lack and envy that parades as disgust, because the oppression, subjugation and humiliation of the Black body still emerges, after more than 400 years of coloniality, as a body that smacks of *smaak*, drips with desire, and lingers with *lus*, long after the shackles have been removed.

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Decolonising the ‘Eye’ within the ‘I’ – Heterotopias of Self: An Interdisciplinary Exploration of Visual and Material Relationships among and between Space, Body, Memory, Identity and Place

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Abstract

This paper operates in conjunction with the creation of, and responses to, a set of creative works conceptualised by myself, operating together as a research process towards investigating the concept of ‘heterotopias of self’ in relation to positionality, memory, identity, place, space and body. The creative work is in the form of film pieces, which, respectively, engage with dissociations between social memory and history in Cape Town (‘*Rootless*’, Gibson 2013a); the relationship between the gendering of toys, land, war and violence (‘*War Play*’, Gibson 2013b); and the projection of ethnic identification in relation to visuality and geographical location (‘*Wish You Were Here*’, Gibson 2015¹).

Keywords: Heterotopias of Self, Mono-disciplinary approaches, Ethnic identification, Art, Film, Literature, Visual Anthropology, Identity, Practice-based Research, Embodiment, Body, Gender, Space, Culture, Violence, History, Geography, Autobiography

¹ <https://objects2015.wordpress.com/2015/06/18/wish-you-were-here-the-artist-as-ethnographic-object/>

Introduction

This article works in conjunction with the creation of, and responses to, a set of creative works conceptualised by myself, operating together as a research process towards investigating the concept of ‘heterotopias of self’ in relation to positionality, memory, identity, place, space and body. The creative work is in the form of film pieces, which, respectively, engage with dissociations between social memory and history in Cape Town (‘*Rootless*’, Gibson 2013a); the relationship between the gendering of toys, land, war and violence (‘*War Play*’, Gibson 2013b’); and the projection of ethnic identification in relation to visibility and geographical location (‘*Wish You Were Here*’, Gibson 2015²).

The films and article bring together concepts of self, memory and visual materiality in relation to historical and personal dissociations and displacements within society, to challenge mono-disciplinary approaches, and thus open up questions concerning interdisciplinary approaches, in particular to explore how often invisible structures of power within social and urban spaces infuse what is ‘seen’ and ‘not seen’ in the ‘making visible’ of selves.

The combined works become vehicles for theoretical exploration, as a means of considering alternative ways of engaging with multiple and seemingly disparate disciplines, from medical – as in memory, body and trauma – to gendered, psychological, conceptual and spatial perceptions of the self’s interrelationships with society, to examine the ‘Eye’ within the ‘I’ within different modes of embodied representation.

Despite their flows of constant renewal and interaction (Mbembe & Nuttall 2004), urban spaces are fraught with difficulties. Frictions often emerge – disparate gaps and clashes between communities, contestations over spaces and histories, and disputes over rights to spaces of the city.

South Africa, for example, has undergone xenophobic attacks (Nyamnjoh 2007; Neocosmos 2006; Hadland 2008; Dodson 2010; Tafira 2011; Solomon & Kosaka 2013; Mlambo 2019; Marumo *et al.* 2010; Solomon 2019; Asuelime

² <https://objects2015.wordpress.com/2015/06/18/wish-you-were-here-the-artist-as-ethnographic-object/>

2020; Chenzi 2020) while violence in general – including gender violence and abuse (Boonzaier & de la Rey 2003; Gqola 2007; Abrahams *et al.* 2009; Muluneh *et al.* 2019) – continues to infuse city spaces.

Spaces of memorialisation such as the Rhodes statue have been interrogated and removed alongside #RhodesMustFall and the ensuing #FeesMustFall protests (Nyamnjoh 2016; Griffiths 2019; Murriss 2016; Naicker 2016; Pillay 2016; Ndlovu 2017; Bosch 2016; Chaudhuri 2016), alongside calls for decolonising tertiary education institutions in South Africa (Mbembe 2016; Becker 2017; Muswede 2017; Fomunyam & Teferra 2017; Xaba 2017; Duku & Salami 2017; Mampane *et al.* 2018; Mahabeer 2018; Sathorar & Geduld 2018; Shefer 2019), while sites of slave memorialisation remain relatively invisible (see later regarding Prestwich Street – Rassool 2011; Shepherd 2007; Finnegan *et al.* 2011).

More recently, Cape Town has seen the rise of a 'Coloured nationalism' (Jacobs 2018; IOL News 2020). Tied up with these interactions are disputes around notions of identity; their histories, their visibilities, and their negotiation, in what Hall (1990) terms is a fluctuating production, 'never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation'. (222). Key to such processes are issues of inclusion and exclusion – a sense of belonging, access and voice, in which notions of culture, gender and racism intersect (Maart 2004; 2014a; 2014b).

The spaces we live within, are not neutral, but are imbued with power relations, social perceptions, and bodily interrelationships (De Certeau 1984; Foucault 1986; Soja 1989, 1996; Lovell 1998; Butler 1990; Lefebvre 1991; Nast & Pile 1998; Mbembe & Nuttall 2004; Pile 2005), within sites and desires of the imagination which infuse scripts of being, and 'being seen' to the extent that, 'we do not live in a homogenised empty space, but on the contrary, in a space thoroughly imbued with quantities and perhaps thoroughly fantasmatic as well' (Foucault 1986:23), 'an expression of an aesthetic vision' and 'a site of fantasy, desire and imagination', (Mbembe & Nuttall, 2004: 354 - 355) rather than 'nothing but the spatial embodiment of unequal economic relations and coercive and segregationist policies' (ibid.: 353), a 'phantasmagoric' space of dreams, hauntings, fantasies and desires beyond the visible and tangible – a 'psychogeography' (Pile 2005), and 'an oeuvre, closer to a work of art than to

a simple material product ... a 'production and reproduction of human beings by human beings, rather than a production of objects' (Lefebvre 1991: 101).

There is a concern that, 'the particular ways in which spatial relationships come together to make bodies and places, through the body and through places, needs to be exemplified, demonstrated and clarified, in places, through the body' (Nast & Pile 1998: 4), in which urban spaces operate a 'conjunction of seemingly endless possibilities of remaking' where 'bodies constantly are 'on the line' to affect and be affected, 'delivered up' to specific terrain and possibilities of recognition or coalescence' (Simone 2004: 9).

This article incorporates an exploration of three short art films by the author, incorporating a praxis-based research approach, in an exploration of the interwoven-ness of the above issues in relation to representation, to open up questions around 'seeing', and 'being seen' by the author – ('*Rootless*', see Gibson 2013a); engaging with dissociations between social memory and history in Cape Town; '*War Play*' (Gibson 2013b), examining the relationship between the gendering of toys, land, war and violence; and '*Wish You Were Here*' (Gibson 2015)³, exploring the projection of ethnic identification in relation to visibility and geographical location. Each film engages with a different aspect of embodied experience – at times seemingly surrealistic, at others, disturbing, and also drawing on the auto-ethnographic. Previous articles (Gibson 2013a; Gibson 2013b; Gibson 2015) have described, to varying extents, aspects of the creation process of these films. This discussion also draws on the concept of heterotopia in relation to the concept of self – as dissociative⁴ yet embodied aspects of selves that form part of the negotiation of self with society.

³ <https://objects2015.wordpress.com/2015/06/18/wish-you-were-here-the-artist-as-ethnographic-object/>

⁴ In this sense, I use 'dissociation' as a metaphorical term, implying its psychiatric definition as the 'separation of normally related mental processes, resulting in one group functioning independently from the rest, leading in extreme cases to disorders such as multiple personality' (Oxforddictionaries.com, acc. 090815). 'Dissociation' is a medical term now used in preference to 'multiple personality disorder' as the many selves that are presented are seen to link on a deeper plane and although performed

Rootless



Figure 1: *Rootless*, Rhodes Memorial Figure 2: *Rootless*, Blouberg Beach

The first film, *Rootless*⁵, involves a life-sized skeleton, created from twigs, filmed as if on a one-day tourist visit to Cape Town, touring sites imbued with memory and history but which also, when juxtaposed with the skeleton – which operates like a life-size puppet – evoke aspects of loss and historical dispossession in relation to land, memorialisation, space and heritage. These spaces are nature reserves; Rhodes Memorial; Prestwich Memorial – the site of storage of over 1 000 exhumed skeletons, assumed to have mostly been previous slaves, from a graveyard uncovered during building work near Prestwich Street in central Cape Town (see Shepherd



separately, are understood to be integrated within the same person. Interestingly, Krüger (2020) has recently argued for culture to be foregrounded in studies of dissociation.

⁵ Created in part-collaboration with artist Kitty Dorje (camera and editing) and Meghna Singh (editing).

2007; Rassool 2011) – *Iziko* Museum, which at the time was undergoing restitution processes concerning Khoisan remains kept in the museum archive (see Legassick & Rassool 2000); and Blouberg Beach, with its view of Table Mountain. The issues the skeleton raised are described in more detail in Gibson (2013a) particularly in relation to my previous experience as a medical student, and questions in relation to human remains.

On a poetic and aesthetic level, however, the film also evokes a sense of loss and dispossession – combined with a poem I created based on the concept of loss, and a very effective music track created especially for the film by a local composer/ musician (Dino Chapman Van Rooyen). Effectively, there is a sense of the loss of history and memory – evoked by the familiar figure of the skeleton and its association with the graveyard – already a heterotopic space described by Foucault (1986) – but which the viewer also identifies with, through travelling with the skeleton from frame to frame. The film has subsequently been used as part of District Six Museum’s commemorative ‘Slave Walk’ at night in the memory of slaves of the Cape, projected onto the wall of a historic city building as part of a walk through the city, thus contributing to a sense of the phantasmagoric ‘haunting’ of city spaces as one moves through them, described by Pile (2005) which, for me, was its perfect viewing location, one which evokes Ingold’s (1993) claim that ‘To perceive the landscape is... to carry out an act of remembrance, and remembering is not so much a matter of calling up an internal image, stored in the mind, as of engaging perceptually with an environment that is itself pregnant with the past’ (152f).

Interestingly, people in Cape Town who see the film often connect it with their own personal sense of dispossession too – often describing this as a ‘loss’ of ancestry, history and living spaces under forced removals during apartheid, along with a consequent sense of loss of ‘self’. This is particularly enabled by the skeleton being a non-gendered, non-racialised, ageless and voiceless yet embodied object, facilitating the self-identification of the viewer, as it glides past Rhodes Memorial and looks down at the view of the city the bust of Rhodes ‘sees’, is served coffee at the commercial café which masks the mausoleum Prestwich Memorial that holds the unnamed remains of the poor and slaves in boxes in a room at the back, and swings merrily before *Iziko*, where the museum’s windows appear like eyes looking through the skeleton’s head.



War Play – ‘No Man’s Land’

War Play

In the film *War Play*⁶, toys of childhood typically associated with gender – girl dolls, male action figurines, plastic army soldiers and guns readily available in South African stores – are assembled, dismembered, reassembled and juxtaposed to explore the associations between embodied notions of masculinity and femininity inculcated and engaged with in childhood, and male violence in relation to women’s bodies, land and war in adult life. In the film, toy soldiers and action figurines appear in juxtaposition with often headless or silenced naked female doll figures that operate sometimes as landscape to fight over, at other times as a ‘trophy’, or in one case, a female figure whose body is made up of toy soldiers, appears to be shooting herself.

In other scenes, the female figures hold guns, as if in self-protection. The works were created and filmed at a *Thupelo* Art Workshop in the Wellington landscape in South Africa (Gibson 2013b), as if randomly found while crawling through the bush. Background music was composed using the

⁶ Conceptualisation, mise-en-scène, filming and directing by myself, editing assistance from Jarrett Erasmus.

nursery rhyme, ‘Three Blind Mice’ with sounds suggesting a battlefield, and the voice of a young boy.⁷ As the origin and making of this film is described briefly in a previous article (Gibson 2013b), I focus here on embodied aspects of the film in relation to the formation of identity in its construction as a ‘story of self’ (Sacks 1995) shaped by memory, and performed, enacted and felt as a construction through an experiential, embodied and sensory mode of operandi, ‘concerned with, and assembled from, sensory and experiential fragments’ (Seremetakis 1994: 4). Gender is a continually reiterated practice, sedimented in the body to the extent that it appears naturalised (Butler 1990). But where does this naturalisation start, and how does it then become articulated later in its intersections with violence, race, geography and space?



War Play – ‘Chicken-Head Man’

Interestingly, when *War Play* was shown in the CAS gallery exhibition ‘Body: Object: Corpse’, deliberately on a small television in a child-sized room⁸ women responded very strongly to the images. One declared emphatically, ‘yes, we should take up weapons against men!’ Others responded by describing the vulnerability they felt as women, particularly in relation to how men treat

⁷ Composed by Mijaou Blech and with the voice of Bailey Blech.

⁸ Curated by Meghna Singh in the exhibition ‘Body: Object: Corpse’.

them and their susceptibility to gender violence in South Africa, which has a history of gender violence from colonialism through apartheid to the present day, and currently has among the highest domestic abuse and rape statistics in the world (Maart 2004, Maart *et al.* 2014; Boonzaier & de la Rey 2003; Gqola 2007; Abrahams *et al.* 2009; Hutchinson 2013). As Gqola (2007) puts it, 'We know that today women do not feel safe in the streets and homes of South Africa, that women's bodies are seen as accessible for consumption – touching, raping, kidnapping, commenting on, grabbing, twisting, beating, burning, maiming – and control, that women are denied the very freedom that 'empowerment' suggests, the very freedom the Constitution protects' (120), and goes on to describe how 'apartheid capitalised on the physical violence of contestation through the militaristic control as well as the structural violence of the economy ... this high militarisation could only take on gendered forms and play itself out along sharply gendered lines... Given its pervasiveness, it finds expression in the academic, business and non-governmental sectors, in culture, language and entertainment and government institutions' (113f).



War Play – 'Plastic Surgery Woman'

It is interesting how the responses were often highly visceral – in the case of women, a sense of expression of their own vulnerability and fears in relation to the objectification of their bodies, and the need to protect or defend them; and in the case of men, at times an expression concerning the uncomfortableness of what, in the observations I made, they associated the images with pornography, along with the violence of the hypermasculinity that the toys of their childhood suggested⁹.

Men also commented on the film's similarity to video games, in which the camera crawled through the undergrowth in a forest landscape, as if aiming a gun at each figure it came across and seemed to respond to what they saw as the overt sexuality of the images.

War Play also subliminally questions how the performance of masculinity in a militarised society might erupt in extreme violence including the abuse of women, often in the form of rape¹⁰ as a key mechanism of power over the vanquished in the face of brute force, and in the sexualised, gendered expression of force, juxtaposing the unstoppable super-hero of male invincibility versus the objectified visualised image of accessible girl dolls¹¹.

The toys of childhood in *War Play* visually expose the intersections of constructions of masculinity with militarised violence for boys, even prior to the institutional frameworks, playgrounds and societies which are 'constituted by violent interaction in their very fabric' (Gqola 2007: 114).

Through juxtaposing and combining gendered toys, the film consequently evokes links between the 'male' toys given to boys, expression of violence over land and ownership, including of women's bodies, even as spoils of war. Yet these toys also evoke utopias – expressions of ultimate desires – male power, invincibility and physicality, and the desire of women to look appealing yet their vulnerability in becoming objects of sexual objectification.

⁹ The soundtrack, by musician/ composer Mijanou Blech, was based on the children's song, 'Three Blind Mice' as an underlying auditory motif for the film.

¹⁰ This does not exclude male rape as an expression of power in war.

¹¹ Notably, 'white' dolls, are easiest to obtain cheaply in South Africa.

Intersectionalities of race and gender are also apparent in the ready availability of dolls that, notably in a South African context, are fair-skinned¹² and would inculcate a racialised 'difference' and utopian desire of 'Whiteness' for local children 'of colour' who play with them. Consequently, *War Play* connects the disconnected; brings to awareness those dissociated elements within the gendered self that extremes of human behaviour become evident within – the brutality of violence, the racialised divides of the gendered every day, the imaginaries of childhood; and enactments of militarised male violence – that play out in the adulthood of society¹³.

Wish You Were Here



***Wish You Were Here* – Film Still 'Not Inuit'**

The film, *Wish You Were Here*, is an exploration of another aspect of identity; the ethnic localisation of self in space and place. In this case, the film draws

¹² In the shop, housed in a small shopping mall in Wellington from which they were obtained, there were no dolls 'of colour' available.

¹³ Hutchinson (2013) for example, sees parallels and draws attention to enactments of violence in times of conflict and dispute in contemporary South Africa, as a consequence of South Africa's history as a militarised state in the past.

from personal experience, as someone of mixed ancestral origins – as far as I know, Filipino, Scottish, Irish and Spanish – in relation to how others have ethnically identified me over the years¹⁴ despite the fact that my identity does not typically fit into a ‘category’, particularly standard ‘ethnic category’ boxes one ticks on forms.

Narratives of these mis-identifications in people’s efforts to ‘locate’ me as from different global spaces are presented as if in a black and white ‘silent movie’ – mimicking Robert J. Flaherty’s classic *Nanook of the North* 1922 ethnographic film depicting the Inuit, for which I have repeatedly been mistaken.

These multiple identities and ‘emplacements’ projected by others– as seemingly from ‘everywhere’ – Inuit/Chinese/Uzbekistani/ Peruvian/Native American/Japanese/Thai/Malaysian but interestingly not as European – even at one point being congratulated by a Chinese lady as having the ‘eye operation’ (Kaw 1993; Aquino 2017; Nguyen *et al.* 2009; Ouellette 2009) to look more Western – explode the nature of the idiosyncrasy and constructedness of stereotyped racial identities and their intersections with geographical space.

Casting myself as an ‘ethnographic art object’, and in collaboration with cinematographer Gareth Jones as cameraman, I play out these different ethnicities through reconstructions in my own contemporary clothes to emulate the poses of anthropological and tourist images of the past and present. The soundtrack is mostly segments of *Nanook of the North* soundtrack played backwards – suggesting the reversal of time, and its flattening through the spaces of ethnic categorisation, in an exploration of where these might come from.

The power of the camera as ‘gaze’ is also evoked, as I move from plinth (as a museum object), to interior, to outdoors.

¹⁴ See conference blog entry, Gibson (2015).
<https://objects2015.wordpress.com/2015/06/18/wish-you-were-here-the-artist-as-ethnographic-object/>

The story is told using a selection of autobiographical experiences over my life, included as written text in the 'silent movie' style, followed by the images as juxtapositions, while I remain muted.¹⁵

Some of the quotations from the film are:

I am in a shopping mall in a poncho. A woman runs up to me. 'Oh, you're Peruvian, she says. 'How lovely, I got back from Peru yesterday'.

'We thought you were Native American', some anthropologists tell me at a conference.

I am in a museum. A woman comes up to me. 'Oh, you speak English, I thought you were from my village. I'm from Uzbekistan, she says'.

An old man refuses to serve me at a vegetable stall. 'I was in a Prisoner of War Camp', he says. 'I don't serve the Japanese'... 'But I'm not Japanese', I say... 'You look Japanese', he says. I won't serve you'.

'&%*\$*!', say men to me in salsa clubs. 'Oh, don't you speak Thai/Filipino? Malaysian? It means 'I love you'. I learnt it on holiday in a bar'.*

I am in Mozambique and the village children follow me around shouting 'Jackie Chan, Jackie Chan'.

'In this country we have very strict security regulations', says the customs official in Heathrow [International Airport, United Kingdom].... 'I am from this country', I say.

I come back to the 'I' within the 'eye' here. Is the gaze I project myself within that of the subjectivity of myself, or the objectivity of the outsider gazing in? In our social interactions, and engagements with the world, it is difficult to step outside of these external representations, as projections of how the world has categorised ourselves and others over historical time, particularly so with the history of a colonial science and ethnic 'stereotypes' that site the body's phrenology, skin colour and hair, as a representation of personhood.

The intersectionality of this with gender, sexuality and geography is evident; as someone who enjoys salsa dance, men in salsa venues in the past have

¹⁵ See Gibson (2015) for more detailed information on constructing the piece.

sometimes approached, talking slowly evidently to make sure I can understand their English. Their patronisingly gentle tones are as if directed to a child, no doubt drawing on their experience of the portrayal of Asian women as childlike, passive and willing to please (Wang 2012; Shim 1998) as exemplified in Hollywood films and other forms of media of the ‘Oriental fantasy’ from the period of 16-year old Afong Moy, the first recorded Chinese woman exhibited in America, in New York and Brooklyn Museums, with four-inch-long slippers on bound feet (Wang 2012¹⁶, and no doubt which the ‘bar girls’ in East Asian tourist venues play into as equivalent exhibits, for the exploitative desires of male consumption. At the same time, in the film, I quote from a 19th century children’s book, ‘A Peep at the World and a Picture of some of its inhabitants’ which in its very brief discussion of China, emphasises the very small bound feet of Chinese women.

In the film, I deliberately contrast this quote with myself sitting upright on a plinth, with a cap and high-necked, dark belted jacket, which is suggestive of a uniformed photograph of a woman from Communist China; then continue with the fact that Mozambican village children identified me as Jackie Chan, with pseudo poses of myself in the film with martial arts poses with a ponytail¹⁷.

The film was an expression of curiosity, and an attempt to understand what others might be ‘seeing’ when they projected their assumptions and my ethnic ‘phenotype’ onto me; an ironic ‘projecting back’, utilising only my own day clothes and minor props. Much of the suggestibility came from my drawing on ‘tourist’ and old ethnographic photographs from the different parts of the world I had been identified as, and merely positioning myself in similar bodily stances; such as stroking a cat in my dressing gown in the same pose I had seen a geisha lighting the cigar of a male tourist. In being none of these ‘identifications’ culturally, the film ends with the officious ‘white’ United Kingdom (UK) Heathrow International Airport official telling me the rules of ‘his’ country, which I have to tell him I was also born in, and am consequently

¹⁶ This was followed shortly after by the second Chinese exhibit at the circus of P.T. Barnum, bringing 20 000 spectators in only six days (Prasso 2005; quoted in Wang 2017).

¹⁷ See Gibson (2015) for image.

a national of, as much as him. In my mind, these images become resources, repeated time and time again throughout history, and becoming part of a cultural subconscious, drawing from the ever-pervasive media stereotypes and simulated tourist 'encounters' with manufactured ethnic stereotypes at tourist venues. At the same time, they reinforce a geographical stereotype – amplifying the link between 'the geography of the world and the geography of the imagination' (Wang 2017:195). The fact that I was also identified in London as Uzbekistani by an Uzbekistani villager perhaps also shows the role that desire plays, possibly in the expression of an immigrant in London to connect with an image of home.

The bigger question might lie with who is projecting onto who, and to what purpose, and the role that memory, history and imagery plays within these. On a more ominous note, I was refused to be served at a market stall by a man who had been in a Japanese prisoner of war camp because he decided I looked Japanese. This also foreshadows the idea of being identified as a 'type', regardless of one's own cultural, social or historical associations, at its worst – in the form of xenophobia, racial prejudice and ethnic genocides that permeate the earth.



Wish You Were Here – Not Peruvian/ Native American

The film also suggests how media, tourist and ethnographic images from the past and present constantly situate the body in – often seemingly timeless – spaces of ‘otherness’ – in its exoticisation, rejection, acceptance and objectification – and to what extent the body negotiates its existence and self-identity amongst the impositions or assumptions of others.

The intersectionality¹⁸ of these negotiations played out in irony, were also apparent when I offered myself as a ‘toy’ to be dressed up by visitors at Greatmore Studios Art gallery in Cape Town at the ‘Till it Breaks’ exhibitions in 2012, where visitors dressed me in my own clothes and could create their own ‘photograph’ alongside the film playing on a screen to the side, with an anonymous hand-drawn landscape background and pot plant.

Here they constructed ‘the gaze’ and imagination took riot. Some slipped into enacting childhood games; hunting polar bears as an ‘Eskimo’ (their words); or pretending they were on holiday; or making me ‘pretty’ as an imagined geisha. Others claimed affinity; a woman from Delhi, India, declared I looked like a North Indian woman and dressed me likewise, and a Palestinian living in Cape Town decided I looked ‘typically Cape Malay’¹⁹, created a headscarf for me and posed beside me.

In these ‘makings’ of ethnicity, I was attempting to understand the fallacy of the ‘constructedness’ of a ‘racialised’ or ‘ethnicised’ identity stereotype, as well as the stories such projections cannot tell, of the individual subjected to them. At times, the projections of others resonated with the perspective of the paradigm of a historical ‘cultural gaze’ that constructed me, and by playfully constructing myself as the ‘art object’, the irony resonates with Maart’s words,

We are not artists, we are simply what art or artists sometimes represent ... if Black people or people of colour come into focus or appear on the canvas, it is as the Coloured subject of the White gaze – the slave, emancipated slave, exotic, trivialised, creature, or object as the backdrop representing time and place - in other words, servitude and subordination (2004: 3).

¹⁸ See Crenshaw (1991).

¹⁹ I have often been told this in Cape Town.

The film has since 'travelled' to Cambridge in the UK (Gibson 2015) and to a conference in Paris at the request of an attending academic. It is interesting that, in Europe, the question was raised by attendees that I might, possibly, be re-ethnicising myself and playing into racial stereotypes by depicting myself in such ways. Interesting, also, persons of colour in Cape Town who have seen the film have generally laughed in collusion at the recognition of the many subjectivities they themselves feel objectified by. My personal response is why, if I choose to wear my own poncho, or clothes, or stand in a particular way, or lean against a wall as if attending a salsa club, should I be re-ethnicising anyone, or become an ethnic 'type' in other's eyes, as I am merely representing myself?

Perhaps we need to dig deeper; to unpack and uncover the plethora of representations to which we are all subject, and to ask how we might rethink, reconceptualise, and re-represent them, to get to a basic humanity of where we wish to go, and be, to look for the 'I' within the 'Eye' that constructs all of us, if we really believe in a world that collectively claims to work together against genocides, poverty, and racial prejudice.



***'Till it Breaks'* Exhibition 2013, Greatmore Studios – 'Not in Japan'**

Conclusion, and Non-Conclusiveness: The ‘Eye’ within the ‘I’

These three films, in association with this article, have explored, through primarily visual means, the material aspects – the embodied negotiation – in the construction of identity and self. It is interesting to note that, in all three films, the body itself – the skeleton, the reconstructed girl and body toys; and the body as ‘ethnographic art object’ – is silenced, despite the soundtrack and written narratives, none have an audible voice, thus emphasising their embodied-ness and the extent to which these are unarticulated. How then, do these social ‘bodies’ of self – often difficult to articulate or contest, silenced by society, or even unrealised by persons who engage with them, exist and intersect within the corpus of the social geographies and city spaces on lives within? Theorists such as Taylor (2006; 2007) extend the material socialisation of the body to suggest that ‘critical attention to repertoires of lived behaviour might illuminate very different versions of past events, enable alternative mappings, and generate other models of scholarly interaction’ (2007: 1418) in her argument that studies of ritual and social performances provide insights into histories that have been ‘written out’ of more formal sources.

However, the negotiations of the body are complex and play out differently in different spaces – as memory, identity, gender, history, community and self; as well as through dis-articulation and dissociations – that of the erasure of history and what is memorialised in *Rootless*; the gendered desires reflected in boy and girl toys played out in challenging and sometimes destructively extreme scenarios in *War Play*; and also in *Wish You Were Here*, in relation to the assumptions, desires, and impositions of others, who play out our identities for us. These to me are the heterotopias of self – the spaces of ‘otherness’, ‘dissociation’ and ‘difference’ within one’s own experiential, remembering and enacting body, that one might occupy, yet feel a discomfort in belonging within, or which only become apparent in brief moments of reversal or possibly insight, aptly, and beautifully, summed up in the following excerpt from Foucault, in his description of a mirror, as both a utopia and a heterotopia,

... I see myself where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror. But it

is also a heterotopia, in so far as the mirror does not exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy. From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there. Starting from this gaze that is, as it were, directed toward me, from the ground of this virtual space that is on the other side of the glass, I come back toward myself; I begin again to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am. The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there (Foucault 1986:24).

Despite the fact that the films do incorporate aspects of utopian desire – the tourist on holiday; the desirability of ‘gendered’ ideal bodies; the exotic, often vicarious ‘elsewheres’ engaged with in our own connections with others – I focus on the films as primarily depicting heterotopias of self – in that the films are more likely to be viewed as focusing on moments of deviance or crisis – the dead, unacknowledged histories; dispossession; gender violence; the idealisation of the hyper-masculinisation and brutality of war; and imposed notions of race and locality. How, then, does one reconnect and integrate the body, within its web of negotiated, sometimes challenged, interrelationships in city spaces, to find points of cohesion and the acceptance of multiplicities within the constructed nature of self, rather than the disjuncture of different heterotopias within the in-between spaces of personhood.

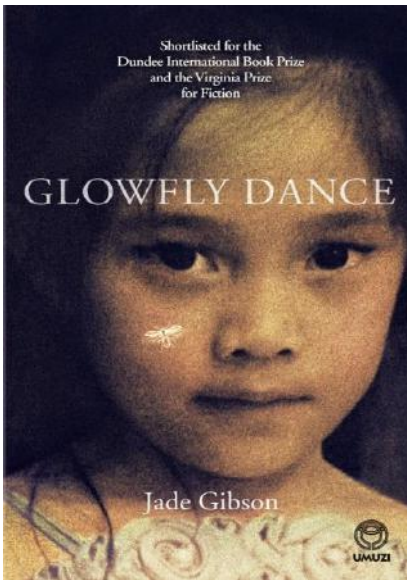
Calls for decolonisation extend beyond an academic syllabus, a written text, a rethinking of history; they extend to a reshaping of experience, of lived memory and embodied interaction, the search for the ‘I’ within the ‘Eye’. All three films indicate, to some extent, traumas on and of the body – even if not immediately apparent – the infliction of power relations onto selves as the ethnic or gendered ‘other’; the dissociation of ownership over memory and history; Rhodes Memorial ‘psychogeographically’ jostling with the suggested image of exhumed slave skeletons in central Cape Town – these are all felt traumas that may exist consciously or unconsciously within those who sense their dislocation and dissociation from society. Furthermore, how does one engage theoretically with such ‘heterotopias of self’, in their disconnect

between the ‘here’ and ‘there’, ‘past’ and ‘present’, and ‘reconnect’ individuals, within the many negotiations, conscious and unconscious, that they encounter as they ‘walk’ their phantasmagoric, heterotopic, sometimes traumatic and other times illusionary ‘elsewheres’, not just through the street and walkways but also museums; hospitals, play areas, shopping malls and other material landscapes of cities that ‘are not simply material or lived spaces – they are also spaces of the imagination and spaces of representation’ (Bridge & Watson 2004: 7). When ‘*Rootless*’ was used for the District Six Slave Commemoration walk in 2012, projected onto the walls of the Slave Lodge, did it help ‘close’ those gaps or dissociations? Does ‘*War Play*’ enable a reconnect between those images of femininity and masculinity inscribed from early childhood; an embodied familiarity with their presence juxtaposed against the unfamiliarity of their associated social violence?; does ‘*Wish You Were Here*’ enable a reconnect with the disciplines of a connected humanity with the ‘divide and prosper’ tool not of apartheid only, but the act of the modernist project of colonisation in its working of history? Recently, I have engaged with the creative text – a literary novel, *Glowfly Dance* (Gibson 2015), encompassing a memoir/autobiography, documenting childhood experiences of domestic violence, from personal experience. The book has been accredited by the South African Department of Education as useful for education on domestic violence, and has been used in diverse university courses, from Medical Humanities to Anthropology, to Psychology, Literary and Gender Studies. The story encompasses themes of identity, childhood, girlhood and emerging womanhood, migration, domestic violence, abuse, abduction, and the devastating impact of intimate partner femicide on children.

It was written to make people feel, in the voice of the child, and its impact is designed to occur through the embodied and emotional impact of reading the story, yet other activities – public and educational talks, workshops and media events – are what brings it to public awareness. Interestingly, as a speaker, I find myself ‘performed’ on various ‘trauma’ rather than ‘thriller’ panels, in auto-ethnographic documentation (University College of London, University of Cape Town) seminars, even on a men’s *indaba* (discussion) for ex-offenders.²⁰ The book has taken me on a series of journeys and encounters that themselves would require extended contextualisation and discussion in an exploration of the complex platforms for, and giving voice to,

²⁰ *Glowfly Dance* also appeals to men who were children of domestic violence

'representations', and 'performances' of domestic violence in society by those who tell their story. Interestingly, in its production, the publisher's representative initially produced a book cover with a Caucasian girl on the front. 'The cover looks great', I said. 'But the girl's eyes have to be slanted. Racism is part of the book'. 'The readers won't mind', said the representative. 'The book constantly refers to slanted eyes', I said. 'Can't we find an image of an Asian girl?' 'That will be too difficult', said the publisher. 'You wouldn't accept it if it was the other way around', I said. After some insistence, the representative 'saw the light' and agreed to Photoshop a photograph of my own eyes into the image of the girl on the cover and, finally, I had my own eyes within the 'I'.



The aim of this article is to establish a sense of the complexity of the self's embodied negotiation of spaces and society, and the multiple frames and environments in which the embodied self, often on an unconscious or articulated level, is produced – and furthermore, dissociations in its sense of production or expression as an identity, and as a consequence, raise questions for further engagement and raise a challenge. How does one move from heterotopias of excluding 'others' (even aspects of our own selves) to inclusive multitopias of self, in past and present?

'Glowfly Dance' front cover

How does one create a mobile, flowing, effective urban space that incorporates multiple histories and engagements, gives space, voice and visibility to the economically and/or socially dispossessed, deal with xenophobia and displacements through and in relation to the material spaces and images that

people engage with and are subject to? What makes a formerly inaccessible space become accessible? How does one create changes within the status quo when embodied aspects of self may be buried or dissociated to some or full extent from consciousness? And where does the emotional and emotive lie within this; is there a theoretical approach for what is felt rather than spoken, to unpack what might be taken as 'understood' within a perceived racial, gendered and social stasis that may have set in, within a space and time of institutional and structural change?

Is there a way to research and rework these relationships; either by exposing them through juxtaposition, making visible the invisible seams of South African society, one that previously operated through the categorisation, spatial and psychological exclusion of bodies? What is the habitus (Bourdieu 1977) of such a society and how does one gain theoretical insight?

Instead of building along the same gridlines, how might one might one rework referents of inclusion rather than exclusion, in relation to the materiality and spaces that bodies inhabit from childhood onwards; and in recognition of the multiple ways in which selves engage with the world through practice, in order to integrate alternative modes of living and connection for a future city, through spaces understood as embodied, physical and imaginal? Ideally, I would present this article with the films, as they work in conjunction, to work in an interdisciplinary mode across text, emotion, vision and as an embodied evisceration of the objectified objectivity of a racialised and gendered past. Perhaps it is only when one connects disciplines to find alternative modes of interdisciplinary engagement that one might find alternative research approaches and theoretical languages for engaging with some of the above questions.

The role of interdisciplinary centres at universities is growing worldwide. Such centres require a means of working *across* disciplines, to establish a new or common language of engagement, rather than the disengagement and specialisation of disciplines as discrete parallels behind interdisciplinary facades. Such an approach might involve moving beyond a unilateral thinking towards a polysemic inquiry that maintains academic rigour yet incorporates the material and physical, as a poesis of engagement concerned with the evocation and construction of materiality, place and space. Otherwise, despite a rhetoric of inclusion and multiplicity, one might exclude rather than include; re-traumatise rather than amend, and continue power discrepancies rather than equalise, repeating past frameworks of restraint.

This then is an article, and yet not a article, incorporating films and stories in its presentation, to engage thinking on multiple levels and open up interdisci-plinary engagement, utilising tools such as creative process, history, auto-ethnography, gender and place. It invokes a need for further research into embodied modes of inclusion and exclusion, trauma, and the construction and negotiation of identities, in relation to the flows and constraints of urban life.

The presentation works spatially, bodily, and materially, in relation to disconnects or 'heterotopias' of self, to present a research approach that I hope is felt and experienced as much as merely written, and to provide insight into how one might, returning to Foucault (1986) 'discover my absence from the place where I am' and, in turn, 'begin again to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am' (24), to unpack the 'Eye' within the collective 'I' that subsumes selves within representational practices and absences that fail to see who and what is really there.

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‘Coloured’ Consciousness: Reflecting on How Decoloniality Facilitates Belonging

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Abstract

This article undertakes an existential journey by exploring the author’s experience of being classified as a ‘Coloured’ woman in South Africa, as per its legislation pertaining to classification, and the reflections that have emerged from it. The author’s lived experience during post-apartheid South Africa has demonstrated that there *are* damaging internalised knowledges pertaining to her identity as a ‘Coloured’ woman, some of which require active decolonising. These reflections were particularly important after attending the 2020 Decolonial Summer School at the University of South Africa in Pretoria, South Africa. It was through the identification and recognition of her layered oppression and her complicity in this oppression that she found the courage to dismantle practices of subordination that were not serving her purpose of being in the world. Through the use of a dialogue format, she reflects on the inhumanity she encountered with her legal classification and how it has shaped experiences she has had in different contexts in South Africa. She also contrasts these experiences with the experiences she has had with the UNISA conference (noted above) members that transitioned their thinking and understanding of her. The replication of coloniality and apartheid through the ‘Coloured’ classification demands that we become conscious of practices that dehumanise us, lest we become second-hand agents of colonisation ourselves. Through engaging with decoloniality, she terms ‘Coloured’ consciousness as a form of critical awareness of her legal classification as ‘Coloured’ and how this consciousness allows her and others classified as such, to take back their agency and shift their agency in more constructive ways. More importantly, this ‘Coloured’ consciousness speaks to decolonising and re-humanising ‘Coloured’ women whose intricate ‘Blackness’ has been shaped by colonialism, apartheid and

violence. It is hoped that this engagement with ‘Coloured’ consciousness will offer a critical awareness of ‘Coloured’ identity in South Africa and internationally.

Keywords: ‘Coloured’, consciousness, colonising decolonial, decolonising, humanity, women

Introduction

All our present struggles with respect to race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity ... the sharply unequal distribution of the earth resources ... these are all differing facets of the central ethno-class Man vs. Human struggle (Wynter 2003: 260 - 261).

When reflecting on Sylvia Wynter’s quote above (2003: 206 - 261), her emphasis on the humanity of those deemed as inferior is evident. In her work, Sylvia Wynter demonstrates that those that have been racialised as inferior to the white man, who is considered the standard embodiment of humanity, would always be caught up in a struggle to assert their humanity. This struggle to be recognised as fully human is still evident in present day South Africa. Although colonialism and apartheid has ‘ended’ in South Africa, those that have been racialised as non-white continue to engage in struggles to reclaim their humanity. This struggle is multidimensional in nature and is interlocked in the race, class, gender, sexual orientation and ethnicity intersections of non-white persons. During the colonial period in South Africa, many enslaved people from Indonesia, Malaysia, India, Madagascar, East Africa and West Africa were forcibly brought to Cape Town by the Dutch and Portuguese colonisers for labour power (Isaacs-Martin 2018; Maart 2014b; Adhikari 2006, Ahluwalia & Zegeye 2003; Martin 1998). These enslaved people were also coerced into sexual relations with European and Portuguese settlers and this resulted in what became termed as miscegenation. Miscegenation refers to the offspring from sexual relations between different race groups. This form of sexual relations was not limited to the enslaved but also included coerced sexual relations between European and Portuguese settlers with the indigenous population of

South Africa (Khoisan, Griqua, Namas). The offspring resulting from the latter were considered racially mixed and thus a need started developing to limit such people from multiplying. It is also worth noting that there were sexual relations between the enslaved populations and the indigenous Khoi, San, amaXhosa, Griqua and Namas that also produced offspring with varied racial features. Since these sexual relations became a concerning trend, the visiting commissioner of the Dutch East India Company (DEIC) to Cape Town in 1685 made a ruling that white men caught engaging sexually with enslaved women would be punished to work as slaves for a period of six months to a year. During 1795, the British, having fought against the Dutch, succeeded in governing Cape Town and continued this racial segregation. In the 1900s, there were several practices of excluding black people from entering the cities, two of which took the form of the Native Reserve Location Act of 1902 and the School Board Act of 1905. In this manner, racial segregation was encouraged. This historical build up in South Africa of racial segregation led to the formation of the National Party's victory and the start of the formal apartheid government in 1948. Apartheid was premised on separating the races and furthering White supremacy (Maart 2014a; Ahluwalia & Zegeye 2003).

In South Africa, although apartheid had legalised racial segregation and created a system of legal classification for races, colonialism was carried out by keeping races separate and ensuring white settler domination. Apartheid therefore sought to extend and formalise the previous forms of racial segregation observed during colonisation. The offspring of miscegenation had multiplied and created a racially mixed group of people whose physical features were diverse and varied. Since the apartheid government was focused on social control, they devised a 'divide and rule' strategy that sought to divide all the races formally and legally. Their only difficulty was with the racially diverse offspring of miscegenation that was too complex to categorise as a race group. This led to several attempts at racialising those with racially diverse features into racial categories. The then government's final attempt took the form of homogenising the racially diverse group into a single category labelled 'Coloured' and this became the legal classification of a group of people who were descended from the previously enslaved, from Malaysia, Indonesia (the region of Java, in particular), Bengal, neighbouring countries such as Angola and Mozambique and various indigenous groups of people. Since the apartheid government legalised racial segregation, any sexual relations between different racial groups were prohibited and thus, the very existence of the legal classi-

fiction was scorned and met with disapproval. To discourage further sexual relations and to ensure minimal growth of the ‘Coloured’ population, the racially diverse physical features exhibited by those belonging to this group were regarded as negative and inferior (Isaacs-Martin 2018; Maart 2014b; Adhikari 2006; Ahluwalia & Zegeye 2003; Martin 1998). Through this, the apartheid government effectively separated the black and ‘Coloured’ groups from forging solidarity as the ‘Coloured’ population was plagued with psychological indoctrination that they were inferior, pessimistic and essentially less than human. This caused the ‘Coloured’ population great turmoil which is still evident in post-apartheid South Africa today.

Methodology

This article offers a reflection of my existential questions and concerns pertaining to my ‘Coloured’ identity, which become evident during and after attending the 2020 Decolonial Summer School in Pretoria, South Africa, organised by a team from the University of South Africa (UNISA). The presenter team was composed of, among other, professors Gordon, Maart and Ramose, whose work I engage with in this article (Gordon 2020a, b; Maart 2020a, b; Ramose 2020). The UNISA Summer School allowed me to reflect on experiences I have had because of my legal classification as a ‘coloured’ woman in South Africa.

The methodology used in this article takes the format of a verbal and written dialogue. This allowed me to reflect on specific questions posed to me by my mentor, Rozena Maart. These questions were designed to elicit my thoughts and knowledge on ‘Coloured’ identity in post-apartheid South Africa. In this dialogue, I specifically draw attention to how I as a ‘Coloured’ woman have become subject to acts of inhumanity through the persistent enactment of the legal classification of ‘Coloured’ upon my being by my colonisers.

This article is also focused on examining the emergence of a ‘Coloured consciousness’ within me. I define ‘Coloured consciousness’ as an awareness of being legally classified as ‘Coloured’, the impact of that awareness and the racial tropes that were created to inflict a false sense of humanity assigned to those legally classified as such, in other words, racial tropes that perpetuate a false consciousness of a people yet dependent on the labour of those very people to build a city for the settler colonials and take care of their offspring. For the purpose of this article, the term, ‘coloured’ has been written in inverted

commas to draw attention to it as a legal classification assigned to persons identified as neither white nor black. I endeavour to create a consciousness of the racist classification of 'Coloured' and how insidious the construction and continuation of 'Coloured' reproduces sub-humanity. The awareness of this reproduction of inhumanity should create what I have termed, 'Coloured' consciousness. This consciousness advances the critical use of 'Coloured' in scholarly avenues where we have witnessed the careless use of racial classifications in publications (such as we have in Niewoudt *et al.* 2019) in South Africa.

I attribute 'Coloured' consciousness to the learning and teaching experienced at the 2020 Decolonial Summer School in which I observed how decoloniality facilitated a sense of belonging. The discussions on decoloniality created a consciousness and an understanding that transcended the restrictions of racial classifications towards a black unity, thereby embracing our innate humanity (Gordon 2020a; 2020b; Maart 2020a, 2020b; Ramose 2020; 2019). It is my hope that my reflections on my legal classification of 'Coloured' opens further debates on race, the continued process of racialisation and the plight toward humanity in post-apartheid South Africa. I now turn to the dialogue segment of this article.

Being 'Coloured' can be Problematic

MAART: Danille, can you share with us what your identity means to you?

ARENDSE: I believe that as one grows into oneself your identity becomes more important to one. To me, identity means how I define myself. When reflecting on who I am during the Decolonial Summer School, an important event occurred to me. Regardless of who I thought I was, what I was being perceived as has had a greater impact on me compared to who I defined myself to be. This was imperative to me, as people tend to respond to one based on what they see. This has been true for me in South Africa as I have been instantly recognised as 'Coloured' in most contexts; I utilise the phrase recognised not because I was known to the seer but because my physical features were known. However, there have been instances when I have not been recognised as 'Coloured' and these instances have provided me with food for thought. Perhaps, my appearance was not after all, just 'Coloured', I thought on occasion. This led me to think of why being or not being 'Coloured' mattered

to me. Having said this, I believe that my identity has not been static but has evolved as I have grown in different areas of my life and in terms of the knowledge I have been exposed to regarding myself and the history of South Africa. In essence, I don't believe I can separate my identity from South Africa – the emergence of my identity – as its history has impacted on how I understand myself. The history of South Africa has influenced how I understand my physical appearance and the way I speak. There are so many aspects of my identity that I believe are tied to my South African heritage.

MAART: What does it mean to be 'Coloured'?

ARENDSE: I only truly started thinking about being 'Coloured' when I attended a historically black university. It was the first time I was taught by black and 'Coloured' educators. It was also the first time, besides the neighbourhood where I lived that I was surrounded by black and 'Coloured' people as the majority. My interaction with specifically 'Coloured' individuals during my university allowed me to rethink my racialised identity. In previous spaces of learning, I was educated by white people and they had not taught or allowed me to question my identity as a 'Coloured' woman. In my university space, I felt more accepted and this allowed me to feel connected. There was a sense of familiarity with the 'Coloured' people in this space that I had not known but felt instantly [connected to]. So to address your question, prior to university, I had not really thought about my identity as 'Coloured'. I accepted it as a fact of life. I was 'Coloured' and that was it, nothing more.

MAART: When did you become conscious of what being 'Coloured' means to you?

ARENDSE: It was only at university that I truly became conscious of what being 'Coloured' meant to me. Through the development of my years of consciousness over the years, the meaning I attach to 'Coloured' has changed. For me, in this present day, 'Coloured' does not signify a race group, instead it signifies an ethnic variety and a plurality. 'Coloured' speaks to a culture of people that are so varied but similarly share a history of colonisation and oppression through the suppression of their varied ancestry. I love that when I speak of 'Coloured' now, I mean plural heritage.

MAART: Can you talk a little about when you first understood what the term 'Coloured' meant?

ARENDSE: When I was young, I understood 'Coloured' as my race group and the way in which I identified myself on all documents both at school and anywhere where that information was requested; it was usually asked for demographic reasons. Then there was also my consciousness of 'Coloured' during my university years when occasionally reading material on 'Coloured' identity. I started to form a clearer idea of what the term 'Coloured' actually meant. As such, if I had not endeavoured to read further on 'Coloured' history and identity, I would have only thought that it was a race group. After my readings, I now understood the term 'Coloured' to mean that I belong to diverse ancestry. The term originated during apartheid when the regime tried to classify people born from diverse ancestry where offspring was considered to be of a different race group. In this sense, I have come to understand 'Coloured' to mean racial diversity and the combination of different cultures and racialised identities.

MAART: Has it been a problematic term for you? If so, can you tell us why?

ARENDSE: When I relocated to a different region than where I was raised and took my undergraduate degree, I felt more invisible and simultaneously highly visible because of my appearance. In Pretoria I hardly saw 'Coloured' individuals. At work I was one of two 'Coloured' individuals depending on the year, as sometimes I was the only one. Over time, I became accustomed to the absence of 'Coloured' people in the region. It was however in this region, due to the lack of 'Coloured' people, that some people struggled to place me into a race group. It was also in this region that I became conscious of my appearance in a very different way. My acknowledgement of my legal classification, 'Coloured' then became a means through which people would communicate the stereotypes and false truths they had heard about 'Coloured' people. This would place me in the awkward position of having to either deny these stereotypes or accept them and laugh them off. On the first few occasions, I would laugh and acknowledge that there were such stereotypes but I did not believe in these stereotypes. Later, when the occasion arose, I felt the pressing need to resist any acknowledgment of 'Coloured' being tied to specific stereotypes. I also felt a growing frustration towards people placing and

restricting my identity according to ‘Coloured’ stereotypes. It also became part of my defence that I could and would not speak for all ‘Coloured’ people when I appeared to be the only one in the room or in the conversation. Against this backdrop, I have become conscious of my appearance and how people perceive me. I have also become aware that due to stereotypes and my appearance, some people will not gravitate towards me but instead see me as a potential opponent. I say this in light of being unable to find solidarity with fellow black women, as my appearance and the stereotypes of my legal identity at times, appear to hinder solidarity with black women. It is through these experiences that ‘Coloured’ has become problematic for me, especially since it is a legal classification used for all legal documents. The legalisation of the term ‘Coloured’ obscured the fact that it was a social construction and not an actual racial classification. This has resulted in the persistence of negative perceptions and increased the uncritical use of the term ‘Coloured’ in various contexts in South Africa. The very existence of people labelled as ‘Coloured’ are still considered to be problematic due to colonial and apartheid-informed notions of what it means to be human (Gordon 2010; Wynter 2003; Fanon 1986). This allowed me to question why being a ‘Coloured’ woman complicates the expression of my humanity. Are we not still perpetuating degrees of inhumanity in South Africa by condoning the use of ‘Coloured’ as a racial classification? More importantly, why were white men and white women able to deem our humanity as sub-human by labelling us as ‘Coloured’ (Ramose 2019; Gordon 2010; Wynter 2003; Fanon 1986)? Why did they feel they had this authority to name us (Ramose 2019)?

The Dangers associated with Coloniality in post-Apartheid South Africa

MAART: Having listened to you talk about your journey, what kind of history does the term Coloured carry for you? I want to be clear in how I utilise the term Coloured. It is a politically charged word for some: to me it signifies a racial classification that was imposed but became an ethnic and cultural identity that people from my community came to embody and give life to. I identify as Black. I also identify as Coloured. I regard my ethnic and cultural identity as Coloured and I do not place it in inverted commas as unreal, false, imagined, or non-existent. I think people have various reasons for placing the term Coloured in inverted commas, some of which are to indicate that it is a

social construction. I am not here to doubt or cast judgement on those reasons. I prefer to state what mine are, from the outset.

ARENDSE: The history associated with 'Coloured' is related to two particular laws ratified during apartheid, namely: The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949 and The Immorality Act of 1950, which prohibited interracial relations and thus those born from such sexual relations, were negatively perceived by White supremacists. Since 'coloured' men and women were born from this miscegenation, they were automatically regarded as illegal and negative traits were associated with their appearance (Isaacs-Martin 2018; Shefer *et al.* 2018; Josias 2015; Maart 2014a; 2014b; Erasmus 2011; Adhikari 2006; Ahluwalia & Zegeye 2003; Martin 1998). The apartheid government created the 'Coloured' category to maintain social control and further divisive politics among black men and women of different skin pigmentation (Isaacs-Martin 2018; Erasmus 2011; Adhikari 2006; Ahluwalia & Zegeye 2003; Martin 1998). As a result, the racial classification of 'Coloured' was legalised during apartheid through the Population Registration Act of 1950 (Isaacs-Martin 2018; Maart 2014b; Erasmus 2011; Adhikari 2006; Ahluwalia & Zegeye 2003; Martin 1998). The apartheid government ensured that those classified under the category of 'Coloured' were made to feel inferior and their morality questionable (Isaacs-Martin 2018; Maart 2014b; Adhikari 2006; Ahluwalia & Zegeye 2003). The injustice and contested morality associated with those classified as 'Coloured' during and post-apartheid continues to be interwoven in law and part of the justice system (Ramose 2019; Adhikari 2006; Ahluwalia & Zegeye 2003). These laws formally introduced and legalised during apartheid have directly impacted on the term 'coloured' and how it is presently understood in post-apartheid South Africa. Although colonisation was responsible for the initial formulation of racial segregation, apartheid had legalised it and legally classified various people as 'Coloured'. In post-apartheid South Africa, the continued use of apartheid classification emphasises the importance of understanding history, particularly in relation to the complex history of how 'Coloured' was termed during apartheid.

MAART: When you look back at the history of racial classification in South Africa, what does it evoke?

ARENDSE: When I think of the history of racial classification in South Africa,

it evokes emotions of unfairness and injustice. The racial and legal classification of 'Coloured' in South Africa has subjected those with this classification to a questionable humanity. More importantly, the apartheid government succeeded in exposing 'Coloured' people to fictitious narratives so that they would internalise these narratives and believe them. For me, this took the form of how I did not question my identity when I was young. I knew I was 'Coloured' and I knew this was my race group. This has been the long-lasting effect that the racial classification has had in South Africa. Having said this, racial classification has impacted on the conditions under which 'Coloured' people have been racialised which have determined their materiality. The racial classification can therefore be viewed as a system of oppression through which the humanity of those deemed non-white were constantly contested. These racial classifications feed into racial tropes that have become inescapable. The premise of colonisation and apartheid was to ensure the separation of races, and consequently, this racial divide was justified and promoted the dehumanising of those viewed as objects (non-white), because only the 'settler' (white) or the 'coloniser' could be subjects and fully human (Boswell *et al.* 2019; Snaza & Tarc 2019; Maart 2020a; 2020b; 2014a; Josias 2015; Mendez 2015; Lugones 2010; Adhikari 2006; Ahluwalia & Zegeye 2003; Wynter 2003). For this reason, the history of violence is an inescapable reality for 'Coloured' men and women in South Africa. Although colonisation and apartheid have ended and we are in a democratic post-apartheid period in South Africa, 'Coloured' men and women still face violence, but in the form of epistemology and ontology (Ramosé 2019, Boswell *et al.* 2019; Snaza & Tarc 2019; Shefer *et al.* 2018; Mendez 2015; Maart 2014a, b; Gordon 2010; Lugones 2010; Adhikari 2006; Ahluwalia & Zegeye 2003; Wynter, 2003). This epistemic violence is particularly rife in the continued use of racial classifications in South Africa that still unconsciously feed into the hierarchical position of races and that 'Whiteness' is still superior and 'Blackness' inferior.

MAART: You and I discussed the research undertaken by a group of scholars from the University of Stellenbosch. What are some of your critiques of that process?

ARENDSE: The research published by the University of Stellenbosch scholars caused quite a stir in both academic and media circles. To me, the research was

framed in a manner that endorsed historically pessimistic connotations associated with 'Coloured' women. The title, 'Age- and education-related effects on cognitive functioning in Coloured South African women' (Nieuwoudt *et al.* 2019), alludes to the classification of 'Coloured' as an actual racial category and ignores the historical and contextual factors associated with the social construction of 'Coloured' (Boswell *et al.* 2019; Dalmage 2018; Shefer *et al.* 2018). To be honest, when reading the title, I was already alarmed. This was further supported by the abstract that made conclusions based on a small sample of 60 women. There were other aspects such as the following quote, 'Young to middle-aged Coloured women present with low cognitive function and which is significantly influenced by education' (Nieuwoudt *et al.* 2019: 1). This quote suggests, as does the title, that 'Coloured' women, on the whole, as race group are problematic. It furthermore suggests that they are cognitively delayed and that their education has impaired their cognitive functioning. In just this short quote, the race, gender, legal classification, cognitive functioning and education of 'Coloured' women are interlocked in their oppression. The research also echoes previous narratives associated with 'Coloured' women as inferior to the white norm. This research did not account for the historical effects of colonisation and apartheid on 'coloured' women which deliberately disadvantaged them in terms of how they were racialised, their education, physical location (forced removals), relationships and freedom of movement. For me, this empirical study emphasised the need to critically engage with the social construction of 'coloured' women. It demonstrated that in 2019, there were still prevailing racist and sexist notions of 'Coloured' women in South Africa and this knowledge was being presented as scientific evidence. This motivated me to engage with my legal racial classification as a 'Coloured' woman. The research by Nieuwoudt *et al.* (2019) highlighted how 'Coloured' women had been essentialised through racist ideology and this to me, was highly problematic, considering the inherent heterogeneity from my varied ancestry (Boswell *et al.* 2019; Shefer *et al.* 2018; Maart 2014b; Adhikari 2006). I was pleased that the article was eventually retracted after a petition was sent to the publishers of the journal. This research, however, presented me with an opportunity to dismantle harmful knowledge practices that persistently perpetuate racism and sexism onto 'Coloured' women in post-apartheid South Africa. I did not want to justify my existence or humanity to the oppressor; instead I wanted to challenge prevailing knowledge on 'Coloured' women such as myself.

MAART: You noted how the Decolonial Summer School of 2020 got you thinking about your Coloured identity. Can you share some of those thoughts?

ARENDSE: The Decolonial Summer School raised a consciousness within me and allowed me to ask myself a few questions related to my identity as a ‘coloured’ woman [most of which I have tried to cover in this article]. It allowed me to get a greater understanding of what decoloniality means and its application in my life. I understood decoloniality to mean that there are colonial remnants still evident in the modern world. Moreover, our knowledge and way of being has and continues to be influenced by coloniality. For this reason, there needs to be an intentional interrogation of colonially informed knowledge and its impact on identities today (Gordon 2020a; 2020b; Maart 2020a; 2020b; Ramose 2020; Mendez 2015; Lugones 2010; Wynter 2003). In my case, I solely focus on how coloniality continues to permeate the identity of ‘Coloured’ women such as myself and why decolonization of ‘Coloured’ as a legal classification is imperative. The experiences I had during the Decolonial Summer School were instances that allowed me to revisit my legal identity as a ‘Coloured’ woman. In the first instance, there was a colleague of mine (black woman) that attended the school with me. We had talked at work previously but never to the extent that we could go beyond the surface. It was through the talks and the discussion of issues raised during the Decolonial Summer School that we started to form an actual connection with one another. She indicated to me, ‘I didn’t really know who you were but during this summer school, I am realising that we have a lot in common’. It was in this instance that I realised that we were separated by appearance but not in social justice. It also occurred to me that she was able to look past my identity as a ‘Coloured’ woman and see me as a black woman.

In the second instance, there were men and women from Brazil in attendance at the Decolonial Summer School. It was strange that although I had nothing in common with them, I had noticed their appearance and felt that there was something similar among us. During one of the discussions, the one Brazilian woman noted, ‘*I see myself as a Black woman*’. This was striking to me because I realised how easily she had said it. It then occurred to me that perhaps I had internalised that I could not claim being black because of my appearance and how people had positioned me outside of the construction of black. In my interaction with the Brazilian people, they had also noticed my appearance and wanted to know where I was from. After informing them that

I am South Africa and legally classified as ‘Coloured’, they understood, because they had heard about this racial classification. In later interaction, the Brazilian man however uttered something to me in Portuguese. I indicated that I did not understand, and he responded, *‘I am so sorry. When I see you, I keep thinking that you are Portuguese and then I speak to you in Portuguese. It is amazing how much you look like us’*. I agreed as I had also noticed the similarities in our appearance, and I understood that I meant Portuguese as one of the main spoken languages of black people from Brazil. Although these incidences are different, the interaction I had with fellow participants were important and essential for forging a decolonial future. And whilst the UNISA Decolonial Summer School of 2020 was over it was definitely not forgotten.

MAART: You once noted that being Coloured is inescapable. Can you elaborate on that statement? Is there a difference between a legalised identity, a socialised identity, and a politicised identity, which as per the latter, you take up yourself, wilfully, with the awareness that you've chosen it for yourself?

ARENDSE: I feel that in many experiences that I have had, being ‘Coloured’ has been inescapable. In most spaces in South Africa, I have been identified as ‘Coloured’ by others as well as self-identifying as ‘Coloured’ when people were confused by my physical appearance. This meant that wherever I went in South Africa, my legal classification as a ‘Coloured’ woman was a description I could not escape. In terms of the differences between my legal, socialised and politicised identity, I will elaborate on each of these. Previously, I had no need to question my legal identity as ‘Coloured’ because I had internalised that I was ‘Coloured’. What this specifically meant to me is unclear, although it would be fair to deduce that it meant that this race group was legitimate. My internalisation of ‘Coloured’ also translated into the fact that I knew I could not be white or black. These racial categories were not available to me. I had learned to recognise my appearance as an integral part of being ‘Coloured’. In this way, I was socialised into my legal identity. Another aspect that contributed to my internalising of ‘coloured’ was that I had been educated by white institutions and thus they were upholding White supremacy (Mendez 2015; Erasmus 2011; Lugones 2010; Adhikari 2006; Ahluwalia & Zegeye 2003; Fanon 1986). My legal identity was thus upheld through my socialisation of continuously identifying as a ‘Coloured’ woman and others recognising and confirming my legal identity as a ‘Coloured’ woman. This is contrasted with

my education at a historically black institution where I experienced belonging and the need to rethink my racial identity. Due to my education at white institutions, I had internalised the apartheid category of ‘Coloured’ as truth and a signifier of my identity. It was only when I was confronted with alternative learning and education that I was able to identify my internalised oppression. In other words, I had not only become ‘Coloured’ in my appearance but also in thought. I had internalised my oppressive self as an oppressive way of being that was inherent in my origin. This, I believe, is the very danger of coloniality, as it seeks to encourage your acceptance of being dehumanised (Gordon 2020a; 2020b; 2010; Maart 2020a; 2020b; Ramose 2020; Boswell *et al.* 2019; Mendez 2015; Lugones 2010; Wynter 2003; Fanon 1986). Through this consciousness, I became aware of how ‘Coloured’ as an identity has always been used for political reasons. When identifying as a black woman, my identity becomes politicised because it acts in contradiction with my legal and socialised identity. It is, however, an identity I choose. Being black does not mean that I have not been influenced by my legal and socialised identity and for this reason; I regard ‘Coloured’ more as an ethnic identity.

MAART: What are some of the stereotypes that you were confronted with in the new location outside of the Western Cape and how did you tackle them?

ARENDSE: Since moving away from Cape Town to Pretoria, there has been a transition in my emotions towards how people have racialised and gendered me as a ‘Coloured’ woman. Stereotypes such as my hair being ‘bushy’ or ‘very curly’, and my body being stereotyped as ‘you have hips and bums (sic)’ were used to racialise me and gender me as a ‘Coloured’ woman. Through these stereotypes, my hair and body features are interpreted as negative. Interestingly, these same features are also used to separate me from black women, as my hair is ‘too straight’ or ‘You don’t have a bum’ or I am ‘too light’. My skin colour, hair and body shape therefore become the means by which I am both separate from blackness but still exhibit enough blackness to not be mistaken for white. There is thus an ambiguity forced upon me by others who do not know how to make sense of my physical appearance (Adhikari 2006; Ahluwalia & Zegeye 2003). I experienced some frustration towards the persistence of stereotypes towards me and this created a shift in me wanting to actively dismantle those perceptions and stereotypes. I felt that there was an internalised stigma that men and women were projecting on me because of my

racial classification. I become visible in spaces where there are not enough women with ambiguity and thus, I complicate the accepted racial binary of white and black. My experiences with confronting stereotypes have allowed me to identify with feelings of inferiority, oppression, shame, doubt and a lack of belonging (Dalmage 2018; Isaacs-Martin 2018; Shefer *et al.* 2018; Adhikari 2006; Ahluwalia & Zegeye 2003). Consequently, these negative stereotypes had also facilitated experiences of 'Other-ing'. Through this, I constantly fluctuated between belonging and un-belonging in a context I called home (Gordon 2010). Trying to address the stereotypes meant that I needed to address knowledge of 'coloured' that was projected onto me. There was no point in upsetting myself when I realised that those who projected did not know any better; they did not fully understand how the term 'Coloured' came about nor did they comprehend the complex and varied ancestry of 'Coloured' people. For this reason, when I was irritated or frustrated by stereotypes placed on me, I would respond, saying: 'You do know that Coloured is not an actual race group, right?' It would then be up to the person to engage me further if they were interested in understanding my history and ancestry. I feel that this has been a more productive way of responding to stereotypes instead of merely opposing the use of stereotypes.

MAART: Has there been a marked difference in the way in which you experience your identity after 1994? Have you spoken to your parents and/or family members about this and do they feel that there has been a shift in the way that they see themselves or what they believe others see them?

ARENDSE: After becoming conscious of my identity as a 'Coloured' woman, I engaged both my parents and my grandfather on their experiences during apartheid and how they were treated during this period. I remember my grandfather saying that he loved swimming, but many beaches close to his home were not open to non-whites. He could alternatively swim in the very early hours of the morning as 'Coloured' people were only permitted to swim at certain beaches and during certain times. This was quite significant for me, as I love swimming, and having been fortunate enough to swim at any time or at any beach in post-apartheid South Africa. When speaking to my mother, I remember her recalling how she was paid the least [in her job] because she was both 'Coloured' and a woman. When thinking of my own employment, I have been fortunate because black and 'Coloured' women fought this oppression so

that women such as me could have a better future. In speaking with my father, he recalled how they were all treated differently because of their racial classification. It was also because of these classifications that they were limited in where they could work and in how much they could earn. Thus, as a young man, he needed to leave school and start working for his family. These remnants of poverty I can still see today, as there was no money for school and the possibility of further education was not an option my father felt was available to me. This I have come to understand by understanding the historical, political and social consequences of apartheid. After completing my Masters' degree, I saw a change in how my family members see themselves. I think they had perhaps held onto notions of apartheid that some spaces were not available to us, as 'Coloured' people. My postgraduate education symbolised that in a post-apartheid society we were able to do things not previously permitted during apartheid. Although there are more opportunities available to me as a 'Coloured' woman in post-apartheid, and I am able to re-imagine my identity, I am aware that being 'Coloured' remains contentious. Thus, how others see me continues to be problematic and this is why we still battle with stereotypes that are mistaken for truths in the post-apartheid era. Post-1994, there are definite differences in the way I experience my identity compared to my parents and grandfather, but there are also similarities in how we are perceived and understood. Based on this similarity, I feel that it is necessary for me to engage with the 'Coloured' identity in our current post-apartheid society.

Decoloniality Dismantles Stereotypes

MAART: What has decolonisation meant to you?

ARENDSE: Decolonisation has become non-negotiable for me as a 'Coloured' woman because it assists me in emancipating myself from the dehumanising practise of my legal classification. Decolonisation will further promote black solidarity instead of furthering the separation of the races. I believe that a prerequisite to decolonisation is a consciousness of the fictitious nature of the racial classification of 'coloured' and how it has only been employed for social control (Isaacs-Martin 2018; Erasmus 2011; Adhikari 2006; Ahluwalia & Zegeye 2003). I draw on Maart's definition of decolonisation (2020b) in which she indicated that to decolonise, means '... to detach yourself

as the colonised subject from the coloniser'. It also involves removing yourself and your behaviour from being regulated by the coloniser. As such, by decolonising myself as a perpetual victim of 'Coloured' identity, I was removing the negative emotions (inferiority, oppression, shame, doubt and a lack of belonging) associated with accepting this regulation over me. In my refusal of this legal classification as a signifier of my racial identity, I was not only decolonising myself, but actively transforming who I wanted to be. I envision my process of decolonisation to take the form of 'Coloured' consciousness. I define 'Coloured' consciousness as an awareness of being legally classified as 'Coloured' and being conscious of the artificial tropes of inhumanity assigned to this legal identity. This 'Coloured' consciousness as I have termed it, calls for the critical use of 'Coloured' and the rejection of this legal classification as bearing no truth but promoting stereotypes. More importantly, 'Coloured' consciousness speaks to the rejection of 'Coloured' women as homogenous and having questionable humanity. Since 'Coloured' is automatically tied to colonial and apartheid evils, the need to decolonise ultimately speaks to the eradication of the legal classification and allowing men and women suppressed under this classification to be liberated. This is why decolonisation is imperative for me and my identity. Based on this, 'Coloured' consciousness is an essential part of the decolonization process for me and serves to liberate 'Coloured' women such as myself, from racialisation and inhumanity.

MAART: What is the way forward for you as a psychologist in the country and as someone who is existentially grappling with the aftermath of apartheid classification on your personal being?

ARENDSE: In reflection on my identity, the construction and use of 'Coloured' as a legal classification has not only hidden the moral and injustice on which colonialism and apartheid was built but created justification for dehumanising those under this classification. The apartheid government created a system of dehumanisation and legalised who was considered human. Those deemed as less than human needed to be policed and controlled. Within this, even my gender as a 'Coloured' woman was racialized and policed. Although apartheid ended, the racialised and gendered attributes from apartheid still inform how men and women respond to me as a 'Coloured' woman. The reproduction of apartheid notions of me as a 'Coloured' woman is how oppressive systems continue to exist and are perpetuated in society. The

entire premise of creating the ‘Coloured’ classification was therefore to ensure that those classified as such would know that they are not fully human. They may have acquired some features similar to those deemed as humans (white men and women) but this did not translate to humanness (Snaza & Tarc 2019; Mendez 2015; Lugones 2010; Wynter 2003). As Ramose (2019) points out, the justifications and apparent truths informing our history is burdened with morality. The justifications for apartheid and creating the ‘Coloured’ classification should therefore also be viewed as the concealing and suppression of truth. In essence, the continuous legalisation of ‘Coloured’ disregards our equality as humans and communicates the refusal of seeing those labelled as such as human beings (Ramose 2019; Wynter 2003). This does not mean that new meanings and values cannot be attached to ‘coloured’ but only in as far as an ethnic identity. In truth there is no race such as ‘Coloured’ and there never was prior to the interpretation, constructions and labelling of colonisers and apartheid-enforcers. The way forward for me as a psychologist in South Africa is to think about the importance of ‘Coloured’ consciousness. My consciousness through decoloniality requires me to question the knowledge that had been presented to me as truth and that had never truly served me. It only served to silence me and make me complicit in my own oppression (Gordon 2020a; 2020b; Maart 2020a; 2020b; Ramose 2020 Wynter 2003). I believe that it is important to grapple with your identity and how you wish to be identified. ‘Coloured’ women are then free to decide their identity and not be subjected to predetermined stereotypes incorporated under a fictitious legal classification. This would be the start of re-humanising, which would involve learning to be human after suffering under dehumanising practices such as the ‘coloured’ classification (Ramose 2019; Wynter 2003). As a result, I see myself as entering a journey of decolonial thinking and as constantly evolving in how I think about myself and my identity. I don’t believe my way of seeing ‘coloured’ should be seen as universal, but it should offer a perspective on the aftermath of the apartheid classifications. In my personal capacity, I want to continue to engage in dissecting ‘coloured’ identity and the different nuances prevalent in South Africa.

MAART: Has the Decolonial Summer School assisted this process in any way?

ARENDSE: The confidence with which Professors Gordon, Ramose and

Maart communicated their knowledge of decoloniality spoke to their wisdom and innate nature of teaching. The concepts were not prescribed but rather offered for interpretation. There was no uniformity in how one should decolonise or to what decoloniality should be because our context is the determining factor when deciding to engage in decoloniality. This was perhaps the most profound aspect for me, as I had become accustomed to prescriptions of how theory should be used and that deviating from this, renders it useless. They advocated the notion that I was a producer of knowledge instead of a perpetual student (Gordon 2020a; 2020b; Maart 2020a; 2020b; 2014a; Ramose 2020; Ramose 2019). In my experiences during the Decolonial Summer School, there are obvious parallels with previous experiences I have had because of my 'Coloured' appearance. The difference between these experiences was that there was no need for me to dismantle the stereotypes or perceptions at the summer school interactions. There was something in the teaching and education of the Decolonial Summer School that had allowed the [previously mentioned] black woman to recognise me as a fellow black woman. We had been colleagues for a while and somehow, she had never regarded me as a black woman or as someone that she shared mutual struggles with before the summer school. In this instance, decoloniality had facilitated belonging. It had created black solidarity among us merely by being part of the summer school. What was it about the Decolonial summer school that allowed her to see me beyond my appearance? I had not changed in terms of my appearance, but her interpretation of my appearance had changed. This drew me to question the central messages of the summer school. The teachings were not only educational, they were facilitating change. They required us to recognise how coloniality was operating to separate us as black women and more importantly, coloniality was allowing us to accept our sub-humanity due to our racialised and gendered existence. Decoloniality advocated for a shift in thinking that transcended the grips of colonial knowledge. This forced us to question what we had come to know as truths and to inspect how we were upholding colonial notions of humanity (Gordon 2020a; 2020b; Maart 2020a; 2020b; Ramose 2020; Snaza & Tarc 2019; Wynter 2003). Furthermore, critical consciousness was raised and shared during the summer school. The Decolonial Summer School also forced us to inspect how White supremacy had created racial classifications as part of the divide and rule strategy and through our acceptance of these classifications, we were complicit in our own oppression (Gordon 2020a; 2020b; Maart 2020a; 2020b; Ramose 2020). This

also brings me to the separation of black and ‘Coloured’ women that was enforced by apartheid. There were no substantial differences, only colonial and apartheid laws that ingrained these differences. This corresponds to how my similarity in appearance with the Brazilian men and women did not ostracise but invite belonging and acceptance. Racial mixing and mixed heritage had been labelled with negativity only to discourage interracial relations. Witnessing how easily the Brazilian woman had claimed her Blackness was inspiring to me. It had allowed me to see how I was still subjecting myself to the confines of the ‘Coloured’ classification. I was black in attitude and thinking but was scared to openly voice it. In seeing how she claimed her Blackness, it facilitated the unshackling of my closeted Blackness because men and women had always subjected me to only being a ‘Coloured’ woman. There was perhaps a hidden curriculum present in the summer school, that of emancipation and recognition of being already fully human. My Blackness did not need to conform to the colonial conceptions of Blackness, but instead could be a Blackness that was inclusive of my diversity. My Blackness had a language of its own and through decolonial thinking, I was able to celebrate this unconventionality.

Conclusion

This article focused on my personal experiences of being classified as a ‘Coloured’ woman in South Africa through the legalised system of classification. My reflections, through the question and answer format, were particularly important after attending the 2020 Decolonial Summer School. During and after engaging with the issues raised during the summer school, I felt a sense of agency to redefine myself through decolonial eyes. It was through the recognition of my oppression and my complicity in this oppression that I found the courage to dismantle systems of subordination that were not serving me. I reflected on the inhumanity I have encountered with my legal classification through ‘Coloured’ consciousness, and why being critical of this legal classification is imperative. I also contrast these experiences with the experiences I had with conference members that transitioned in their thinking and understanding of me. My experiences during post-apartheid South Africa have demonstrated that there are damaging internalised knowledges regarding ‘Coloured’ women that require active decolonising. It is with this in mind that my intention is not to be recognised or affirmed, but rather to make the

invisible, more visible and in so doing, give a voice to the silenced narratives. I am encouraged to build a future where I belong and that celebrates my difference. I believe that engaging in my narratives as a 'Coloured' woman, whose humanity has been questionable, I am able to challenge the truths forced upon me and reclaim my humanity. The replication of coloniality and apartheid through the 'Coloured' classification demands that we become conscious of practices that dehumanise or else we become agents of oppression ourselves. Through a 'Coloured' consciousness, we become critical of the legal classification of 'Coloured' and allow those labelled as such, to take back their agency and shift their narrative in more constructive ways. More importantly, this 'Coloured' consciousness speaks to decolonizing and re-humanizing 'Coloured' women whose intricate Blackness has been shaped by colonialism and violence.

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Decolonisation and Food: The Burden of Colonial Gastronomy – Stories from West Bengal

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Abstract

This article makes an effort to unpack the ways in which the traditional food customs of precolonial Bengal were colonised by the Europeans, especially the British, followed by the Portuguese. In the course of its unpacking, the article reflects rather elaborately, as the details reveal, on how the colonisation of food customs and culinary practices of precolonial Bengal opened gateways for the Europeans to fragment the traditional society of precolonial Bengal socially, culturally, racially and communally. With scant references to the colonisation of food in Cape Town, South Africa, where the Dutch brought Bengali families in the middle of the 1600s as enslaved peoples to assist them in setting up a halfway station for their continued colonisation of India, this article also explores the various possibilities of decolonising the colonial and capitalistic invasions of European and North American food customs and culinary practices in contemporary West Bengal, in particular.

Keywords: Traditional food customs, precolonial Bengal, colonisation, culinary practices, decolonising food practices

Introduction

This article unpacks the ways in which the traditional food customs of pre-

lonial Bengal were colonised by the Europeans, especially the British, followed by the Portuguese. In the course of its argument, the article reflects rather elaborately, as the details reveal, on how the colonisation of food customs and culinary practices of precolonial Bengal opened gateways for the Europeans to fragment the traditional society of precolonial Bengal socially, culturally, racially and communally. With scant references to the colonisation of food in Cape Town, South Africa, where the Dutch brought Bengali families in the middle of the 1600s as enslaved peoples to assist them in setting up a halfway station for their continued colonisation of India, this article also explores the various possibilities of decolonising the colonial and capitalistic invasions of European and North American food customs and culinary practices in contemporary West Bengal, in particular.

Subject Location: A Political Point of Departure

In introducing this article, we assert our political point of departure as a means to offer our subject location, both in terms of our personal interest and political commitment to the process of decolonisation as a Bengali man born in India, and a Black South African woman, whose heritage stems from the old slave quarter of the Cape: whose maternal grandmother's heritage is directly linked to the enslavement of the Bengali from Bengal, India and the Bengali Javanese from Indonesia by the Dutch and trafficked to the Cape, and whose maternal grandfather's heritage stems from the Xhosa people of the Eastern Cape. We situate these subject identities as part of a larger practice focused on the day-to-day activities of the colonised, of which we are both a part. We wish to assert from the outset that colonisation, which first and foremost stages itself upon the mind and the body of the colonised (Biko 1978: 25) can only fully be addressed upon the full realisation of its multi-layered operation. And, whilst this is a painstaking process for the colonised, for the most part, the consciousness derived during the stages of its unpacking provide a possibility for understanding the social and material conditions that were constructed in order for colonialism to flourish; the knowledge of these social and material conditions, which we take up later in this article, offer us a broad spectrum from which to locate the many ways in which colonisation was staged upon the mind, body and soul, and as this article demonstrates more precisely, the palate of the colonised (*Palates of Pleasure*, Maart & Dey forthcoming).

Methodology

In this article, we examine culture as a key component of the social conditions of usurpation and colonialism, linking culture and identity to food as a practice of being-in-the-world that is central to the daily life of the colonised, which the coloniser seizes and appropriates (*Palates of Pleasure*, Maart & Dey forthcoming). Existentialism allows us the possibility of reflecting upon how we exist in the world, as well as the possibility of understanding our respective contexts through the many relations of our engagement within the world. We will, as such, address some of these existential elements that motivated us to engage with the phenomenon of decolonisation and decoloniality as scholars relaying our experiences, whilst also relying on the social research method of auto-ethnography, which offers us the benefit of a select number of narratives, which simultaneously situate our locations as well as sets up the context from which we draw.

One author was born within a Bengali family in the city of Kolkata and his mother tongue is Bengali. Since his childhood days, he observed that both his parents and grandparents made a concerted effort to introduce him to various forms of writing in the Bengali language. Given the overwhelming presence of the English language across the British colonies, India was, and remains, no exception. The other author was born in Cape Town within a family where her grandparents were the head of the household; her maternal grandmother spoke openly of her Bengali and Hindu heritage. This was not only evident by her dress and physical appearance and the fact that she was racialised and the subject of racial slurs in the street that were directed at her Indian heritage but also because an oral tradition of handing over ancestral information from one generation to the next was an active practice in the old slave quarters of the Cape as it is in many communities on the African continent and in the African diaspora. Her maternal grandfather was a Xhosa man, who married her grandmother after her first husband passed on; that marriage, due to the laws of apartheid, only took place in 1954, when her mother was 16 years old. The combination of their culinary skills was passed on to the said author which she relishes to this day. The knowledge upon meeting her paternal grandmother the week of her 19th birthday, brought the history of her culinary interest to full circle. It was revealed then that her paternal grandmother had met her paternal grandfather in a hotel where she worked as the cook. The love and joy in preparing food and delighting in the

varied cuisine her culture has to offer through its indigenous plants, its sea (knowledge gained from her maternal grandfather who was also a fisherman) and the efforts of the Dutch and the British in acquiring spices from India in their colonising conquest, all of which South Africa has an abundance of, are all drawn into the colourful and flavourful array of the plates that were created in her hotel and in her neighbourhood, which the author reproduces in her home. As such, as co-authors we also cite our collaborative work, *Palates of Pleasure*, which provides a historical journey and critique of food, culture, community, colonisation and desire in our respective locations of Bengal and Cape Town, where we also trace the acts of colonisation by our common colonisers, the British, Dutch, Portuguese and the French.

For the purpose of this article, the Bengali author will centre his experiences, and draw from them when asserting the history of Bengali cuisine that came to define his palate; the South African author does not take the same approach in this collaboration but one which offers an integration of their joint analysis and critique. All forms of expression that refer to 'I' reflect on the Bengali author who centres his family's culinary history throughout the article. The autoethnographic narratives shared and foregrounded are those of the Bengali author. It is our belief, given the parameters of a journal article, that this collaboration offers readers an opportunity to understand the history of colonisation of Bengali gastronomy, which for the purpose of this article, remains our primary focus. This article explores various social, cultural, racialised and communal factors that led to the disruption of Indigenous food customs and culinary practices in Bengal during the colonial era and its continuity in the contemporary modern-day Bengal.

Food, House, Language, Home and Away

For the Bengali author, the persistence of his Bengali parents and grandparents enabled the Bengali in him to remain rooted in his mother tongue, and on the other hand, allowed him to evolve epistemologically and ontologically in a contextual manner, understanding his location, language, culture, identity, food customs and practices, as something that they owned and passed on to him. He understood the latter more profoundly over the years as intellectual property and ancestral property.

When he was admitted to an English medium school for the first time, the British colonial pedagogical practices made him feel very disconnected

from his Bengali identity and rather uncomfortable; he realised, much later, that such pedagogical practices meant to. At that time, whilst he was not acquainted with terms such as colonialism, postcolonialism, decolonialism, colonality, postcoloniality and decoloniality, he sensed that something was terribly awry. The comfort and ease that he was afforded while reading and learning in Bengali at his home did not happen at his school when he was taught the English language, mannerisms and expressions.

Let me now take a more personal approach, as I utilise the term ‘I’ and direct the personal impact of my family history. During the latter part of my schooling, I realised that English is not only a language, but an authoritative phenomenon imposed by the British colonisers, that pushed me to act against my social, cultural and historical roots. Such experiences of ‘complex social relations’ are best expressed by Lefebvre (1991: 18) as they made me feel ‘isolated and inward-looking. I experience my individual consciousness split into two (into the private consciousness and the social or public consciousness); it also became atomised (individualism, specialisation, separation between different spheres of activity, etc.)’.

In other words, returning to the memories of my school days as an adult, I recognised this period of early schooling as one that forged a process of contradiction within me by the manner in which I was taught English, and the accompanying mannerisms, relegated my Bengali language as insignificant; it was at this stage that my bodily reaction and not my vocabulary was able to identify colonialism (Fanon 1967: 61).

With the passage of time, I became acquainted with the above-named terms, and gradually understood that the much sought after English-medium school functioned as a laboratory for manufacturing colonial forms of thinking, which acknowledge and celebrate the ideologies of British colonisation in an unquestioning way. As a result, I felt the need to interrogate and dismantle these British colonial forms of knowledge production in daily life, which in turn provoked an exploration of various possibilities for decolonising the everyday patterns of my own thinking, being and doing, many of which are taken up by existentialists world-wide (Thiong’o 1986; Ramose 1999; Maart 2004; Hunt & Holmes 2015; Gordon 2020).

Scholars concerned with self-examination and self-interrogation as part of a continuum of consciousness raising (Maart 2006: 84) have to undertake habitual decolonial exercises; these are crucial to any form of unpacking as a scholar takes charge of the process and accepts that decolonisation begins

with the examination of the self. The scholar then has to ask, ‘How do I decolonise myself?’ It is important to overcome the existential bad faith of self-centric ‘I’-ness and transcend into the collective realm of ‘we’-ness, which South Africans describe as *ubuntu* (Ramose 1999: 32). In other words, I felt that the social, cultural, historical, political, epistemological and ontological values of my existence were shaped by the knowledge and actions of the collective socio-cultural environment in which my being was constructed. Therefore, in order to decolonise my everyday thought processes, patterns and actions, it is important to address strategies, one of which is the ability to build networks of solidarities in a transcultural and transnational manner.

It is also crucial to realise that ‘there are only points of view, perspectives, masks and roles. Truth is draped in veils; it can be defined only by an endless succession of points of view’ (Lefebvre 1991: 17). It is all of the above that provided me with the motivation to attend the Decolonial Summer School at the University of South Africa (UNISA) in 2017, and again in 2020. As such, in order to build pluriversal networks of solidarity and resistance against the toxic ideologies of coloniality, I ventured beyond the geographical boundaries of India, my country of birth, and took up the invitation to attend my first Decolonial Summer School at UNISA in 2017. Amidst the many agreements and disagreements, the two-week summer school at UNISA enabled me to understand the different forms of decolonial exercises that are taking place across the globe, from collective and co-creative points of view.

My understanding of decoloniality as a collaborative exercise received further impetus during the UNISA Decolonial Summer School of 2020. The week-long summer school taught me the theoretical, ideological and the phenomenological differences between ‘decolonialism’, ‘decolonisation’ and ‘decoloniality’ and the many ways to understand them within particular social, cultural, political, geographical and racial contexts. During the engagement with scholars in attendance, I soon realised that the terms decolonialism, decolonisation and decoloniality are not philosophical doctrines but open-ended, de-hierarchical and depolarised exercises whereby one shows regard for learning and also shares with others the diverse constellations of knowledge that exist across the globe. These terms also generate epistemological and ontological ambiguities as essential categories of everyday life. ‘It never exhausts its reality; from the ambiguity of consciousness and situations spring forth actions, events, results, without warning’ (Lefebvre 1991: 18). The urge to participate, habitually, in these ambiguous exercises motivated me to

investigate the influence of colonisation and coloniality in everyday life. As such, I made a presentation on the burden of colonial gastronomy in colonial West Bengal at the UNISA Decolonial Summer School of 2020.

Colonial Practices and Complicity

The practice of British and Portuguese colonisation, in particular, and its effects are deeply engraved on the psyche of the colonised of past-partition contemporary India. This is seen in the way that physical appearances, body language, food customs, fashion choices and racialised attitudes towards dark-skinned Indians, our own people so to speak, are driven by the colonial social and cultural parameters created by the primary coloniser, the British, and are now perpetuated by the upper classes of India, in the name of modernity and postmodernity.

As such, the acknowledgement of colonial food customs and culinary practices in India is nothing new; the problem, however, lies in the lack of awareness. I am not opposed to, nor do I have a problem with, embracing culinary dishes from different parts of the world as I believe that it is an act of showing appreciation toward other cultures through their food. However, if North American, and a select number of European culinary practices, are promoted at the cost of delegitimising, dehumanising and diminishing Indigenous culinary practices, then it is important to probe the social, cultural, geographical, historical and racist intentions of such acts. Through the criticism of colonially fashioned habitual food customs and culinary practices in this article, ‘everyday life also emerges as a critique, a critique of the superior activities in question (and of what they produce: ideologies)’ (Lefebvre 1991: 87). The exercise of decolonising and deracialising the taste buds, as discussed in this article, unpacks the ‘value of culture as a factor of resistance to foreign domination’ (Amílcar Cabral as cited in *BLACKPAST* 2009).

I was born into a family of chefs. My great-grandmother, my grandmother, my mother, my father, my grandfather, my great-grandfather, my uncles, my aunts and my siblings either were or are fabulous cooks. As I was born into a Bengali family, expectedly, my introduction to a broad range of food items were centred on traditional Bengali foods. I cannot deny the fact that apart from traditional Bengali food, I was also introduced to communal cuisines that can be depicted as socially, culturally and racially diverse. This introduction to a multicultural gastronomy was underlined by diverse

narratives, which were shared and confirmed by my parents and grandparents. On the one hand, the narratives enabled me to map the evolution and development of Bengali food culture in the contemporary Indian state of West Bengal across the precolonial, colonial and postcolonial times and on the other, the narratives provoked an interest to investigate the various ‘colonial and cultural forces that sought to dominate its creation and dissemination’ (Chaudhury 2020: 1).

For instance, during my childhood days when I requested that my grandmother prepare a dish of *chikin chow*¹ or *bhej chow*², she would laugh and say: ‘You should have taken birth [been born] in a *Cheena bari*³ rather than in a Bengali household’. I remember how my preference for chicken over lamb was mocked by my grandparents. They would often say: ‘You are [a] Muslim born in a Hindu household’. When my friends and relatives came to know that I usually have dinner between 7:30 pm and 8 pm, they would often laugh and say: ‘You are born with a Bengali face and a British body’. I often wondered why it was necessary for me to be born into a Chinese household in order to enjoy eating chow mein or why preferring chicken over mutton implied that I needed to be a Muslim, or when consuming an early dinner, I was considered British?

With the passage of time, these ponderings gradually transgressed into phenomenological interrogations that provoked an analysis of the binaries of traditional Bengali cuisine as opposed to modern Bengali cuisine; authentic Bengali cuisine as opposed to inauthentic Bengali cuisine; good Bengali cuisine as opposed to bad Bengali cuisine; and precolonial Bengali cuisine, as opposed to colonial Bengali cuisine. These binaries were shaped by factors such as climate, religion, agriculture, caste, class and economy during the precolonial, colonial and postcolonial times. Therefore, the consumption of food is not only a biological exercise and a process of activating an individual’s taste-buds but also a collective and collaborative exercise of understanding the social, cultural, communal, historical, political and economic tastes of different

¹ *Chikin Chow* is the colloquial Bengali way of referring to the dish ‘Chicken Chow mein’.

² *Bhej Chow* is the colloquial Bengali way of referring to the dish ‘Vegetable Chow mein’.

³ *Cheena Bari* is a colloquial Bengali way of referring to the house of a Chinese person, usually in a mocking manner.

communities across diverse geographical locations across time and space.

In view of the aforementioned arguments, the following segment analyses how gastronomical practices of the British and the Portuguese have:

- i. disrupted the traditional food and culinary practices of the Bengali community in West Bengal;
- ii. simultaneously, colonised the culinary practices of the Bengali community in West Bengal.

This article henceforth is divided into four sections:

1. The first section, titled ‘Precolonial Food Culture of Bengal’ reflects upon the different food and culinary practices of precolonial Bengal and various social, cultural, caste, communal, geographical and climatic factors that have shaped such practices.
2. The second section, titled ‘Colonial Influence on Food Customs’ explores the various ways through which the traditional food culture in precolonial Bengal was disrupted, dehumanised and colonised by the physical forces of British and Portuguese colonisation and later by the metaphysical forces of American capitalism in the postcolonial era.
3. The third section, titled ‘Decolonising and Deracialising Taste Buds: The Aesthetics of Taste’ outlines the various possibilities through which the burden of the colonial gastronomy can be dismantled and decolonised in contemporary West Bengal.
4. The final section, ‘Not Exactly a Conclusion’, thematically and theoretically justifies how this article does not conclude with a definite set of solutions; but rather opens up diverse decolonial possibilities for dialogues, polylogues, agreements and disagreements on re-locating and re-indigenising the traditional food customs of West Bengal in the contemporary era.

Precolonial Food Culture of Bengal

History allows us to know the nature and extent of the imba-

lances and conflicts (economic, political and social) which characterise the evolution of a society; culture allows us to know the dynamic synthesis which has been developed and established by social conscience to resolve these conflicts at each stage of its evolution, in the search of survival and progress (Amílcar Cabral as cited in *BLACKPOST*, 2009).

In a similar manner, the precolonial food culture not only reflects upon the availability of food materials and culinary practices, but also on the diverse patterns of consumption and its aesthetic values, as detailed in different socio-religious texts. The history of food customs and culinary practices of precolonial Bengal also functions as a reminder of the persistent ‘neo-colonial’ relations’ of the present with the past ‘within the ‘new’ world order’ (Bhabha 1990: 6). The food culture of precolonial Bengal was determined by climatic, geographical, aesthetic and socio-religious factors.

Machey Bhaatey Baangali

The Bengali phrase ‘*Machey bhaatey Baangali*’ can be loosely translated as: ‘a Bengali cannot live without fish and rice’. This phrase is ambivalently used in contemporary expressions among its community. On the one hand, the phrase is used as a reminder of cultural rootedness by and for the Bengalis and on the other hand, to ridicule the culinary chauvinism of the Bengalis. If, however, the origin of this phrase is socio-historically and phenomenologically investigated, then it can be said there lies a firm geographical and scientific basis behind its origin. Bengal has always been renowned for its fertile land and the cultivation of paddy rice (Arendt & Zannini 2013: 121). The rivers of Bengal also serve as a reservoir for varieties of freshwater fish, and as a result, traditionally, rice and fish emerged ‘as the staple food of the Bengalis’ (Halder 2016).

It is, however, important to note that rice and fish are not the ‘only’ authentic food of the Bengalis. Apart from rice and fish, precolonial Bengal has been known for various non-vegetarian and vegetarian dishes. Quite unfortunately, the capitalist forces of reckless profiteering in postcolonial West Bengal have exoticised and tokenised the traditional food culture of precolonial Bengal through universally projecting the state as a manufacturing ground for rice and fish.

As such, the global notion of Bengali cuisine is limited to a set platter, which is often and incorrectly designated as an ‘authentic Bengali platter’. Within the said platter, there will be a specific vegetable dish, a fish dish, a lentil dish, a meat dish and a sweet dish. Such dishes have been carefully selected and authenticated in such a manner by Bengalis who have prepared them for centuries that it not only seduces the taste-buds, but as a result also generates a strong profit-making market space. During the era of pre-colonialism and pre-capitalism, when taste-buds were not dictated by the market, geographical conditions aside, the dietary practices in precolonial Bengal were widely influenced by climatic conditions.

Shukhrobarer Sondhey belaye Esho Money Rekhe/Doodh Chere Prothom Ami Khabo Bhaat Mekhey

The above-noted phrase is taken from an invitation card for *Annaprashan*⁴. *Annaprashan* is referred to as the first rice-eating ceremony. The phrase can be loosely translated as: on a Friday evening, you are warmly invited to my first rice-eating ceremony. Usually, in West Bengal the rice eating ceremony takes place in the evening during which guests are invited to partake in the first rice-eating ceremony of a one-year old child over dinner. In India, the rice eating ceremony is celebrated when a one-year old child finishes the breastfeeding period and gradually moves towards the weaning period. The onset of the weaning period is celebrated through the rice eating ceremony. In the ceremony, the gathering is usually organised over dinner instead of lunch as determined by the hot and humid climate of the state. If the ceremony takes place during the summer season, then the hot and humid weather during the day makes it challenging for people to participate in a public gathering. During the evening, the heat and the humidity subsides and as a result the process of gathering becomes more comfortable, as compared to hosting the event during the day.

Apart from the gathering time, one might ask: Why is it always a rice-eating ceremony and not a bread-eating ceremony or perhaps even something else? Two major factors underlie this traditional practice – that is, the socio-religious and climatic considerations. According to a Bengal government report of the 1940s, the weather conditions demanded the daily requirement of

⁴ *Anna* means rice; *Prashan* means eating.

3600 calories per person, for the entire population of precolonial Bengal and rice played a pivotal role in ensuring the supply of these calories (Murshid 2008: 483).

Chitrita Banerji in *Life and Food in Bengal* (2005) notes that around ‘3500 calories are acquired from rice itself’ (Banerji 2005: 76). Besides the consumption of boiled rice, different varieties of rice were also consumed like muri (puffed rice), khoi (flattened rice), and so forth. The high calorie content of rice enables the individuals to cope with health problems such as diarrhoea and dehydration which can be caused by extreme heat and humidity. This practice also interrogates the Western science of modern food, which are widely mimicked in India today. In an article titled ‘Weight Loss Secrets: 5 Things You Should Never Eat at Night’ (2015), the author notes: ‘White rice is just as bad as white bread; in addition, it also has very little nutritional value’. The above-mentioned government report has already proved that this argument is baseless in the contemporary era. Different types of food practices are adopted according to the geographical, climatic, social, religious and economic conditions of a particular place. Therefore, the universalised narrative of ‘ideal and healthy food’ as propagated by Western science is highly questionable.

Charbya-Choshya-Lehya-Peya

This sub-section of the article unpacks the socio-religious factors that influenced the precolonial food customs of Bengal. According to Pranad Ray in *Banglar Khabar* (1987) and Bipradas Mukhopadhyay in *Pak Pranali* (2007), *charbya* are the foods that are consumed by chewing, such as rice (*bhaat*), meat (*mangsho*), vegetables (*shobji*), fish (*maach*), and so forth; *choshya* are the foods that are consumed by sucking such as homemade digestive enzymes (homemade probiotic drinks that are made with fruits and spices) popularly known as *ambal*, *tak*; *lehya* are the foods that are consumed by licking such as *chatni* (chutney), *payesh* (sweet porridge), *doi* (yoghurt); and *peya* are the foods which are consumed by drinking, such as milk and juice.

In, *The Vishnu Purana*⁵ (Parashara 2015), a definite sequence of eating has been prescribed: ‘meals should start with the sweet dish, followed by salty dishes and end with spicy and bitter dishes’ (245). One of the major reasons

⁵ *The Vishnu Purana* is one of the eighteen ancient and medieval texts of Hinduism.

behind prescribing such a sequence is that the habit of eating sweet dishes at the beginning and eating bitter dishes at the end eases the process of digestion and guards the stomach against bacterial infections. The *Brihad-dharma Purana* (1915) proposes a different sequence: ‘... boiled rice and ghee should be consumed first, followed by spinach and rest of the vegetables, and the meal should end with milk and boiled rice’ (translated by Banerji 2005: 185). The Bengali author saw his grandfather following a similar eating pattern as outlined in *Brihad-dharma Purana*: he begins his lunch with boiled rice and ghee and ends it with milk and boiled rice. One day, out of curiosity, I asked him why he finishes his lunch with milk and boiled rice on a daily basis? He replied, that a vegetarian meal should always consist of milk and boiled rice because they are sources of protein, calcium and energy. These also supplement the meat, fish and/or egg in a non-vegetarian meal. It should also be consumed at the end of a vegetarian meal because it protects the body against health problems such as gastroenteritis and acidity.

According to *Prakritapaingala*, a 13th century collection of verses in Bengali by Pingalacharya, an ideal Bengali platter should consist of ‘*mainimaccha lection of verses in Bengali by Pingalach*’ (cited in Banerji, 2005: 23). In other words, that it should consist of hot rice with ghee, leaves of the jute plant that are prepared by frying and hot milk. Sriharsa’s writing, *The Naishada-Charitaor the adventures of Nala Raja of Naishada* (1836), a 12th century Sanskrit epic, provides a detailed insight into the Bengali eating culture through the marriage of the protagonists called Nala and Damayanti:

At their wedding feast, different dishes are served, such as cooked vegetables, fish, mutton, deer meat, different varieties of pitha (a sweet variety), flavoured drinks and tambul (betel leaves) (Sriharsa 1836: 450).

The *Brihad-dharma Purana* also mentions the caste-based food of precolonial Bengal. For example, the Brahmins, the upper caste who were notably priests and rulers, widely consumed white-scaled fish like *ruhi* (carp), *punti* (barb) and *shakul* (salmon) because white-scaled freshwater fish were considered spiritually pure and healthy; the Kshatriyas, one of the four *varna*, or social castes that occupied a position on the hierarchy below the Brahmins, and were composed of warriors and rulers, preferred a meat-based diet of poultry, venison, lamb, and so forth because socio-culturally the consumption of meat

was associated with masculine power and warfare; the Vaishyas, one of the four castes that occupied a lower position on the hierarchy after the Kshatriyas, composed primarily of businessmen and traders, preferred a vegetarian diet because their indulgence with trade and commerce provoked dietary purity and spirituality (Dhillon 2014; Agarwal 2016; Waghmore 2017).

In India, generally, dietary purity and spirituality are associated with a vegetarian diet. The Sudras, also known as the outcasts, considered the lowest of the four *varnas* of the Hindu caste system were regarded as scavengers and it was believed that because of their outcast status they were generationally condemned to live on rotten meat (Doctor 2008; Samal 2017). *Tikasarvasvaby* Sarvananda sheds light on the socio-cultural differences within the food customs of precolonial Bengal by specifically showing ‘the love and passion of the people of east Bengalis for *shuktimachh* (dried fish)’ (cited in Ray 1987).

Even today, *shuktimachh* stands as an epitome of Bengal⁶ culture. *Tikasarvasva* also mentions some of the spices that were habitually used in the precolonial traditional Bengali kitchen such as *marich* (black pepper), *labanga* (clove), *jirak* (cumin), *ada* (ginger), *jaifal* (nutmeg), *hing* (asafoetida), etc.

Mukundaram Chakravarti in *Kabikankan-Chandi (Chandimangal)* (2011) notes how in medieval Bengal, irrespective of caste, class or regional differences, vegetarian dishes were blended with non-vegetarian dishes. For example, *chingri maach die cholar daal* (lentils cooked with prawns), *chital maach die palang-er chocchori* (chital fish cooked with spinach), *machher matha die puisaaker chocchori* (basella leaves cooked with fish head), *fulburi die macher jhol* (lentils cooked with fish), *chingri die borar jhol* (prawns cooked with a type of lentil fritter), *thod chingri* (prawns cooked with *thod* (a type of vegetable)), etc. It is also important to note that this amalgamation of vegetarian and non-vegetarian dishes was typically practised by the local residents of the Medinipur district of precolonial Bengal. Although it is widely consumed by the people all across the state, it was adopted from the food culture of those in Medinipur. In Bharatchandra Ray’s ‘*Annadamangal*’ around 23 types of vegetarian and non-vegetarian dishes are mentioned:

... sarsadi, ghanta, different types of fried spinach, thick soup of gram pulse, arahad, moong, mas, barbati, batul, and matar dal, bada, badi,

⁶ *Bangal* is the colloquial Bengali term, which is used to refer to the original residents of the eastern part of Bengal.

banana, radish, coconut fry, milk and dalna prepared with thod, shuktoni, jackfruit seeds with sugar, bottle-gourd with til and pithali, brinjal, and preparations of pumpkin. Among the non-vegetarian dishes were katla, fried chital fish, koi, magur and shol fish, boiled turtle egg (ganga fal) and the various meat preparations like shikpora (meat burnt in a spit, later known as kabab). Apart from these dishes there were some other unconventional dishes such as preparations with bamboo flower, and dalkachu and odkachu⁷ (cited in Bose 2004: 355 - 357).

These food practices of precolonial Bengal underwent a massive transformation with the invasion of Islamic rulers during the 18th century. On the one hand, the invasion introduced several new food items like ‘watermelon, pomegranate, pulao⁸, biriyani⁹, kabab¹⁰, kofta¹¹ and kaliya¹²’ (Halder 2016) and on the other hand, the already existing caste and class divisions were further fractured. Prior to the Islamic invasion, onion and garlic, either in cooked or raw form, were hardly consumed by the Bengalis – certainly not by the Brahmins. However, after the arrival of the Muslims in precolonial Bengal, with the passage of time, onion and garlic were introduced as a daily cooking ingredient in the Bengali kitchen. While the Hindu outcasts, the Sudras, voluntarily adopted the new food practices as propagated by the Muslims, the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas and the Vaishyas firmly resisted the Islamic food practices and strictly prohibited the consumption of their food items. The former also believed that ‘the smell of prohibited food could lead to degradation of caste status or expulsion from the religious community’ (Halder 2016).

⁷ Types of arum roots.

⁸ This dish is prepared either with meat (and sometimes fish) or vegetables and rice. Different varieties of vegetables or meat are fried; spices are added and then mixed with boiled rice. At the end ghee is added for flavor.

⁹ This is a rice dish which is prepared by mixing meat, rice, potato and boiled eggs. Unlike *polau*, where the ingredients are prepared separately and then mixed at the end, Biryani is a one-pot meal and it is prepared by putting all the ingredients together in one pot.

¹⁰ A spicy grilled meat dish.

¹¹ Koftas are fried balls either prepared with meat or vegetables.

¹² Either prepared with fish or meat, Kaliya is a spicy gravy, which is usually served with rice.

There was a time when the consumption of chicken and beef was strictly prohibited in the upper-caste Bengali households because it was incorporated into the mainstream Bengali cuisine by Muslims. An upper-caste Bengali was strictly forbidden to consume any kind of food items that had been touched and/or prepared by a person of Muslim faith. A violation of such a norm resulted in familial or community expulsion. As a consequence, my grandparents laughed at my fondness for chicken. In addition, my friends questioned my Hindu identity when they learnt of my fondness for beef kebab and beef kofta. According to Ghulam Murshid in *Hajar Bacharer Bangali Sanskriti* (2008), apart from the Hindu outcasts, the Islamic food culture was adopted by the Bengali middle-class Hindus and the high-class Hindus who converted to Islam (Murshid 2008: 491 - 492). These fragmentations in the food customs and culinary practices gave rise to multiple forms of social, cultural, communal, class and racial hierarchies.

Panch Phoron

Panch Phoron is a spice that has been an integral part of precolonial Bengali cuisine. The term *Panch Phoron* can be translated into English as ‘a combination of five spices’. Usually, the five spices are: nigella seeds (also known as black cumin or *kalonji*), fenugreek seeds, cumin seeds, black mustard seeds and fennel seeds. It is very difficult to trace the historical evolution of the concept of *panch phoron*, but it is believed that the combination of five spices has a spiritual and mythical significance with the number five as mentioned in ‘*Rig Veda*’. In ‘*Rig Veda*’, ‘the number five may be related to Pancha Bhoota, which is the basic five elements that Hindus claim is the basis of creation. Those elements are fire, water, air, earth and ether’ (cited in ‘Panch Phoron: Indian Five-Spice’ 2020). In the traditional Bengali households, the ingredients of *panch phoron* were thus associated with the Hindu religious notion of *Pancha Bhoota*. Therefore, in precolonial Bengal the use of *panch phoron* in daily food dishes was not only considered healthy but was also used in the cooking of food items during the religious rituals. With the Islamic invasion of Bengal, the binaries between ‘authentic Hindu foods’ and ‘authentic Muslim foods’ started developing (approximately during the 18th century), and as a result *panch phoron* became a medium for preserving one’s ‘pure Hinduness’ in the Bengali households. It was also regarded as an apt

substitution for garlic and onion, the consumption of which was believed to be strictly against the Hindu spiritual values. Even today, *panch phoron* is a common spice in the Bengali cuisine.

The Bengali author recollects, two specific *panch phoron* delicacies from his grandmother's and mother's kitchen – *aloo panch phoron* and *panch phoron die musur daal*. *Aloo panch phoron* is prepared with boiled potatoes (*aloo*), mustard oil, salt, *panch phoron* and turmeric powder. Besides, *aloo panch phoron* another delicacy that is highly appreciated in the Bengali author's family is *panch phoron die musur daal*. *Musur daal*, also known as red lentils, are cooked with mildly fried *panch phoron*, salt and turmeric powder. The usurpation and settler colonial presence of the British colonisers gave rise to pseudo-scientific and pseudo-medical narratives, which declared the consumption of *panch phoron* unhygienic and unhealthy in the tropical weather conditions (U. Ray 2012: 710).

The imposition of these illogical perspectives widened the already existing class, caste, gender, communal and economic hierarchies in precolonial Bengal's culinary practices. It also opened gateways for the British colonisers to deculturalise and dehumanise the traditional gastronomic practices of precolonial Bengal in a very systematic manner, relying on what they were able to do best – divide and rule.

Colonial Influence on Food

Valentin-Yves Mudimbe in his book titled, *On African Fault Lines: Meditations on Alterity Politics*. *Thinking Africa* argues:

The colonial library is a transdisciplinary space that for centuries transcended axes of separation between natural and social sciences. Its huge knowledge capital was put to the service of absolute aberrations such as the slave trade. The library justified the unjustifiable in deviant ethics, shaming human intelligence (Mudimbe 2013: 19).

The process of animalisation and subordination of food /customs and culinary practices of precolonial Bengal and the appropriation of colonial food ethics played a crucial role in not only justifying the unjustifiable logic of the tropical climatic conditions and the behavioural patterns of the local residents of precolonial Bengal, but also in generating a set of archives that turned to the

past of the oppressed people, and distorted, disfigured and destroyed it (Fanon 1963: 71). In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967), Frantz Fanon notes that ‘A man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language’ (Fanon 1967: 59). So apart from trade, commerce, politics and slavery, food functioned as an effective ‘language’ for the British colonisers to build their physical and ideological empires in precolonial Bengal. However, their process of gastronomic colonisation involved seduction as well as coercion. Seduction’s reward was the false promise of recognition by the master. It is believed that the British in India tried to convince the Natives that if the colonised in India chose the British way, they would have the reward of being seen as British, and therefore more civilised.

In order to establish mercantile relationships with India, European ships began to arrive on the Indian shores from the late 15th century. Historical documents reveal that the Portuguese were the first to reach the Indian subcontinent and they were gradually followed by the Dutch, French, Danish, and the British. As the Portuguese arrived, apart from the various precious items they stole from the continents of Africa and the Americas, they brought along with them several new food items, either vegetables or ‘processed’ food such as ‘potato, chili pepper, okra, tomato, cauliflower, cabbage, bread, cheese, jelly and biscuits’ (Sen 1997: 95; Habib 2014: 54 - 60).

In the article ‘The Portuguese Influence on Bengali Cuisine’ (1997), Collin Taylor Sen outlines a detailed table of the different fruits and vegetables that were brought to Bengal by the Portuguese and later on, how these became part of the regular Bengali cuisine from the colonial era. We cite it here to foster further discussion of our main argument:

English Name	Bengali Name	Comments	Use in Bengali Cuisine
Cashew	Kaju	Native of S.E. Brazil, introduced to the west coast of India to check soil erosion. Today India is the world leader in its production.	Snacks.

Pineapple	Anaras	Introduced in Bengal in 1594 from Brazil.	Used fresh in chutney.
Peanut	Chinar Badam	Introduced from America, perhaps via Africa. The Bengali name means 'Chinese nut' which indicates that it could have arrived via Manila or China. However, 'Chinese' is also an adjective used by Bengalis to denote anything foreign.	Snacks.
Papaya	Peypey	Originated in Central America. Came to India via Philippines (where the Spanish had taken it) and Malaysia.	Unripe as fruit, paste used as a meat, tenderiser.
Sweet Potato	Ranga Aloo	Introduced from Africa or Brazil. Bengali name means 'red potato'.	Used as a vegetable, used in sweet dishes to add flavour and in shrimp dishes.
Potato	Aloo	The Spanish brought the first potatoes to Europe in 1570. On the west coast of India, it is called batata (sweet potato). In 1780, a basket of potatoes was presented to Sir Warren Hastings in Calcutta (Achaya 1991: 118). It was grown in the foothills of the Himalayas in the 1830s. By 1860, potatoes had become popular in Calcutta, although orthodox people avoided them until the 20th century.	Vegetable dishes, dried and with gravy; in shukto, poshto. In curries with meat and seafood. Filling for samosas.

Decolonisation and Food: The Burden of Colonial Gastronomy

Tomato	Bilayati Begun	Originated in Mexico or Peru. Came via England in the late 18th century	Chutney. Flavouring for lentils
Chillies	Lanka	The Bengali name indicates it may have come via Sri Lanka. Originated in Central America. Spread rapidly in India as substitute for long or black pepper. By the mid-16th century, Europeans were calling it 'Calcutta pepper.'	Fresh, dried, and powdered. Used for flavouring and decoration.
Guava	Peyara	May have originated in Peru. Known in Eastern India as early as 1550. Widely grown in Bengal.	Eaten as fruit, Guava, cheese and jelly.
Corn or Maize	Bhutta	Originated in Central America.	Roasted and eaten on the cob, usually purchased from street sellers.
Litchi	Lichu	Native to southern China. The Portuguese brought it to Bengal at end of the 19th century.	Eaten as a fruit, juice, jelly and drunk as wine.
Okra or Lady's Finger	Bhindi	Probably from Africa	Fried, boiled or cooked in stews.

Beside fruit and vegetables, many other food items like biscuits and baked pastries were introduced by the Europeans, particularly the British. K.T. Achaya in 'The Food Industries of British India' (1991) talks about a famous French traveller, Francois Bernier who visited Bengal in 1660 and in one of

the memoirs Bernier mentions that ‘the supply of inexpensive biscuits to the crews of European ships was very common’ (Achaya 1991:123). This confirms the widespread belief that small-scale biscuit manufacturing units had already developed in Bengal in the 17th century.

Apart from biscuits, the introduction of cheese by the Portuguese brought a major transformation to the traditional culinary practices of Bengal. Several new food items like *chhanar dalna* (cheese ball curry), *potoler dolma* (pointed gourd stuffed with cheese), *rosogolla* (cheese balls soaked in sugar syrup), *pantua* (deep-fried cheese balls soaked in sugar syrup), *lyangcha* (cylinder-shaped fried cheese soaked in sugar syrup), *sukto* (assorted vegetables along with bitter gourd cooked in milk and poppy seeds), *chhanar payesh* (rice cooked in cheese, milk and jaggery) and so forth, evolved in the traditional Bengali kitchen.

The regular use of cheese in the Bengali kitchen changed the place of desserts under the influence of the Portuguese in colonial Bengal. Today, all the cheese-based sweet dishes that are consumed in West Bengal are as a result of Portuguese colonialism. Other than the Portuguese, the French colonisers widely influenced the snack culture of Bengal. For instance, the concept of *mamlet* was drawn from the French omelette. Usually, a French omelette is prepared with eggs, milk, salt, black pepper, unsalted butter and a filling of crème fraîche, herbs, fresh fruits, and so forth. However, a *mamlet* in West Bengal is prepared with eggs, salt, chopped onions, chopped chillies, chopped tomatoes, garam masala and oil. Unlike the French omelette, *mamlets* are made without any filling. Of interest is that the Dutch and the Danish did not have much influence on the food culture of Bengal.

With the arrival of the British, the already transformed food culture of Bengal under Portuguese colonisation underwent further transformation and it had a mixed impact on the local population. In precolonial Bengal, ‘Bengali cuisine not only refused to become national, but by remaining emphatically regional, its domestic nature was also kept intact’ (Ray 2012: 705). During the period of colonial Portuguese occupation, the regional essence of the food and culinary practices did not change, rather it was multiplied and diversified because, like the British, they did not enforce their food on the local Natives of Bengal. Rather, they acknowledged the amalgamation of Portuguese culinary practices with the local culinary practices in the Bengali kitchen.

The introduction of British food customs in tropical Bengal were underlined with the expropriation of local food and the appropriation of British

culinary practices. This process of expropriations and appropriations was catapulted by the ‘colonial medical texts from 1770 until at least 1850’ (Sengupta 2010: 82). The tropical climate of Bengal raised the fundamental question: is the heavy meat-based diet of the British suitable in such weather conditions? The British displayed ‘a kind of false bravado, and the exhibition of a generous contempt for what they reckon[ed to be] the luxurious and effeminate practices of the country’ (Curtis 1807: 280). Such a false bravado motivated the British colonisers to blame the climate for their afflictions, rather than the unsuitability of their diet. In 1775, Philip Francis, the Governor of Bengal wrote: ‘I am tormented with the bile and obliged to live on mutton chop and water. The Devil is in the climate I think’ (cited in Burton 1993: 7). Disapproving colonial sentiments steeped in Christianity were not an unfamiliar basis of critique by the British of India; the British not only believed that God was on their side as they usurped, colonised and plundered, but when God was not, the devil had to be held responsible (Maart & Dey forthcoming).

Elizabeth Collingham in her book titled *Imperial Bodies: The Physical Experience of the Rajc.1800–1947* (2001) argues that such unhealthy dining ‘served well to underline the status of the Company grandee in India’ (Collingham 2001:75–77). Collingham also argues that through the racialisation of Bengal during and after the Indian Revolt of 1857 the ‘body of the British official in India became an even more powerful signifier of “Britishness”, and diet and dress became, accordingly, cultural sites on which a sense of bodily difference between the British and their Indian subjects were maintained’ (81 - 84). It is evident from John Beames’ *Memoirs of a Bengal Civilian* (1961) in which he talks about the daily food of a British official in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He notes:

Our chota haziri, or little breakfast, was at five-thirty to six, and consisted of tea, eggs boiled or poached, toast and fruit ... Breakfast at eleven consisted of fried or broiled fish, a dish or two of meat – generally fowl cutlets, hashes and stews, or cold meat and salad followed by curry and rice and dessert. We drank either bottled beer – the universal Bass – or claret ... Between four and five there was tea and cakes, ... Dinner at half past seven or eight consisted of soup, and entrée, roast fowls or ducks, occasionally mutton, and in cold weather once or twice beef, and entremets of game or a savoury, and sweets (Beames 1961: 197).

In the tropical heat and humidity of Bengal it does not require any medical books or scientific experiments to justify that such a food routine is lethal to the body. In the year 1807, even a British surgeon from the naval hospital of Madras named Charles Curtis observed that the ‘over-consumption of meat was the root of many of their ills’ (Curtis 1807: 280). He also noted: ‘They cannot too soon ... accustom themselves to what are called the native dishes, which consist for the most part of boiled rice, and fruits, highly seasoned with hot aromatics, along with meat item[s] and sauces, but with a small proportion of animal matters’ (Curtis 1807: 281). As such, Dipesh Chakrabarty in *Rethinking Working-Class History. Bengal 1890 - 1940* (1989) rightly suggests that ‘eating was a ritualised expression of a colonial ruling-class culture ... signifying ... excess and plenitude’ (Chakrabarty 1989: 167).

The signifiers of excess and plenitude gradually percolated into the food and culinary practices of the upper and middle class Bengali community through the usage of spoons and forks instead of hands, through the pleasure of wasting food items instead of re-using them, or sharing with others, through risking one’s health by blindly mimicking the European (especially the British) culinary practices, etc. ‘It is not that the Europeans were not aware of the non-suitability of their dining , but to maintain their superior status of “Europeanness or Britishness”, through food, they continued to practice “brutal racialisation” and “abusive adjectivisation”’ (Dey 2020a).

Besides naturalising such a dietary practice as ‘authentic and healthy’, the British also used food as a medium to assert their White masculine superiority over the local Natives. As a result, several cookbooks that were published during the period of British colonisation in Bengal portrayed the kitchen and the food items as ‘filthy, dirty and uncouth’ (Sengupta 2010: 85). Arthur Kenny-Herbert Wyvern’s cookbook *Culinary Jottings: A Treatise in Thirty Chapters on Reformed Cookery for Anglo-Indian Exiles* (1885) describes the local Bengali kitchen in the following manner: ‘a wretchedly mean, carelessly constructed, go down [outbuilding] ... inconveniently far from the house, and consequently open to every passer-by’ (Wyvern 1885: 499). The author also criticises the presence of inadequate equipment in the kitchen, noting that ‘the cook had to use his cloth for a sieve, and his fingers for [a] spoon or fork’ (Wyvern 1885: 499). Another cookbook titled *Indian Outfits and Establishments: Practical Guides for Persons to Reside in India* (1882) characterises the Native food and culinary styles of Bengal as: ‘the native ways are not as our ways and the less you see them over their cooking

operations the more appetite you will have for the food set before you' (Wyvern 1885: 68).

It is important to note that the traditional Bengali kitchen was always open to the passer-by because it was not just a private family space to prepare food, but also a welcoming public space to feed a hungry passer-by. This had been an integral part of the traditional culture of precolonial Bengal. The British disapproved of, and rejected, this traditional custom and through the assistance of White European medical men they tried to highlight the perceived degenerated culture of the Bengalis. James Ranald Martin, a presidency surgeon of Bengal who later became the president of the East India Company's Medical Board, in his book *Notes on the Medical Topography of Calcutta* (1837) reflected:

When we reflect on the customs of the natives, their long misgovernment, their religion and morals, their diet, clothing, etc., and above all their *climate* [e.i.o] we can be at no loss to perceive why they should be what they are (Martin 1837: 43 - 45).

Justifications for colonisation and subordination were inserted everywhere, especially medical journals. If the British could sustain their argument, in writing, of the colonisation of India as a necessity, in the name of goodwill and modernity through which they depicted themselves as saviours of the savages, they could justify the extraction of wealth and the brutal exploitation of the Indian population ((*Palates of Pleasure*, Maart & Dey forthcoming).

In accordance, the disputed thread between food, masculinity climatic conditions and medical science was further entrenched by the 18th century theories of climatic determinism as discussed by Thomas R. Metcalf in *Ideologies of the Raj* (1994): 'heat and humidity were seen as conspiring to subvert manliness, resolve and courage' (105). Sir Herbert Risley in *The people of India* (1908) and Robert Orme in *Of the Government and People of Indostan* (1971) justify that effeminacy of the people of colonial Bengal are directly associated with their 'enfeebling diet' (42 - 45, 57) and habit of consuming 'easily digestible' (47, 58) food such as rice, lentils, sweets and spices. Such problematic narratives received further applause from the high-caste and middle-class Bengali Hindus.

The colonised high-caste and middle-class Bengalis supported such food narratives because it catered to their taste-buds on the one hand and

enabled them to ‘be in the good books’ of the British colonisers on the other. It allowed them to equate these food narratives with civility and modernity, and to show how much, they as the high caste, had in common with the British. Authors like Pragnasundari Devi and Rwitendranath Tagore felt that the traditional food and culinary culture of precolonial Bengal were narrowly defined. Buddhadeb Basu, in his book *Bhojan Shilpi Bangali* (2004) defines Bengali cuisine as, ‘liberal and cosmopolitan, with the potential to incorporate all other flavours and indigenise them, so representing a synthesis of different cultures’ (Basu 2004:18).

The support of the high-caste and the middle-class Hindus encouraged the British to use gastronomic narratives as a tool to practice social, cultural, communal, racial, caste and religious-based divisions in colonial Bengal and reduce the traditional food of precolonial Bengal into a ‘disruptive, decivilising, dehumanising, exploitative, racist, violent, brutal, covetous and thingifying system’ (Cesaire 2001: 71). So, instead of becoming a synthesis of different cultures, the culinary practices of Bengal, under British colonisation, gradually became a glorification exercise of the European food culture, supported by the upper caste Brahmins (U. Ray 2012: 715).

The traditional fried cheese-based sweet dishes, widely adapted from the Portuguese, such as *lyangcha*, Lady Kenny (round shaped shallow fried cheese balls soaked in sugar syrup) and *pantua* and *chhana bhaja* (fried cheese) lost its popularity and was replaced by pastries and baked goods because the black and blackish-brown colour of these traditional sweet dishes made the Bengalis believe that it would darken their skin. They believed their skin would become much darker, which as a result of the ‘divide and conquer’ strategies of British colonisation that entrenched skin colour hierarchies, had to be avoided. In the postcolonial era, the dehumanisation and subalternisation of traditional food customs of precolonial Bengal aggravated by the Americanisation and commercialisation has a significant effect on individual taste buds.

Today, a large number of people in West Bengal believe that the traditional food customs of precolonial Bengal are ‘unmodern’ and ‘backdated’ and in order to develop a cross-cultural and universal food habit one must blindly adhere to the ‘European or widely Euro-North American (USA) food practices such as pizzas, pastas, burgers, sandwiches, Tacos, a Mexican food item, different forms of salads, consumption of varieties of meat, etc.’ (Dey 2020a).

There is nothing morally wrong with inculcating new tastes; but intentions are important as they more often than not speak to cultural appropriation and cultural imperialism. The practices of cultural imperialism in India (especially in precolonial Bengal) enabled the White European colonisers to disguise themselves under the existential patterns of the Black Natives. Such a form of disguise allowed the colonisers to generate seductive narratives of Western/ colonial superiorities and non-Western/ Indigenous/Native inferiorities. These narratives provoked the local Natives of Bengal to expropriate the Indigenous socio-cultural practices and appropriate the practices of the European colonisers in a voluntary manner.

This is why, the European colonisers through the ‘so-called theory of progressive assimilation of native populations’ (Amílcar Cabral as cited in *BLACKPOST* 2009), could successfully colonise the food and the culinary practices of the Natives of precolonial Bengal by camouflaging themselves as welfare workers and progressive settlers. European and North American food have further augmented the already existing racial, class and caste hierarchies that existed in precolonial and colonial Bengal. As a result, in the process of trying to be a local citizen, the adaption of such food has decapitated the Indigenous socio-cultural sense of belonging of people in contemporary West Bengal.

In order to counter the colonial/capitalist invasions of European and North American food and culinary practices in contemporary West Bengal and to revive the traditional precolonial food cults, multiple initiatives are being undertaken by individuals, government institutions and private institutions, which will be discussed in the following section.

Decolonising and Deracialising Taste Buds: The Aesthetics of Taste

The process of challenging, countering and dismantling the colonial and capitalist invasions of European and North American food and culinary practices is what Lewis Gordon argues as a movement from ‘double consciousness to potentiated double consciousness’ (Gordon 2014). In other words, double consciousness can be understood as ‘seeing yourself through the hostile other’ and potentiated double consciousness can be understood as ‘seeing the contradictions of the system’ (Gordon 2014). It is important to expose the contradictions of the mimicked gastronomic patterns of

contemporary West Bengal by pondering on a basic question: What does our heart desire? Alexandra Jamieson, in her book *Women, Food and Desire: Honor Your Cravings, Embrace Your Desire and Reclaim Your Body* (2015), elaborates:

I'm a big believer that aside from providing us with the nutritional fuel we need to function at our best, food should make us happy. That's right: food should delight us, ignite us, and make us feel good. Really, really good. But, for most of us, the way we approach food does just the opposite ... It makes us feel ashamed. It makes us feel ugly and undesirable. It makes us feel wrong and unwelcome in our own bodies. And when we lose our knowledge that we have power over our relationship to it, it allows us to hide out from life (Jamieson 2015: 3 - 4).

The globalisation, commercialisation and capitalisation of European and North American food and culinary practices have manufactured a toxic and false hierarchy of 'undesirability' and 'desirability' that are based on class, caste, communal, social, cultural, geographical and economic belonging. In order to dismantle such toxic and false colonial and imperial European and North American influenced gastronomic desires and hierarchies in contemporary West Bengal the initiatives addressed below, are being taken.

***Khadya Mela* or Food Fests**

The Bengali term *Khadya Mela*¹³ can be loosely translated into English as a food festival. In order to revive the traditional Indigenous food cultures of precolonial Bengal, the government of West Bengal, in collaboration with local municipal organisations and private sponsors organises various food festivals across all the districts of West Bengal every year. These are organised across the state broadly for two reasons – firstly, organising it across all the districts of West Bengal ensures social, cultural, geographical, communal and economic representation; and secondly, such an organisational pattern brings together the local diversities of the traditional food and culinary practices.

¹³ *Khadya* means food and *Mela* means fests.

Allow us here to note the food items that were prepared and sold at the food festival: ‘Dum Dum Nale Jhole 2019’. The geographical place Dum Dum is located in the northern part of Kolkata and has historically been a residential area of the original residents¹⁴ of West Bengal. Therefore, the food items prepared for the festival catered to the traditional food and culinary practices of the residents there. The festival also displayed a cross-cultural and a cross-national approach by blending local Bengali ingredients with those acquired from the Europeans in the colonial and the postcolonial era. For instance, some of the local traditional dishes that were prepared were: fish and chicken *kabiraji*, *chhanar salna*, *basanti polau*, mutton *kosha*, *niramish pathar mangsho*, *maccher dobhaaji* and N.C. Das-er *rosogolla*. Fish and chicken *kabiraji* is prepared by removing the bones from the chicken and fish, mincing it and then mixing it with finely chopped onion, garlic, ginger, salt and turmeric. After mixing it thoroughly the mixture is flattened and then it is coated with biscuit powder. Thereafter, it is deep fried in mustard oil. It is then served hot as an evening snack or as a starter to meals that follow. The concept of *Kabiraji* was brought to the region by Muslim invaders of Bengal.

Chhanar dalna is prepared by making cheese balls that are deep fried in either mustard oil or butter. After the cheese balls have been fried, they are kept aside and a curry with ginger, garlic and onion paste is prepared. While the curry cooks, the cheese balls are soaked in it then served hot with a portion of rice. This is a common delicacy for the Bengalis, especially for vegetarians. This item is a blend of traditional Bengali and Portuguese cuisine. *Basanti polau* is prepared with rice, ghee, cardamom, cashew nuts, raisins and basanti colouring (a deep yellowish colour). This food item is a regular in the Bengali household, brought forth from the royal kitchen of Sova Bazar Rajbari¹⁵.

¹⁴ I have used the phrase ‘original residents’ in order to denote the Bengalis who have remained in West Bengal after the partition of precolonial Bengal into East Bengal (currently Bangladesh) and West Bengal in the British colonial era. During the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971, several refugees from East Bengal arrived in West Bengal and settled widely in the southern parts of Kolkata, whereas the northern parts of Kolkata widely remained in the hands of the original residents of West Bengal.

¹⁵ Sova Bazar is a historically reputed place, which is located in the northern part of Kolkata. The ‘Raj Bari’ or the royal palace of Sova Bazar is believed to

Mutton *kosha* is another delicacy that was brought forth by the Muslim invaders and rich ingredients are used for this spicy preparation. The mutton is cooked in a pot on a low flame; ginger, garlic, onion, tomato and red chilli paste are added to the mutton. It is usually prepared in mustard oil and is served with a portion of rice, *paratha*, *roti* and *luchi*.

The evolution of *niramish pathar mangsho*¹⁶ took place in the kitchen of the temple of Hindu Goddess Kali at Kalighat, Kolkata. The name of the dish in Bengali, when translated into English, is ‘vegetarian mutton curry’, which sounds quite peculiar. Though the term ‘*niramish*’ is translated into English as ‘vegetarian’, it connotes more than that. In Bengali culture, the term ‘*niramish*’ is used for dishes that are specially cooked without onion and garlic. As previously mentioned, the Bengalis believe that the use of onion and garlic were introduced into the Bengali cuisine by the Muslims, therefore they signify non-vegetarianism and anti-Hinduness; they are not the only cultural and ethnic group who adhere to this belief. With respect to this belief, still today, several Bengali households prefer to cook vegetarian dishes without onion and garlic. As such, in the temple of Hindu Goddess Kali at Kalighat, a special mutton curry without onion and garlic is prepared by the chefs at the temple’s kitchen as an offering to the goddess, on a daily basis. Today, this item has become a special delicacy in many Bengali households.

Maccher dobhaaji is a traditional food item of precolonial Bengal. The Bengali word ‘*macch*’ can be translated into English as ‘fish’ and the word ‘*dobhaaji*’ can be translated into English as ‘double fried’. The *dobhaaji* is usually prepared with fish like *Rohu*, *Bhetki* and *Pomphret*. A paste of salt, turmeric, onion, garlic, ginger, hand prepared garam masala, tomato, red chilli powder, cumin powder and ginger powder is prepared, then uniformly applied on the pieces of raw fish. The battered fish is double fried in mustard oil, which means that after the fish is fried for the first time, it is taken out of the frying pan, more spices are added and then it is put back in the frying pan to be fried for the second time. Usually, it is served with a portion of rice and lentils. N.C. Das-er *rosogolla* deserves special mention because historically it is believed that N.C. Das or Nobin Chandra Das discovered a white spongy

be the heart of North Kolkata because of its strong social, cultural and gastronomic impact on the habitual existence of the people there.

¹⁶ In the Bengali language, ‘*Pathar Mangsho*’ means goat meat.

sweet, which is made of cheese and sugar syrup, and he named it *rosogolla*¹⁷. Therefore, Nobin Chandra Das, which is also the name of a well-acclaimed sweet shop in Kolkata established by his family members, holds a significant social, cultural and historical place in the heart of the Bengalis. Some of the cross-national and cross-cultural dishes that were prepared at the food festival at Dum Dum were *nolengur* mousse and *nolengur* cupcake. *Nolen gur* translates to ‘new jaggery’ and it is extracted from date palm trees using deft skills during the winter months in West Bengal. In the festival, the local flavour of *nolengur* was integrated with the flavours of the European bakery items like mousses and cupcakes.

In a similar fashion, every year, several food festivals across different parts of West Bengal are organised to showcase the diverse social, cultural, communal and religious gastronomic patterns that are practised in a non-hierarchical and pluriversal manner in the contemporary era¹⁸.

Aesthetical Marketing by Street Hawkers

In order to de-racialise and decolonise the taste buds, the street food hawkers play a pivotal role through their tactics of aesthetical marketing. Aesthetical marketing is a phenomenon in which the sellers advertise their objects through their ‘self-created, rhythmic and rhetorical punchlines’ (Dey 2020b). On the one hand, their punchlines attract the attention of the customers and on the other it interrogates the racial prejudices that were once cultivated by the European colonisers of the traditional food of precolonial Bengal. For example, while travelling on a public bus a hawker would often sell black-coloured digestive capsules that are popularly known as *hajmi golis* with a Bengali punchline – *Dekhite Kaalo/Khete Bhalo*. The punchline can be loosely translated into English as – ‘It looks black and tastes good’. These punchlines have been used several times in this sub-section because the street hawkers shout it in a rhythmic manner to gain the attention of the customers on the one side and to dismantle the racial prejudices and ‘pigmentocracy’ (Maart 2014:

¹⁷ In Bengali language, the word ‘*Ros*’ means sugar syrup and ‘*Golla*’ means round.

¹⁸ All the information that has been shared in this section is a part of the first-hand experience of Sayan Dey. He has gathered this information after attending various food festivals in the city of Kolkata.

15) of the individuals towards the Native Bengali food dishes on the other. The second author stresses this point very directly when she asserts that the ‘extent to which a hierarchy of pigmentation operates in black communities, ... where divide and conquer strategies, as a consequence of our troubled relationship to White supremacy, gave rise to narratives of light skinned/dark skinned dichotomies escalating to a point to determine logic that can only be described as perverse and traumatic’ (Maart 2014: 15). Such pigmentocratic narratives of light-skinned and dark-skinned dichotomies widely influence the food of West Bengal. For instance, during my childhood I was often warned by my elders that I should avoid drinking tea and coffee because it would darken my skin. When I asked why, they would say that tea and coffee are either black or brownish in colour, therefore it has a direct impact on the colour of the human skin. So, a punchline like *Kalo Chaa/Bhlao Khaa*, which can be loosely translated into English as – ‘Black tea tastes good’, counters such illogical and colonially mimicked narratives by focusing on positive aspects.

In order to lure customers, many roadside sweet sellers will use the punchline – *Kaalo Lyangcha Dekhe Mukh Bhyangchaben Na/Akbar Khaben Konodin Bhulben Na*; loosely translated into English as – ‘do not make a face by looking at the black colour of the *lyangchas* because they are so tasty that if you have one, you will crave more’. As previously mentioned, a *lyangcha* is a cylindrical black coloured sweet and many people continue to believe in contemporary West Bengal that black coloured sweets should not be consumed because they darken the skin.

Back in my hometown of Kolkata, there is a roadside hotel close to where I live which uses the following punchline: *Jokhon Kalo-Shada Mishey Ak/Tokhon Khabarer ki Shwad Dekh*. The punchline, when translated into English, reads as ‘the combination of black and white enhances the taste of different foods’. In other words, in order to meet the desire of your taste buds it is important to liberate them beyond the narrow confinements of social, cultural, political, racial, communal, religious, geographical and economic binaries. This appears to be a very effective recipe for de-racialising, decolonising and de-capitalising the individual taste buds from the European and North American gastronomic influences in contemporary West Bengal.

Food blogging appears to be a very effective method of decolonising and de-racialising food and culinary practices and has become quite a phenomenon. Today, the practice of food blogging is growing at a fast rate in

West Bengal. It is not only introducing people to the traditional dining places, snack joints and sweet shops of West Bengal, but also making an effort to remember the dismembered food and culinary practices of precolonial Bengal. As an example, let us explore the food blog titled ‘Mohamushkil – a bongfoodie’s quest about best foods in India’, which was developed by an entrepreneur and avid food blogger named Indrajit Lahiri. Amongst several aspects of traditional Bengali cuisine, one of the most significant aspects of Bengali food culture that he elaborates upon in the blog is the culture of the ‘pice hotel’ in Kolkata. So, what then is a pice hotel?

According to Indrajit Lahiri, the concept of the pice hotel evolved around 1930s–40s when ‘things were available in paisa and then a full meal here (the basic ones) were available at the cost of a few paisa. Hence, people used to call them paisa hotel-pais hotel-pice hotel’ (2017). Food researcher Pritha Sen reflects upon this concept:

Pice hotels also known as Bhaater or Rice hotels were what were also termed Hindu hotels. They mushroomed sometime in the 1930s–40s as cheap eating houses set up to feed the hordes of daily-wage earners, students and babus who lived in the hostels and messes of Calcutta, far away from their homes in primarily East Bengal and therefore the food was primarily Bangaal, another reason why they have remained so low profile till the foodies discovered them a few years ago! The food was just like you would have at home, never knowing what your mother would put on the table, never knowing what fish your father would get back from his early morning with the accent on small fish and greens. The meals were served for 1/16th of a rupee (*sholoanayak taka*) but everything had a price to it from the *kola pata* to the *lebu* with rice and dal being unlimited [e.i.o (cited in Indrajit Lahiri 2017)].

Thus, apart from serving homely and traditional Bengali foods, the pice hotels function as archives of social, cultural, political and culinary histories. Some of the renowned pice hotels are, among others: Swadhin Bharat Hotel, Hotel Siddheshwari Ashram, Jagannath Bhojanalay and Young Bengal Khidderpore. Swadhin Bharat Hindu Hotel was established in the year 1917 amidst various anti-colonial movements in colonial Bengal.

During the British colonial era, this hotel served as a dining space for delicious food to many freedom fighters including Chittoranjana Das, the

founder leader of the Swaraj Party in Bengal. Apart from serving traditional delicacies like *machher matha die chorchori*¹⁹ and *topse machh bhaja*²⁰, it functions as a repository for diverse socio-historical narratives. Hotel Siddeshwari Ashram was established in the year 1925 and it has also served as one of the most visited dining places for revolutionaries in colonial Bengal. It is highly reputed for *kabirajijhol*²¹ and *rui machher jhol*²². Jagannath Bhojanalaya was established in the year 1960 and gained its reputation or its chefs from the Indian state of Orissa²³. Today, it is known for serving delicious mutton curry and *vetki fry*²⁴. Young Bengal Khiderpore was established in the year 1930 and it is generally reputed for its home-style Bengali foods.

Apart from pice hotels, Indrajit also talks about snack joints like Lakshmi Narayan Shaw and Sons, *lassi*²⁵ shops near the Esplanade metro station, etc. in his blog. Visiting and dining at these places is not only about satisfying one's desire for manifold food tastes, but also about revisiting one's individual as well as collective socio-cultural past. In this way, food blogs function as a powerful medium to remind one of, and allow one to recover, the traditional food and culinary practices of West Bengal.

Reviving the Family-Centric Culinary Practices

A very unique aspect of the traditional Bengali food and culinary practices is that most of the Bengali families have a rich history of preparing certain food dishes, which have originated within a respective family and is not commonly prepared by any other family and/or is not cooked in any restaurant. For instance, two dishes that have evolved from my family kitchen are *doga patar*

¹⁹ *Machher matha die chorchori* refers to a dish of mixed vegetable prepared with fish head.

²⁰ *Topse machh bhaja* refers to a dish of deeply fried 'topse' fish.

²¹ *Kabiraji* has already been described in this article. So, 'kabirajis' are made and then it is soaked in the curry. Any curry in Bengali language is referred to as 'jhol'.

²² *Rui machher* refers to Rohu fish and '*rui machher jhol*' refers to rohu fish curry.

²³ It is important to note that most of the reputed male chefs in these pice hotels are believed to have come from Orissa.

²⁴ *Vetki* is a type of white-scaled fish.

²⁵ It is a curd-based drink and is prepared by mixing curd, water and sugar.

jhol and *notun alur chocchori*. The preparation of these dishes was initiated by my great-great grandmother. *Dogapata* refers to the leaves of bottle gourd and pumpkin, and as mentioned earlier, *jhol* refers to any curry. The *jhol* is prepared by boiling bottle gourd and/or pumpkin leaves along with vegetables like potatoes, chicken drumsticks, papayas, pumpkins and carrots. After they are boiled, a small amount of mustard oil, or refined oil is poured into the cooking pan to mildly fry the *panch phoron*. After the *panch phoron* has been fried, the boiled vegetables are added to the cooking pan along with salt and black pepper. After all the required ingredients have been added, it is cooked for some time and then served hot, accompanied by boiled rice. Apart from being a delicacy during the humid summer season, it also functions as a home-made remedy for health problems like stomach inflammation and ulcers.

Notun alur chocchori is a vegetable dish made from onion, garlic, red chilli powder and small chunks of unpeeled potatoes. It is specifically cooked during the winter season, widely, due to two reasons: firstly, the potatoes that are used are not the usual large-sized potatoes, but the small, round ones that are cultivated exclusively during the winter season in West Bengal; secondly, this preparation is extremely hot and spicy. Therefore, it appears suitable for consumption only in cold weather conditions because its consumption during the unbearable summer heat might lead to health problems like stomach inflammation, indigestion, bloody diarrhoea, etcetera. This dish is prepared by chopping the unpeeled potatoes into small pieces. Then, along with finely chopped onions and garlic, red chilli powder, salt and turmeric powder, the potatoes are deep fried in the mustard oil. The oil that is used is measured precisely so that after the preparation of this dish is complete, the deep-fried onions, garlic and potatoes remain soaked in the fried oil. Usually, it is eaten with boiled rice as well as a serving of *roti*. Altogether, these initiatives are not only enabling a community to re-discover and rebuild their local and regional gastronomic traditions, but also function as an exercise to archive the past into the present and move toward a decolonial future.

Not Exactly a Conclusion

The purpose of elaborating on the traditional food and culinary practices of West Bengal and offering a critique of the European and North American imitation food patterns is not to generate narratives of gastronomic orthodoxies and chauvinisms, but rather to expose the various social, cultural, racial,

communal, geographical, colonial and political factors that motivated people to disown their traditional consumption patterns and impersonate the European colonisers and the North American imperialists. It is important to illustrate how the social, cultural, historical and sensual desire of taste buds have been captivated, colonised and enslaved by the toxic seductions of colonialism and capitalism.

The purpose here is not to conclude this article with a definite set of solutions but to develop a depolarised, pluriversal platform for dialogues, polylogues, agreements and disagreements, which will enable us to holistically involve ourselves in the exercise of *mothofatso* or a continuous re-humanisation of the social, cultural, historical, communal and geographical traditions of Indigenous food of West Bengal. The continual rehumanisation will also motivate us to de-hierarchise, de-capitalise and embrace different food from different parts of the world and successfully move from ‘elimination to connections’ (Gordon 2020).

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Volume I

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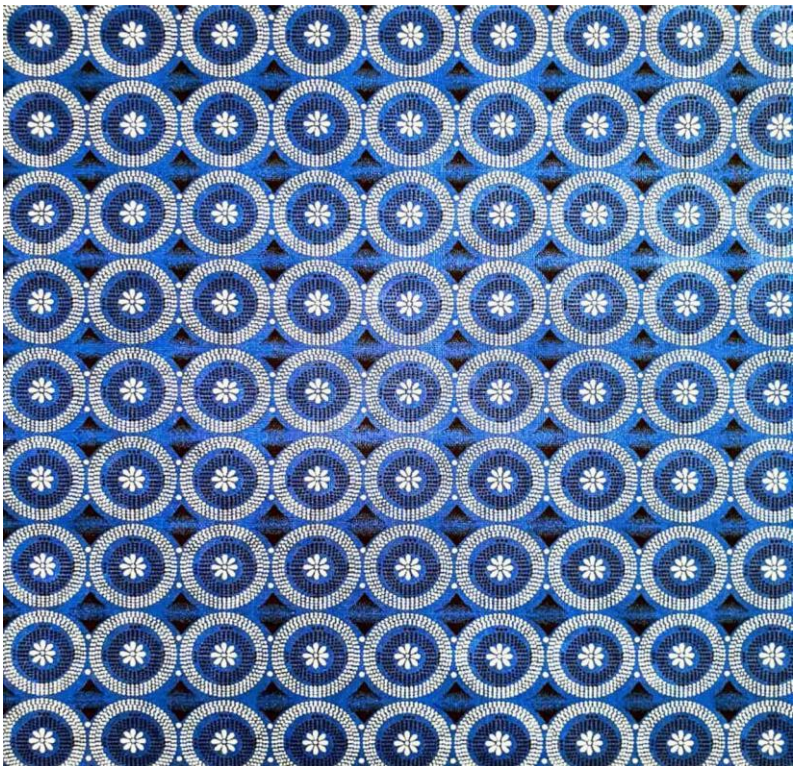
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Alternation

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Southern Africa**

**Decoloniality and Decolonial Education:
South Africa and the World
Volume II**

**Guest Editor
*Rozena Maart***

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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 Makarere 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 Makerere, 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 ‘Makerere’ 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*, Makerere 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, jewelled 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.

Acknowledgement: Sipho Singiswa wishes to acknowledge, through the ‘Critical Times, Critical Race’ research group, which was a recipient of a research grant through the National Research Foundation of South Africa (NRF), for their support in making travel and symposiums available that furthered discussion and research with students.

œ Opinion Piece 02 œ

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 AO 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 CRRRI 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

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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.

- Gordon, J.A. 2001. *Why they Couldn't Wait: A Critique of the Black - Jewish Conflict Over Community Control in Ocean-Hill Brownsville, 1967 - 1971*. New York & London: RoutledgeFalmer.
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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.

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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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jection of Blackness, was published by SUNY Press in 2018.

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