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Published online: 09 Mar 2022.

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Consciousness breathing resistance in higher education: not separate but equal

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to take the ocean of experiences, feelings and thoughts in relation to online teaching as a reaction to the restrictions on face-to-face teaching brought about by the COVID-19 Pandemic in 2020 that have passed through my mind, having been influenced by the efforts and ruminations of others, and fit it into a teacup. The purpose of this exercise, in grappling with the visceral tensions experienced in this moment despite the similarities evoked of the 'separate but equal' treatment of persons under apartheid; and in keeping with Robinson-Morris' '(re)thinking as (non-) method', is to explore how challenging the Eurocentric conception of the unitary-self challenges the duality implicit in 'Double Consciousness' and proves a grappling with 'Multiple Consciousness' as a way of being-becoming and inter-being towards seeking liberation of the mind (framed through Black Consciousness and African Feminist Theory) through recourse to Ubuntu and Buddhist Philosophies.

Background: of oceans and teacups

The 'transition to online teaching' in response to restrictions on face to face learning during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, despite the putative transition post-apartheid South Africa (SA) higher education policy, appeared to evoke the vocabulary and logic of the 'separate but equal' doctrine employed under apartheid. This policy distinguished/separated people on the basis of race. Operating under the guise of equal but different treatment towards the 'separate development' of putatively essentially different races concealing an ideology of white supremacy and Black subordination; while perversely engineering educational, social and economic conditions to orchestrate that domination and subordination (Makoni et al., 2001). This is not a commentary on the potential merits of online education, but an attempt to draw attention to what immediately going-online as a response of to the COVID-19 crisis reveals about the absence of a rupture in the colonial-apartheid logics in the legal academy despite the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (Constitution) that brags a justiciable Bill of Rights which recognizes equality, dignity and freedom as values and legal principles; recognizes education as a right; and purported to end the (colonial-)apartheid era.

The consequences of the immediate shift to online teaching were largely exclusionary and had disproportionate material and psychological implications for students along the lines of race, gender and class. Factors such as barriers to internet access, limited internet connectivity, interrupted or absent electricity supply, computer illiteracy, unfamiliarity with newly introduced online learning platforms, and absence of sources of support with information technology and computer usage. As well as limitations on or absence of devices from which to meaningfully participate in real-time class, access notes and learning material, write and edit assessments. The lack of safe and conducive environments to work from/within under lockdown where access to campus accommodations and other public facilities was prohibited, lack or limited access to nutrition and rest and time to attend lecture and/or focus on studies. Facing additional obligations of care-work including child care and provision for family members who were ill or financially destitute having lost jobs. In addition to this students and staff faced widespread trauma, grief and loss due to domestic violence, sexual violence, COVID related deaths and retrenchments; this often in the context of the absence of financial, health and/or food security (Bua lit Collective, 2020; Mpungose, 2020; United Nations Development Project, 2014).

All of this while those who had access to uncapped Wi-Fi, state of the art devices and limited or no obligations outside of studying, despite inevitably being affected by the pandemic, had capacity to access learning secured and operated in a more insulated environment, demanded and received real-time education; simply continuing on leaving others behind. While this dynamic of privilege and marginalization is not new – it only exacerbated existing inequalities in contexts where university students already don't always have food, accommodation and other basic resources – and placing the onus on vulnerable[1] students to overcome systemic challenges and somehow keep-up. This does even account for what it required for students to have to constantly detail the experiences of marginalization in order to get minor concessions like access to resources and extensions.

This in relation to law students situated in law schools which teach and are bound by the Constitution as the supreme law of SA with a justiciable bill of rights that compels the respect, protection and promotion of the values and rights of human dignity, equality and freedom. Despite avowal of these values and rights, and commitment to social justice as reflected in the preamble of the Constitution, the ethics of university management, teachers and even students in campuses across South Africa simply continued. The reason is they could, leaving those who could not access their education that rapidly shifted online in the midst of national uncertainty, loss and fear to simply 'catch-up' (with assurances of being 'accommodated' should the need arise in educational 'bootcamps') appeared at time cursorily acknowledged, but largely ignored. This despite calls from collectives of student, staff and communities to take a moment to reflect, plan and then approach the crisis in a manner that addresses the needs of vulnerable students (and persons generally) as a starting point rather than an afterthought thus deliberately exacerbating that vulnerability, and allowing proximity to historical privilege to prevail in facilitating uneven access to education.[2]

When institutions nationally went online, students (and even staff) who did not have resources to access online education were separated from the community of scholars for which education had been not been interrupted and for whom a call to 'save the academic year' was made. Those students without resources were summarily cast the burden of finding information, support and a means of joining those with the resources to continue. Why efforts to mitigate the inequality that followed pressing on with business as usual doesn't change the character of the response, is simple. When the vulnerable and oppressed are not centred, their vulnerabilities and oppressions are only entrenched and perpetuated – further blocking avenues towards emancipation such as education (Harris, 1990). This is central to an understanding of systemic inequality and necessarily central to meaningful efforts to ending it; and an appreciation of justice as concrete: 'Justice means children

with full bellies sleeping in warm beds under clean-sheets. Justice means no lynching, no rapes. Justice means access to livelihood. It means control over ones own body' (Matsuda, 1989, pp. 8–9).

The issue in the moment was less with the 'what': going online, then with the 'how': institutions doing so in an instant while aware of the resource disparities rooted in colonial-apartheid history. Rather than collective mindfulness and strategizing of the rights and ethics of how to proceed – in broad consultation and cooperation with those impacted by these decisions – vulnerable students were side-lined as an inconvenience to be accommodated rather than equal participants to whom we are legally and ethically bound to be accountable to. What is the meaning of avowing human dignity, equality if justice is not enacted?

As a queer Black woman,[3] teaching at a higher education institution in SA, growing under the influence African and Buddhist Philosophical teachings, I was confronted with the perennial paradox of having gratitude for a continued livelihood and the hypocrisy of participating in modes of teaching irrespective of the likely exclusion of students in an already exclusive environment. The overwhelming national institutional response of 'business as usual' and resorting to a language of accommodation, especially as employed in historically white universities, seemed to operate as a reminder to those operating under the forces of racialized, gendered, class oppressions that they are at the margin and that they do not belong – a familiar message. This message, not ironically, also functioned to remind educators that they too are dispensable should they not comply.

Former Deputy Chief Justice of the Constitutional Court of SA described the feeling of being a 'legitimate intruder' in the context of being a first-time judge in the ostensibly post-apartheid courtroom in 1994 (Moseneke, 2020, p. 19). I wish to re(think) as non-method navigating feeling like a 'legitimate intruder' as a law teacher, and legal professional, in the moment that was the academy in 2020 during the crisis. More specifically how the doctrine of separate but equal, while purportedly a morally repugnant and antiquated doctrine in a 'post-apartheid society', continue to be visible in the logics of the academy onto-epistemically; and how as educators we were complicit with this logic despite the visceral aversion and resistance to complying.

I found myself again viscerally aware of operating at the margin questioning what commitment to education and justice in a law school meant; and what that means for the legal scholars and/as practitioners that are developing in these spaces. Navigating the awareness that the university is an inherently exclusive enterprise and simultaneously grasping at the possibilities of higher education institutions facilitating critical thinking and meaningful efforts to participate in holding space for and contributing action towards systemic change (Modiri, 2016). I take courage in bell hooks contention that marginality exceeds deprivation to be a 'site of radical possibility, a space of resistance … central location for the production of a counter hegemonic discourse that is not just found in words but in habits of being and the way one lives' (1990, p. 341). She suggests that there is merit to maintaining marginality as a 'space of refusal' that resists co-optation which would foreclose the possibilities of the space for (re)imagination and creation that the margin provides (hooks, 1990, p. 341). The margin gives us the space to develop a 'counter-language … giving us ways to speak that de-colonize our minds, our very beings' (hooks, 1990, p. 342).

This piece attempts to take the ocean of experiences, feelings and/as thoughts that have passed through my mind, having been influenced by the efforts and ruminations of others, into a teacup. The purpose of this exercise, in keeping with Robinson-Morris' '(re)thinking as (non-)method', is ' … an onto-cognitive rendezvous with philosophical and disciplinary knowledge(s) through the abstract machine of the mind and is an attempt to transgress, resist and undo the infliction of epistemological violence … ' (2019, p. 29). Thus this is not an attempt to suggest a comprehensive articulation of either a problem or solutions through a particular body of literature, but a reflection

on an experience through 'rhizomatic' conceptual resources (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Robinson-Morris, 2019, p. 34).

This rhizomatic approach apprehends philosophy as a system of underground stems that connect at points without having to be of the same substance (Robinson-Morris, 2018). There is a resurgence of compelling critical material that even in the most challenging circumstances has resisted erasure and co-optation erupting through barriers to be accessible. Even if from different scholarly traditions, I do not experience the (re)surfacing of these ideas as competing, but often rhizomatic in their origins and contributions. This is not to assume that they are universalisable or even necessarily coherent – but they speak to moments, spaces, bodies and beings with whom they resonate awakening consciousness. There is no beginning or end to trace, but rather a journey of mapping from the humble location of where it is that one begins (Robinson-Morris, 2018).

As such, in this process, I map strands of Critical Race Theory (CRT), Black Feminist Theory, African Feminist Theory, Black Consciousness (BC), Decolonial and Decolonial Feminist Approaches as well as Buddhist and African Philosophies. I draw on the vocabulary that they provide to identify, articulate and navigate continued, at times obfuscated, logics of white supremacist, capitalist, hetero-patriarchy in its global systemic operations despite its various and particular iterations. In this process I engage education, not limited to formal, as being insuperable for conscientization and as such subscribe to the view that '[e]ducation should both enhance and value the human experience, while seeking to globally improve the human condition' (Robinson-Morris, 2018, p. 3).

Zuleika Sheik points out in the limitations of the subjective 'I' which in the context of the academy remains inherently colonized (Sheik, 2020, p. 1). [4] She develops Fred Moten's statement 'I consent not to be a single being' to account for doing justice to our multiple selves in our ancestral histories, particularities and solidarities encapsulated as 'I/we consent not to be a single being' (Moten, 2018; Sheik, 2020, p. 3). In this way, I am inspired to navigate I/we as a multiplicity rather than a stultified self that suggests we cannot do or be differently; rather one that prompts us to explore our being-becoming and inter-being.

In what follows I/we contextualize the SA university and law school, and the concept of equality as it emerges from the Constitution, and how it is that the continued logics of colonial-apartheid may persist. I then turn to the implications of this on how I/we encounter and navigate my/our own consciousness, challenging the Eurocentric duality in favour of a multiplicity that recognizes that even the self is not singular. I briefly traverse how African and Buddhist Philosophies contribute towards understanding ways of being-becoming and/or inter-being that prioritizes harmony, mindfulness and loving-kindness, not in opposition, but as a part of self. I consider that this approach to consciousness breaks from Eurocentric modes which foreclose possibilities of relating to ourselves and other beings differently towards collective conscientization and systemic paradigm shifting.

Situating the university in SA's incomplete revolution: liberal egalitarianism (democratization) v liberation

It is trite that the university has, since inception by settler-colonialists in SA, been instrumental in constructing and reproducing discourses of racial hierarchy and justifications of domination of the putatively inferior African and/or Black subject/object to the putatively superior white subject (Modiri, 2016). This dichotomous and hierarchical reasoning is characteristic of the Eurocentric

culture that the university was established to propagate (Nunn, 1997). Grada Kilomba observes, 'concepts of knowledge, scholarship and science are intrinsically linked to power and racial authority' (Kilomba, 2008). In the same vein the law has been utilized to construct, regulate and maintain identities and relations between people (Nunn, 1997).

Thus, in the law school, the positivist approach to knowledge has tended to reduce it into information to be banked; orientating students towards passive, disconnected adaptation and even valorization of dominant ideologies, prevailing conditions and injustices (Freire, 1970; Modiri, 2016). Consequently, the ideology of survivalist individualism characteristic of a European culture, for which exclusive accumulation of material resources in a world conceived of as comprising of finite resources, has prevailed (Nunn, 1997). Society is framed as a competitive zero-sum game of domination and subordination where some Black people can be assimilated into an elite stratum that would provide some insulation from the brunt of gendered racialized capitalism (Gillespie & Naidoo, 2019). The assimilation into 'elite white colonial subjectivities and professions has been one of epistemic and ontological violence' (Modiri, 2015, p. 233). This is consistent with the reduction of students into consumers of the product of universities as (neo)liberal corporations – to buy-in to whiteness (Modiri, 2016). 'As a result, the [SA] University and therefore also the [SA] Scholar developed a peculiar detachment from the lived experiences and intellectual heritages of the place in which they were situated' (Modiri, 2016, p. 526).

The Bantu Education Act of 1953 emblemizes the function of education in maintaining colonial-apartheid interests. Universities were specifically employed under apartheid to 'ingrain in black subjects subservience and silence' (Motimele, 2019, p. 206). The fear of reprisal prompted the apartheid government to adopt an explicit policy of total racial segregation under the guise of 'separate development' and the language of the 'separate but equal' doctrine imported from the Jim Crow legislation of the United States (Motimele, 2019). This justified the diversion of resources, material and ideological, towards entrenching the colonial designs of a separate society of subjects and those who serve them – while maintaining a façade of equality to remain morally irreproachable (Makoni et al., 2001). Core to the façade was framing white supremacy as benevolent stewardship (Tabata, 1959; Xaso, 2019).

Officially, this doctrine is regarded as morally repugnant and an anachronism of the apartheid past. However, regard to the coloniality of power provokes interrogation of the ready acceptance of this (Quijano, 2000). According to the coloniality of power, notwithstanding political independence, institutions of colonialism remain and perpetuate colonial logics and dynamics of power systemically through the maintenance of economic and social relations that operate in accordance with racialized and gendered categorical differentiation of humanity; this is used to justify subjugation and exploitation delineated by who is regarded by colonial powers as human (Lugones, 2008; Ndlovu, 2013; Quijano, 2000).

In the same spirit, transformative constitutionalism and the avowed commitment to freedom, equality and dignity have been questioned in light of the 'remaining logic and framework of colonial-apartheid' (Modiri, 2015, p. 224). Law schools nationally widely continue to take an uncritical liberal orientation which presents the law as neutral and apolitical and as such avoids engaging with whether this logic has been interrupted – and the implications of this in practice and in life generally. According to Wendy Brown, '[d]epoliticization involves construing inequality, subordination, marginalization, and social conflict, which all require political analysis and political solutions, as personal and individual, on the one hand, or as natural, religious, or cultural on the other' (Brown, 2006, p. 15). The content of 'transformation' itself, the commitment to change, has been critiqued in light of the absence of content that has depoliticized the term and allowed it to

mean what is convenient for it to mean for those privileged in particular contexts. This is explained in situating the concepts' emergence from the compromise between reform (democratization) and revolution (liberation) at the moment of SA's first democratic Constitution (Sibanda, 2020). This is also evident in the approach to equality.

Foremost South African equality law scholar, Catherine Albertyn admits that liberalism is the dominant political, legal and economic idea evident in the substantive equality jurisprudence of the Constitutional Court and that this amounts to an 'equality of recognition rather than redistribution'(2018, p. 441). Substantive equality is premised on the idea that differential treatment is not necessarily unfair if it is rationally enacted to prevent or mitigate harm that results from an imbalance (Albertyn, 2018). Accordingly it is argued that the liberal egalitarian approach is premised on the equal moral worth of all humans – also articulated as dignity – thus presents equality as recognition (Albertyn, 2018). She advocates for a turn to a more 'transformative approach to better address deep systemic inequality in our society' (Albertyn, 2018, p. 459). She reflects that the SA contemplated in the transition to democracy was a liberal egalitarian non-racist, non-sexist society 'in opposition to colonialism and apartheid' where 'jurisprudence was powerfully inclusive, but not always transformative … ' to the extent that it falls short of systemic change (Albertyn, 2018, p. 458). As a part of the remedy, Albertyn argues for understanding non-binary difference and its hierarches towards appreciating 'diverse configurations of race, ethnicity and colour' towards 'non-hierarchical framework of pluralism, participation and inclusion' towards 'equality of condition'(2018, pp. 462–464). Notwithstanding this, she takes the position that contested conceptions of substantive equality in SA ' … do not merely reproduce Western or colonial ideas but seek to 'appropriate and transform these ideas via local conditions and anti-colonial, anti-racist and anti-patriarchal struggles' (Albertyn, 2018, p. 450). To this end Albertyn states, 'Canada and [SA] are recognized as at the cutting edge of substantive equality jurisprudence' (2018, p. 459).

Albertyn's contribution exhibits two dimensions of the limitation of the current framing of the equality clause. The first is that it is depoliticized – as unlike the long standing critiques of the inadequacies towards systemic redress made by critical and decolonial scholars – this presentation removes the significance of race and gender in co-constituting society. The second is that it presents the clause as ahistorical or historical only within this liberal depoliticized narrative. This articulation is useful in inspiring careful consideration of the celebration of progressive parallels between one of the most unequal societies in the world, and a country that literally buried its genocidal past and continues to have stark inequalities (Hanson, 2009; Gamez & Manuel, 2020).

Carolina Combre traces the connection between SA and Canada through the word apartheid and emphasizes the political character that extends beyond segregation that happens to be on the basis of race – to the systemic operations of white supremacy in engineering racialized domination and subordination (Cambre, 2007). She also recognizes how this continues to manifest in different configurations despite the word itself being unspoken (Cambre, 2007). Thus, when reflecting on the declarations of progress attributed to the Constitution, Ndumiso Dladla timeously asks 'progress for whom' and 'progress for what'? (Dladla, 2017a, p. 124). To explain how the equality clause can coexist with continued separate but equal logics in operation we may consider Dladla's contentions on the relationship between liberalism and white supremacy.

Dladla contends, following in the BC and Africanist tradition, that 'liberal doctrine of non-racialism is not incompatible with white supremacy, but in facts supports its existence' (Dladla, 2017a, p.126). Liberalism has been grounded in Eurocentrism which historically departs from the assumption of European superiority to other ways of being in the world (Serequeberhan, 2002; Dladla, 2017a). It speaks of inclusion in abstract terms without questioning who extends the inclusion

to whom and on what basis. Fundamentally liberalism has condoned the 'right of conquest' through eliding the history of ' … unjustly gained privilege and power of the beneficiaries of racism who acquired that power and privilege on the basis the discourse of politics and race' (Dladla, 2017b, p.104). Furthermore it perpetuates the 'civilizing mission' in presenting the transcendence of difference based on the 'assumption of the universalizability and superiority of Western civilization' (Dladla, 2017b, p.106 & 117). This, Dladla argues, is more accurately described as 'multi-racialism' as it implicitly concedes an essential difference of races and provides Black people can gain human status through accepting Western (civilized) culture (2017b, pp. 106-107). This perpetuates 'racism without race' and the continued 'separate but equal' logic (Dladla, 2017b, p.110).

This reading of SA's transition to a constitutional democracy, and ostensible break from apartheid-colonialism, is compatible with the 'two-stage theory' in terms of which the attainment of a liberal democracy with universal franchise would be only the first step towards liberation, requiring a second stage of worker revolution towards socialism that makes a society without hierarchical categorical identities designed to (re)produce domination and subordination conceivable (Gillespie & Naidoo, 2019; Hassim, 2018). This is resonates with Quijano's argument that decolonization of territory is incomplete until dismantling the structures and dynamics that constitute these categories and hierarchies (Quijano, 2000). Thus the struggle for liberation is an anti-racist, anti-sexist struggle against patriarchal white supremacist capitalism in all its iterations towards a truly non-racial society (Dladla, 2017b; Hassim, 2018).

This resists the idea that the constitutional transition marked a radical break from colonial-apartheid, but also reveals that 'assimilation has become an end in itself' co-opting black elites into the transformation from white domination to white hegemony and surfaces what 'inclusion' practically entails (Gillespie & Naidoo, 2019, p. 233). Legal education is obliged to uphold the Constitution but this has been criticized as a hollow gloss over the continued logics of coloniality (de Sousa Santos, 2007; Madlingozi, 2016). Moments of crisis reveal this in the priorities and ethics displayed not on paper, but in conduct. This is not isolated, but can be situated within the characterization by Tshepo Madlingozi of SA's Constitution as operating on the ostensibly linear upward incline in continuing with the momentum of modernity, engendering a bifurcation of society, premised on anti-blackness, that allowed for elite black people to assimilate a putative white status in their proximity to whiteness while the majority of the black population remained on the other side of the 'abysmal line' in the zone of non-being (2016). Thus it perpetuates the colonial-apartheid ontology of white as human and superior and black as inhuman or sub-human (Madlingozi, 2016). Lived through the experience of the constitutional liberal democracy applying to those in the zone-of-being while on the '"other side", patronage, appropriation, and repression remain politics' (Madlingozi, 2016, p. 125). The moment of transition online may be a drop in the ocean, but rather conspicuously reveals that this celebrated equality clause has not produced a change in conduct that would protect vulnerable individuals from separate but equal treatment – as Law Schools across the country pressed for business as usual entrenching racialized and gendered inequalities and privileges. This is inextricable from the broader context.

I/we cannot forget the significance of the SA student movements' confrontation with whiteness and hetero-patriarchy in the privileged space of the university; and how it explicitly challenged the assimilationist logic and emphasized the urgency of the incomplete revolution beyond the university (Gillespie & Naidoo, 2019). Worker-student solidarity in calling for a living wage specifically challenged the logics of bifurcation. Moshibudi Motimele states, 'The irony is not lost on students that apartheid birthed a generation of unskilled, hyper exploited black workers who were denied access to higher education, and the post-apartheid era has now sucked their children into the

process of internalizing the logic of individualized advancement and normalizing the "cheap black labor" trope' (Motimele, 2019, p. 207).[5]

Furthermore Modiri situates this within the broader fabric of SA society where,

> 'majority of South Africans; increasingly vocal irruptions against the obscenity of unequal property ownership; private wealth and exploitation of workers; student protests over colonial-apartheid symbols and unaffordable higher education tuition fees; sexual violence and gender stereotyping; the Eurocentrism and whiteness of knowledge and cultural production in [SA]; government corruption and disillusionment with the African National Congress ("ANC") and hence with the "post-apartheid" dispensation … '. (2016, p. 509)

In this context the online response can be recognized as either as a complete disconnectedness of law schools and universities from reality or a concerted backlash against renewed calls for a truly decolonial higher education and society. This perpetuates a logic where protestors, students, student-protestors, and workers have equal rights in terms of the Constitution, but are separate enough to disregard as collateral damage if they do not assimilate into the logics of the system. On a psychic level, Gillespie and Naidoo reflecting on the student movement articulate,

> ' … much like … DuBois's theory of double consciousness, in [SA] (the world's most unequal society) black people have been forced to cultivate the capacity to move along the long spectrum between white privilege and black wretchedness … . In the wake of settler colonialism and apartheid, and in the face of a facile postapartheid nonracialism that never gained traction as an antiracist project, a much more useful strategy for students was to resolve the dilemma of double consciousness toward blackness.' (2019, p. 234)

Modiri evokes the need for a critical conscientization, following the CRT and BC traditions, to 'bring into view what is currently unseen and unknown, and thereby respond to the conceptual, political and practical disorientation (Modiri, 2016). Gqola posits that the reliance on material separation and psychological subjugation of Black peoples during apartheid was countered by BC's recognition of the power of Black solidarity (Gqola, 2001a). Central to liberation was thus self-determination and liberation of the mind (Biko, 2004; Gqola, 2001a). ˈThis liberation entailed a rejection of the values that sustained white society to the detriment of Black society … ' – including the deeply propagated notion of inferiority and alienation (Gqola, 2001a, p. 132).

In grappling with the implication of the coloniality of the university we may appreciate that '[u]nveiling the university's exploitative practices and its deeply embedded structures of racism, sexism and class inequality can be profound acts of demystification on their own' (Kelly, 2016, p. 6). It has been argued in other contexts that the nature of the university precludes it from being an engine of change (Kelly, 2016). However, in the South African context if universities are not sites of resistance they will remain sites of the perpetuation of hegemonic colonial logics. With regard to legal education as the start of the legal career in a country that purports to be democratic and founded on the values of equality, dignity and freedom there is an irrefutable legal obligation to enact these values in the practices and culture of the university. The question arises: how do I/we function in the law school and the university with the apartheid-colonial logics that still abound towards dismantling these logics? While changing the logics of the university requires collective and institutional responses, I depart from the premise that the need for change in the Eurocentric value systems underpinning university culture, require conscientization contemplated by BC towards a paradigm shift. In other words, without consciousness we are not actively undoing the conduct and habits through which these logics manifest and are normalized outwardly and in our very psyches.

Consciousness matters: revisiting binary logic and the assumption of a unitary self

Du Bois describes this thematic constant of duality as a 'two-ness of being' of 'an American, a Negro; to warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder' (1903, p. 5, 1996, p.194). Dickson suggests that this construction of double-consciousness is influenced by figurative and medical literature of the time (1992, p. 299). The former is attributed to the influences of European Romanticism and American Transcendentalism, the latter the then emerging field of psychology and notion of the 'split personality; the 'set of oppositions' that separate mind and spirit, 'understanding' and 'soul'; 'world' and 'spirit' (Dickson, 1992, p. 299). One of the invocations of double-consciousness is 'internal conflict in the African American individual between what was African and what was American' (Dickson, 1992, p. 300). This for I/we evokes a spectrum and tension between being black and South African (as an ostensibly assimilated and/or implicated person).

Importantly, for Du Bois, 'the distinctiveness of African consciousness was spirituality … revealed in folklore, … history of patient suffering and faith' that 'negro blood has yet a message for the world' that evoked a 'spiritual sense' and 'softening sense' in a cold and calculating world (1987, p.194; Dickson, 1992). This served as an 'alternative to dominant inability to "see" apart from the possibilities for action and profit' (Du Bois, 1996, pp. 194-195; Dickson, 1992). I/we may read and experience not as an appeal to the 'noble savage' trope but as a profound appeal to onto-epistemologies such as Ubuntu, as reflected by Ramose's analysis of *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, that iterates variously across the African continent conveying, non-exhaustively on account of the limits of English to capture the bounds of its meaning, 'to be a human being is to affirm one's humanity by recognizing the humanity of others and, on that basis, establish humane relations with them' (1999, p. 52; Dladla, 2017b).[6] A value system that centralizes human being-becoming, and a striving for goodness, as a process determined by conduct rather than in abstract and absolute terms with view to enhancing equilibrium; one that makes it an ethical obligation to view justice concretely and which would not be compatible with leaving vulnerable members of a community behind in a moment of crisis.

Madlingozi affirms this response to duality in his revival of Mphahlele's call to overcome the 'first exile' in recognizing that 'the ultimate aim of colonisers is to separate colonised peoples from their sources of economic autonomy, ways of understanding the world, and ultimately, themselves' (Madlingozi, 2018a). He connects the aims of Afrikan Humanness, and its reliance on the value system inculcated in Ubuntu, and Black Consciousness (BC) through Mphahlele and Biko (Madlingozi, 2018b, p. 159). This striving is one that does not centre whiteness nor subscribe to a romantic reversion to the enduring stereotypes about the precolonial past (Madlingozi, 2018b). This approach rejects the categorical and essentialist logic that Desiree Lewis, in the context of African Feminism, cautions has the ' … effect of reproducing western modes of misrepresentation and projection' (Lewis, undated, p. 3). The journey is one of 'self-discovery' a 'quest for a true humanity' – a journey of consciousness that reprioritizes the self as/in relation to other people (Biko, 2004; Madlingozi, 2018b, p. 159).

I/we recognize, as articulated by Madlingozi et al, 'The Buddhist grammar of dignity shares common features with *ubuntu* or *botho* (2021, p. 166). Both these philosophies emphasize the qualities of compassion, harmony and duty towards all beings. More crucially, these two grammars of dignity emphasize inter-relatedness … ' (Madlingozi et al., 2021, p. 166). Furthermore, Robinson-Morris has argued 'combining the Ubuntuist and Buddhist notions of subjectivity yields a new form of subjectivity (if it can even still be called this), which recognizes and navigates multiplicities

organically and in motion (2018, p. 42). Importantly this equilibrium that envisages harmony is not a metaphor and in order to be meaningful requires grappling with restoration and redistribution following the unjust wars of conquest and the systemic harms that they produce (Tuck & Yang, 2012; Dladla, 2017b).

Notwithstanding the duality's utility in challenging Eurocentricity, this tendency to conceive of the problem as one of duality more closely resembles Eurocentric logic that so often takes grip through the uncritical adoption of conventions of a moment in time (Gqola, 2001a). Thus what this duality elides are the experiences of Black women and overcoming patriarchy within the striving for a liberated consciousness (Gqola, 2001a). Simamkele Dlakavu, evoking Pumla Gqola contends,

> 'Black feminist scholar and activist Pumla Gqola has noted (2010, p. 8) that "memory resists erasure", and Black feminist academics, artists and activists in [SA] have been working to challenge representations of nationhood, political history and memory that place Black women at the margins … Failing to highlight this racialized and gendered form of inequality or to provide a platform for Black women commentators and activists to articulate this lived experience further relegates Black women's struggles and pains to the margins of our political discourse. Black women in SA are challenging power in various ways. We Black women are engaged in activist-intellectual projects to build a more humane society through our time, voices (written, signed, made verbal), labour, physical presence, ideas and political strategies to build branch es/chapters to movements.' (Dlakavu, 2017, p. 90; Gqola, 2010, p. 8)

Thus I/we are confronted not with a duality of consciousness, but a multiplicity that presents itself in complex and interactive (not merely additive) ways (Crenshaw, 1989). This requires overcoming the elusiveness of the operations of consciousness in order to navigate them more purposefully. Angela Harris challenges the very assumption of a unitary self, 'we are not born with a "self," but rather composed of a welter of partial, sometimes contradictory, or even antithetical "selves"' (1990, p. 584). She goes on to argue 'a unified identity, if it can exist, is a product of will, not a common destiny or natural birthright' (Harris, 1990, p. 584). The conclusion of this argument is that consciousness is transient and 'is not a final outcome or a biological given, but a process, a constant contradictory state of becoming, in which both social institutions and individual wills are deeply implicated' (Harris, 1990, p. 584). This is more consistent than dichotomous logic, with the onto-epistemic orientation of African and Buddhist Philosophies described earlier. Being-becoming and inter-being is a constant unfoldment not a static fact (Buddarakkhita Thera, 1985; Ramose, 1999).

As such multiple-consciousness is not static nor an average point on a spectrum, but 'a process in which propositions are constantly put forth, challenged and subverted' (Harris, 1990, p. 584; Matsuda, 1989). Multiple-consciousness is ' … explicitly tentative, relational, and unstable, and that to do so is all the more important in a discipline like law, where abstraction and "frozen" categories are the norm' (Harris, 1990, p. 586). That 'difference is always relational' reminds us that navigating the multiple-consciousness is also recognizing the multiplicity of value systems at odds in our own minds and psyches. This perspective resists the fragmentation of the experiences of Black queer women and otherwise situated – but also resists the idea that there is a static and containable single 'consciousness' even within the 'self'. I/we confront the oppressor within my/ourselves, our psyches and heritage, recognizing the multiplicity within my/ourselves none of which is necessarily less or more 'us' unless perhaps if we deliberately decide it so (Harris, 1990, p. 611). We become ourselves relationally in similar ways that we become Black or female and as such '"essential self" is always an invention; the evil is denying its artificiality … 'and ' … to be compatible with this construction of the self-feminist theory about "women" must be similarly

strategic and contingent, focusing on relationships not essences' (Harris, 1990, p. 611). Thus multiple-consciousness allows us to simultaneously and deliberately debunk and navigate categories – and causes us to be deliberate about the impact of our conduct.

Gqola identifies the emergence of attention to self-identification and positioning within feminist discourses as part of unfoldment of African Feminism (2001b). She reflects on the deliberate choice to occupy a subject position and the significance of the act of naming in this way rendering our/their own lives (Gqola, 2001b; Maqagi, 1990). In Gqola's words: 'While the postcolonial feminist/womanist project is undeniably concerned with subverting colonial and patriarchal systems of logic, its focus is on opening the terrain of Blackwomen's representation and theorization to new signification' (Gqola, 2001b, p. 15).

Maria Lugones situates the fear of plurality in Eurocentric logics in plurality's tendency to render worlds where whiteness no longer purchases control over reality and authority over everything (2003). As such I/we understand Lugones to suggest that the liberatory possibilities in *mestizaje* and multiplicity are not about accepting multiplicity as a result of mixing essential universal categories – but that of challenging categorical logic as determinative and a different approach to navigating multiple-consciousness (2003). This challenge to the 'politics of purity' and 'politics of separation' is then a challenge to the possibilities of absolute integration and coherence (Lugones, 2003, p. 160). This would then challenge the possibility of coherence not just as groups in society, but in our very own consciousness.

Thus the call for 'auto-reflection' and 'self-aware [ness]' to be 'active subjects' is a call to resistance through consciousness (Lugones, 2003, p. 189). Lugones furthers, 'I see this reduction of multiplicity to unity as being completed through a complex series of fictions' (2003, p. 189). These fictions are validated through circular logic. Unity itself is the product of separating the unit from what is rendered exterior (Lugones, 2003). This applies to the self as well; we are made to war with ourselves constantly, splitting and denying in search of an authentic self – and in this process removed from rhizomatic values such as being-becoming and inter-being towards collective healing, fulfilment and wellbeing. I/we note Matsuda's injunction:

> ' … The multiple consciousness I urge lawyers to attain is not a random ability to see all points of view, but a deliberate choice to see the world from the standpoint of the oppressed. That world is accessible to all of us.' (Matsuda, 1989, pp. 8–9)

Reflexive thoughts

Decolonial approaches have provided accessible vocabulary to articulate the interconnected global logics and experiences of coloniality as a specific systemic embodied experience with race and gender as central analytical categories deeply implicated in class (Icaza & Vázquez, 2016). This has encouraged writing from a place of situated vulnerability – recognizing that the process can be likened to feeling a way forward through the dark in trying to think outside the logics of coloniality so deeply ingrained (Icaza & Vázquez, 2016). As such when I/we draw on the vocabularies of consciousness that resonate with and assist in the articulation of an embodied experience in SA, I/we do so without assuming that this is generalizable. Simultaneously recognizing the global coloniality of power and confronting Mphahlele's caution about a response to oppression that centres the oppressor and straitjackets my/ourselves into essential identities defined by those oppressors. In this way, I have attempted to articulate the navigation of my/our own consciousness in the context of taking law school online as a response to the crisis despite further marginalizing already

vulnerable students – and conspicuously perpetuating the colonial-apartheid architecture of a puta-tively separate but equal society.

In occupying the margins and recognizing the continued relevance of the strategy of conscious-ness as resistance, I/we grappled with whether this meant apprehending this experience as a duality, as has been described in various intellectual traditions, as the binary/tension/polarisation between the assimilated/Western conception of the self or subject and a true self or a self that can be ident-ified with a pre-colonial self. Upon interrogation I/we realized that this binary logic is itself situated in a Eurocentric onto-episteme that assumes that there can be only be these linear poles. As such, I came to an understanding of multiple-consciousness as articulated by Harris, drawing from Mat-suda, that it is not a duality but a multiplicity of selves of consciousness that emerge to be navigated (Harris, 1990; Matsuda, 1989). This appreciation anticipates not only the complexities articulating identity and being in the world, but the absence of or illusion of a fixed self. Not towards decon-struction into complete abstraction, but towards a more mindful articulation and navigation being and relating to the dynamic and multiplicitous 'self' and dynamic and multiplicitous peoples in the world. The idea of navigating multiplicity as a starting point, and doing so in a manner that departs from consideration of justice for all beginning as a consideration for the most vulnerable in society, returned me/us to the question of ontological priorities (Harris, 1990).

I/we began to realize that the issue behind the complacence with the separate but equal treat-ment of people was an ontological question and that a Eurocentric conception of self that was able to separate out individuals that were left behind and see them as collateral damage to progress or 'the show going on'. Furthermore that the commitment to justice being tied to dignity of all lit-erally and the visceral sense of an obligation to the most vulnerable students was influenced by onto-epistemic commitments to being-becoming and inter-being.

As such I/we recognized the influence of African and Buddhist Philosophy on my/our con-ception of personhood that resisted uncritical acceptance of teaching online in response to the pan-demic induced lock down – on the basis of the harm to other beings it perpetuated. I drew on Robinson-Morris' and Madlingozi et al's parallels between Ubuntu (as African Philosophy) and Buddhist Philosophy that suggest ways of being other than the Eurocentric individualistic con-ception of self that allow us to both recognize the fluidity of the concept of the self and an individual and navigate the complexity of consciousness from a place of care and compassion towards all beings. I realized that would be incompatible with the 'business as usual' approach to the crisis in making the ethical imperative to ensuring that vulnerable students are not left behind by responses to the lockdown teaching conditions an urgent priority. While I/we did not attempt a detailed exposition of these parallels due to the scope of this writing, I/we reflected on how they correspond to Harris' conceptions of multiple-consciousness and the transient self that achieves justice through inter-relational awareness and conduct.

I/we suggest that core to this struggle is the rejection of binary logics that pressurize us to assume a unitary self, towards embracing multiple-consciousness and deliberately navigating this in accordance with and while deliberately inculcating a value system of being-becoming and inter-being towards dismantling hierarchical categories altogether – and viewing redress and redistribu-tion as ethical imperatives as human being-becomings and inter-beings rather than essential par-tisan positions. I/we engaged an argument that law schools need to enact their commitment to equality and be attentive to not simply re-inscribing apartheid-colonial logics. A starting point necessary for this is deliberate interrogation of the underlying value systems being accepted and proliferated through the elision of apartheid-colonial logic by liberal gloss on concepts such as equality. I/we cannot justify separate but equal conceptions of access to resources or justice;

whatever our avowed commitments are there must be a call to live them in my/our value systems and conduct. In actively seeking to navigate my/our multiple-consciousness I evoke the words of hooks,

> 'This is an intervention. A message from that space in the margin that is a site of creativity and power, that inclusive space where we recover ourselves, where we move in solidarity and remove the category of colonized/ colonizer. Marginality as a site of resistance. Enter the space. Let us meet there. Enter the space. We greet you in the name of liberators.' (1990, p. 343) … [7]

Notes

1. I do not mean to imply that vulnerability is an essential/absolute/homogenous state, but recognize that context, time, space determines the extent of the inherent vulnerability of human beings and is exacerbated disproportionately as a result of cultural and political hegemony (patriarchal white supremacist capitalism) (Koivunen et al., 2018).
2. For example the Covid-19 Peoples Coalition.
3. I do not take race, nor any other identity category, to be essential or immutable. In recognizing the various contextual iterations of racial identity - I refer here to the conception of Blackness following the Black Consciousness Movement. (Biko, 2004; Sivanandan, 2008). I similarly do not depart from an essentialist conception of gender or sexuality- and recognize that these terms have varied meanings across times, spaces and other contexts. I evoke them as both an act of positionality and solidarity and am simultaneously aware of the limitations inherent in any evocation; In keeping with this 'I write from the limits of myself' and see these limits as neither static nor universal. (Lugones, 2003, p. 109).
4. I am grateful to Zuleika Sheik, as an editor of this paper, for encouraging me to articulate the confluence of African and Buddhist Philosophy on my thinking and a critical self-reflection on the use of I in this writing process.
5. Ibid (Motimele Note 32) 207.
6. This has been paralleled to *mutunchi, iwa* and *agwa* in the context of Nigeria (Mabvurira, 2020, p. 73).
7. I/we end with an ellipsis to recognize that the dialogue, in thought and conversation, is ever unfolding.

Disclosure statement

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