

Decolonizing Gender, Decolonizing Philosophy: An Existential Philosophical Account of Narratives from the Colonized

Rozena Maart

Abstract: This essay situates the narrative of two Black women—one from the Black Consciousness Movement of Azania, one from the Black Panther Party—as central to the process of decolonizing philosophy and decolonizing gender. It offers a Black Consciousness critique of gender and philosophy, which both form the prelude to the narratives. Psychoanalysis, as the hermeneutics of the subject, is central to the process of interpretation and thus the interrogation of racism and colonialism. This essay shifts the paradigm of thinking by situating narrative and narration as central to the process of Black existentialism—spoken word, dialogue, exchanges, cross continental activism and scholarship—all within the same breath: the breath of the page where a simultaneous reading permits the deconstruction of the spoken word of the subject, and the deconstruction of writing.

On Speech and the Text: Introducing the Concern

A text that attempts to unravel coloniality has to start with narratives of freedom. Verbal narratives, when translated into writing as text, bare the content of the consciousness of the speaker. The hermeneutics of the subject, when the subject speaks, is one that signifies that interpretation is first and foremost an interpretation of speech. To speak out against

one's colonization is a recognition that one understands one's agency; that agency is firstly one that utters its history of oppression. The subject who utilizes speech to reflect, critique, analyze, and inform, repositions herself because her freedom demands it.

An account of how we have rid ourselves of colonizers in the past one hundred years has been the most compelling shift for "philosophy" (as a collective phenomenon); without revolutions, especially those that urged armed struggle, philosophy would never have spilled its blood . . . even if it has only been a drop. Derridean deconstruction, born from the exclusion of a young Jewish boy—Jacques Derrida—from his school in Algeria when Vichy came to power, planted the seed whereby the hidden, the forbidden and the repressed would be uncovered in philosophy. The punishment of Blackness, Jewishness, Africanness has turned philosophy upside down, examining its orifices from different points of entry. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, *Africana Philosophy*, and *Philosophy Born of Struggle* are all intellectual and political movements that started with a shift in thinking and a commitment to challenge how learning and knowledge are produced.¹

Although the subject is always at the centre of the deconstruction of colonialism, the deconstruction of philosophy does not always permit the subject to be the center of deconstruction. Is it not at each occasion, amidst the process, as we examine the ways in which the subject is situated, that we discover the task we undertake in the process of decolonizing the identity of the subject, the gender of the subject? As is revealed later in the narratives of two Black women, one from the Black Consciousness Movement of Azania and one from the Black Panther Party, White women have for decades taken ownership of gender critiques without situating their agency within the system of White domination.

Each moment in history has to undergo its own process of unpeeling the history of each subject in a genealogical way, and examine the ways in which we interact with one another, how that interaction is layered in time, sealed in historical events, interlocked with each day as the perseverance for Empire is executed. Can we, however, connect the subject to the system of domination which sustains her subjectivity, which sustains and asserts her presence? And as we do so, do we sever ourselves from the gendered

1. Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1979); *The Rainbow of Desire: The Boal Method of Theatre and Therapy* (London: Routledge, 1994). See Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 1970). Leonard Harris, ed., *Philosophy Born of Struggle* (New York: Kendall Hunt Publishing Co, 1983). *Philosophy Born of Struggle* is both a text edited by Leonard Harris and an annual conference held by the organization by the same name, which after twenty years is now chaired by Dr. Tommy Curry at Texas A&M University. See Pbos.com.

components of her identity that experience a similar patriarchal chastisement that we have been subjected to? For one subject, the woman subject as colonizer, there is an existing foundation within White Supremacy and Empire; buoyancy and structures are in place to further her agency alongside her father, brother, son, if she willingly or unwillingly chooses to perpetuate, maintain and reproduce it; for the woman subject as colonized, there is none. Each will be subjected to the rule of the father; each will be a victim of sexism, patriarchy, rape, sexual assault or incest.

To enact a Black philosophical critique is to lay bare the brutalities of Black flesh; it is to locate the oral tradition, to locate speech and to understand that decolonization is first and foremost uttered speech, revolutionary speech, speech aimed at revelation of the contradictions of coloniality. This paper tackles the decolonization of gender and the decolonization of philosophy simultaneously through offering narratives of speech as a means of situating this intertwined history.

Towards a Philosophical Critique of Being Black

What is a philosophical critique of being Black? Is it a critique of the mind, an engagement with it, with its outpouring as Freudian psychoanalysis would demand except to keep the construction of race outside of it, like Freud did, and whose only understanding of race we witness in writing appeared at the height of Nazism in the late 1920s. For it is he, Sigmund Freud, who committed the ultimate repression and denial—the unconscious he spent years studying. In an interview published in Peter Gay's book *Freud: A Life in our Time*, Freud, who had to sign the document the Gestapo shoved under his nose in order to be released to London where he fled because of anti-semitism, notes "my language is German, my culture, my attainment are German. I considered myself German, intellectually, until I noticed the growth of Anti-Semitic prejudice in Germany and German Austria. Since that time I prefer to call myself a Jew."²

I shall ask it a second time. What is a philosophical critique of being Black? Does it still have to be engraved? Have those who make claims to its presence failed because the colonization of philosophy has achieved its objective by holding the colonized accountable to the very process whereby, for example, the Black and colonized philosophers of the United States continue to attach themselves to the discourse of their masters in the belief that the master has become their friend? Do they, in their attempts at participating in the political economy of philosophy, still adamantly believe that proving themselves to their colonizers by overlooking their crimes of coloniality, usurpation, violence, rape, pedophilia, shunning and marginalization, will offer them the best price for their complicity—a wobbly ladder to climb, a

2. Peter Gay, *Freud: A Life for Our Time* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1988), 448.

third class ticket to sit on the train of repression as it makes its stops along its journey of European scholarship; the guarantee of publication and an invitation to eat at the dinner table in the big house? Has slavery and colonialism passed from use value to exchange value with the price of complicity, now written in the very scholarship that perpetuates White domination because Black Philosophy has sold its only commodity—the use of educated Black labor power to further reproduce the European philosophical tradition? Tommy Curry, in “The Derelictical Crisis of African American Philosophy: How African American Philosophy Fails to Contribute to the Study of African Descended People,” is adamant in his assertion that “all investigations into Blackness are normatively and hence ideologically driven and not culturally relevant to the actual lives of Africana people.”³

I shall ask it a third time. What is a philosophical critique of being Black? Is it the psyche that should take centre stage in our philosophy of being Black—or put inversely—of our philosophical critique of Blackness? It is after all upon the body, within the body, where the psyche stages its presence. It is no longer a secret—the body is the psyche. Philosopher Tanella Boni from Côte d’Ivoire notes, “. . . the body is central to the struggle for recognition.”⁴ If, as Curry contends, Black philosophers have failed to establish a Black Philosophy because they are too busy referring to their White masters, is it, possibly, as a consequence of the process of recognition that Boni establishes? Is the face-to-face bodily struggle for recognition ultimately the Achilles heel of the Black man (*sic*) as Stuart Hall referenced when discussing Fanon’s interpretation of the Hegelian master and slave dialectic?⁵ Lewis Gordon posits this spot-on in “African American Philosophy, Race and the Geography of Reason,” when he notes,

Fanon, in *Black Skin White Masks*, presents a powerful portrait of what it means to live ensnared by the search for the self in an antipathetic other’s eyes of the *dialectics of recognition*. He shows that colonialism created a form of phobogenic imposition that infected intersubjective relations and the methods of their understanding and evaluation. Put concretely: Reason had a tendency to exit whatever room he entered. Fanon’s critique, even of methodologies offered by colonial disciplinary practices, can be characterized as the identification of *epistemological colonialism*—colonization at the level of knowledge.⁶

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3. Tommy J. Curry, “The Derelictical Crisis of African American Philosophy: How African American Philosophy Fails to Contribute to the Study of African Descended Peoples,” *Journal of Black Studies* 42.3 (2011): 314–33.
 4. Tanella Boni, “The Dignity of the Human Person: On the Integrity of the Body and the Struggle for Recognition,” *Diogenes* 54.3 (2007): 59–68.
 5. Stuart Hall in *Frantz Fanon: Black Skin, White Masks; A Documentary*, directed by Isaac Julien, written by Mark Nash for the Arts Council of England (1996).
 6. Lewis Gordon, “African American Philosophy, Race and the Geography of Reason”

Is a Black philosophical critique one where the psychoanalysis of philosophy is necessary in order to allow its disciples to do the necessary self-examination and self-interrogation? Kwame Gyekye's *African Ethics* needs to be extended to include the ethical demand of refusal, one which Tunisian Albert Memmi asserts, when he offers it as an option for both the colonizer and the colonized. In some of my earlier work in the 1990s I have written on the politics of refusal—the refusal to participate in the very system of White domination that holds us hostage has to be developed as a politics, and with it a plan of political action.⁷ One such approach includes interrogating and questioning what is a psychoanalytic critique of being Black, of being Black and colonized, and how does the existentialist expression of Blackness inform one's critique?

Psychoanalysis as the hermeneutics of the subject helps reveal everything in speech, writing, and in the imagination. The repression of writing abandons the task of inscribing absence. Speech overrides it. The Aristotlean *mythos* comes to mind as I undertake this project of inscribing the events of the native, the events of coloniality and the narrative of the colonized native. Narrative is central in Aristotle's *Poetics*; he demands it. Ricoeur insists upon it. For Ricoeur the way that we understand one another in our every day, in our daily life, involves an irreducible narrativity. Ricoeur himself was opposed to the Parisian philosophical style: one that insisted on the formulation of writing as text that is inscribed by the very process, the very learned performance of a practice acquired through repetition that in turn develops into habit, where argument is treated as assertion and counter assertion accompanied by the decadent practice of making grandiose claims. But where do words fit or figure in the arrangement of philosophical arguments, especially when they are the words of the colonized and/or when no argument is being presented but the very process of colonization is narrated as argument itself? Where do words fit in writing? Is it that words spill across the page without argument: the process whereby decolonization reveals itself to those who wish to hear it, see it, smell it, taste it?

Decolonization in the English language, as though it were a gift, means the possibility of wrapping it in words usurped from the very depths of coloniality—where words are devised to brutalize Blackness. English words, drawn from the English language, are the currency with which I inscribe this critique. Words meant to line up in an order that speaks the meaning of

Reason," in *Not Only the Master's Tools: African-American Studies in Theory and Practice*, ed. Lewis R. Gordon and Jane Gordon (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2006), 11–12.

7. See Rozena Maart, "Consciousness, Knowledge and Morality: The Absence of the Knowledge of White Consciousness in Contemporary Feminist Theory," in *A Reader in Feminist Ethics* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press, 1993), 129–66.

its civilization, an order within which the colonized is kept hostage; an order that buries the colonized deep into the sand of the Eastern Cape, *Kaffraria*⁸ . . . to bury it deep into Namibia in 1903 by the hands of the Second Reich who pushed the Herero and the Nama people into the depths of the land in the German language, *drücken*, boundaried by barbed wire . . . death, genocide, at their hands, as unmarked grave, invisibilized by form and structure, invisible in memory, invisible in writing, unknown to the scholar who accepts *White Mythology* as history.⁹ What is the purpose of decolonization for the scholar, schooled in colonial culture and colonial language—engrained, pierced—in mind, thought, and flesh: to deflesh, to decay after the bullet has been buried . . . to excavate, extract the bullet, examine it, see where it was made, how it was made, peruse the purpose of its poison, extract the venom of its violence? Date it. Remember never to forget it. To scoop the narrative of the Black woman into your hands, like water, washing your page, writing it with fluidity, digging into the very lines that erase it, that do not tell its tale . . . lines that mark boundaries within which live only the beneficiaries of colonialism, colonizing the colon as it regulates the sentence, regulates and sentences the writer who does not obey the rules of the English language, determined that you hold up its civilization, its etiquette of eloquent distant speech, keeping your flesh, your subjectivity, as far away from the page inscribing its unspoken White consciousness holding its nose, scenting it with your silence in case the smell of racism rotten, decayed and fermented can be detected.¹⁰ Callous in its capacity and formation, bounding itself around your veins and capillaries, its memory carried by your coronary pump until it fails, while the callouses of colonialism erases itself from the scenes of its

8. The word *kafir*, also spelt *kaffir*, is said to be derivative of an Arabic word meaning *infidel*. The word is regarded as a racial slur in South Africa, much like the word *nigger* in the United States. The word *Kaffraria* was a descriptive word given to a region in South Africa, the Eastern Cape, which was referred to as “the land of the Kaffirs.”

9. Jacques Derrida, “White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy,” *New Literary History* 6.1 (1974): 5–74.

10. See Maart, “Consciousness, Knowledge and Morality.” I reference Jacques Derrida and Frantz Fanon here to convey a relationship between and among writing, history, language, and European reason. I show how their individual contributions merge in my work. Derrida says, in “White Mythology,” “What is Metaphysics? A white mythology which assembles and reflects Western culture: the white man takes his own mythology (that is, the Indo-European mythology), his *logos*—that is, the *mythos* of his idiom, for the universal form of that which it is still his inescapable desire to call Reason” (12). Fanon continues in *Black Skins White Masks*: “To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization” (13).

crime and you lie in bed, ready to be buried, in your own grave, *nil by mouth*, defeated while the battle rages on.

To Decolonize: Thinking through the Process

To decolonize is to remove the process, the movement, and the procedures that decapitated Africa—left it with a body and robbed it of its head, stole its mind.

de·col·o·nize

verb (used with object), de·col·o·nized, de·col·o·niz·ing.

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

verb (used without object), de·col·o·nized, de·col·o·niz·ing.

3. to free a colony to become self-governing or independent.¹¹

To decolonize is to grant independence to the colonized from the colonizer, yet still to account to her. To decolonize is to release the colonized, to release the colony from its status as colony, as part of the Empire—to release the colony and prevent revolution. To decolonize is to allow the colony to become independent, to offer it such a possibility in the language of the colonizer so that the colonized cannot take back what is hers in the language with which she fought the colonizer's usurpation . . . independent yet without the memory of how the wealth of her country was extracted without the audible sound of her Zulu tongue clicking in protest—*ngeke abulale me . . . ngeke abulale me . . . you will not kill me . . . you will not kill me*. To decolonize is to unpeel and examine each layer of colonialism, each segment that is layered with history, lodged in, hooked, entrenched, in words, sounds, blood, with body parts, with breath drawn from the fermented land . . . you inhale it, draw it in. To decolonize—is to open the wounds of the word; the word gone flesh from its moment of announcement. *Ukuze*—decolonize . . . there is no word in isiZulu for decolonize. To colonize, *ikoloni* . . . exists because it has happened: derived from the English word *of the colony*. The colony was constructed; its undoing, its decoloniality, has not been named.

To think of oneself as being colonized, or having been colonized, is to think of oneself as having been taken over, invaded, violated, defiled, raped, all of your blood injected with that of your perpetrator as you watch, become an alibi, observe, fight, accept, reject, lie still, live within it and along side it, forget it, allow it to seep into your soul for without it you have no heartbeat. The awareness of the need to decolonize is to recognize that you have been taken over. Inhabited. Occupied. To remove the inhabitants and inhabit one's own body, completely, one's own mind, reshape one's thinking

11. "Decolonize," *Dictionary.com*, 2014. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/Decolonize?s=t>. Accessed 22 July 2014.

is to rid oneself of part of the self that has attached itself and cannot be severed. To forcibly remove settler colonials from one's flesh is to expel the blood of your great-grandmother. Her blood. Your blood. Her blood. Your mind. Your tongue. Her tongue. Your vision. Her walk. Your gaze. Her death. Your soul. Your sensibility. Her misfortune.

Decolonization is to ask the colonized—the one who admits, declares, confesses to her helplessness, her savage ignorance, the woman determined and poised to speak as beautiful as her blonde blue-eyed teacher demands—who are you? And do you know who you are? It is to know, to accept, to recognize, that they were here, there, everywhere and within the blood that runs as yours, she lives. She is your great-grandmother, your great-great grandmother, your great-great grandfather who sought refuge in your great-great-grandmother's bosom, or she in his. It is to recognize that she may have seduced him, like she did with any glass of water if you put it in front of her, and he, drawn into the land as though he was supposed to own it, fell in love despite his resistance. It is the only time, your father tells you, where "that old man had no choice."

To decolonize gender is to ask: "who makes this request?" Is it the colonizer; the colonized? Who makes this demand, this call to decolonize gender? This assertion to separate colonizers on the ground of gender, what is it? What is the purpose of this demand to separate the history of racism—the one that threw its legs around already gendered flesh? To show the woman as colonizer in allegiance with the history of usurpation—when she sat with her legs crossed, looking up at her grandmother who made her wishes known to her husband while he was getting ready to attend the Berlin conference in 1884—is to recognize the unspoken history of White women's allegiance with their fathers when empire building failed to give them the equality they felt they so richly deserved. "*Père, aller et nous apporter le Congo,*" [translation: Father, go and bring us the Congo], she said. "*Non Père, laissez-le nous apporter au Soudan,*" [translation: No, Father, go and bring us the Sudan], said her sister, as she stitched her colonial request into the cardigan she knitted for her father at the fire.

To remove the colonial means to remove both the White man and the White woman—the agents, complicit in the colonial project, engaged, engrossed in empire; it means to remove both the beneficiaries who regret the event but reap the benefits of its impact, revel in its rewards even if it means to "dress down" in order to identify with the masses while they remain committed to the undoing of colonialism, as though by saying it they have rid themselves of a consciousness they do not wish to have. To decolonize gender is to separate the colon from the colonial; the intestine by which it digests the degraded, minces the masses, chews then swallows, occasionally spitting out the unsavory ones. To decolonize gender is to look to Black women—your peers, your colleagues, your friends, your foes, your

family—and to ask of them what you ask yourself without having to ask them at all.

Do you see yourself? Do you see yourself in the White woman's reflection at whose racist jokes you laughed?

Do you see yourself? Do you see yourself in the White woman's voice you just allowed to instruct the Black women in the room and how to be researchers?

Do you see yourself? Do you see yourself in the White woman's gaze as she looks Black women up and down, commenting on their clothes, knowing that she cannot be part of them, she cannot give her clothes to them like Oxfam handouts whereby, as a reward for her noble gesture she is able to feel superior both in fleshy composition and in political presence?

Do you see yourself? Do you see yourself on the White woman's page, as she writes you into her report, commenting on how agreeable you are, how your Black sisters are angry and aggressive?

Do you see yourself? Do you see yourself in the White woman's shadow, as she parades you in front of her White friends as the "good Black" without having to say it, and where you accept it because your presence alone is her reward?

Do you see yourself? Do you see yourself being seen?

The lines of reading . . . the lines of writing . . . the lines of thinking. Colonialism only has one line—destroy. It has many dots to complete the line . . . usurp, kill, colonize, criticize, brutalize, ghettoize, tamponize, throttle, squeeze, rob, denigrate, blacken, maim, mute, silent, dead. Repeat. Everywhere. Repeat again. In thought, word and mind [read]: in the text.

Writing and Orality

There is a line . . . a dividing line . . . a line that cannot be crossed. For to cross it, overstep it, anger it, is to announce the erasure of history. Writing offers the linear absorption of words, from left to right we follow, guided by the process known as reading, pausing only when instructed by the comma, stopping only when the full stop demands it. The function of grammar forges the functioning of meaning, keeping the Wandering Jew¹² outside,

12. I use the expression here to indicate who is kept out of the main flow, the main text of writing as White Mythology—who is punished. The mythical figure or legend of the doomed Jewish sinner who is forced to wander without the possibility of rest in death until the second coming of Christ has been utilized frequently for centuries, some argue from about the thirteenth century. Some of these depictions include the taunting of Jesus on his way to the crucifixion and the punishment of Cain, who is banished from his home after having sinned (he killed his brother Abel). The emphasis here in the text is to draw attention to the perpetual punishment inflicted on those who do not comply with the laws of language. In German the expression "Ewige Jude" means the Eternal

prohibiting the *strandloper*¹³ from walking to the next coastal port where he can again live off the sea without getting caught by it. In the moment when the pleasure of the text is stifled, held captive by words which dwell in orderly form, then the text fails to clasp the continuity of thoughts that cannot be caught, cannot be brought to bear to live in the lines that writing allows, that computer screens make possible—for to exclude the colonized, deny the colonized entry into the text, is to assert the grammatology of the absence of presence. To think in the present, write in the present, and overlook the years, the months, the days, the hours of brutality who, murdered cannot come to the page in resurrection is to further the aim of European reason. The line of division forces us to cross over; it forces us to think outside of the line of the page. To think of the continuous line of colonialism punctuated by the continuity of coloniality and to visibilize it, make it seen, make it flesh, is to hold the agents of White supremacy accountable for its inscription. To hear a speaker is to give her that voice in the text because her sound is denied. Sound is text especially when it drums the demise of domination; sound is text when transferred as word. Sound becomes the word. Sound is the reading of the voice that echoes through retelling. Sound is the possibility of reading alongside and within, outside of the text yet inside; sound is the disruption of reading . . . for to read in silence and not hear the gagging gurgle of gross indecency, genocide, germs growing on overgrown patches of ground is to be complicit. Lips sealed in blood. Voices treasured, bones measured, heaped, piled, burnt.

Senegalese philosopher Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow is adamant in his assertion of the centrality of orality in African cultures. Without orality the African Being is de-centered from itself, detached, much like Socrates, whose schooling took place in Egypt, in Alexandria, understood. Thus, with

Jew. In French and other Romance languages, reference has been made to the "wanderings of the Jew," as in French "le Juif errant," and dates back, in some cases, to the Medieval period. I reference it here in German and in French to convey how commonly the expression is used.

13. I evoke the colonial term *strandloper* [Afrikaans: beach walker] here to indicate the punishment *strandlopers* received for not complying with first Dutch and then British law in South Africa. The term *strandloper* was given to San people, and those with San heritage, who walked and lived on coastal beaches refusing to be stationed and controlled in one confined area after Dutch usurpation of the land. The common denunciation of the lifestyle of the San was often expressed in terms that suggest they walked, talked, danced, got drunk, fornicated, made babies, then went to the next beach to do the same thing. Beach walker and beachcomber communities are common in several parts of the world where people subsist on the ocean. An enviable lifestyle in the eyes of some, a dreaded immoral way to live in the eyes of others, for which punishment had to be meted out on a regular basis.

this principle of orality Socrates laid the foundation for philosophy, which Western Metaphysics has erased while its architects narrowed the nose of the sphinx during the period of her physical reconstruction—her physical African traces weathered down by climatic elements and the fantasy of the thieves of history who saw an opportunity to rob her of her heritage and re-sculpt her history by narrowing her nose. The decentering of Black presence means the decentering of the orality with which Black presence is sustained. Orality is the sound of our breath that saves our lives. Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams saved Egypt: the seven years of plenty and seven years of scarcity, for which Egypt was prepared, placed dream interpretation front and central as a historical and political moment, as a historical African moment, which the European founders of psychoanalysis cannot deny! The verbal dream interpretation Joseph offered Pharaoh saved lives; African orality saved lives and the first moment in psychoanalysis was born—on the African continent, and streamed, fed and saved those along the Nile. A Black philosophical critique needs to take into account the history of Africa's legacy of education and the production of knowledge—from mathematics, to philosophy, to psychoanalysis, and at each and every moment speech and orality are central to the process. Reason cannot exist without the spoken word; this has to be stated.

The disorder of reason is created when trauma is packaged as knowledge: you read on the white page in linear form in order to dissociate from the day-to-day acts of coloniality. European Reason forces, penetrates, without your knowledge—it is invisible—because your knowledge is not regarded as reason but your genocidal death is reason itself, anemic, no blood, no flesh. The penetration of the land is lost in the civilization of the colonial language . . . writing it in the straight and narrow, aided and abetted by the grammatology of colonial languages, keeping the weight of the African tongue outside. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o had already stated this in *Decolonizing the Mind*. Punctuation punishes and evades; it demands that writing has structure, form and no weight. No weight. No measurement. No gram. No weight of your tongue after it has been cut—no measurement. No measurement, not even an ounce of the flesh that was spilled can filter through to disrupt the written word because otherwise it is not a sentence, a paragraph, not a text but a cunning ceremony of death, a coffin.

Shifting the Visual Paradigm . . . Shifting the Geography of Reading

There are various moments within the two lengthy segments below—taken from even lengthier interviews—I offer here for examination that warrant in-depth interrogation but only some of which I shall unpack. The words of two Black women, from two different continents, both of the same age and generation, both from the era of Black Consciousness and Black Power, both

with histories of being arrested, banned, and on-the-run from the police allow for a particular kind of engagement that textual analysis alone does not afford. Narration meets critique; in the end they do not meet one another at the same moment of pause at the edge of the page; they do not have to . . . the violence of the letter ends at any minute, it is always inconvenient.

So few narratives of Black women are available to us through texts other than fiction written by Black women, or the few Black women I can rely on who work in the area of Cultural Studies, Black Studies and/or Critical race theory. Examples drawn from theoretical texts either situate Black women as students, in the position of the learner, or not at all. There is a dearth of knowledge on the construction of Black identity in a number of locations—of this there is no doubt. At the same time, my preference has always been to do interviews as a means of situating Black presence in the text as forcefully as possible without the limitations of research formalities that often urge that interviews either be collated, placed at the back of the text as appendices or summed up, stacked together, massed together, truanting outside of the main text, which is reserved for theorists upon whom rests the privilege of inscribing presence.

Remembering the Event . . .

Interview/Conversation Report

Grace is someone I met in my late teen years. She is the mother of a friend who died several years ago; Grace joined her daughter at the Space theatre for an improvisation session during the nineteen seventies when her daughter and I were in attendance on Saturday afternoons. We were just two young girls, one from the slave quarter and another from the rural area forced to live in a township although both our parents and grandparents were born in the slave quarter. I have stayed in touch with Grace over the years partly because her daughter and I almost shared the same birthday and were born hours apart and telephoned each other every year as young adults until her death,

Analysis

The mastering of presence is the mastering of uncovering absence and situating the subject who has been absent yet present as a consequence of the process of erasure; it is to assert presence within the decolonial text, to shift the dominant paradigm, to shift the location of the subject and to destabilize the word itself—subject—to forge presence when little to none existed; it is to engrave presence from the traces left by those who have written before you. Thus, for the colonized subject to be subject is to be thinghood personified—it is to occupy the space of relevance as determined by you—the colonized—despite the conditions under which you enter it . . .
Bertha Mason, Caliban, Kunta Kinte

and partly because Grace, now in her late seventies, is among the few women I know who insist on dancing at a conference or literary festival—whether there is music on the program or not—and someone who speaks her mind whether those in attendance want to listen to what she has to say or not. A few years ago when I was doing book promotion in major cities in South Africa we were in touch on a daily basis for two months. We would chat at night and she would share her diary writings with me on the phone. She had read my work and I was slowly becoming acquainted with her unpublished, very poetic, diary writings. She would feed me a few pages at a time. On each occasion, I insisted that she should publish her work and she would respond that I should keep my nose out of her affairs as she had celebrated more boyfriends than birthdays, some of whom, still alive and well, she added, were now very high up in the ANC. Grace broke out in a rebellious chuckle each time she added the latter. Since I was doing book promotion around the country, she asked me to give a talk to a group of young people at a small town between King's William's town and East London in the Eastern Cape while I was in the region. She asked whether she could record the talk. I took the opportunity to ask her whether I could do an interview with her because her life history is interesting in more ways than meets the demands, let alone the limitations, of any research project, and she agreed. Our discussion

... if not invisibilized is then made present as mad, oversexed, enslaved ... The colonized as subject, writer, and critic, meanders between and among the multiple locations of her subjectivity—she has to enter the text without the removal of the colonizer and assert her presence where her absence has flaunted its trace. The presence of the colonized in the text is the presence of a historical trajectory that forges signification despite the hollow graves, the skeletons at the bottom of the ocean, gurgling above the foam of waves—Atlantic, Pacific, Indian—ghosting on white pages. To meet, to come together, through fate or circumstance, is the tale the colonized tell on a regular basis and yet, in the moment when the event needs to become text, when the word has to become flesh, and the flesh has to come to the page to bear witness, the colonized serve the purpose of subtext, not yet text, referenced in refereed journals, an afterthought of the event, an appendix, an insignificant organ because of the diet of colonization. To write with grace, to write and bring to the page the life history of Grace, is to write an event wherein lie the history of the colonized, on her terms, as an account offered to the writer as comrade and friend. Grace is her second name, her name second to the isiXhosa name, her Christian name which the colonizer could pronounce; it is her name wherein lie the history of her Herero ancestry, the history of her grandmother's escape from South West Africa [correction: Namibia]'s

was focused on her university days and the influence of Black Consciousness in her life, and whether it had altered her way of thinking especially in view of the fact that she trained to be a teacher and started her own school for girls and now had a granddaughter whose post-colonial reading list she found objectionable, which she articulated to me very strongly and as such it often determined both the direction and the content of our discussions. I shall refer to my interview with her as narrative one. Grace has insisted that I use her second name and not her isiXhosa name.

Second Reich. "Use my name," she said, "I will not be a pseudonym. I will claim my place in your writing by my name, my English name, which I carry with Herero isiXhosa grace." In the moment when the meeting becomes an event, a moment of realization, a meeting place of generations of the colonized who survived to tell the tale, history is inscribed by the moment when consciousness becomes truth, when truth paves the way for possibility, and the reconstitution of the consciousness of the colonizer—however he or she struggles with such an event. The moment when the colonized is inscribed is not a moment of forgiveness or lament for the White woman as colonizer, it is a moment to recount the crimes of colonization and to come to terms with the burden of decolonizing the colonial within her, who has to mourn the death of domination on the terms that her self-interrogation allow.

Narrative One

Interview/Conversation Report

I was the only one from my village, let alone my family, who went to High School and the University. Fort Hare was the place to be and when Steve Biko came into our lives everything changed. Steve was from down the road, as we said in those days . . . from King. You know, Barney Pitjana is also from the Eastern Cape? I lived quite a way from Alice. I studied by candlelight and I had candle-wax all over my books for most of

Analysis

The decolonization of space is a prerequisite for the decolonization of gender; the decolonization of the land is the first prerogative in the process of decolonization, and claiming it, taking ownership of it, taking it out of its illegality means opening up the possibility of equitable distribution. When the lives of the masses have been determined by the usurpation of land, the masses have to take it back. Gender is both contained and

my teenage years. I walked to Fort Hare with three young men from my village for almost two hours and then back again every evening. All of what I was studying made me feel as though I would only be filling in the gaps—doing what White people did not want to do. When I went to the SASO (South African Student Organization) meetings, the ones that were open to women to attend, I learnt a lot. It brought home the point of what I hear young people now talk about as critical analysis or postcolonial theory and how to apply it to what we read and the way that we read as it shows how colonial discourse is implanted. This is anticolonial and Black Consciousness stuff, as far as I am concerned. They stole it from us—well the anticolonial stuff anyway. They just say it in high-flying English. My granddaughter is at U.C.T. (University of Cape Town), a place I said I would never go and my children would never go. I am neither proud nor ashamed because it is not for me to say where my granddaughter should study. All I know is that I wish I had her guts. She is fearless. She talks about how she challenges professors and I cringe but as soon as she continues with the story I am no longer afraid for her. “Gogo [translation: Grandma in isiXhosa] but I got this from you,” she says. How she thinks she got her critical analysis from me still beats me because she has gone so much further. Black Consciousness was the only thing that kept me alive . . . if you asked my late husband twenty years ago he would have said the same. It

situated, it is both colonial and of the colony, and it lives its formation, construction, mutation, transformation and reproduction in all ways under colonialism and then as the colony permits both through legislation and through instituting its own formation as a consequence of the laws of prohibition. The usurpation of land is the usurpation of the people, the usurpation of the people is the usurpation of the psyche of the people, and the body is the psyche—it is where the psyche stages, performs, acts out, tells its tale.

When feet walk thousands of miles because the colonial regime has demanded that it stay within the confinements it prescribes, it inhibits, thwarts and chastises the mobility of the colonized; to defy it is to defy the machinery of the regime and do so in spite of its determination to extinguish you as though you were a fire. Grace situates her history of resistance without having to declare it; it is evidenced in her ability to go to school, to go to university, to be aware that Bantu Education was geared towards educating her towards servitude. Grace’s consciousness of self, her self-consciousness, is evidenced in her articulation of how aware she is of her surrounding and her location. Autobiography, biography and narrative have been underestimated in philosophical discourse yet given a particular kind of presence in literary criticism; in psychoanalysis without autobiography there is no unconscious to uncover. Without autobiography psychoanalysis would not have its reason. Hegel insists

is good to hear my granddaughter express her Black Consciousness in however small doses I can detect. I don't like the way she dresses but then again I love the fact that she is a free spirit and does not care what anyone thinks, not even what I think. Being able to be a teacher . . . well, a retired teacher, and know what I know now about the importance of fighting with literature, fighting with language, and fighting with sociology, they are all Eurocentric—where Black people are depicted in textbooks as passive victims or these creatures drawn into history because of Dutch and British colonialism and apartheid, is something I wish I was able to do back then. I am an English teacher trained to do what English was meant to do in those days—make you a good subject of the British Empire. A good, obedient . . . [*kaffir*] grateful for your education, and grateful that you can speak better English than people from your village and that you had the privilege and the benefit of reading Shakespeare. If I could live it all over again I would be a writer and only write in Xhosa. The written word is so powerful and yet I felt powerless as a Xhosa girl because I did not know that I could challenge it—the White man's language—well, you kids did that in '76. Don't get me wrong—I did . . . but not the way that I have learnt through your generation and my granddaughter's generation. I thank the world everyday for people like you [points to me] because you make me smile and you give a different perspective

on the subjective moment, why else would self-consciousness precede consciousness of [the thing], Being or surrounding. Self-consciousness is thus the route, the stepping-stone to reason. Having established her reason, Grace is drawn to the Black Consciousness Movement because it is here where she is able to verbalize her disapproval of coloniality, it is here where consciousness—as Black Consciousness philosophy, politics and movement—is first and foremost affirmation, bonding, revelation, nourishment. The decolonization of the consciousness of the emancipated slave is thus first and foremost through the language with which to say it—to speak the slavish consciousness and seek the tools with which to transform it, facilitate its transition from Being to Becoming; it is also the realization that within the decolonial project lies the vicissitude of Being . . . the acquisition of consciousness in the language that defies the project of the infliction of slavish consciousness. Grace speaks in isiXhosa, the language of her heritage, and within the moment where speech is not accessible to the colonizer, the project to decolonize has already begun. The Ngūgĩan prerogative that Grace embraces is one that meanders through the different stages of her education within the colony under its rule; it is one as a Xhosa woman with a Namibian grandmother where consciousness has crossed boundaries, deserts, and escaped the inevitability of genocide . . . it is one that moved from dehererofication in *Otjiherero*

of the world of the written word. But let me tell you, back in the day when those White women said they were our comrades in the struggle, they lied to our faces and we did not have the will to tell them to *voetsek!* [trans.: Fuck off!] Instead they patronized us, calling us “mamma this” and “mamma that” like it was so cool and so ethnic. But hey, they spoke down to us, as though we should be so honored that they were even speaking to us, that we needed them . . . they spoke to us as though we were speaking a language that belonged to them and that we should be grateful that it was taught to us because now we can try to sound like them. Ja (“yes”), those White women put me in the hospital. Isn’t that ultimately the aim of the colonizer and his madam? Then she turns around a few years later and thinks she can be my friend? They drive us mad and get us committed to mental hospitals. This is what Fanon saw. Isn’t this what Fanon experienced? Isn’t this why Biko opened a community health clinic? Even that White woman who was my English teacher at the Christian missionary school I attended; when I told her I was going to varsity, she asked me: “why do you want so much? Don’t you have enough already?” I fought that woman but she ultimately marked my work and I had no defense. I did not know the meaning of critical analysis. I knew how to do it, face-to-face, like our people you know, who tell you off in your face, but I did not know that it was called critical analysis. Now when I read

to the Kaffrarianisation of the *kaffir* in *isiXhosa*. To say the word *kaffir*, to say it when it is forbidden because it is unspeakable, much like the word *nigger*, is to say it with trepidation, caution, with reluctance, with anxiety as it stimulates the grinding of the colon that regulates the body and the indigestibility of the intestine, clogged with acts of humiliation, which as a result spits out the word before it passes through the boundary of your mouth and the air that scents the history of your Being. The decolonization of gender is the decolonization of the words with which to say it—colonial words, words bearing the history of your colonization. The decolonization of gender, is the realization that it is gender’s common denominator, violence, gender-based violence that allows the relationship between the woman as colonizer and the woman as colonized to meet, get together, and perpetuate the Fanonian psychoexistential complex. How does reason, European reason, exist within the context of decolonization, when the colonizer who is an agent of the very system she claims to be against and whose demise she claims to work towards, goes home everyday, after her meeting with the colonized, and continues to enjoy the many privileges afforded to her as a beneficiary of White colonization and domination? In the context of the meeting place where the anti-racist White woman meets with the Black woman, the language of sisterhood, the “mamma-fication” Grace speaks of, urges the reference to being born of

my granddaughters books, I bite my teeth out of frustration because I have to teach her the anti-colonial struggles that came out of Africa, which she knows little about . . . how struggles in Africa are forgotten but which Europe happily takes credit for and calls postcolonial theory. Now we have the postcolonial and the decolonial who make the anti-colonial invisible. I'll be seventy-six next month and I am only now realizing because of my granddaughter how reading and writing shapes the way that we think of history and shape the present and the future. You know, I have to look away when I tell you this. Not a day goes by when I don't look at my granddaughter and see the resemblance between her and my grandmother. At least my Herero grandmother lives on in her. My grandmother was led out of Namibia and crossed the border at a time when she could have been shot and killed but she did it anyway. *Here tog!* [trans.: My God!] She was a child. *A blerry kind* [trans.: A mere child.] It was better than being starved to death and having barbed wire as your comfort and your escape. What do we have to lose? Nothing. We have nothing to lose anymore and so I say to you and your generation—don't let the country go back to the colonizers. There's a lot of work to do. We have to keep our eye on the Whites in this country but really, really, we have to battle our own people, everyday, for the most part, because we have been so deeply, deeply colonized. It's going to take years, a lot of years,

a Black woman. The colonizer uses a language to draw the Black woman close to her, using the language of respect offered to women of a certain age in most African cultures, which the agent of colonization had set out to destroy, which in the language that she converses with Grace, speaks testimony to her success. The colonizer does her pathological bonding in English, working towards an anti-apartheid state in the language used to colonize the very woman she speaks to and in which, in the perverse pleasure of her contradictory acts of affinity and distance, the face of the queen of England on one side of the coin, the African elephant shot and maimed on the other. In seeking to be the child of the mother who was colonized, Grace is placed at the center of the process of politicization and depoliticization. The two faces of the coin, one of empire, one of usurpation, speak precisely to the duplicity and deceit that hospitalized Grace. A Being that is brutalized will seek refuge in the mind; the mechanism of consciousness can only hold it together when it is fed the same diet . . . not peace, not poison. To be politicized and depoliticized simultaneously is to face the abyss—the bottomless pit of your own self-destruction. Grace has to cross a bridge which only exists in the intimacy of madness, a space between acceptance and rejection, the space between facing your colonizer and facing the anti-racist activist, the space between your motherhood and the child who claims you birthed her—the White woman who “mammass”

but it has to be done. We cannot let a whole generation be born and be buried with their minds as colonized minds. We owe it to our foremothers to stand up and continue the fight.

you and who has enjoyed 300 years of your usurpation and your death. The language of decoloniality and anti-racism spoken by both the colonizer and the colonized in the same space is a language of madness—the perpetual double-crossing of words into acts until the moment of colonial orgasm is achieved—the ecstasy of defeat. The language of colonial madness, when performed under the purpose of allegiance building—the anti-apartheid women’s meeting of colonizer and colonized—is the movement of familialism towards the autonomy of experiencing violence on your own. This is the moment when Grace “becomes mad” and she has to be hospitalized, alone, and suffer the violence of her condition without being able to point to the source, without the ability to stop the dosage of her terror, without the possibility of refusing the shock treatment given from those whose kindness kills. The Black Consciousness woman is always punished for her stance—for her refusal to collude with White women in her own destruction. The Black Consciousness woman is always punished by attempts at ostracism by accusations of madness meant to drive you mad, meant to inflict its purpose of pain with the possibility that you will become silent, after the last injection of colonization had been administered—by your own hand. In the aftermath of madness, when the order of survival has been restored, the product—a granddaughter—stands the testimony of time.

The Meeting . . . of Minds

Interview/Conversation Report

In 2011 during the time that I was making the transition from Guelph, Canada, to Durban, South Africa, and attending a conference in the United States prior to my departure, I was fortunate to meet a woman in passing at an airport. Dealing with the stress of having flights cancelled and being rerouted I walked over to a coffee shop and asked for Lactose-free milk upon receiving my order. Some people bond over smoking a cigarette, which seems to be forbidden in most public places these days, whilst others bond over food items. I reached out to touch the lactose milk carton the same time another woman did. Apart from the fact that she was tall and striking in appearance (which she credits to being a dancer for most of her life) had dreadlocks, wore pearl earrings, bright red lipstick and jeans, she also wore a Steve Biko t-shirt. Her t-shirt caught my eye and she saw me smiling. This brought us to a moment of acquaintance. After our casual hellos we chatted for three hours and realized that we had several things in common. Soon after Fatima asked me if she could interview me for a radio show she hosted in the California region that focused on women of color. I agreed and we both whipped out our ipads. I asked her whether I could do an interview with her and she agreed; it would have to be done another time, we muttered almost simultaneously. We wrote to each

Analysis

The Cape, the Western Cape, the city of Cape Town. The Cape, the Eastern Cape, the city of Mossel Bay, the town of King William's town. The subject as writer and critic scrolls across the page to claim her history and her heritage; her place of birth, the place of her grand-paternal heritage and the source of her Black Consciousness—King William's town, the town of the colonial British King is also the town where the Black Consciousness revolutionary Stephen Bantu Biko was born. In San Francisco, a meeting between minds takes place as a consequence of signification—a Biko T-shirt that is worn by a Black woman over the age of seventy and is identified. The sign is not overlooked; in the process signification—the relationship between the signifier and the signified—producers speech that drives the process of decolonization. To share the path of decolonization is to share the burden of colonialism and imperialism; it is to bring the colonized to a moment of learning of the struggles in places with which a history is shared. The history of British colonialism, the history of enslavement and the locations where struggles were sought to counter it—Oakland, California, the Cape in South Africa—forges a relationship of continuity. Decolonization does not have an end; there is no pause button as one takes a vacation from the process—it is always ongoing, it

other for several months, and spoke on skype, each time not quite getting to the interview—not because we were forgetful but because we got carried away talking about all sorts of events that had made the news and after an hour or so got called away by other commitments. I finally conducted the interview with Fatima—three months ago, one and a half years after meeting her—which I am focusing on in this article. I refer to it in the text as narrative two.

is always a process by which, among women where gender is centralized, there are ways of engaging with the process that allow for it to be scrutinized, placed under the microscope of history yet without having to declare it to one another. Decolonization is not achieved through one single gesture, act, moment or event because it is never complete. The decolonization of gender demands dissemination to a younger generation. Every social space has its own history, its own history of usurpation and violence, and within it the colonized is both subject and object. Every act of decolonization needs to seek out another, for in every colonized space where histories of violence live, another is born.

Narrative Two

Interview/Conversation Report

When I was a student at Berkeley and a Black Panther, it was unthinkable to challenge White professors about their Whiteness—in all aspects. I am talking about White professors who we saw on the march . . . those who claimed to fight for civil rights but who in the classroom taught literature, philosophy and history as though Black people did not matter or worst of all—did not exist. We did not exist in literature, we did not exist in philosophy and when we existed in history books it was as enslaved beings. The group of Black women I hung out with went to class, went home, cleaned and cooked at home, went to jobs

Analysis

To decolonize gender is to recognize the role that masculinity played in the long fight to freedom; it is to recognize that as Black women we cannot separate ourselves from the efforts of men, whether symbolic or real, in taking a stand so that we could secure rights above humiliation, denigration, death—so that we could envision lives where freedom and dignity were possible. On a podium in Mexico in 1968 two young Black men—John Carlos and Tommie Smith—accept their medals with bowed heads, each wearing a black leather glove, one on the right hand, the other on the left hand, fist toward the sky in Black Power

in restaurants and shopping malls, went to meetings, went on protest marches, fed our children or our sister's children, went home to parents who lived far away from us where we were asked about what we were going to become when we finished studying. There was a goal in sight for our parents—that was education and the possibility of working and living inside the America they suffered through and fought for. Neither my brother nor I once spoke to our family about what we were really going through. My sisters and brothers got jobs the minute they finished school. In some way I think I have failed. I stopped studying; I stopped living my dream because it was unthinkable to me that I would become a victim of the White thinking that I despised. The life of the Black Panthers is all I lived for until such time when I simply removed myself because I could not cope with so many of our people going to jail, being humiliated, being killed. Not a day goes by without wondering whether I should have fought harder. I knew one thing then: that I was slowly becoming enmeshed into the White thinking that I despised and the political struggles I waged in directly addressing my professors—be this with the grades I got, the analysis they offered, which were inadequate and inaccurate, the view of African American culture they offered because they were the experts—were simply not enough. I know that I am not alone. Whiteness was everywhere in our lives, in our books, in the way that we were

salute. It was a time where Martin Luther King had already been assassinated; the disillusionment of the Black masses in the United States matched the disillusionment of the Black masses in South Africa. The Black woman is a multi-layered subject whose subjectivity is composed of many different facets; history demands it of her and her contemporary reality expects it of her. She cannot be an angry Black woman; she has to be the woman who graciously meanders in and out of the reality of White Supremacy—this is the reality that she has to respond to . . . to make herself better by recognizing her subservience to it. Fatima is at the university learning about White culture, White history, and in the communication process where the agent of colonization packages words as knowledge by situating her authority of its history, the word becomes one, and one becomes embroiled in the word.

The educated Black woman subject remains silent on her experience of racism, exclusion—silent to her parents who consider her position within the university as a privilege. The Black woman subject as a Black Panther member, someone who stands up for her right to confront the very system of White domination that continues to hold her hostage. She resists White thinking. She considers her continuation at university detrimental to her Black identity; it wears at her. It will wear down her blackness. It is not enough. The offering of slices of her black life is not enough. Black Power

taught, just everywhere. So many of us, now in our seventies have Black Power to thank for saving our lives . . . but many of us wondered whether fighting it in the classroom is not where we should have fought harder . . . I mean in terms of the analysis, the language, the discourse, as your generation insist on calling it—that is what kept us out. We could not fight off bullets in the street and in the textbooks. I kept up the dancing and worked with one of my cousins in setting up a dance school. Even when we handed the school over to a young couple after twenty years, I kept up the dancing because it was the only area in my life that I did not feel that I had to visualize Whiteness in order to express myself through my body. My body is my body; it is the only thing that I can offer ownership of even when I know that it has been colonized . . . even when I know that its colonization happened with resistance because there is one thing that my body knows it is the movement within me—the physical, psychical and social—are all part and parcel of the movement of my people.

saved her life. The emancipated subject who is subject because she furthers the aims of the British empire as a colonial, safeguarding the colony for the mother country against the colonized. The White woman who protests for civil rights—the professional anti-racist—she does not fight to end White Supremacy, she protests for civil rights to be granted, to amend and transform the ways that White Supremacy pursues itself. In the process the White woman activist, the professional protester, acquires additional rights; she has the right to protest, ungrateful as she appears to be, she acquires additional rights—the right to claim the freedom of those who were enslaved; those who hang on the strings of her generosity. She gets to take ownership of civil rights; the right to teach American history, the right to construct knowledge because she appears trusted, her heart in the right place, her care and consideration shown as jewels because she is able to chip at White Supremacy even though it continues to benefit her, but of which she is only able to complain sufficiently to still keep it in operation. The line of decolonization never meets the line of colonialism; it is as irregular as the colon in the body upon which the psyche rests, and upon which the regulation of thought into flesh settles, rises and falls, upon the rupture of any colonial act that contests its presence. — • —