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

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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 Nation[1] experience: an upbringing that displays the New South Africa's[2] 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 arecited 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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