

BUILDING SOLIDARITIES

Racial Justice in the Built Environment

Building Solidarities is a form of mutual pedagogy between the campus and the public, through dialogues on urgent questions about constructed environments, urban life, and ecologies.

Building Solidarities: Racial Justice in the Built Environment foregrounds the communities of Minneapolis, Nairobi, and New York, in dialogues between students, activists, artists, and academics.

While building mutual solidarities between our campus and our partners, we aim to extend the political imaginaries, community futures, and solidarities that our partners may build with each other.

As we study racial and environmental complexities and injustices, we remain vigilantly reflexive about the relationship between our campus and our neighbors, in Harlem and elsewhere.

The series is supported by the course "Colonial Practices," taught by Anooradha Iyer Siddiqi. Web/podcasts are hosted by community organizations. To receive a research guide and link to attend, register by emailing the event title and date to buildingsolidarities@gmail.com.

Institutional Inhabitations

4:30-5:30 PM EST, September 23 2020

Guests: The GoDown Arts Centre and Navatman

On structuring cultural institutions and critical communities of black-brown solidarity in the African and South Asian diasporas of Nairobi and New York. Web/podcast by the GoDown Arts Centre (www.thegodownartscentre.com) and Navatman (www.navatman.org).

Building Historical Consciousness

4:30-5:30 PM EST, October 14 2020

Guests: Chris Cornelius, Elsa Hoover, and Nick Estes

Indigenous thinking on infrastructure and architecture as sites for historical consciousness and contemporary creative practice in North America. Web/podcast by The Red Nation (www.therednation.com)

Monumental Landscapes

4:30-5:30 PM EST, November 11 2020

Guests: Kate Beane, Lydia Muthuma, and Bhakti Shringarpure

A consideration of landscapes of monumentality through iconoclasm, replacement, and renaming of built and natural structures in Nairobi and Minneapolis. Web/podcast by Warscapes (www.warscapes.com).

Environmental Reclamations

4:30-5:30 PM EST, December 9 2020

Guests: Alishine Osman, Anisa Salat, and Huma Gupta

Environmental diasporas and ecological reclamation in the 'Somalias' of Dadaab, Minneapolis, and Mogadishu. Web/podcast by Jadaliyya, "Environment in Context" (www.jadaliyya.com Environment page) and Status podcast (www.statishour.com).



INSTITUTE FOR COMPARATIVE
LITERATURE AND SOCIETY
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

BARNARD

Office of the Provost, Barnard College
Barnard and Columbia Colleges Department of Architecture

Institutional Inhabitations

On structuring cultural institutions and critical communities of black-brown solidarity in the African and South Asian diasporas of Nairobi and New York.

September 23, 2020

4:30-5:30 PM EST

Guests: The GoDown Arts Centre and Navatman

The GoDown Arts Centre is a premier non-profit multidisciplinary arts facility in Nairobi that provides subsidized space for Kenyan artists and presents a diverse range of programs for local audiences, as well as spearheading entrepreneurial capacity building programs and creative sector discourses for artists in the East Africa region. Some of its programs include *Nai ni Who*, a Nairobi festival that celebrates city diversity, urban geographies and cultures, and identity formations, and a Creative Entrepreneurship Course that helps artists make a living off of their art, which has developed over the years to include a segment on copyright now run in partnership with Harvard University's Copyright x.

Navatman Music Collective explores the depth and beauty of Carnatic (South Indian classical) music while imbuing it with diverse, contemporary influences. The choir finds joy in the pure act of singing. Based in the cosmopolitan New York City, it brings to Carnatic music new presentation formats, cross-genre collaborations, original compositions, and a sense of diverse, judgement free community. Navatman Dance, led by artistic director Sahasra Sambamoorthi, is a *bharatanatyam* dance company based in New York City whose mission is to bring extraordinary productions to the stage, making Indian classical dance more accessible to understand and experience without removing the tradition and history that the style has developed from.

Joy Mboya is the Executive Director of the GoDown Arts Centre. Joy has wide experience in the Kenya cultural sector, having served on the boards of many different arts organizations in film, theatre, music and dance. She is the recipient of a number of awards including the Head of State Commendation Medal (2009) for her contribution to the development of the creative economy in Kenya, and most recently the Order of the Golden Warrior State Commendation (2013) for her contribution to the development of the Kenya cultural sector. Joy is a graduate in architecture from Princeton University, USA.

Garnette Oluoch-Olunya is a Strategic Consultant, Arts & Culture, for the GoDown Arts Centre. Amongst other projects, she has been a neighborhood coordinator for *Nai ni Who*; and faculty on the Creative Entrepreneurship Course. She has been Senior Lecturer in the Department of Language & Communication, and Director of the Centre for Cultural and Creative Industries at the Technical University of Kenya, and is currently adjunct faculty in the Departments of Theology and Literature at St Paul's University, Limuru, Kenya. She sits on the Advisory board of, and has edited several issues of *Jahazi: Journal of Culture, Arts &*

Performance, an important local platform for critical conversations. She is also co-author with Joy Mboya of 'Nai ni Who?: Exploring Urban Identity, Place and Social Reconstruction in Nairobi' in *Critical Interventions: Journal of African History & Visual Culture* Vol 11 Issue 1, 2017. She is a fellow of the Centre for Advanced Scholarship, University of Pretoria, RSA. She holds a PhD in English Literature from the University of Glasgow, and is a member of the Glasgow University Council.

Sahasra Sambamoorthi is the co-founder of Navatman. She has a passion to reignite the fire of the South Asian performing arts within the U.S. From a young age Sahasra knew she wanted to remain in the field not only as a dancer but as an arts administrator, and her time in Columbia University's South Asian fusion dance group Taal only furthered that ambition. Sahasra consequently co-choreographed and co-produced *Her Story*, a powerful dance drama about the lives of women legends in Hindu mythology with alumna Srinidhi Raghavan. The unpredicted success of the show led her to start her dream in Navatman, Inc and further her education by garnering her MA from New York University in South Asian dance, history, and anthropology. Though Sahasra was both born and trained in the US, this has only served to widen her ability to connect with both Indian and non-Indian audiences. It has also helped her gain accolades and scholarships, such as the New Jersey State Council of the Arts Folk Arts Apprenticeship.

Keisha Brown trained in ballet, tap, jazz, and caribbean dance from the age of 9 at schools across New York City including Broadway Dance Center and Alvin Ailey. She took singing lessons through her elementary school years up to high school, but ceased upon being told she "wasn't good enough." Soon after, due to college preparation and believing she had to "realistically" choose dance or a degree, she took an indefinite break from dance only having the chance to take a class or perform a handful of times over six years. Upon attending Navatman's production, *Tales of Bhasmasura* in 2016, she was rejuvenated and reminded of her love for dance and music. After the show, she scurried down the steps of the Tribeca Performing Arts Center theater, immediately asking co-founder of Navatman, Sahasra Sambamoorthi, "How do I do what you just did and when do classes start?" Keisha began her training in Bharatanatyam and Kathak under Sahasra Sambamoorthi in 2017. It was soon followed by Carnatic vocals under Samyukta Ranganathan one year later and Odissi under Sri Thina Subramaniam two years after. Currently, Keisha is a faculty member with the Navatman school assisting in administrative tasks, training in teaching Bharatanatyam and Kathak, and enjoying all Navatman has to offer.

This program is supported by the course "Colonial Practices" taught by Anooradha Iyer Siddiqi.
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Guiding Questions

1. How would you describe your experiences building your organization? What were the highlights and pitfalls? How does your organization relate to others in your cultural milieu?
2. Can you speak to how you have worked with the built environment and the communities in your city? What is gained by your community approach?
3. Based on your experiences in Nairobi after the post-election violence of 2008 and the Nai Ni Who? project (GoDown Arts Centre) and the Black Lives Matter Movement in Nairobi (GoDown Arts Centre) and New York (Navatman), can you discuss how you think about and attempt to structure black-brown solidarities? How do you connect to the African, South Asian, and diaspora neighborhoods of Nairobi and New York?

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Akwugo Emejulu

12 January 2017

2 comments

Another University is Possible



The SOAS students' struggle to decolonise their curriculum is a call to reshape and re-imagine what the university is for and whom the university should serve.

The School for Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) was founded by the British state in 1916 to strengthen imperial interests in Asia and Africa. It admitted its first students in 1917, among them colonial administrators, as well as military officers, doctors and missionaries, to instruct them in the languages and cultures of the regions to which they would be posted to govern and rule on behalf of the British Empire. It is in light of the institution's centenary that

SOAS students are seeking to decolonise it. This collective action undertaken by academic staff and students attempts to challenge the university's "self-image as progressive and diverse" and build a more just and inclusive institution. Some of the aims of decolonisation are reparative: students are demanding the provision of more scholarships for refugees and displaced people, regardless of their immigration status, and more bursaries and grants for working-class students. Linked to the decolonising agenda is also the campaign to end the outsourcing of cleaning staff and for their secure work and pay.



At the start of every academic year, the Students' Union publishes its educational priorities. Decolonising the curriculum is a key priority declared by the Union and thereby the students they represent. It is the suggested actions for this objective, 'Decolonising SOAS: Confronting the White Institution', that has provoked controversy – even though it would seem that students at SOAS, the only higher education institution in Europe devoted to the study of the Middle East, Asia and Africa, would have every right to demand that their curriculum is grounded in the perspectives and scholarship of the regions in which the university purports to specialise.

The campaign statement to decolonise SOAS does not call for the removal of specific theorists from the curriculum, yet this has been misrepresented in the media, with the students caricatured as ignorant, censorious snowflakes who insist on racialising the 'pure' discipline of philosophy. *The Telegraph's*

insist on racialising the pure discipline of philosophy. *The Telegraph's* headline read, 'University students demand philosophers such as Plato and Kant are removed from syllabus because they are white'. The article reports that the conservative philosopher, Roger Scruton, derided the student action as ignorant: "clearly they haven't investigated what they mean by 'white philosophy'. If they think there is a colonial context from which Kant's Critique of Pure Reason arose, I would like to hear it." Meanwhile, conservative historian Anthony Seldon counseled: "We need to understand the world as it is and not rewrite history as some might like it to have been". The great irony of these dismissals is that the SOAS students are seeking to resist the very revisionism itself of contemporary accounts of the Enlightenment, specifying that "if white philosophers are required, then to teach their work from a critical standpoint. For example, acknowledging the colonial context in which so called 'Enlightenment' philosophers wrote within."

The question is, what does it mean to teach the Enlightenment 'in context'?

The typical telling of the familiar Enlightenment story goes something like this: all men are equally endowed with rationality and logic. These rational men also have inalienable natural rights with which no actor can interfere. Thus all rational men must enjoy liberty. These rational men are not subject to the arbitrary power of the state or the church; it is only through a social contract between free men and the state that they voluntarily relinquish some of their liberty for the benefits of living in a society and enjoying the protection of a sovereign ruler. It is in the Enlightenment philosophies of Immanuel Kant, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, David Hume and John Locke, for instance, that we see the birth of European modernity expressed through the ideas of the individual, rationality, equality, liberty and property.

Contemporary understandings of the Enlightenment assume that philosophers such as Kant, Rousseau, Hume and Locke, are expansive and inclusive in their views of humanity, especially since they claim their ideas are universal. But how do these philosophers define who gets included in the category of 'man'? Who gets to enjoy categorisation as a rational individual with inalienable rights to life, liberty and property – and who does not? It is taken without question that the philosophers' exclusivism underlying the category of 'man' is merely anachronistic. More importantly, the political nature of such categorisation is considered to be completely beside the point of their theories, which, we are

repeatedly reminded, serve as the bedrock of liberal democracy. Quite rightly, SOAS students wish to be critically engaged by their lecturers on this point of how humanity is conferred to include some people but not others in the Enlightenment vision of ‘man’ and hence, European modernity.

Membership to the category of rational, free and equal men is restricted, as has been extensively documented by some of the Enlightenment philosophers themselves, and as Leah Bassel and I argue in our forthcoming book on women of colour and austerity. “Race is in no way an ‘afterthought’, a deviation from ostensibly raceless Western ideals”, Charles Mills reminds us, “but rather a central shaping constituent of these ideals”. The contemporary interpretation of the Enlightenment obscures its exclusion of women, ‘savages’, slaves and indigenous peoples through the prevailing racial science as inherently irrational beings. Savages – or the colonial other: the Native or Aboriginal peoples, the African, the Indian, the slave – were constructed as subhuman, incapable of logical reasoning and thus not subject to the equality or liberty enjoyed by ‘men’. It is here, in the hierarchies of modernity that we can understand the central role of racism in shaping the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment is brought into being by Europe’s colonial entanglements and is wholly dependent on its particular patriarchal relations – which Europe, in turn, imposed on its colonial subjects.

It is of crucial significance that Enlightenment philosophies dovetail with the political economy of colonialism and continue to shape, and to limit, political discourse today. To enslave and plunder requires the dehumanisation of the Other, to exploit and expropriate the colonial subject’s labour. We would do well to remember that key Enlightenment theorists had a financial stake in imperial conquest and their philosophies were put to work to justify their material interests. For instance, John Locke was an investor in the trans-Atlantic slave trade and defended slave owners’ property rights – the right to own, rape and murder fellow human beings for profit. It was this intellectualisation of chattel slavery and colonialism, via a sophisticated, selective categorisation of ‘man’, that made colonialism and the slave trade – and thus European modernity – possible. The concepts of liberty, equality, property and human rights born of the Enlightenment are entwined with the history of capitalist violence. As such, refusing to scrutinise the positions of Enlightenment philosophers on university curricula serves to whitewash the

legacy of colonialism. “There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism,” wrote Walter Benjamin. “And just as such a document is not free of barbarism, barbarism taints also the manner in which it was transmitted from one owner to another.”

Consequently, when the SOAS students demand acknowledgement of “the colonial context in which so called ‘Enlightenment’ philosophers wrote within”, they are resisting the revisionism that seeks to erase and deny the racial and gender politics underlying contemporary ideas of Europe – and their own institution. Further, by demanding to refocus their studies on African, Middle Eastern and Asian scholarship, the students expose the operation of whiteness in their curriculum: because whiteness is normative, white supremacy operates in plain sight but resists being named or subject to critique. The backlash and the misrepresentation of the students’ views is part of a familiar pattern of delegitimising those who challenge white domination.

The campaign to decolonise SOAS is a call to reshape and re-imagine what the university is for and whom the university should serve. As Kerem Nisancioglu, Lecturer in International Relations and a member of the campaign to decolonise SOAS argues: “We need to understand the racial politics that inform knowledge production as this goes right to the heart of both what the university is and what racism is.” To decolonise is to imagine that another university is possible.

Akwugo Emejulu is Senior Lecturer at the University of Edinburgh. From February 2017, she will be Professor of Sociology at the University of Warwick. Her co-authored book, The Politics of Survival: Minority Women, Activism and Austerity in France and Britain is forthcoming with Policy Press.

2 Comments

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Chris Yates

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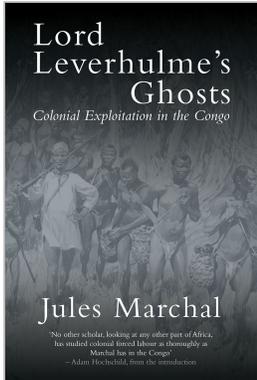


I recently read of John Locke's financial stake in the slave trade, in David Olusonga's brilliant book 'Black and British: A Forgotten History'. Locke was a shareholder in The Royal African Company, who, between the 17th and 18th centuries, held a royal monopoly in trading slaves. Over a period of fifty years, some 150,000 men, women and children were sold into "miserable slavery", writes Olusonga.

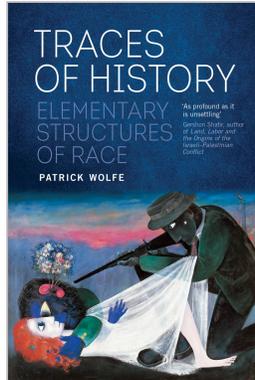
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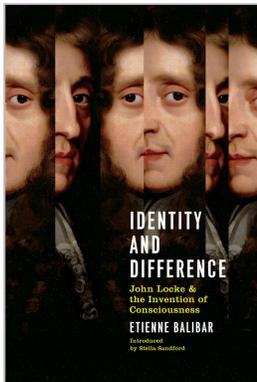
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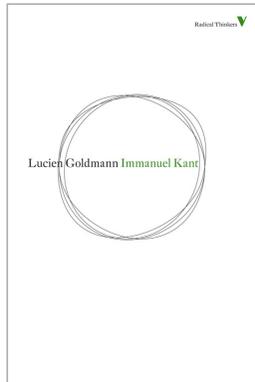
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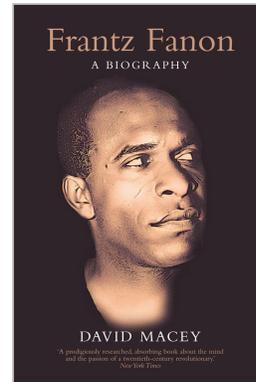
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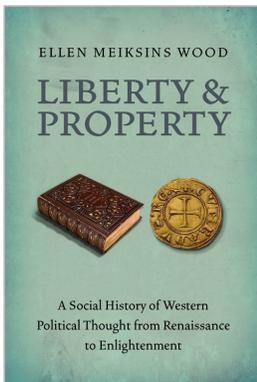
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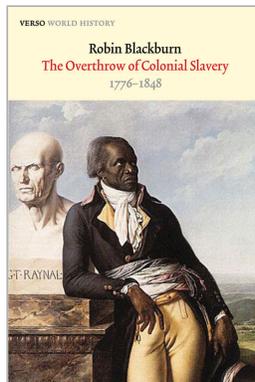
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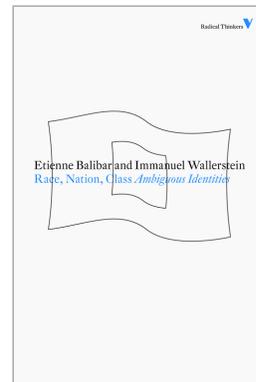
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Liberty and Property



The Overthrow of Colonial

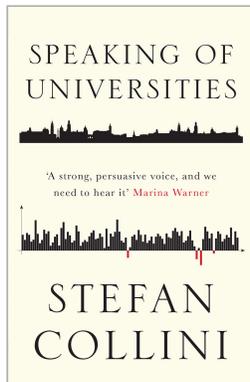
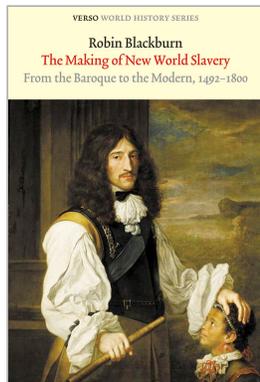


Race, Nation, Class

by Ellen Meiksins Wood

Slavery
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by Etienne Balibar and
Immanuel Wallerstein



*The Making of New World
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From: Within the Circle: An Anthology of African American Literary

Criticism from the Harlem Renaissance to the Present, Angelyn Mitchell, ed.
Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994.

Alice Walker

In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens

(1972)

I described her own nature and temperament. Told how they needed a larger life for their expression. . . . I pointed out that in lieu of proper channels, her emotions had overflowed into paths that dissipated them. I talked, beautifully I thought, about an art that would be born, an art that would open the way for women the likes of her. I asked her to hope, and build up an inner life against the coming of that day. . . . I sang, with a strange quiver in my voice, a promise song.—Jean Toomer, "Avey," *Cane*

The poet speaking to a prostitute who falls asleep while he's talking—

When the poet Jean Toomer walked through the South in the early twenties, he discovered a curious thing: black women whose spirituality was so intense, so deep, so *unconscious*, that they were themselves unaware of the richness they held. They stumbled blindly through their lives: creatures so abused and mutilated in body, so dimmed and confused by pain, that they considered themselves unworthy even of hope. In the selfless abstractions their bodies became to the men who used them, they became more than "sexual objects," more even than mere women: they became "Saints." Instead of being perceived as whole persons, their bodies became shrines: what was thought to be their minds became temples suitable for worship. These crazy Saints stared out at the world, wildly, like lunatics—or quietly, like suicides; and the "God" that was in their gaze was as mute as a great stone.

Who were these Saints? These crazy, loony, pitiful women?

Some of them, without a doubt, were our mothers and grandmothers.

In the still heat of the post-Reconstruction South, this is how they seemed to Jean Toomer: exquisite butterflies trapped in an evil honey, toiling away

This essay first appeared in Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (New York, 1972).

their lives in an era, a century, that did not acknowledge them, except as "the mule of the world." They dreamed dreams that no one knew—not even themselves, in any coherent fashion—and saw visions no one could understand. They wandered or sat about the countryside crooning lullabies to ghosts, and drawing the mother of Christ in charcoal on courthouse walls.

They forced their minds to desert their bodies and their striving spirits sought to rise, like frail whirlwinds from the hard red clay. And when those frail whirlwinds fell, in scattered particles, upon the ground, no one mourned. Instead, men lit candles to celebrate the emptiness that remained, as people do who enter a beautiful but vacant space to resurrect a God.

Our mothers and grandmothers, some of them: moving to music not yet written. And they waited.

They waited for a day when the unknown thing that was in them would be made known; but guessed, somehow in their darkness, that on the day of their revelation they would be long dead. Therefore to Toomer they walked, and even ran, in slow motion. For they were going nowhere immediate, and the future was not yet within their grasp. And men took our mothers and grandmothers, "but got no pleasure from it." So complex was their passion and their calm.

To Toomer, they lay vacant and fallow as autumn fields, with harvest time never in sight: and he saw them enter loveless marriages, without joy; and become prostitutes, without resistance; and become mothers of children, without fulfillment.

For these grandmothers and mothers of ours were not Saints, but Artists; driven to a numb and bleeding madness by the springs of creativity in them for which there was no release. They were Creators, who lived lives of spiritual waste, because they were so rich in spirituality—which is the basis of Art—that the strain of enduring their unused and unwanted talent drove them insane. Throwing away this spirituality was their pathetic attempt to lighten the soul to a weight their work-worn, sexually abused bodies could bear.

What did it mean for a black woman to be an artist in our grandmothers' time? In our great-grandmothers' day? It is a question with an answer cruel enough to stop the blood.

Did you have a genius of a great-great-grandmother who died under some ignorant and depraved white overseer's lash? Or was she required to bake biscuits for a lazy backwater tramp, when she cried out in her soul to paint watercolors of sunsets, or the rain falling on the green and peaceful pasture-

lands? Or was her body broken and forced to bear children (who were more often than not sold away from her)—eight, ten, fifteen, twenty children—when her one joy was the thought of modeling heroic figures of rebellion, in stone or clay?

How was the creativity of the black woman kept alive, year after year and century after century, when for most of the years black people have been in America, it was a punishable crime for a black person to read or write? And the freedom to paint, to sculpt, to expand the mind with action did not exist. Consider, if you can bear to imagine it, what might have been the result if singing, too, had been forbidden by law. Listen to the voices of Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, Nina Simone, Roberta Flack, and Aretha Franklin, among others, and imagine those voices muzzled for life. Then you may begin to comprehend the lives of our “crazy,” “Sainted” mothers and grandmothers. The agony of the lives of women who might have been Poets, Novelists, Essayists, and Short-Story Writers (over a period of centuries), who died with their real gifts stifled within them.

And, if this were the end of the story, we would have cause to cry out in my paraphrase of Okot p'Bitek's great poem:

O, my clanswomen
Let us all cry together!
Come,
Let us mourn the death of our mother,
The death of a Queen
The ash that was produced
By a great fire!
O, this homestead is utterly dead
Close the gates
With *lacari* thorns,
For our mother
The creator of the Stool is lost!
And all the young women
Have perished in the wilderness!

But this is not the end of the story, for all the young women—our mothers and grandmothers, *ourselves*—have not perished in the wilderness. And if we ask ourselves why, and search for and find the answer, we will know beyond all efforts to erase it from our minds, just exactly who, and of what, we black American women are.

One example, perhaps the most pathetic, most misunderstood one, can provide a backdrop for our mothers' work: Phillis Wheatley, a slave in the 1700s.

Virginia Woolf, in her book *A Room of One's Own*, wrote that in order for a woman to write fiction she must have two things, certainly: a room of her own (with key and lock) and enough money to support herself.

What then are we to make of Phillis Wheatley, a slave, who owned not even herself? This sickly, frail black girl who required a servant of her own at times—her health was so precarious—and who, had she been white, would have been easily considered the intellectual superior of all the women and most of the men in the society of her day.

Virginia Woolf wrote further, speaking of course not of our Phillis, that “any woman born with a great gift in the sixteenth century [insert “eighteenth century,” insert “black woman,” insert “born or made a slave”] would certainly have gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage outside the village, half witch, half wizard [insert “Saint”], feared and mocked at. For it needs little skill and psychology to be sure that a highly gifted girl who had tried to use her gift for poetry would have been so thwarted and hindered by contrary instincts [add “chains, guns, the lash, the ownership of one's body by someone else, submission to an alien religion”], that she must have lost her health and sanity to a certainty.”

The key words, as they relate to Phillis, are “contrary instincts.” For when we read the poetry of Phillis Wheatley—as when we read the novels of Nella Larsen or the oddly false-sounding autobiography of that freest of all black women writers, Zora Hurston—evidence of “contrary instincts” is everywhere. Her loyalties were completely divided, as was, without question, her mind.

But how could this be otherwise? Captured at seven, a slave of wealthy, doting whites who instilled in her the “savagery” of the Africa they “rescued” her from, one wonders if she was even able to remember her homeland as she had known it, or as it really was.

Yet, because she did try to use her gift for poetry in a world that made her a slave, she was “so thwarted and hindered by . . . contrary instincts, that she . . . lost her health. . . .” In the last years of her brief life, burdened not only with the need to express her gift but also with a penniless, friendless “freedom” and several small children for whom she was forced to do strenuous work to feed, she lost her health, certainly. Suffering from malnutrition and neglect and who knows what mental agonies, Phillis Wheatley died.

So torn by “contrary instincts” was black, kidnapped, enslaved Phillis that her description of “the Goddess”—as she poetically called the Liberty she did not have—is ironically, cruelly humorous. And, in fact, has held Phillis up to ridicule for more than a century. It is usually read prior to hanging Phillis’s memory as that of a fool. She wrote:

The Goddess comes, she moves divinely fair,
Olive and laurel binds her *golden* hair.
Wherever shines this native of the skies,
Unnumber’d charms and recent graces rise. [My italics]

It is obvious that Phillis, the slave, combed the “Goddess’s” hair every morning; prior, perhaps, to bringing in the milk, or fixing her mistress’s lunch. She took her imagery from the one thing she saw elevated above all others.

With the benefit of hindsight we ask, “How could she?”

But at last, Phillis, we understand. No more snickering when your stiff, struggling, ambivalent lines are forced on us. We know now that you were not an idiot or a traitor; only a sickly little black girl, snatched from your home and country and made a slave; a woman who still struggled to sing the song that was your gift, although in a land of barbarians who praised you for your bewildered tongue. It is not so much what you sang, as that you kept alive, in so many of our ancestors, *the notion of song*.

Black women are called, in the folklore that so aptly identifies one’s status in society, “the *mule* of the world,” because we have been handed the burdens that everyone else—*everyone* else—refused to carry. We have also been called “Matriarchs,” “Superwomen,” and “Mean and Evil Bitches.” Not to mention “Castraters” and “Sapphire’s Mama.” When we have pleaded for understanding, our character has been distorted; when we have asked for simple caring, we have been handed empty inspirational appellations, then stuck in the farthest corner. When we have asked for love, we have been given children. In short, even our plainer gifts, our labors of fidelity and love, have been knocked down our throats. To be an artist and a black woman, even today, lowers our status in many respects, rather than raises it: and yet, artists we will be.

Therefore we must fearlessly pull out of ourselves and look at and identify with our lives the living creativity some of our great-grandmothers were not allowed to know. I stress *some* of them because it is well known that the

majority of our great-grandmothers knew, even without “knowing” it, the reality of their spirituality, even if they didn’t recognize it beyond what happened in the singing at church—and they never had any intention of giving it up.

How they did it—those millions of black women who were not Phillis Wheatley, or Lucy Terry or Frances Harper or Zora Hurston or Nella Larsen or Bessie Smith; or Elizabeth Catlett, or Katherine Dunham, either—brings me to the title of this essay, “In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens,” which is a personal account that is yet shared, in its theme and its meaning, by all of us. I found, while thinking about the far-reaching world of the creative black woman, that often the truest answer to a question that really matters can be found very close.

In the late 1920s my mother ran away from home to marry my father. Marriage, if not running away, was expected of seventeen-year-old girls. By the time she was twenty, she had two children and was pregnant with a third. Five children later, I was born. And this is how I came to know my mother: she seemed a large, soft, loving-eyed woman who was rarely impatient in our home. Her quick, violent temper was on view only a few times a year, when she battled with the white landlord who had the misfortune to suggest to her that her children did not need to go to school.

She made all the clothes we wore, even my brothers’ overalls. She made all the towels and sheets we used. She spent the summers canning vegetables and fruits. She spent the winter evenings making quilts enough to cover all our beds.

During the “working” day, she labored beside—not behind—my father in the fields. Her day began before sunup, and did not end until late at night. There was never a moment for her to sit down, undisturbed, to unravel her own private thoughts; never a time free from interruption—by work or the noisy inquiries of her many children. And yet, it is to my mother—and all our mothers who were not famous—that I went in search of the secret of what has fed that muzzled and often mutilated, but vibrant, creative spirit that the black woman has inherited, and that pops out in wild and unlikely places to this day.

But when, you will ask, did my overworked mother have time to know or care about feeding the creative spirit?

The answer is so simple that many of us have spent years discovering it. We have constantly looked high, when we should have looked high—and low.

For example: in the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., there hangs a quilt unlike any other in the world. In fanciful, inspired, and yet simple and identifiable figures, it portrays the story of the Crucifixion. It is considered rare, beyond price. Though it follows no known pattern of quilt-making, and though it is made of bits and pieces of worthless rags, it is obviously the work of a person of powerful imagination and deep spiritual feeling. Below this quilt I saw a note that says it was made by "an anonymous Black woman in Alabama, a hundred years ago."

If we could locate this "anonymous" black woman from Alabama, she would turn out to be one of our grandmothers—an artist who left her mark in the only materials she could afford, and in the only medium her position in society allowed her to use.

As Virginia Woolf wrote further, in *A Room of One's Own*:

Yet genius of a sort must have existed among women as it must have existed among the working class. [Change this to "slaves" and "the wives and daughters of sharecroppers."] Now and again an Emily Brontë or a Robert Burns [change this to "a Zora Hurston or a Richard Wright"] blazes out and proves its presence. But certainly it never got itself on to paper. When, however, one reads of a witch being ducked, of a woman possessed by devils [or "Sainthood"], of a wise woman selling herbs [our root workers], or even a very remarkable man who had a mother, then I think we are on the track of a lost novelist, a suppressed poet, of some mute and inglorious Jane Austen. . . . Indeed, I would venture to guess that Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman. . . .

And so our mothers and grandmothers have, more often than not anonymously, handed on the creative spark, the seed of the flower they themselves never hoped to see: or like a sealed letter they could not plainly read.

And so it is, certainly, with my own mother. Unlike "Ma" Rainey's songs, which retained their creator's name even while blasting forth from Bessie Smith's mouth, no song or poem will bear my mother's name. Yet so many of the stories that I write, that we all write, are my mother's stories. Only recently did I fully realize this: that through years of listening to my mother's stories of her life, I have absorbed not only the stories themselves, but something of the manner in which she spoke, something of the urgency that involves the knowledge that her stories—like her life—must be recorded. It is probably for this reason that so much of what I have written is about characters whose counterparts in real life are so much older than I am.

But the telling of these stories, which came from my mother's lips as naturally as breathing, was not the only way my mother showed herself as an artist. For stories, too, were subject to being distracted, to dying without conclusion. Dinners must be started, and cotton must be gathered before the big rains. The artist that was and is my mother showed itself to me only after many years. This is what I finally noticed:

Like Mem, a character in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, my mother adorned with flowers whatever shabby house we were forced to live in. And not just your typical straggly country stand of zinnias, either. She planted ambitious gardens—and still does—with over fifty different varieties of plants that bloom profusely from early March until late November. Before she left home for the fields, she watered her flowers, chopped up the grass, and laid out new beds. When she returned from the fields she might divide clumps of bulbs, dig a cold pit, uproot and replant roses, or prune branches from her taller bushes or trees—until night came and it was too dark to see.

Whatever she planted grew as if by magic, and her fame as a grower of flowers spread over three counties. Because of her creativity with her flowers, even my memories of poverty are seen through a screen of blooms—sunflowers, petunias, roses, dahlias, forsythia, spirea, delphiniums, verbena . . . and on and on.

And I remember people coming to my mother's yard to be given cuttings from her flowers; I hear again the praise showered on her because whatever rocky soil she landed on, she turned into a garden. A garden so brilliant with colors, so original in its design, so magnificent with life and creativity, that to this day people drive by our house in Georgia—perfect strangers and imperfect strangers—and ask to stand or walk among my mother's art.

I notice that it is only when my mother is working in her flowers that she is radiant, almost to the point of being invisible—except as Creator: hand and eye. She is involved in work her soul must have. Ordering the universe in the image of her personal conception of Beauty.

Her face, as she prepares the Art that is her gift, is a legacy of respect she leaves to me, for all that illuminates and cherishes life. She has handed down respect for the possibilities—and the will to grasp them.

For her, so hindered and intruded upon in so many ways, being an artist has still been a daily part of her life. This ability to hold on, even in very simple ways, is work black women have done for a very long time.

This poem is not enough, but it is something, for the woman who literally covered the holes in our walls with sunflowers:

They were women then
My mama's generation
Husky of voice—Stout of
Step
With fists as well as
Hands
How they battered down
Doors
And ironed
Starched white
Shirts
How they led
Armies
Headragged Generals
Across mined
Fields
Bobby-trapped
Kitchens
To discover books
Desks
A place for us
How they knew what we
Must know
Without knowing a page
Of it
Themselves.

Guided by my heritage of a love of beauty and a respect for strength—in search of my mother's garden, I found my own.

And perhaps in Africa over two hundred years ago, there was just such a mother; perhaps she painted vivid and daring decorations in oranges and yellows and greens on the walls of her hut; perhaps she sang—in a voice like Roberta Flack's—*sweetly* over the compounds of her village; perhaps she wove the most stunning mats or told the most ingenious stories of all the village storytellers. Perhaps she was herself a poet—though only her daughter's name is signed to the poems that we know.

Perhaps Phillis Wheatley's mother was also an artist.

Perhaps in more than Phillis Wheatley's biological life is her mother's signature made clear.

Decoloniality as the Future of Africa

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Abstract

Decoloniality is not only a long-standing political and epistemological movement aimed at liberation of (ex-) colonized peoples from global coloniality but also a way of thinking, knowing, and doing. It is part of marginalized but persistent movements that merged from struggles against the slave trade, imperialism, colonialism, apartheid, neo-colonialism, and underdevelopment as constitutive negative elements of Euro-North American-centric modernity. As an epistemological movement, it has always been overshadowed by hegemonic Euro-North American-centric intellectual thought and social theories. As a political movement, it has consistently been subjected to surveillance of global imperial designs and colonial matrices of power. But today, decoloniality is reemerging at a time when the erstwhile hegemonic Euro-North American-centric modernity and its dominant epistemology are experiencing an epistemological break. This epistemic break highlights how Euro-North American-centric modernity has created modern problems of which it has no modern solutions and how theories/knowledges generated from a Euro-North American-centric context have become exhausted if not obstacles to the understanding of contemporary human issues. This essay introduces, defines, and explains the necessity for decoloniality as a liberatory language of the future for Africa.

Introduction

This essay introduces and defines decoloniality as an epistemological and political movement and advances decoloniality as a necessary liberatory language of the future for Africa. Decoloniality speaks to the deepening and widening of decolonization movements in those spaces that experienced the slave trade, imperialism, colonialism, apartheid, neocolonialism, and underdevelopment. This is because the domains of culture, the psyche, mind, language, aesthetics, religion, and many others have remained colonized. Decoloniality calls on intellectuals from imperialist countries to undertake ‘a deimperialization movement by reexamining their own imperialist histories and the harmful impacts those histories have had on the world.’² The essay begins by back-grounding the long-term impact of colonialism as a constitutive part of Euro-North American-centric modernity as it challenges the notion of colonialism being considered a mere event/episode in African history. It proceeds to distinguish coloniality from colonialism and decoloniality from decolonization. It ends by rebutting some of the criticisms of decoloniality and concludes by explaining why it is a liberatory language of the future.

Colonialism as Understood from the Epic School

The leading African scholar Ali A. Mazrui argued that the long-term impact of colonialism on Africa can be understood from two perspectives. He designated the first perspective as the epic school. This school underscored the fact that colonialism amounted to ‘a revolution of epic propositions.’³ Mazrui identified six long-term consequences of colonialism. First, colonialism and capitalism forcibly incorporated Africa into the world economy, beginning with the slave trade, ‘which dragged African labour itself into the emerging international capitalist system.’⁴

African labor contributed immensely to the economic rise of a Euro-North American-centric trans-Atlantic commerce. Second, Africa that had been excluded from the post-1648 Westphalian sovereign state system and that was physically partitioned after the Berlin Conference of 1884–5 was later incorporated into the post-1945 United Nations sovereignty state system. One can add that the fragmented and weak African ‘postcolonial’ states were admitted into the lowest echelons of the Euro-North American-dominated state system of the world.⁵

Third, Africa was incorporated into a Euro-North American-centric world culture and European languages. Fourth, Africa was incorporated into a heavily Euro-North American-centric world of international law. Fifth, as a consequence of colonialism, Africa was incorporated into the modern technological age including being ‘swallowed by the global system of dissemination of information.’⁶ Finally, Africa was dragged into a Euro-North American-centric moral order dominated by Christian thought. Mazrui’s conclusion was, therefore, that ‘What Africa knows about itself, what different parts of Africa known about each other, have been profoundly influenced by the West.’⁷

The epic school is countered by the episodic school. It posits that ‘the European impact on Africa has been shallow rather than deep, transitional rather than long-lasting.’⁸ In fact, it was the Nigerian historian Jacob F. Ade Ajayi of the Ibadan nationalist school, who depicted colonialism as ‘an episode in African history.’⁹ While the episodic school is correct in underscoring African agency and initiative in the making of history even under the constrained circumstances of colonial rule, the danger lies in its decoupling of colonialism from the broader wave of Euro-North American-centric modernity that radically transformed human history. Understood from this perspective, colonialism cannot be understood as an event/episode. Colonialism was a major part of what Walter D. Mignolo termed ‘global designs’ that became entangled with ‘local histories.’¹⁰

While it is true that ‘Each African entity–village, town or kingdom–viewed the challenge of European conquest as a new historical factor’ and that ‘Africans could either resist the white man, form alliances with the newcomers, or exploit them as far as possible in the continuous struggle for survival, wealth or power,’ it remains true that these initiatives did not crack or change the bigger enveloping wave of Euro-North American-centric modernity that unfolded from the 15th century.¹¹ Even decolonization struggles of the 20th century failed to substantially ‘move the centre’ and to effectively ‘re-member’ Africa after over 500 years of ‘dismemberment’ to use Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s terminology.¹² What happened as a consequence of decolonization is that the dismantling of direct colonial administrations did not give rise to a ‘postcolonial world,’ rather as noted by Ramon Grosfoguel, global coloniality ensued.¹³ Global coloniality cannot be separated from Euro-North American-centric modernity. Today, African leaders continue to manage and maintain the global system after replacing direct colonial rulers.

This is why Grosfoguel characterized Euro-North American-centric modernity as racially hierarchized, patriarchal, sexist, Christian-centric, hetero-normative, capitalist, military, colonial, imperial, and modern form of civilization.¹⁴ Grosfoguel used the term ‘heterarchies’ of power to underscore the complex vertical, horizontal, and crisscrossing invisible entanglements in the configuration of modern global power structure that emerged from colonial encounters.¹⁵ The negative consequences of this modernity included the slave trade, imperialism, colonialism, apartheid, neo-colonialism, underdevelopment, and neo-liberalism including Washington Consensus and structural adjustment programs.¹⁶ Globalization is, today, still driven by coloniality on a world scale. The epic impact of colonialism led the leading decolonial theorist and poet Aime Cesaire to pose the question: ‘what, fundamentally, is colonialism?’¹⁷ Cesaire understood colonialism to be a disruptive, ‘decivilizing,’ dehumanizing, exploitative, racist, violent, brutal, covetous, and ‘thingfying’ system.¹⁸

Coloniality

Coloniality is a useful concept that names various colonial-like power relations existing today in those zones that experienced direct colonialism. The concept of coloniality was introduced by the Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano¹⁹ but was further elaborated by the Argentinean decolonial semiotician Walter D. Mignolo²⁰ and others such as Nelson Maldonado-Torres.²¹ Quijano identified four key levers of coloniality. The first is control of the economy. The second is control of authority. The third is control of gender and sexuality. The fourth is control of knowledge and subjectivity.²² Mignolo emphasized 'colonial difference' as a central leitmotif of coloniality.²³ Coloniality is a name for the 'darker side' of modernity that needs to be unmasked because it exists as 'an embedded logic that enforces control, domination, and exploitation disguised in the language of salvation, progress, modernization, and being good for everyone.'²⁴ Building on the work of Quijano and Mignolo, Maldonado-Torres elaborated on the meaning of coloniality and its difference from colonialism in these revealing words:

Coloniality is different from colonialism. Colonialism denotes a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on the power of another nation, which makes such a nation an empire. Coloniality, instead, refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labour, intersubjectivity relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and every day.²⁵

In Africa, such scholars and political activists as Wilmot Edward Blyden in *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*,²⁶ Frantz Fanon in *Black Skins, White Masks*,²⁷ and *The Wretched of the Earth*,²⁸ Kwame Nkrumah in *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*,²⁹ Chinweizu in *The West and the Rest of Us*,³⁰ *Towards the Decolonization of African Literature*,³¹ and *Decolonizing the African Mind*,³² Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *Decolonizing the Mind*,³³ and others also engaged with the problem of coloniality without using the term coloniality. Nkrumah is credited for the concept of 'neo-colonialism' that enabled him to graphically expose the tentacles of what he termed the 'Wall Street Octopus'.³⁴ Nkrumah correctly understood imperialism as operating like an octopus in its domination of the world. Global coloniality is also better understood as an octopus constituted by heterarchies of domination, control, and exploitation. Other scholars like Walter Rodney and Samir Amin understood coloniality in terms of 'underdevelopment' and 'dependency' perspectives.³⁵ The emphasis in all these articulations of coloniality was on economic domination, which is just one strand of coloniality.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o emphasized the psychological/epistemological as well as cultural and linguistic impact of coloniality and correctly concluded that 'The present predicaments of Africa are often not a matter of personal choice: they arise from an historical situation.'³⁶ Ngugi wa Thiong'o elaborated that 'imperialism is not a slogan' and explained that 'It is real; it is palpable in content and form and in its methods and effects.'³⁷ The octopus nature of coloniality is well articulated by Grosfoguel who identified its various entangled heterarchies such as complex class formations, core-periphery divisions, male-female hierarchies, heterosexual-homosexual hierarchies, religious/spiritualities hierarchization and divisions, epistemic/knowledge hierarchies, linguistic hierarchies, and aesthetic.³⁸ Ngugi wa Thiong'o detailed the workings of coloniality on the minds of its targets:

The biggest weapon wielded and actually daily unleashed by imperialism against that collective defiance is the cultural bomb. The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names,

in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland. It makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves; for instance, with other people's languages rather than their own. It makes them identify with that which is decadent and reactionary, all those forces which would stop their own springs of life. It even plants serious doubt about the moral rightness of struggle. Possibilities of triumph or victory are seen as remote, ridiculous dreams. The intended results are despair, dependency and a collective death-wish. Amidst this wasteland which it has created; imperialism presents itself as the cure and demands that the dependent sing hymns of praise with the constant refrain: 'Theft is holy.' Indeed, this refrain sums up the new creed of neo-colonial bourgeoisie in many 'independent' African states.³⁹

Coloniality is, therefore, an invisible power structure, an epochal condition, and epistemological design, which lies at the center of the present Euro-North American-centric modern world. At the center of coloniality is race as an organizing principle that not only hierarchized human beings according to racial ontological densities but also sustains asymmetrical global power relations and a singular Euro-North American-centric epistemology that claims to be universal, disembodied, truthful, secular, and scientific.⁴⁰ At another level, as articulated by Mignolo, 'Coloniality names the experiences and views of the world and history of those whom Fanon called *les damnés de la terre* ('the wretched of the earth,' those who have been, and continue to be, subjected to the standard of modernity).'⁴¹ According to Mignolo,

The wretched are defined by the colonial wound, and the colonial wound, physical and/or psychological, is a consequence of racism, the hegemonic discourse that questions the humanity of all those who do not belong to the locus of enunciation (and the geo-politics of knowledge) of those who assign the standard of classification and assign to themselves the right to classify.⁴²

Decoloniality

Decoloniality is different from anti-colonialism that dominated the 20th century. Anti-colonialism was largely an elite-driven project in which elites mobilized peasants and workers as foot soldiers in a struggle to replace direct colonial administrators. African anti-colonial struggles of the 20th century did not produce a genuine 'postcolonial' dispensation marked by the birth of a new humanity as demanded by Fanon, for instance. What was produced is a complex situation that Achille Mbembe termed 'the postcolony,'⁴³ Gayatri Spivak described as 'postcolonial neo-colonized world,'⁴⁴ and decolonial theorists understood as 'coloniality.' What distinguished this situation was what I have termed the 'myths of decolonization.'⁴⁵ But decoloniality materialized at the very moment in which the slave trade, imperialism, and colonialism were being launched. It materialized as resistance, thought, and action.

Decolonial movements assumed various forms and terms such as Ethiopianism, Garveyism, Negritude, Pan-Africanism, African Socialism, African Humanism, Black Consciousness Movement, and African Renaissance. Thus, unlike simple anti-colonialism, decoloniality was and is aimed at setting afoot a new humanity free from racial hierarchization and asymmetrical power relations in place since conquest.⁴⁶ Maldonado-Torres is, therefore, correct in defining decoloniality this way:

By decoloniality it is meant here the dismantling of relations of power and conceptions of knowledge that foment the reproduction of racial, gender, and geo-political hierarchies that came into being or found new and more powerful forms of expression in the modern/colonial world.⁴⁷

Decoloniality

struggles to bring into intervening existence an-other interpretation that bring forward, on the one hand, a silenced view of the event and, on the other, shows the limits of imperial ideology disguised as the true (total) interpretation of the events in the making of the modern world.⁴⁸

Decoloniality is distinguished from imperial versions of history through its push for shifting of geography of reason from the West as the epistemic locale from which the 'world is described, conceptualized and ranked' to the ex-colonized epistemic sites as legitimate points of departure in describing the construction of the modern world order.⁴⁹ Decoloniality names a cocktail of insurrectionist-liberatory projects and critical thoughts emerging from the ex-colonized epistemic sites like Latin America, Caribbean, Asia, Middle East, and Africa; it seeks to make sense of the position of ex-colonized peoples within the Euro-America-centric, Christian-centric, patriarchal, capitalist, hetero-normative, racially hierarchized, and modern world system that came into being in the 15th century.⁵⁰

Decoloniality seeks to unmask, unveil, and reveal coloniality as an underside of modernity that co-existed with its rhetoric of progress, equality, fraternity, and liberty. It is a particular kind of critical intellectual theory as well as political project which seeks to disentangle ex-colonised parts of the world from coloniality.⁵¹ What distinguishes decoloniality from other existing critical social theories is its locus of enunciations and its genealogy—which is outside of Europe. Decoloniality can be best understood as a pluriversal epistemology of the future—a redemptive and liberatory epistemology that seeks to de-link from the tyranny of abstract universals.⁵² Decoloniality informs the ongoing struggles against inhumanity of the Cartesian subject, 'the irrationality of the rational, the despotic residues of modernity.'⁵³

Decoloniality is born out of a realization that the modern world is an asymmetrical world order that is sustained not only by colonial matrices of power but also by pedagogies and epistemologies of equilibrium that continue to produce alienated Africans that are socialized into hating Africa that produced them and liking Europe and America that reject them. Schools, colleges, churches, and universities in Africa are sites for reproduction of coloniality. We so far don't have African universities. We have universities in Africa.⁵⁴ They continue to poison African minds with research methodologies and inculcate knowledges of equilibrium. These are knowledges that do not question methodologies as well as the present asymmetrical world order. In decoloniality, research methods and research methodologies are never accepted as neutral but are unmasked as technologies of subjectivation if not surveillance tools that prevent the emergence of another-thinking, another-logic, and another-world view. Research methodologies are tools of gate-keeping.

Decoloniality is premised on three concepts/unit of analysis. The first concept is that of *coloniality of power*. It helps in investigating into how the current 'global political' was constructed, constituted, and configured into a racially hierarchized, Euro-American-centric, Christian-centric, patriarchal, capitalist, hetero-normative, hegemonic, asymmetrical, and modern power structure.⁵⁵ The concept of colonial of power enables delving deeper into how the world was bifurcated into 'Zone of Being' (the world of those in charge of global power structures and beneficiaries of modernity) and 'Zone of None-Being' (the invented world that was the source of slaves and victims of imperialism, colonialism, and apartheid) maintained by invisible what Boaventura de Sousa Santos termed 'abyssal thinking.'⁵⁶ Abyssal thinking according to Santos is informed by imperial reason and manifests itself in bifurcation of the world into 'this side' (the side of complete beings governed according to dictates of emancipation, law,

and ethics) and ‘that side’ (the side of incomplete beings governed according to expropriation and violence).⁵⁷ In short, coloniality of power is a concept that decolonial theorists use to analyze modern global cartography of power and how the modern world works.

The second concept is that of *coloniality of knowledge*, which focuses on teasing out epistemological issues, politics of knowledge generation, as well as questions of who generates which knowledge and for what purpose.⁵⁸ Coloniality of knowledge is useful in enabling us to understand how endogenous and indigenous knowledges have been pushed to what became understood as ‘the barbarian margins of society.’ Africa is today saddled with irrelevant knowledge that saves to disempowered rather than empowering individuals and communities. Ake emphasized that Africa had to seriously engage in struggles to free itself from ‘knowledge of equilibrium,’ that is, knowledge that serves the present asymmetrical power-structured world.⁵⁹ On the sphere of knowledge, decolonial theorists are at the forefront of decolonizing what they have termed ‘Westernized’ universities that have been built throughout the world.⁶⁰

The third concept is that of *coloniality of being*, which gestures into the pertinent questions of the making of modern subjectivities and into issues of human ontology.⁶¹ African scholars engaged with the question of coloniality of being from the vantage point of what they termed ‘African Personality’ and ‘Negritude’ among many other registers used in the African decolonial search for restoration of denied ontological density, sovereign subjectivity, as well as self-pride and self-assertion.⁶² Both ‘African Personality’ and ‘Negritude’ were concepts developed in struggle by Africans as they tried to make sense of their predicaments within a context of dehumanizing colonialism. Coloniality of being is very important because it assists in investigating how African humanity was questioned as well as into processes that contributed towards ‘objectification’/‘thingification’/‘commodification’ of Africans.⁶³ One of the continuing struggles in Africa is focused on resisting objectification and dehumanization of Black people on a world scale. It is a struggle to regain lost subjecthood and eventually citizenship as well as many other questions to do with being and humanism as politicized states of existence.

Therefore, one grand proposition of decoloniality is that modernity unfolded as Janus-headed process, understandable on the basis of the locus of enunciation of the person trying to understand the fruits and heritage of modernity.⁶⁴ In decolonial thought, modernity is said to have unfolded as a phenomenon that colonized *time*, *space*, and *being* and was constituted by rhetoric of progress, civilization, emancipation, and development, on the one hand and on the other, by the reality of coloniality.⁶⁵ This reality has taken decolonial thinkers into historical and philosophical mediations, which are beginning to reveal the ‘under side’ of modernity.⁶⁶

Decoloniality pushes for transcendence over narrow conceptions of being decolonized and consistently gestures towards liberation from coloniality as a complex matrix of knowledge, power, and being. Decoloniality consistently reminds decolonial thinkers of ‘the unfinished and incomplete twentieth century dream of decolonization.’⁶⁷ Decoloniality announces ‘the decolonial turn’ as a long existing ‘turn’ standing in opposition to the ‘colonizing turn’ underpinning Western thought.⁶⁸ Decoloniality announces the broad ‘decolonial turn’ that involves the ‘task of the very decolonization of knowledge, power and being, including institutions such as the university.’⁶⁹

But decoloniality is often confused with postcolonial theory. Decoloniality and postcolonial theory converge and diverge. On the convergence side, they both aimed at dealing with the colonial experience. Sabine Brock and Carsten Junker effectively delineate converging and diverging positions, approaches, and trajectories of decoloniality and postcoloniality.⁷⁰ Decoloniality and postcoloniality provide a range of critiques of modernity. But they diverge in their intellectual genealogy.

As put by Mignolo, decoloniality emerges ‘from the receiving end of Western imperial formations.’⁷¹ Decolonial theory is therefore traceable to those thinkers from the zones that

experienced the negative aspects of modernity such as Aime Cesaire, Frantz Fanon, William EB Dubois, Kwame Nkrumah, and Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Postcolonial theory unlike decolonial theory is traceable to post-structuralists and postmodernists such as Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, and the theory was then articulated by scholars such as Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha.⁷² Postcolonial theory and decolonial theory also differ in terms of where they begin their critique of modernity/coloniality. Decolonial theorists begin their critique as far back as 500 years covering the Spanish and Portuguese colonialism.

Postcolonial theorists begin their critique with the British colonization of India in the 19th century, in the process ignoring some 300 years of the unfolding of modernity/coloniality. Because of this, postcolonial theorists somehow try to decouple modernity and colonialism in the process missing the fact that modernity and coloniality are inextricably intertwined paradoxically. While postcolonial theorists are concerned with dismantling meta-narratives, decolonial theorists push forward an analysis predicated on questions of power, epistemology, and ontology as foundational questions in the quest to understand the unfolding and operations of the modern Euro-North American-centric modernity.⁷³ The postcolonial 'cultural turn' is different from the 'decolonial turn' because the former is located and revolves within a Euro-North American-centric modernist discursive, historical, and structural terrain and the latter is born at the borders of Euro-North American-centric modernity and is fuelled by a decolonial spirit of disobedience.⁷⁴ Whereas postcolonial theorists' horizon is universalism and cosmopolitanism, decolonial theory gestures towards pluriversality and new humanism. In short, one can say that postcoloniality and decoloniality converge and diverge across genealogies, trajectories, and horizons.

But some strands of decoloniality, particularly those that build their case from the reality of the slave trade, colonialism, and racism are deemed to be locked in victimhood and narcissism of minor difference by Achille Mbembe, a celebrated African postcolonial theorist.⁷⁵ Mbembe critiqued particularly those decolonial analyses informed by nationalism and Marxism for being enclosed inside an intellectual ghetto from which they articulate 'false philosophies.'⁷⁶ He identified these 'false philosophies' as 'nativism' and 'Afro-radicalism.' While Mbembe acknowledges the power and appeal of these analyses, he dismisses them as 'false philosophies.'⁷⁷ Nationalist and Marxist theorists are blamed for seeking to create an Africa that has a polemic relationship with the rest of the world.⁷⁸ These fake philosophies were said to have been elevated into 'dogmas and doctrines' that have been 'repeated over and over again' by nationalists and Marxists.⁷⁹

To Mbembe, African scholarship that continues to blame colonialism is said to suffer from 'self-ghettoization' taking the form of 'territorialization of the production of knowledge.'⁸⁰ Those African scholars who argue from a nationalist and Marxist perspective are accused of promoting a

false belief that only autochthonous people who are physically living in Africa can produce, within a closed circle limited to themselves alone, a legitimate scientific discourse on the realities of the continent.⁸¹

Such African scholarship that blames colonialism is said to be also informed by 'a lazy interpretation of globalization.'⁸²

Mbembe's critique provoked an equally severe response from Paul Tiyambe Zeleza and other like-minded scholars. He was criticized for uncritical celebration of globalization and cosmopolitanism that underpin Euro-American-centric hegemony and his call for 'internationalization' of African scholarship as a way of 'getting out of the ghetto' was equated with 'globalizing tendencies of neo-liberal economic policies of liberalization.'⁸³ Zeleza reminded

Mbembe that the domain of knowledge generation in and on Africa has never been ‘ghettoized.’ It has never been closed from external influences and currents of thoughts. Instead, it has been excessively exposed to external and imported Euro-American paradigms.⁸⁴

Rebutting Postcolonial Critique

Decoloniality must not be confused with nationalist and Marxist thought. Decoloniality is against essentialism and fundamentalism as put by Grosfoguel:

This is not an essentialist, fundamentalist, anti-European critique. It is a perspective that is critical of both Eurocentric and Third World fundamentalisms, colonialism and nationalism. What all fundamentalisms share (including the Eurocentric one) is the premise that there is only one sole epistemic tradition from which to achieve Truth and Universality.⁸⁵

Also, as noted by Maldonado-Torres, decoloniality is not a singular theoretical school of thought but a family of diverse positions that share a view of coloniality as the fundamental problem in the modern age. This means that there might be some decolonial positions that might degenerate into romanticism, nativism, and fundamentalism, but that critique is not generalizable to all decolonial thought and initiatives.

The decoloniality expressed in this essay is essentially a repudiation of European fundamental LIE: colonization = civilization. Decoloniality provides ex-colonized peoples a space to judge Euro-American deceit and hypocrisy and to stand up into subjecthood through judging Europe and exposing technologies of subjectivation.⁸⁶ It is a decoloniality that seeks to ask new and correct questions about the human condition, going beyond Euro-American-centric epistemology that deliberately posed some human problems wrongly to continue deception. Decoloniality exposes the fact that Euro-American epistemologies are exhausted opening an opportune moment for articulation of decolonial epistemologies from the South in an endeavor to attain cognitive justice. Rationality and technology have not completely managed to overcome all obstacles to human freedom.

At another level, the decoloniality articulated here involves re-telling of history of humanity and knowledge from the vantage point of those epistemic sites that received the ‘darker side’ of modernity, including re-telling the story of knowledge generation as involving borrowings, appropriations, epistemicides, and denials of humanity of other people as part of the story of science. It is also a call for democratization of knowledge, de-hegemonization of knowledge, de-westernization of knowledge, and de-Europeanization of knowledge.

At the core of decoloniality is the agenda of shifting the geography and biography of knowledge, bringing identity into epistemology – who generates knowledge and from where? Decoloniality’s point of departure is existential realities of suffering, oppression, repression, domination, and exclusion. Decoloniality enables the unmasking of racism as a global problem as well as how knowledge including science was used to justify colonialism. Finally, decoloniality accepts the fact of ontological pluralism as a reality that needs ecologies of knowledges to understand.

Conclusion: Towards a Decolonial Future

The Rhodes Must Fall Movement that was provoked by the continued presence of Cecil John Rhodes’s Statue at the center of the University of Cape Town is one indicator of the continuing need for decoloniality. What began as an attack on Rhodes’ statue has grown into a student demand for decolonization of universities in South Africa. This indicates that unlike postcolonial theory, decoloniality has a very strong activist and practical liberatory thrust. At the continental level, the African Union is spearheading Agenda 2063 whose overarching objective is a

paradigm shift from coloniality to pan-Africanism and African Renaissance. Agenda 2063 envisions a new African humanity living in a free, united, peaceful, and prosperous Africa. The decolonial call is for Africans to free themselves from shackles of coloniality that is pervasive in the domains of power, knowledge, and being. What is envisioned by decoloniality are African people as active and free makers of their own futures.

Within the broader Global South context, the decoloniality movement has produced such South–South formations as the Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa that is geared at shifting economic power from the West. This has led Mignolo to coin the term ‘de-westernization’ as part of decoloniality.¹ Ngugi wa Thiong’o has enriched the decoloniality archive with future-oriented concepts such as decolonizing the mind, moving the center, remembering, and globalectics, which clearly indicate capturing the state of the decolonial movement and its desire to set afoot a new humanity. *Decolonizing the mind* speaks to the urgency of dealing with epistemicides and linguisticides. *Moving the centre* addresses the problem of Euro–North American centrism. *Re-membering* is about uniting a dismembered and fragmented continent. *Globalectics* gestures towards post-racial pluriversality as the home of new humanity.

Notes

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¹ Mignolo, *Dark Side of Western Modernity*.

² Chen, *Asia as Method*, vii.

³ Mazrui, *The Africans*, 12.

⁴ Mazrui, *The Africans*, 12.

⁵ Clapham, *Africa and the International System*.

⁶ Mazrui, *The Africans*, 12.

⁷ Mazrui, *The Africans*, 13.

⁸ Mazrui, *The Africans*, 13.

⁹ Ajayi, ‘Colonialism.’

¹⁰ Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*.

¹¹ Ajayi, ‘Colonialism,’ 172.

¹² Ngugi wa Thiong’o. *Moving the Centre*.

Ngugi wa Thiong’o, *Re-Membering Africa*.

¹³ Grosfoguel, ‘The Epistemic Decolonial Turn,’ 203–246.

¹⁴ Grosfoguel, ‘Decolonizing Post-colonial Studies,’ 15.

¹⁵ Grosfoguel, ‘Decolonizing Post-colonial Studies.’

¹⁶ Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Empire*.

¹⁷ Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 32.

¹⁸ Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 32–45.

¹⁹ Quijano, ‘Coloniality of Power,’ 342–386; Quijano, A. ‘Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism,’ 533–579.

²⁰ Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*; Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Renaissance*; Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*.

²¹ Maldonado-Torres, ‘On Coloniality of Being,’ 240–270.

²² Quijano, ‘Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality.’ 168–178.

²³ Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*.

²⁴ Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*, 6.

²⁵ Maldonado-Torres, ‘On Coloniality of Being,’ 243.

²⁶ Blyden, *Christianity*.

²⁷ Fanon, *Black Skins*.

- ²⁸ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*.
- ²⁹ Nkrumah, *Neo-colonialism*.
- ³⁰ Chinweizu, *The West and the Rest of Us*.
- ³¹ Chinweizu et al., *Toward the Decolonization of Africa Literature*.
- ³² Chinweizu, *Decolonizing the African Mind*. (Lagos: Pero Press, 1987).
- ³³ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing the Mind*.
- ³⁴ Nkrumah, *Neo-colonialism*, 9.
- ³⁵ Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, and Amin, *Delinking*.
- ³⁶ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing the Mind*, xii.
- ³⁷ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing the Mind*, 2.
- ³⁸ Grosfoguel, 'Decolonizing Post-colonial Studies,' 16–17.
- ³⁹ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing the Mind*, 3.
- ⁴⁰ Grosfoguel, 'The Epistemic Decolonial Turn,' 303–246.
- ⁴¹ Grosfoguel, 'The Epistemic Decolonial Turn,' 8.
- ⁴² Grosfoguel, 'The Epistemic Decolonial Turn,' 8.
- ⁴³ Mbembe, A. *On the Postcolony*.
- ⁴⁴ Spivak, *The Post-colonial Critic*.
- ⁴⁵ Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Coloniality of Power*.
- ⁴⁶ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*.
- ⁴⁷ Maldonado-Torres, 'Thinking Through the Decolonial Turn,' 117.
- ⁴⁸ Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*, 33.
- ⁴⁹ Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*, 35.
- ⁵⁰ Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*.
- ⁵¹ Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*.
- ⁵² Mignolo, 'Introduction,' 159.
- ⁵³ Mignolo, *The Dark Side of Western Modernity*, 93.
- ⁵⁴ Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Empire*, 177–195.
- ⁵⁵ Grosfoguel, 'The Decolonial Epistemic Turn.'
- ⁵⁶ The concern of zones of being and non-being is borrowed from Fanon. See also Santos, 'Beyond Abyssal Thinking' 45–89.
- ⁵⁷ Santos, 'Beyond Abyssal Thinking,' 45–50.
- ⁵⁸ Quijano, 'Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality,' 168–178.
- ⁵⁹ Ake, *Social Science as Imperialism*, 16.
- ⁶⁰ Grosfoguel, 'The Structure of Knowledge,' 73–90.
- ⁶¹ Wynter, 'Unsettling the Coloniality,' 257–337.
- ⁶² Blyden, *Christianity and Nkrumah, Consciencism*.
- ⁶³ Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 'Empire.' See also MacKittrick, *Sylvia Wynter*.
- ⁶⁴ Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*.
- ⁶⁵ Wynter, S. 'Columbus,' 251–286.
- ⁶⁶ Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Modernity*.
- ⁶⁷ Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, 221.
- ⁶⁸ Maldonado-Torres, 'Thinking Through the Decolonial Turn,' 1.
- ⁶⁹ Maldonado-Torres, 'Thinking Through the Decolonial Turn,' 1.
- ⁷⁰ Broeck and Junker, *Postcoloniality*.
- ⁷¹ Mignolo, 'Further Thoughts on (De) Coloniality,' 22.
- ⁷² Grosfoguel, 'The Epistemic Decolonial Turn.'
- ⁷³ Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *The Decolonial Mandela*.
- ⁷⁴ Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Modernity*, 46.
- ⁷⁵ Mbembe, 'African Modes of Self-writing,' 239–273.

- ⁷⁶ Mbembe, 'Getting Out of the Ghetto', and Appiah, *In My Father's House*.
- ⁷⁷ Mbembe, 'On the Power of the False,' 613–655.
- ⁷⁸ Mbembe, 'On the Power of the False.' 613–655.
- ⁷⁹ Robins, 'The (Third) World is a Ghetto'? 18–26.
- ⁸⁰ Mbembe, 'Getting Out of the Ghetto.'
- ⁸¹ Mbembe, 'African Modes of Self-writing.'
- ⁸² Mbembe, 'African Modes of Self-writing.'
- ⁸³ Zeleza, 2003.
- ⁸⁴ Zeleza, 2003.
- ⁸⁵ Grosfoguel, 'The Epistemic Decolonial Turn,' 212.
- ⁸⁶ Cesaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*.

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The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House
Audre Lorde

I agreed to take part in a New York University Institute for the Humanities conference a year ago, with the understanding that I would be commenting upon papers dealing with the role of difference within the lives of American women: difference of race, sexuality, class, and age. The absence of these considerations weakens any feminist discussion of the personal and the political.

It is a particular academic arrogance to assume any discussion of feminist theory without examining our many differences, and without a significant input from poor women, Black and Third World women, and lesbians. And yet, I stand here as a Black lesbian feminist, having been invited to comment within the only panel at this conference where the input of Black feminists and lesbians is represented. What this says about the vision of this conference is sad, in a country where racism, sexism, and homophobia are inseparable. To read this program is to assume that lesbian and Black women have nothing to say about existentialism, the erotic, women's culture and silence, developing feminist theory, or heterosexuality and power. And what does it mean in personal and political terms when even the two Black women who did present here were literally found at the last hour? What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy? It means that only the most narrow parameters of change are possible and allowable.

The absence of any consideration of lesbian consciousness or the consciousness of Third World women leaves a serious gap within this conference and within the papers presented here. For example, in a paper on material relationships between women, I was conscious of an either/or model of nurturing which totally dismissed my knowledge as a Black lesbian. In this paper there was no examination of mutuality between women, no systems of shared support, no interdependence as exists between lesbians and women-identified women. Yet it is only in the patriarchal model of nurturance that women "who attempt to emancipate themselves at perhaps too high a price for the results," as this paper states.

For women, the need and desire to nurture each other is not pathological but redemptive, and it is within that knowledge that our real power I rediscovered. It is this real connection which is so feared by a patriarchal world. Only within a patriarchal structure is maternity the only social power open to women.

Interdependency between women is the way to a freedom which allows the I to be, not in order to be used, but in order to be creative. This is a difference between the passive be and the active being.

Advocating the mere tolerance of difference between women is the grossest reformism. It is a total denial of the creative function of difference in our lives. Difference must be not merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic. Only then does the necessity for interdependency

become unthreatening. Only within that interdependency of difference strengths, acknowledged and equal, can the power to seek new ways of being in the world generate, as well as the courage and sustenance to act where there are no charters.

Within the interdependence of mutual (nondominant) differences lies that security which enables us to descend into the chaos of knowledge and return with true visions of our future, along with the concomitant power to effect those changes which can bring that future into being. Difference is that raw and powerful connection from which our personal power is forged.

As women, we have been taught either to ignore our differences, or to view them as causes for separation and suspicion rather than as forces for change. Without community there is no liberation, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between an individual and her oppression. But community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist.

Those of us who stand outside the circle of this society's definition of acceptable women; those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference -- those of us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are Black, who are older -- know that survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support.

Poor women and women of Color know there is a difference between the daily manifestations of marital slavery and prostitution because it is our daughters who line 42nd Street. If white American feminist theory need not deal with the differences between us, and the resulting difference in our oppressions, then how do you deal with the fact that the women who clean your houses and tend your children while you attend conferences on feminist theory are, for the most part, poor women and women of Color? What is the theory behind racist feminism?

In a world of possibility for us all, our personal visions help lay the groundwork for political action. The failure of academic feminists to recognize difference as a crucial strength is a failure to reach beyond the first patriarchal lesson. In our world, divide and conquer must become define and empower.

Why weren't other women of Color found to participate in this conference? Why were two phone calls to me considered a consultation? Am I the only possible source of names of Black feminists? And although the Black panelist's paper ends on an important and powerful connection of love between women, what about interracial cooperation between feminists who don't love each other?

In academic feminist circles, the answer to these questions is often, "We do not know who to ask." But that is the same evasion of responsibility, the same cop-out, that keeps

Black women's art our of women's exhibitions, Black women's work our of most feminist publications except for the occasional "Special Third World Women's Issue," and Black women's texts off your reading lists. But as Adrienne Rich pointed out in a recent talk, which feminists have educated themselves about such an enormous amount over the past ten years, how come you haven't also educated yourselves about Black women and the differences between us -- white and Black -- when it is key to our survival as a movement?

Women of today are still being called upon to stretch across the gap of male ignorance and to educated men as to our existence and our needs. This is an old and primary tool of all oppressors to keep the oppressed occupied with the master's concerns. Now we hear that it is the task of women of Color to educate white women -- in the face of tremendous resistance -- as to our existence, our differences, our relative roles in our joint survival. This is a diversion of energies and a tragic repetition of racist patriarchal thought.

Simone de Beauvoir once said: "It is in the knowledge of the genuine conditions of our lives that we must draw our strength to live and our reasons for acting."

Racism and homophobia are real conditions of all our lives in this place and time. I urge each one of us here to reach down into that deep place of knowledge inside herself and touch that terror and loathing of any difference that lives there. See whose face it wears. Then the personal as the political can begin to illuminate all our choices

*Prospero, you are the master of illusion.
Lying is your trademark.
And you have lied so much to me
(Lied about the world, lied about me)
That you have ended by imposing on me
An image of myself.
Underdeveloped, you brand me, inferior,
That s the way you have forced me to see myself
I detest that image! What's more, it's a lie!
But now I know you, you old cancer,
And I know myself as well.*

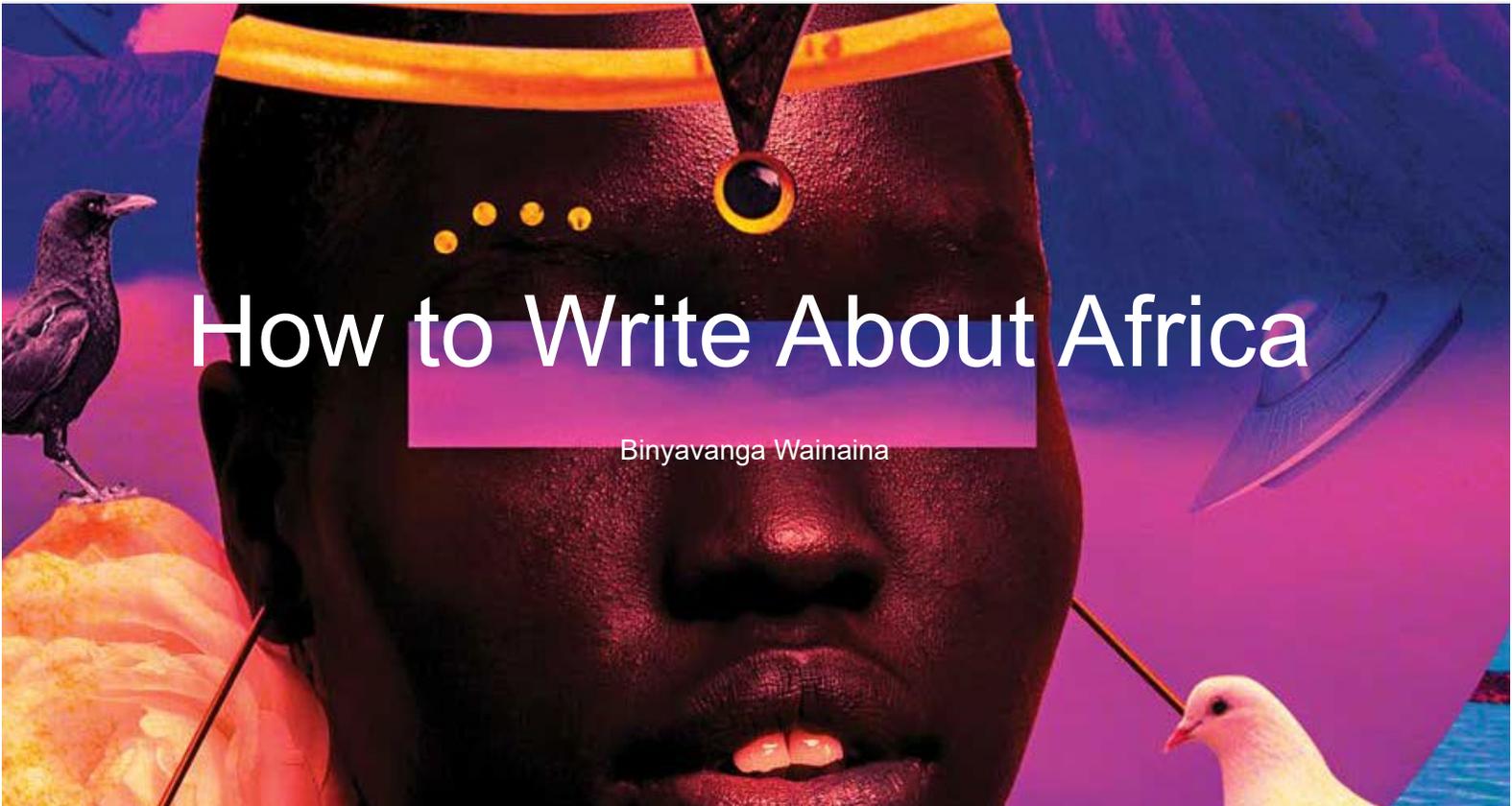
~ Caliban, in Aime Cesaire's A Tempest

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Comments at "The Personal and the Political" Panel, Second Sex Conference, October 29, 1979.

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I UNDERSTAND



How to Write About Africa

Binyavanga Wainaina

Always use the word 'Africa' or 'Darkness' or 'Safari' in your title. Subtitles may include the words 'Zanzibar', 'Masai', 'Zulu', 'Zambezi', 'Congo', 'Nile', 'Big', 'Sky', 'Shadow', 'Drum', 'Sun' or 'Bygone'. Also useful are words such as 'Guerrillas', 'Timeless', 'Primordial' and 'Tribal'. Note that 'People' means Africans who are not black, while 'The People' means black Africans.

Never have a picture of a well-adjusted African on the cover of your book, or in it, unless that African has won the Nobel Prize. An AK-47, prominent ribs, naked breasts: use these. If you must include an African, make sure you get one in Masai or Zulu or Dogon dress.

In your text, treat Africa as if it were one country. It is hot and dusty with rolling grasslands and huge herds of animals and tall, thin people who

are starving. Or it is hot and steamy with very short people who eat primates. Don't get bogged down with precise descriptions. Africa is big: fifty-four countries, 900 million people who are too busy starving and dying and warring and emigrating to read your book. The continent is full of deserts, jungles, highlands, savannahs and many other things, but your reader doesn't care about all that, so keep your descriptions romantic and evocative and unparticular.

Make sure you show how Africans have music and rhythm deep in their souls, and eat things no other humans eat. Do not mention rice and beef and wheat; monkey-brain is an African's cuisine of choice, along with goat, snake, worms and grubs and all manner of game meat. Make sure you show that you are able to eat such food without flinching, and describe how you learn to enjoy it—because you care.

Taboo subjects: ordinary domestic scenes, love between Africans (unless a death is involved), references to African writers or intellectuals, mention of school-going children who are not suffering from yaws or Ebola fever or female genital mutilation.

Throughout the book, adopt a *sotto* voice, in conspiracy with the reader, and a sad *I-expected-so-much* tone. Establish early on that your liberalism is impeccable, and mention near the beginning how much you love Africa, how you fell in love with the place and can't live without her. Africa is the only continent you can love—take advantage of this. If you are a man, thrust yourself into her warm virgin forests. If you are a woman, treat Africa as a man who wears a bush jacket and disappears off into the sunset. Africa is to be pitied, worshipped or dominated. Whichever angle you take, be sure to leave the strong impression that without your intervention and your important book, Africa is doomed.

Your African characters may include naked warriors, loyal servants, diviners and seers, ancient wise men living in hermitic splendour. Or corrupt politicians, inept polygamous travel-guides, and prostitutes you have slept with. The Loyal Servant always behaves like a seven-year-old and needs a firm hand; he is scared of snakes, good with children, and always involving you in his complex domestic dramas. The Ancient Wise Man always comes from a noble tribe (not the money-grubbing tribes like the Gikuyu, the Igbo or the Shona). He has rheumy eyes and is close to the Earth. The Modern African is a fat man who steals and works in the visa office, refusing to give work permits to qualified Westerners who really care about Africa. He is an enemy of development, always using his government job to make it difficult for pragmatic and good-hearted expats to set up NGOs or Legal Conservation Areas. Or he is an Oxford-educated intellectual turned serial-killing politician in a Savile Row suit. He is a cannibal who likes Cristal champagne, and his mother is a rich witch-doctor who really runs the country.

Among your characters you must always include The Starving African, who wanders the refugee camp nearly naked, and waits for the benevolence of the West. Her children have flies on their eyelids and pot bellies, and her breasts are flat and empty. She must look utterly helpless. She can have no past, no history; such diversions ruin the dramatic moment. Moans are good. She must never say anything about herself in the dialogue except to speak of her (unspeakable) suffering. Also be sure to include a warm and motherly woman who has a rolling laugh and who is concerned for your well-being. Just call her Mama. Her children are all delinquent. These characters should buzz around your main hero, making him look good. Your hero can teach them, bathe them, feed them; he carries lots of babies and has seen Death. Your hero is you (if reportage), or a beautiful, tragic international celebrity/aristocrat who now cares for animals (if fiction).

Bad Western characters may include children of Tory cabinet ministers, Afrikaners, employees of the World Bank. When talking about exploitation by foreigners mention the Chinese and Indian traders. Blame the West for Africa's situation. But do not be too specific.

Broad brushstrokes throughout are good. Avoid having the African characters laugh, or struggle to educate their kids, or just make do in mundane circumstances. Have them illuminate something about Europe or America in Africa. African characters should be colourful, exotic, larger than life—but empty inside, with no dialogue, no conflicts or resolutions in their stories, no depth or quirks to confuse the cause.

Describe, in detail, naked breasts (young, old, conservative, recently raped, big, small) or mutilated genitals, or enhanced genitals. Or any kind of genitals. And dead bodies. Or, better, naked dead bodies. And especially rotting naked dead bodies. Remember, any work you submit in which people look filthy and miserable will be referred to as the 'real Africa', and you want that on your dust jacket. Do not feel queasy about this: you are trying to help them to get aid from the West. The biggest taboo in writing about Africa is to describe or show dead or suffering white people.

Animals, on the other hand, must be treated as well rounded, complex characters. They speak (or grunt while tossing their manes proudly) and have names, ambitions and desires. They also have family values: *see how lions teach their children?* Elephants are caring, and are good feminists or dignified patriarchs. So are gorillas. Never, ever say anything negative about an elephant or a gorilla. Elephants may attack people's property, destroy their crops, and even kill them. Always take the side of the elephant. Big cats have public-school accents. Hyenas are fair game and have vaguely Middle Eastern accents. Any short Africans who live in the jungle or desert may be portrayed with good humour (unless they are in conflict with an elephant or chimpanzee or gorilla, in which case they are pure evil).

After celebrity activists and aid workers, conservationists are Africa's most important people. Do not offend them. You need them to invite you to

their 30,000-acre game ranch or ‘conservation area’, and this is the only way you will get to interview the celebrity activist. Often a book cover with a heroic-looking conservationist on it works magic for sales. Anybody white, tanned and wearing khaki who once had a pet antelope or a farm is a conservationist, one who is preserving Africa’s rich heritage. When interviewing him or her, do not ask how much funding they have; do not ask how much money they make off their game. Never ask how much they pay their employees.

Readers will be put off if you don’t mention the light in Africa. And sunsets, the African sunset is a must. It is always big and red. There is always a big sky. Wide empty spaces and game are critical—Africa is the Land of Wide Empty Spaces. When writing about the plight of flora and fauna, make sure you mention that Africa is overpopulated. When your main character is in a desert or jungle living with indigenous peoples (anybody short) it is okay to mention that Africa has been severely depopulated by Aids and War (use caps).

You’ll also need a nightclub called Tropicana, where mercenaries, evil nouveau riche Africans and prostitutes and guerrillas and expats hang out.

Always end your book with Nelson Mandela saying something about rainbows or renaissances. Because you care.

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Binyavanga Wainaina

Binyavanga Wainaina was the founding editor of *Kwani?*, a leading African literary magazine. He won the 2002 Caine Prize for African writing, and has written for *Vanity Fair*, *Granta* and the *New York Times*. He passed away in 2019 in Nairobi at the age of 48.

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