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DECOLONIZATION AND DENAZIFICATION

Student Politics, Cultural Revolution, and the Affective Labor of Remembering

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Abstract

In 2015 students in South Africa mobilized to decolonize universities and to struggle for free higher education. This article discusses these developments in the context of contemporary theories of remembrance, repression and denial and current debates around decolonization and "talking race" in post-apartheid South Africa. The current South African student movement(s) challenge apartheid legacies and white colonial culture, contending that campuses are still dominated by racist symbolic and economic orders. They argue, "As we learn we need to unlearn and develop new epistemologies." This article analyses this process as it unfolds and looks at the unfolding intergenerational tensions and discusses how a lack of affirmative labor of remembrance on the side of the white South African population complicates notions of decolonization in relation to a gendered black nationalism. A point of conceptual reference is the 1968 student protest movement in West Germany, which forcefully broke the silence surrounding fascist continuities within the newly democratized institutions (and society) that was "unable to mourn" and remember.

Keywords: South Africa, decolonization, West German denazification, student protests, shifting politics of representation, memory politics and racialized affective labor of remembrance, black nationalism

The "Rhodes Must Fall" campaign began early 2015 at the University of Cape Town, followed by other initiatives such as "Open up Stellenbosch" and "Transform WITS." The idea of decolonizing universities became the prompt for the formation of a national "fees must fall" movement which enjoyed wide popularity on the one and faced increasingly severe state repression on the other hand. Some of the measures called for in the campaign to decolonize South African universities were the hiring of black academics, an end to outsourcing of workers, change in curricula, language policies, politics around student residences, the relationships between professors and students, socioeconomic injustices, new forms of political organizing and self-expression, the renaming of buildings, and the removal of statues.[1]

I will discuss these developments in the context of contemporary theories of remembrance, repression and denial and I will relate the debates around decolonization to post-apartheid South African memory politics with a special focus their impact on "talking race." A point of reference in making these connections will be the so-called cultural revolution in post-national socialism Germany as it was unfolding in the late 1960s. Memory politics surrounding remembrance and denial of the Nazi era are still contested in Germany today, seventy years later. As in South Africa, today, it was also about two decades post-conflict that the 1968 student protest movement in West Germany forcefully broke the silence surrounding fascist continuities within the now democratic institutions (and society) of the Federal Republic of Germany. Today, about twenty years post apartheid, predominantly black students challenge apartheid legacies and/or white colonial culture, contending that campuses are still dominated by a racist symbolic and economic order. They argue that "as we learn we need to unlearn and develop new epistemologies."[2] Students argue that decolonization is not the same as deracialization in the way government seems to understand it: a simply bringing in more black personal. Students argue, might simply reproduce the old order. They oppose processes of assimilation, co-option or integration (black people being 'welcomed' into institutions)—their aim is rather to radically change the whole system.

A Speaking Race under Conditions of Coloniality

The debates on the anti-, the non-, the post-, the neo- of racialization and racism have been unfolding with enormous velocity since 2015 and the ability to shift the discursive terrain, to make visible the invisible, to voice the previously unspeakable, is breath taking. Until recently the labelling of "black" or "white" seemed to be a faux pas, something, if you know the codes, you can only whisper behind your hand; scholars would refer to their research as having taken place in a low income area southwest of Cape Town that everyone knows is a black "informal settlement" (slum). Suddenly "black" and "white" appears to be omnipresent, newly liberated signifiers in public speech.[3] The conditions of *coloniality* on campus are at the center of the critique. Maria Lugano describes this concept eloquently.

> With the expansion of European colonialism, the classification was imposed on the population of the planet. Since then, it has permeated every area of social existence and it constitutes the most effective form of material and inter-subjective social domination. Thus, "coloniality" does not just refer to "racial" classification. It is an encompassing phenomenon, since it is one of the axes of the system of power and as such it permeates all control sexual access, collective authority, labor, subjectivity/inter-subjectivity and the production of knowledge from within these inter-subjective relations. (2010, 745)

A myriad of structural, linguistic, and cultural analyses are produced as black students express their anger and pain. University establishments reacted initially with rejection, and then, given the immense popularity of the movement, with liberal "repressive tolerance," a concept Herbert Marcuse introduced in 1968 in the context of Berkley University student protests; this potentially suffocating embrace in the sense of "we thank our students, we learn from them, but . . ." was quickly replaced with outright defensiveness followed by a militarisation of campuses as the protests continued in 2016. Sizwe Mpofu-Walsh criticized "the people who are leading our universities" for not encouraging debates about "race, decolonisation and economic justice" but to instead criminalise active students. In an ironic distancing himself of British etiquettes, he clarifies "by 'debate,' I do not mean a 'gentlemanly' exchange of views

followed by tea and scones. The debate we need to have in South Africa is loud, multilingual, fractious and unpredictable. It involves protest, songs, dance and speech."[4] Achille Mbembe initially described the situation as an evolvement of new voices through which "anger, rage, and grief seem to become the new markers of identity and agency" and where the "key pillars of the 1994 dispensation—a constitutional democracy, market society and non-racialism—are also under scrutiny." Mbembe and the movement grew more and more antagonistic. He wondered why whiteness as well as pain and suffering has turned into "erotogenic objects," something he cautions might not lead to demythologize whiteness but on the contrary will ultimately "end up claiming us," an "us" the students no longer take for granted as the intergenerational conflict among black young activists and their parental generation unfolds.[5] This intergenerational fallout is reflected in calls to "stop 'uncle-ing' us" and Panashe Chigumazi sums up this fallout: "However, as things stand, where 'our parents,' the generation of black intellectual and political leaders, continue to fail us by choosing respectability politics and race transcendence over the pressing demands of decolonization, that interest is no longer as keen. They are losing the little moral authority they had. Very soon we will not be willing to listen to them any more."[6]

I argue that right now non-racialism, no longer understood in its initial apartheid context, i.e. being a political strategy, but often rather crudely reduced to a form of colour-blind politics of belonging which mostly inform white people's comfortable identification with a universal, post-race South Africanness, is not a helpful strategy supporting "transformation." Non-racialism might have had its time as a contested and complex concept already during struggle days. However today the often simplified removal of all markers of "race," a social construct that not only legitimize(d) discrimination but also granted and still grants privileges, erasures the possibility to name, analyze and therefore fight the continuous symbolic and material manifestations of the "race" in post-apartheid South Africa. To avoid color-conscious language and critique with the intention of unlocking black people from the position of Otherness tied to blackness means at the same time to absolve white people from acknowledging that past atrocities have been done in the name of whiteness; atrocities that are still holding them responsible today collectively and as individuals becoming white, being white, doing white—intentionally or not.[7]

Undoing Violence? The "Affective Labour of Remembering" and "Relational Distortions"

Wytske Versteeg follows the ideas of Emmanuel Levinas, arguing that violence is undone when it still hurts but no longer wounds: once the violated freedom possesses the full power to absolve. Here, freedom and power are inevitably interlinked concepts. The Latin word *absolvere* has a broad meaning: to free, to acquit, to complete, finish, let go, rid oneself or others of guilt. Most of these meanings refer to an interaction between self and the other: I free you, I acquit you, I let you go. Then there is the meaning that refers back to the self in the sense of "I rid myself of guilt." When the victim keeps the full freedom to free itself then this is a clear first step to turn a violent act into a hurt and to eventually conclude, finish and let go of the matter.[8] Translated to the situation in South Africa, one needs to acknowledge that for many black people, freedom has not yet reached the full power to absolve white people and this is why the current generation of activists speak of "black pain and anger." The persistence of racism and racialized social inequality requires the naming of who is doing what to whom from which specific, current and historical, individual and collective, position. As long as this is not done, that, what is done in the name of whiteness, keeps gaining the power to be still wounding.

The Need for the Affective Labor of Remembering

Racial subjectivities are interrelated, both, constructed as mutually exclusive, but simultaneously reciprocally constitutive to each other. I suggest three main consequences of this: firstly, white liberals, intimidated by black (and some white) critique of structural, everyday societal racism *and* their collective silence in the face of angry, right-wing, white victim discourses is problematic in itself; secondly: they therefore fail to challenge the majority of white South Africans' denial about whiteness's global hegemony and their continuous partaking in post-apartheid/colonial systems of privilege. As a consequence of point one and two the overwhelming majority of white people appear to be unable or unwilling to engage in a pro-active engagement with what I conceptualise as the *affective labor of remembering* on the side the perpetrator collective; in my view a fundamental element of post-conflict societal transitioning and healing. As such the *affective labor of remembering*[9] includes forms of individual self- scrutinization of one's own

voluntary (and involuntarily) inclusion in dominant systems of privilege in relation to a critical reflection of one's own collective social positioning (as white and /or middle class and/or heterosexual, and/or able bodied etc. . . .) to then "own" one's complicities and the responsibilities that come with them.

In 1967 Alexander and Magarete Mitscherlich published *The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behaviour*,[10] which describes German postwar society's inability to mourn their owns deeds: to cope and deal with their war crimes, the guilt of the collective of perpetrators in relation to the holocaust, the collective support of the regime and of war crimes. This inability, based on repression and denial, feed German's continuous entitlement toward "their" lost territories in Eastern Europe. The recognition of the separation of Germany in East and West Germany (symbolized by the wall as a consequence of losing World War II) became a taboo. The Mitscherlichs argue that "behind such a taboo lurks the dream that, by some unforeseeable stroke of good fortune, Germans might yet be able to recover what was earlier gambled away through criminal hubris" (1975, 4). It seems to me that this inability to mourn and the lack of recognition of one's own deeds and the taboo and entitlement that result out of this, is reflected in white supremacists as well as in white liberals' denial of what has been done and is still done in the name of whiteness; a construct the former are holding up as distinct and superior and that the later declare as no more powerful or relevant in a post-racial society. However, a part of taking responsibility for one's own voluntary (or involuntary) inclusion into dominant systems of privilege and power, may they be present or past with lingering legacies, is, to collectively mourn the crimes, the violence and the lives lost in the name of whiteness.[11]

Decentering Whiteness: DE-construction, -colonization, -nazification

Germany

Toni Morrison has noted that the focus of racism studies lies mostly on the objects of racism and not on the acting subjects. Morrison argues that the study of racism is

> always defining it asymmetrically from the perspective of its impact on the object of racist policy and attitudes. . . . It seems both poignant

> and striking how avoided and unanalyzed is the effect of racist infection on the subject. What I propose here is to examine the impact of notions of racial hierarchy, racial exclusion, and racial vulnerability on non-blacks who held, resisted, explored, or altered those notions.[12]

Modes of coloniality and the inscribed racism shaped and still do shape the self-imagination of the West. Many scholars, such a Paul Gilroy, in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993); Stuart Hall, in *The West and the Rest. Discourse and Power* (1996); or Michelle M. Wright, in *Becoming Black* (2004), to name only a few, have argued that Western values and the notion of modernity is deeply invested and linked to colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade. Something that cannot be conceptualized without the context of violent forms of Othering at the intersections of race with gender, class, sexuality, and religion.[13] That various discourses and practices of violence were not simply an aberration of enlightenment and of modern western thought but rather a condition of it has been argued also by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in the 1940s in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1940) in relation anti-Semitic forms of Othering leading to the Shoa and the Nazi death camps. In his book *Modernity and Ambivalence* (1993), Zygmunt Bauman takes the critique of Enlightenment as a basis of modern thought further, arguing that its cultural and social project relies on the "distinction between an inside (ordered, accepted) and an outside (disordered, unacceptable)"[14]—the West and the rest. Such critiques of Western values, developed in the context of slavery, colonialism and the holocaust, of racism and anti-Semitism, requires in the first place the capacity to endure the ambivalence of modernity in order to tackle these complicities rather than simply denying them. I am interested in the gray zones: not the easily condemned right-wing positions of a Red October campaign or an Afriforum, but the conviction of being able to preserve one's individual innocence in the face of systemic human rights atrocities from which one was (still is) in one or another way benefiting. Even when we don't look at the mainstream but at white anti-racism and non-racialism the question arises: how can one, socialized in a Eurocentric context with white privileges *not become* tainted with racism even if one fights it? How do "we" memorize, how do we become "we" through memorizing—and through *not* memorizing—twenty-one-plus years post-apartheid?

The anthology *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* examines these questions for the African-American community in post-slavery USA.

How do we relate to others' memories, how do we assist or intervene in the politics of remembrance? Germany's contested journey of memorising its own deeds as a conflictual, multi-party effort is here of interest. The first winds of progress emerged in 1968, about twenty-three years post-fascism, when the daughters and sons of those living through Nazi Germany demanded real "denazification" in all public spheres. The breaking of family taboos (what did my grandfather do during the war?) happened one generation later. It is important to note that German democratic institutions began only twenty years post-1945 to prosecute Nazi criminals in the Auschwitz Trials themselves before 1963 the allied forces conducted the trials. In 2013 the ZDF documented that in the 1960s nearly all heads of departments in the Federal Ministry of Justice were still old Nazis.[15] The out of parliament opposition (APO: Außerparlamentarische Opposition) targeted the remains of Nazi-ideologies and personnel in academic and political institutions and this introduced the beginning of marginalized but visible, loud, and provocative forms of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Translated, this means something like to "cope with and to work through the negative and repressed aspects of a collective past."

Anti-capitalism, anti-imperialism, denazification, and a cultural and social revolt went hand in hand with the emerging of a culture of memorizing. Various and still ongoing struggles for multiple layers of remembrance, the power of definition, the lifting of taboos, breaking of silences, acknowledgment of moral and political implications and ultimately discussions of individual choice and agency, collective perpetratorship, and guilt or responsibility are resurfacing, altered, added on, discarded by new generations, and changing subject positions. *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* is till today a contested space. Only in 1985, following then-president Weizäcker's historic speech, it became an official part of the project to modernize German national identity. This large, state organised discourse is often critiqued by civil society organizations as hypocritical and too tame; rather it is mainly small scale neighbourhood projects and initiatives and new social movements who contribute to the vivid landscape of contested cultures of memory and on-going attempts to find ways to cope with the past, and who also fight against the (re)strengthening of neo-nazism. Progressive, ever-changing and evolving negotiations of how to relate to the past perhaps resist the notion that final closure and release can be achieved. But while the holocaust (reluctantly) received public, political, and scholarly attention, nationally and internationally, colonial amnesia has not been lifted

very much to this day. In fact, current right-wing mobilization is reversing the gains made toward acknowledging past German deeds and current responsibilities in relation to fascism, anti-Semitism and German colonialism. I have discussed elsewhere how this plays out in public culture, in immigration politics and contemporary forms of racism.[16]

Taking responsibility for historic injustices and dealing with their legacies is and will remain unfinished business as different generations ask different questions and seek different answers. The country I come from has been transitioning in relation to German fascism for nearly eighty years; till today it is transforming its fascist legacies, for better or worse, developing, resisting, struggling for or against a landscape of multi-layered memories. As in today's South Africa, the controversy of what actually constitutes violence, was passionately debated in the 1968 era: How to weigh the metaphorical slap into the face of all victims of the Nazi era when Germany's chancellor refused to step down in 1968 when his prominent Nazi past was revealed against the public physical slap into the face by an antifascist activist in response to him not taking responsibility?[17]

The 1960s out of parliament opposition (APO) was a multitude of movements; the student movement and the reform of universities went hand in hand with a struggle for denazification of institutions such as the education and justice system and of the social and cultural sphere. The APO aimed to expose the socioeconomic injustices of capitalism and promoted a non-dogmatic libertarianism and modes of political organising which differed from traditional left-wing, communist party structures.

Similar to today's South African student movement which (at some point) refused to continue with hierarchical leadership structures and chose to work with horizontal task teams, the 1968 movements promoted (more or less successfully) forms of alternative political organising and living: the feminist slogan of the time "the private is political" indicated the intersections of the so-called cultural revolution: relationships, sexuality, gender relations, and communal spaces became sites to experiment with an anti-bourgeois habitus aimed at political as well as social change. This played out as an inter-generational conflict, as an opposition to a parental generation actively involved in or at least ambivalent toward the Nazi regime. After the war and since the "economic wonders years" of the 1950s, this generation had found a comfortable niche: an "I didn't know" narrative in combination with self-victimhood (the war, the destruction, the de-industrialisation, the hunger years, etc.) allowed for an undisturbed

focus on participating in the emerging consumer society and its socially provincial and reactionary politics.

South Africa

Are there similarities in white post-apartheid South Africa? In October 2013 the self-proclaimed *Red October* movement surfaced. The crowd of people, publicly organising themselves around white victimhood narratives, organised a spectacle which was met with more or less silence by a majority of whites who might have privately disagreed with the position of the protestors but who did not publicly disavow that the protesters spoke in the name of all whites. The silent white majority positioned itself off the ground of the battlefield. Familiar with such majority "non-reaction," I published the opinion piece "Extremism's Memory Politics: Organized Amnesia." My main argument was that around the world different but similar forms of white supremacy and right-wing extremism are (re)emerging; neither the left nor the so-called mainstream of society has an adequate answer to this and the narrative logics of these populist movements are similar:

Firstly, historic revisionism and denialism. The expression "Hitler . . . if he would not have done this thing with the Jews . . . but he gave us highways and decreased unemployment" resonates with Hofmeyr saying about apartheid: "No, I don't think all of it was wrong but it couldn't go on forever. . . . Hendrik Verwoerd gave us good schools, how can I say that's wrong?" Secondly, the delegitimizing of established parties as corrupt European or cosmopolitan elites. I am not arguing they are not corrupt but it is interesting to see which arguments are to be found in the merger of the supposedly new true voices of "the people" (for instance bold anti-intellectualism, anti-cosmopolitanism, post-factual essentialism etc.). Thirdly, the call for xenophobic exclusion and a localized "Lager" mentality reflected in calls for tighter internal security and border management. All this evokes connotations of old symbolism, iconographies, and discourses of an ethnically homogeneous *Volksgemeinschaft*, whose conservation and continuity needs the segregation of those who belong and deserve, and those who don't. Fourthly, victimhood mentality. Today "illegal" immigrants are blamed for stealing wealth and women, and consequently the UK immigrant's anti-racist slogan "We are here because you were there" serves as an unwelcome reminder of colonial rule and slavery, past regimes of theft, racism and violence. The new legitimating narrative is a seemingly more acceptable

"Neo-Racism," accepting equality in principle but stressing difference in culture and mentality. Fifth: memory-aversion. Victim mentality is directly linked to memory politics and the revision of history. Memory of past atrocities are unpleasant for perpetrators and bystanders, they are linked to guilt. You are seen as a pariah in the international community, and the survivors of victimized communities remind the perpetrator collectively through their very existence of their past deeds. As such they and future generations are perceived as dangerous and hurtful and constructed as the source of one's own uneasiness. This can lead to aggression against previously victimized collectives, now seen as a collective of perpetrators. A framing that reinforces point four: imagining one's own community as universal victim.

What makes this particularly interesting in the context of the current decolonization movement in South Africa is that Afrikaaner interest groups such as Red October resurfaced in April 2015 when green paint was thrown at the Paul Kruger statue in Pretoria. Paul Kruger (1825–1904) was a Voortrekker and later Transvaal president and descendant of a German immigrant who came to South Africa in 1713 as a mercenary for the Dutch East India Company. Protesters sang the apartheid national anthem and waved the old apartheid flag as they see Kruger as one of their national heritage figures, while the paint-splashers see him as a symbol of colonial violence. Greg Nicolson commented on this as follows: "Over 20 years into democracy, after hundreds of years of brutality, things haven't changed fast enough. The ANC could have done better, clearly, but spaces described as the avenues to opportunity, universities and professional workplaces, remain white, exclusive, often only tolerating a rainbow-nation-trickle of blacks who face extra hurdles. If they fail, their performance reflects a race. If they succeed, well, what an exception! That's what the protests over the statues are about. The specific legacies of Rhodes and Kruger are largely meaningless. They represented a system that oppressed and in a post-Apartheid society where racists only officially emerge under the extreme right-wing (or on social media), the statues are a symbol of all that remains to be done, of real transformation. While almost everyone seems to want change, they want it without fuss, without shaking the status quo. They want to open a conversation (maybe an inquiry?) within the current system while their symbols of being remain untouched. But that leads to stasis, as it has, with the idea of transformation dropped into white noise. UCT's protesters have managed to do something different. It might be messy, but this is politics, not a classroom. The #RhodesMustFall campaign recognized

that symbols matter. Symbols are vessels of identity and knowledge of the collective and its power."[18] This act of *guerrilla communication* might be considered as gentle in so far as they chose a friendly green and not pink, queering Mr Kruger's masculinity on top of mocking his ossified colonial authority. Symbolism is powerful; this is why this statue has been erected in the first place; this is why in post-reunification Germany the statues in former East Germany vanished: Berlin *dismembered* Lenin, buried the pieces in the woods to only excavate and literally *remember* him safely in a museum twenty-five years after the reunification.[19] Even in the United States the confederate flag is now under attack and taken down from public buildings; seen from a more global perspective, the demand of the student movement to relocate Rhodes & Co. straightaway to a museum is overdue and harmless.

One of the problems with South Africa's exceptionalism is that everything seems so outrageous, exclusive and unheard off. It is spine chilling to read the commentary section after Nicolson's article but it is informative if one wants to feel the pulse of a particular sense of entitlement of some quarters of white South Africa. This is nowadays more or less disguised in a color-blind universalism that produces the paradox of notions of collective victimisation and notions of individual innocence. *We* (as white people) are suffering "reverse racism" but *I* (a colorless individual) did/do not partake in structural white privilege. The situation in South Africa, and other countries with emerging right wing populism, reminds one of Walter Benjamin's description of the dialectics of movement and standstill.[20] Some of those "*formerly* [*sic*!] privileged" look backward and see all that has been lost in the name of progress (human rights, equality, democracy); they feel forced into a future as they look backward. Some of those "*formerly* [*sic*!] disadvantaged"[21] look backward and see all that has been supposedly lost: discrimination and inequality; but they feel trapped by a future resembling the past.

Gender, Decolonization, Retraditionalization

If those placed on the side of the perpetrator collective avoid to take part in the *affective labor of remembering* required for transformation particular reactions might be triggered among those historically and currently placed at the receiving end of violence done in the name of whiteness; I refer

here to the universalization of a particular form of anti-Eurocentric particularism, based on de-complexified notions of (pan)-Africanness and/or "real" blackness in the context of celebrating an imagined cultural authenticity and purity of African/Black traditions. As so many black feminists have argued (Gqola, Ramphalile, Davis, hooks, Wallace, Wright et al.), a critique well summarized for the USA in *Gender, Race and Nationalism in Black Politics* (Alexander-Floyd, 2007), black patriarchal nationalism (as any nationalism) often feeds dangerous politics of belonging and violent forms of Othering. This Othering for the purpose of self-definition includes the targeting of black homosexuals and of black women who demand gender equality as "unafrican." This Othering also includes the chauvinism that violates migrants from elsewhere in Africa, xenophobia or afrophobia, often legitimized by "they take our women." Further more, students shared that, within some corners of the "fees must fall" movement, black protestors who were relatively light-skinned, were termed "yellow bone," supposedly not receiving the full load of racist exclusion and violence, therefore being silenced as "not black enough" to speak up in the movement. In the political sphere current governmental trends such as attempts to strengthen traditional leadership structures mimicking the Black Authorities Act as developed under the apartheid regime in 1951, or more recently, the Traditional and Khoi-San Leadership Bill, speak to the problematic aspects of reinventing notions of essential blackness.[22]

I see white identity politics, refusing to engage in the *affective labor of remembering* and a particular form of black identity politics, invested in patriarchal national chauvinism, as interrelated *relational distortions*: partly a crude reflex of forcing to light the hidden and repressed by some of those at the receiving end of systemic racism. To mind comes also the scandal around the former WITS University student representative Mcebo Dlamini, who claimed in April 2015 to love Hitler. His logic: as whites are now against Hitler something has to be in for blacks. The growing critiques from the movement's margins, voiced by queer and feminist activists, speak as much to this reality as the critique of "shading" and other internally growing practices of Othering, division and exclusion.[23] The statement of a black consciousness inspired student that there is no female black full professor at Wits is however a (deliberate?) distortion of Steve Biko's understanding of blackness as a political and not biological, phenotypical identity as her claim denied a female black full professor with a South African Indian background her black identity. Both, Ngugi wa Thiong'O

and Fanon cautioned us of the limitations of "cultural nationalism" and the "negritude's revivalisms" when arguing that "the past was not always a source of hope. . . . To move from decolonisation to xenophobic cultural nationalism [which, as I argue is also deeply gendered and heteronormative] . . . is not an option."[24]

Relational distortions are a challenge for movement building—from within and also from outside. The shift from a politically informed Black identity, as envisioned by Fanon, Biko et al., toward claiming an imagined pre-colonial "authenticity," can turn out to be deeply reactionary, patriarchal and undemocratic. Frantz Fanon foresaw this long time ago: "The customs, traditions, beliefs, formerly denied and passed on in silence are violently valorized and affirmed. Tradition is no longer scoffed at . . . the past, becoming henceforth a constellation of values, becomes identified with the truth."[25] If Fanon is to be taken seriously, the project of decolonization will have to find a position toward such developments in order to not be hijacked by reactionary forces within and from outside. Liberation theory responded broadly in two different ways to the dilemma of the past in the present, noting that "writers such as Ho Chi Minh and Frantz Fanon looked to the future, hoping that participation in the revolutionary struggle would turn colonial subjects into citizens. Others such as Gandhi, Afghani, and even Mariategui looked to the religious traditions and institutions of the past to mobilize resistance and legitimize alternatives to the economy and political structures of the colonial state."[26] However, this did not always work. Margarete Kohn and Kelly McBride describe postcolonial governance as often being a paradox, namely, that the postcolonial state was structured by the very same institutions which were designed during colonialism to subordinate and exploit the colonized.

A very contemporary application of this analysis is Mpofu-Walsh's critique of the South African government that has failed to resolve the crisis of education at all levels. He critiqued problematic loyalties, noting that

> this is an area where the student movements need to become more consistent. While I whole-heartedly support movements like Rhodes Must Fall or Open Stellenbosch, I feel they are comparatively timid in their critique of state power. The point is simple: if we are unequivocal about the evils of white supremacy, we must be equally firm about the need for corrupt political leaders . . . to fall.[27]

This is a productive application of Fanon's vision of a new humanism for the formerly colonised which transcends essentialized identities and loyalties, and prioritises political positioning and solidarity as expressed in *Black Skin, White Masks*: "I am a man, and what I have to recapture is that whole past of the world. . . . Every time a man has contributed to the victory of the dignity of the spirit, every time a man has said no to an attempt to subjugate his fellows, I have felt solidarity with his act" (1952, 176).[28]

Politics of Becoming

Subverting and disturbing normative signification processes can impact on the imaginary and as such produce social change, or as Toni Morrison says, "imagining is not merely looking or looking at; nor is it taking oneself intact into the Other. It is, for the purposes of the work, *becoming*" (Morrison 1992:4, in Kaplan 1997: xvii). What do we become and how?"[29] Maybe we need to become comfortable with the idea that "decolonization" cannot be a captured in a noun. There is no arriving at an accomplished destination; rather, as an on-going process, it can only be done again and again. Therefore, the verb "decolonizing" is the appropriate concept for *becoming*, something that inevitably encompasses everybody: those placed at the receiving end of colonial and racial privileges, embraced or rejected, and those at the receiving end of colonial and racial discrimination, endured or fought. I too am interested in "the function of racism for the 'voluntary inclusion' in dominant systems of power."[30] The inclusion into dominant systems of power and privilege is complex as it takes place at the intersections of our various positionalities and speaks to the ambiguity of being included and excluded at the same time: white but poor, poor but heterosexual, black but male, male but handicapped, female but white, immigrant but documented, educated professional but refugee and undocumented and so forth. . . . The voluntariness and/or involuntariness of inclusion and the responsibilities that come it makes all this even more complex and involves all sides engaged in dominance, oppression, and resistance.

In Germany, twenty-three years after the end of German fascism, "denazification" and the reform of universities (as well as other public institutions) was central to the previously noted 1968 movement and its "coping with the past." This was captured by the slogan "Beneath the

[academic] gowns lingers the fug of 1,000 years," a reference to the Nazi motto: "The empire of a 1,000 years," and resulted in universities dropping their centuries-old legacies of academic regalia, since they became identified as symbols of reactionary right-wing values. The decolonization of symbolic orders on South African campuses has touched on many aspects and often the devil lies in ambivalent details. Only a few years ago the SRC (student representative council) at WITS, the largest and probably most radical element among formal student organisations, wanted the institution to provide them with uniforms. In the late 2000s they received their "jacket of office" and since then every new representative receives his dark blue blazer in a ceremony on the eleventh floor, the offices of the usually reviled management of the university—the vice chancellor and his four deputies. Resembling the obligatory school uniform, another colonial legacy, inducting children into embodying bourgeois manners necessary for the replication of such institutions, the new SRC insignia of distinction too mimic this symbolic order and its legacies—otherwise critiqued. This small everyday example speaks to the aspiration of "becoming," of imagining, to speak with Morrison. As such this is a paradox imaginary, symbolizing the partaking in rituals which are at odds with the transformation of the very same structures that denied access on the basis of race, class and gender formerly, but also, by appropriating these codes of distinction, subverting a still existing dominant order of exclusion. How one relates to this appropriation might be based on one's own positionality and how this shapes one social and political identities; how the legacies of the violence of past regimes are experienced, individually and collectively, in the present, influences the rejection, subversion, and/or embracement of symbolic orders otherwise critiqued.

Absolvere: You, Me—Us? Memory Politics as permanent Construction Site

Levinas, as discussed earlier, argued that violence is undone when it still hurts but no longer wounds; only then the violated come to possess the full power to absolve. The Latin word *absolvere* has a broad meaning: to free, to acquit, to complete, finish, let go, rid oneself or others of guilt. Most of these meanings refer to an interaction between self and the other: I free you, I acquit you, I let you go. Then there is the meaning that refers back to the self: I rid myself of guilt.

The collective past of the country I come from inevitably situates me, as do my individual choices of how I position myself in relation to this past and in relation to how this past plays itself out in the present. All this informs how I see, experience, and make sense of my surroundings here in South Africa. I am white, I am non-South African, I am middle class. This is obvious. I don't like the term activist and prefer to say I have been living a political life as a left feminist anti-racist and anti-fascist in Germany; this is not obvious if I do not chose to make it visible, audible and readable: a practice I am experimenting with since I moved to Johannesburg eight years ago. Experimenting because being—becoming?—white is similar and different here; everywhere "becoming" in the sense of disrupting hegemonic white norms is something one has to invent, to make up, learn, here and now, improvised in the everyday often without adequate role models.

How do you imagine a decolonized South Africa? It is a construction site, I think. Most likely a permanent one, as different generations might find different answers and questions but there is one thing I am sure of: white people need actively to take part in this process by wanting to become something else and by shaping their own contribution to the *affective labor of remembering*—a labor students currently undertake when arguing "the emotional[31] is political."

The past and the present meet when we acknowledge our situatedness in relation to power, here and now, as being marked by the residues of our individual *and* collective position within past systems of privilege. This is beyond our individual choices, which in themselves are constituted by privilege as having a choice in the first place is a privilege itself. In order to dismantle systems of privilege and shift unjust and asymmetric positions in the future, we need to understand that the past is made in the present as much as the present is made by the past: both impact on our respective being in the world. If white people remain in a position of anger and denial based on a victim narrative, they inevitably appropriate the victim collective's experience.[32]

The alternative would be the ability to relate oneself to one's historically/socially/culturally (not racially) ascribed collective in order to "own" and then mourn its deeds. To acknowledge, as an individual, how one is inevitably implicated in a collective responsibility for past and present deeds enables agency instead of paralysis. To not acknowledge one's ex- or implicit responsibility feeds a paralysis which needs to diminish or deny "black anger and pain," the very same emotions that make one feel the

discomfort of one's complicity. However, the denial and rejection of these emotions and their causes do not absolve from complicity but situates one in the realm of past and present perpetrators. By contrast, acknowledging one's collective responsibility enables to one partake in the affective labor of remembering and mourning: this labor means to connect with the discomfort the acknowledgement of one's own structural complicity with privilege and power may cause; to make this connection allows for mourning to be transformed into activity: namely the partaking in the dismantling of the very same structures of privilege one (still) benefits from. This affective labor of remembering and mourning ultimately allows to feel empathy with the violated, a powerful act of recognition.

Every context produces different strategies of denial and remembering, of complicity and resistance. The respective global contexts within which Germany and South Africa each transitioned[33] from conflict to post-conflict were strikingly different and these contrasts bear consideration:

Whereas Germany has been liberated from itself by others (something that was only acknowledged officially in 1985), South Africa was liberated by members of the suppressed majority collective (with the support of some members of the perpetrating collective). Given the evolving cold war scenario, the West made sure that West Germany would not fall to the Eastern block and, after an initial deindustrialisation, pumped millions of dollars (via the Marshall Plan) into the country. This transition needed to succeed; Western powers were still worried forty-five years later, at the time of its reunification, about Germany's destructive potential.

Contrary to this, the new democratic government of South Africa, run by the formerly suppressed, had to repay the debts of its suppressors while the whole world, in need of a happy ending, celebrated the rainbow narrative. There was no internationally organised re-education for white South Africans, no "Persilschein"[34] issued for *not* having issued the *dompas*, for *not* having stuck pencils in someone's hair, for *not* having bombed the frontline states, for *not* having prosecuted in the name of apartheid law. In the German case, the extermination and exiling of victim collectives had taken place at an industrial scale and as a consequence the newly democratised West Germany was a country primarily filled with perpetrators, bystanders and their offspring: the unique situation arose, where the perpetrator collective was forced by its own succeeding generation(s), in conjunction with an international community, to remember its own deeds.

In democratic South Africa, the perpetrating collective is in the minority; it is the victimised majority which has liberated itself and is now ruling the country politically; it is their offspring, the so-called *born free* who now argue to not be free of the unjust material residues of the past, the dominant symbolic orders of coloniality and of the intergenerational transmission of trauma; this generation connects the notion of being free with the *affective labor of remembering* as a crucial form of working toward a substantial change in the current symbolic order and order of distribution. They engage in this labor and they demand others to do so, too.

It remains an open question if the white minority will embrace its own decolonization, if their offspring will begin to ask necessary and uncomfortable questions and if the current project of decolonization will be able to save itself from the pitfalls of dogmatism and chauvinistic identity politics. Gayatri C. Spivak has summed this up poignantly when saying, "History is larger than personal goodwill, and we must learn to be responsible as we must study to be political."[35]

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NOTES

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1. For more information about the current public debate see: https://www.google.com/search?q=YOUTUBE+LUISTER&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8 or visit the Facebook page, "Decolonize South African Universities"
   http://www.mediaforjustice.net/it-is-not-just-about-afrikaans/
   https://theconversation.com/how-south-african-universities-are-governed-is-the-biggest-challenge-47075
   https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=hFIp9h4znyc&feature=youtu.be
   http://www.iol.co.za/sundayindependent/time-to-decolonise-our-universities-1.1843798#.Ve62GBGqqko
2. Nontobeko Dlamini, Diversity Studies Student at the roundtable discussion in October 2015.
3. See the 2015 Ruth First memorial lecture contributions,www.journalism.co.za/projects-a.../ruth-first/
4. Mpofu-Walsh 2015.
5. Mbembe 2015. It is important to notice, that whiteness is a used in this text is an overall term of those persons constructed by the different racial regimes in South Africa as such and who until today are benefiting by the privileges instilled upon this category. There are differentiations among whites (English white, Afrikaner white and other whites who settled in South Africa after their former colonies became independent such as Portuguese and of course more recently arrived white immigrants such as myself). This is not the space where these differentiations, different self-identifications and inter-group relations can be explored.
6. Chigumazi 2016.
7. When I speak in the following of the perpetrator collective I mean not only persons who directly supported a criminal system but also those who were claimed by it with their agreement, who were indifferent about it, who resisted this claim but where nevertheless benefiting from it in certain aspects. I include perpetrators, bystanders and their offspring and use this term in an intergenerational sense, which includes those born "after." I explore elsewhere in more detail how this positions myself in relation to the privileges the global hegemony of whiteness grants me but more specifically in relation to Germany having actively supported the apartheid regime – as did other western countries.
8. I am using these reflections on Levinas developed by Wytske Versteeg in Veersteeg 2006 and privately translated by Jutta van Dalsen.
9. The term "affective labor" is conceptually rooted in the work of Sigmund Freud and has gained political currency through 1970ies feminist movements and their expansion of the patriarchal notion of what constitutes labor, arguing for the inclusion of what has been marked traditionally as women's work, including care work. Other authors , such as Toni Negri and Michael Hard, have worked and expanded

the usage of this concept. Others included its application into the field of memory studies.

10. Mitscherlich and Mitscherlich 1967.
11. The same applies for hegemonic masculinity, heteronormativity, and all regimes of oppression.
12. Morrison 1992, 11
13. See for instance the work of Walter Mignolo.
14. Zaretsky 1992, 1519.
15. Kramer 2013.
16. Schuhmann 2007
17. One among many other examples illustrating this process, was the public slapping of the back then German chancellor Kiesinger by the so-called Nazi-huntress Beate Klarsfeld. Klarsfeld promised at a public event at the technical university Berlin where students and intellectuals demanded the chancellor to step down due to his Nazi-past, to slap him. First, the student organization laughed in disbelief, but After Klarsfeld did slap Kiesinger at his own party summit a few months later in November 1968, they supported her when she was sentenced to one year of imprisonment (never enforced due to her by now French citizenship) in order to set an example that political differences should not lead to violence. Intellectuals and artist voiced support and the powerful SDS, the socialist student movement, condoned the smashing of the judges window as an appropriate response to what they labeled as a "terror ruling."
18. Greg Nicolson 2015.
19. *Der Spiegel*, October 9, 2015, http://www.spiegel.de/panorama/gesellschaft/berlin-lenin-statue-soll-ins-museum-a-1052335.html.
20. Benjamin 1974.
21. The term "formerly disadvantaged" is a perfect example of South Africa's attempts to promote a nonracial policy and political language, working around the fact that all those who were "disadvantaged" were (and most of them still are) black (in the apartheid logic: African black, Indian, cultured). There is no "doer" in this language and it is notable that the term "formerly privileged," as a logic counterpart to the widely used formerly disadvantaged, does not exist may be because it is too obviously wrong.
22. Claasen 2015. Also see Ramphalile 2011.
23. As one among many reports, see: Pather 2016.
24. Nayar 2013, p. 112.
25. Fanon, "Racism and Culture," cited in Nayar 2013, 111.
26. Kohn and McBride 2011, 5.
27. Mpofu-Walsh 2015.
28. Fanon, *Black Skin*. Cited in Nayar 2013, 112.
29. Schuhmann, 2015, 50
30. Kalpaka and Räthzel 1990, 19.
31. Students at the WITS Center for Diversity Studies in discussion with me and Gokce Yurdakul in October 2015.

32. In the German case Habermas named, this covers memories symbolized in the cynical sentence, "The Germans will never forgive the Jews for Auschwitz."
33. There is a multitude of comparative scholarship and political keynotes produced which compare Germany 1990 and South Africa 1994 and by doing so comparing the former GRD (who was in support of the anti-apartheid struggle) with the anti-communist apartheid regime. It would be interesting to explore why this is a specially fashionable approach within Germany (is this a contemporary form of sanitizing German history?). I feel that there are more illuminating similarities (and differences) between the post 1945 transition in Germany and post-apartheid South Africa.
34. *Persilschein* is a colloquial term that was originally used in Germany in the sense of a *carte blanche*, referring to washing powder, and became synonymous during official American denazification processes. Assumed Nazi perpetrators and followers were able to "clean" their reputation with a Persilschein based on testimonies of former victims or opponents.
35. Spivak 1998, 329–48.

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