SCHOLARLY PAPER

Burdened by a Beast: A brief consideration of social death in South African universities

Iram Yousuf (University of Pretoria, RSA)

Abstract

This paper considers the domain of subjectivity and knowledge in the colonial matrix of power and its relation to the university. It explores how this subset of the said matrix has led to the (social) death of students, specifically Black students, within the contemporary westernised university in the South African context. I maintain that the colonial matrix of power which defines the westernised university gives rise to violence, as students attempt to escape (social) death and regain their humanity. Furthermore, student responses to institutional violence (symbolic, systematic and subjective), which imposes a state of (social) death on Blackness, are delegitimated through the discourse of irrationality and vandalism, and reproduce the problematic discourses that relegate Blackness to the social position that imposes (social) death in the first place. My aim in this paper is thus to explicate this colonial matrix of power as it plays out in the university context.

Keywords: colonial matrix of power, social death, coloniality, decolonisation.

Introduction

This paper considers (social) death, what I interpret to be a sociopsychological alienation from the past and present, within the university. I explore how the educational system has been centred around a Eurocentric perspective,[1] ultimately eroding the value of being Black within the institutional space. I highlight how race characterises and defines life and death in (post)colonial[2] society through exploring what determines the categories of those defined as living in the zones

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1   See for instance the work of Lebakeng, Phalane and Nase (2006).

2   I use the brackets in (post)colonial to demonstrate the lingering effects of colonial ideals in societies which would otherwise define themselves as postcolonial. This formulation is rooted in the scholarship of decolonial thinkers Tlostanova and Mignolo (2009), who define these lingering effects of colonialism as contemporary 'coloniality'.

of 'being' or 'non-being' (Fanon 1967). This exploration allows me to make the case that race thus becomes the focal point of political and social governance, specifically as it relates to an educational system predicated on Eurocentrism, that is, the westernised university in South Africa. In my view, these two factors – who is defined as existing in the zones of being and non-being, respectively, and how the racial topography structures the social and political modes of governance in the westernised university – suggest that colonisation creates a system of domination structured around race which grounds (social) life and death, particularly within the university. By exploring violence as a response to institutional harm (symptomatic of symbolic, systemic and subjective violence), I attempt to show that violence in a call for decolonisation is the anti-force striving against (social) death. This claim is premised on the work of Gordon (2015) who, through a systematic and detailed reading of Fanon (1967), claims that since Blackness is regarded as illegitimate, any actions of Blackness will be similarly disregarded. It is on the premise of this instinctual delegitimating process that Blackness acts from a position which seeks to bring the 'gods' – whiteness and its modes of being – down to size using violence (Gordon 2015). Jean-Paul Sartre, in his preface to *The Wretched of the Earth* (Fanon 1965), frames this force to reclaim the humanity of Blackness as 'irrepressible violence'. He argues:

> he [Fanon] shows clearly that this irrepressible violence is neither sound and fury, nor the resurrection of savage instincts, nor the effect of resentment: it is man recreating himself. I think we understood this truth at one time, but we have forgotten it – that no gentleness can efface the marks of violence; only violence itself can destroy them. *(in Fanon 1965: 21)*

Following in the (post)colonial tradition and with the aim of highlighting how the colonial matrix of power functions in the westernised university, I show how Blackness resists (social) death as instantiated by the intrinsic nature of violence in these institutions. I start by detailing the intersection between (social) death and coloniality, as evidenced through the contemporary westernised university. I then consider how the violence of death and the relegation of Blackness to the category of subhuman, through the perpetuation and maintenance of a zone of non-being, are sustained in the westernised university. I conclude by underscoring the sociality of 'race-based' modes of exclusion. The conclusion reaffirms my argument that notions of death include socially and psychologically perceived (social) death.

(Social) Death, coloniality and the university

In his opening paragraphs to 'Race, Theodicy, and the Normative Emancipatory Challenges of Blackness', Lewis Gordon (2013: 727) remarks on Sylvia Wynter's (2006: 87) argument that 'race is ... a biodicy'. He claims that this statement implies that the world in which race was constructed is also one in which there is a negotiation between life and death – in other words, it is about who lives and who dies. This distinction highlights the sociopolitical implications of the colonial matrix of power, which Fanon (2004) takes issue with in his treatise 'On Violence'. In revealing the deeply sociopolitically embedded ideologies of race and racialisation in the colonial condition,

Fanon (1952, 2004) allows us to consider the suggestion that death ought to be treated with more systematicity, which implies broadening our understandings of the terms 'life' and 'death'.

Life and death are not confined solely to the physical death of the biological entity. Kalish (1968) reconceptualises death as physical, psychological, sociological and social, and distinguishes self-perceived (social) death, whereby a person believes that they are as good as dead, from other modes of (social) death. When thinking through (social) death, one could argue that it originates in slavery. If caught during a battle, captives were spared physical death and instead subjected to servitude through enslavement. However, this was a conditional commutation since death was only suspended insofar as slaves submitted to their powerlessness. This pardon from physical death and the resultant slavery led to punitive experiences of (social) death, which manifested both physically and psychologically (Patterson 1982). Turner (1967) describes (social) death as a *natal alienation* – a loss of connection not only with the past, but also with possible future generations. For the purposes of this analysis, I incorporate both meanings of (social) death, as used by Kalish (1968) and Turner (1967). Race so construed, as denotative of life and death, thus becomes the focal point of sociopolitical modes of governance in the (post)colonial condition. It should be noted also that the concept of race, as I use it here, is entwined with the process of colonisation, culminating in the contemporary manifestation of coloniality.[3]

The process of colonisation created a system of domination structured around race (Maldonado-Torres 2007). Given the historical function of race as sanctioning (social) life and death, it can be argued that colonisation instituted sociopolitical modes of governance that perpetuate(d) this system of domination. This claim is premised on the fact that colonisation, which, as noted, manifests as contemporary coloniality (Tlostanova & Mignolo 2009), is a derivative of historical political paradigms such as slavery. Furthermore, colonisation became the model of power at the heart of modernity, and colonialism as a structure of dominance and exploitation was deeply intertwined with capitalism. According to Maldonado-Torres (2007: 243), capitalism 'became tied with forms of domination and subordination that were central to maintaining colonial control'. Simply put, in order to maintain colonial control and to enforce the domination and subordination of the 'other' by race, the exploitative nature of capitalism, with its roots drawn from slavery (see Horne 2018), was employed. Thus, capitalism as a tool of the coloniser is a primary contributor to the (social) death of the colonised or the 'other', as it maintains the continued survival of hegemonic structures of domination. Capitalism is a constitutive part of the (post)colonial condition, which is characterised by resource exploitation, the imposition of western principles of democracy and freedom, and, ultimately, the unfreedom of Blackness/Indigeneity through exploitative labour processes, all of which serve as a reminder of the persistence of contemporary coloniality.

From among these dominating colonial and capitalist structures, one in particular stands out: the university, which has its roots deeply embedded in coloniality. Established during the

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3   Coloniality differs from colonialism. Colonialism refers to an economic and political relationship with the sovereignty of a nation or a people which is controlled and dictated by a colonial power, making the colonial power – the coloniser – an empire. Coloniality refers to established 'power patterns' (Maldonado-Torres 2007: 243). These 'power patterns' emerge as a consequence of colonialism, and 'define culture, labour, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations' (Quijano 2001: 342). Maintained in art, culture, books, sculpture, criteria for academic performance, self-image and an overall encapsulation of the modern experience, coloniality thus survives colonialism as its extension into the (post)colonial condition.

colonisation of the African continent, the university as an institution for the advancement of Europeans embodied the values and ideals of the homeland. Thus, the university in colonised Africa had embedded in it the racist superstructure of colonialism and its ideologies. This is still the case today, despite the advent of decolonial movements and the emancipation of Black people. These historical legacies and systems of power derived from the days of colonisation, and, in the case of South Africa, also from the apartheid era, are experienced in the pedagogical space, in the institutional and residential cultures of the university, in the system of administration and in the commodification of education, by imposing criteria that deter social cohesion and inclusivity, as well as through the curriculum. The essence of the westernised university (Grosfoguel 2011) in colonised Africa is thus deeply engrained in coloniality.

According to Quijano (2007), the colonial matrix of power consists of four primary and interrelated domains: control of the economy, control of authority, control of gender and sexuality, and control of subjectivity and knowledge (see also Wai 2012).[4] In Africa, the westernised university continues to reproduce Eurocentric perspectives and the knowledge of the European continent and its subjects. Thus, there is a deficit in the production and exploration of knowledge which would contribute meaningfully to the empowerment, upliftment, liberation, development and freedom of Africa. African universities currently function as westernised institutions geographically located on the continent. Intellectuals and academics from Africa have been schooled in the epistemologies constructed by the west and are trapped in the systems that graduated them as academics. They have yet to challenge and critique the epistemologies that subordinate and subjugate everything African (Mudimbe 1988) using their own epistemologies of alterity (Wai 2012).[5] Significantly, many African academics are also guilty of ignoring this 'confinement of thought' from within a Eurocentric paradigm that mistakenly hails itself as a universal approach. Africa, and specifically the westernised university, is thus still ensnared within the colonial matrix of power; still burdened by the 'Beast' of colonialism (Mbembe 2016).

The analysis now moves on to consider the domain of subjectivity and knowledge in the colonial matrix of power. It further explores how this domain has led to the (social) death of (specifically Black) students within the university, as described by Kalish (1968) and Turner (1967).

The violence of death

> These violent delights have violent ends
> And in their triumph die, like fire and powder,
> Which, as they kiss, consume.[6]

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4   Quijano argues that the colonial matrix of power produced various forms of social discrimination, race being one of them.

5   Mudimbe (1988: i) explains epistemologies of alterity from a position of African gnosis as those epistemologies where 'negritude, black personality, and African philosophy might be considered to be the best established in the present-day intellectual history of South Africa'.

6   See Shakespeare (2009: Act II, Scene VI, Line 9).

(Social) death, one could claim, is a violent yet delighted process. How else can one explain why men who slaughtered Black people until their blood ran like rivers are allowed to occupy venerated spaces and lord it over the children of Black people (Lindeque 2016)? How can it be that men who 'tormented and violated all that which the name "Black" stands for while they were alive' are celebrated (Mbembe 2016: 30)? Surely, a statue erected on a public campus is not expected to be looked at with contempt? Rather, it is probably expected that students should gaze upon the statue in awe of the man who laid the foundations of the 'great institution' which they have the privilege of attending. Even if the foundations are corrupt and compromised, having been built on the blood, sweat and tears of students' ancestors, they must be grateful to stand in the institution's halls, walk in its gardens, linger in the shadows of its statues of men who committed 'great acts' that fostered so-called progress and modernisation. By excluding their narratives and encouraging them to cherish and exhibit gratitude for the privilege of being *allowed in*, students are coerced into dislodging from their memory the insufferable realities of the past. Subconsciously, and reinforced through institutional cultures and mores, students are sternly reminded that being *allowed in* means they must quietly submit and glorify colonial and 'apartheid architecture' which, in Mbembe's (2016: 30) words, is not 'conducive to breathing' and living, yet informs institutional reality, which is framed in the discourses of generosity and benevolence as well as gestures of inclusivity, tolerance and transformation.

In the violent delight at the (social) death of Blackness, there emerges a retaliatory violence directed at the perpetrator of that (social) death. As Fanon (1967) notes, it is when natives understand their worth in relation to the coloniser that they take up the decolonial project. 'For if, in fact, my life is worth as much as the settler's, his glance no longer shrivels me up nor freezes me, and his voice no longer turns me into stone' (Fanon 1965: 35). When the anti-force[7] meets with the violence that culminates in and is characteristic of (social) death, decolonisation results, or, as Fanon (1965: 27) puts it, 'decolonisation is the meeting of two forces, opposed to each other by their very nature'. The opposition here is derived from the relegation of Blackness to the zone of non-being, which culminates in the assertion of Blackness and Black identity which seeks to rise out of the pit of negation; the resistance of negation manifests as the opposition between the two forces. The Black subject is thus 'no longer on tenterhooks in his [the colonisers] presence; in fact [(s)he explicitly states], I don't give a damn for him' (Fanon 1967: 35).

Decolonisation therefore becomes a necessary tool in the project of disintegrating the colonial matrix of power and destabilising the established patterns of that power. The decolonisation of the domain of subjectivity and knowledge challenges how '"facts", "reality" and "truth", a style of interpreting, a way of viewing and understanding the social world' are approached and perceived (Modiri 2013: 455). In South Africa, a 'late modern capitalist, liberal and bureaucratic disciplinary social order' prevails (Modiri 2013: 457), predicated on historical injustices that have resulted in the dispossession of Black people along with their political marginalisation. The rise of old injustices and the creation of new ones, coupled with inequalities and exclusions (Terreblanche 2012), demand new social, economic and legal orders as a way of advancing contemporary conceptions of justice that ameliorate these injustices. The call for quality, decolonised education centred

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7   A force striving against the anti-Blackness force. As Michael Jeffries describes it, 'anti-blackness … captures the dehumanization and constant physical danger that black people face. The "anti" in "anti-blackness" is a denial of black people's right to life' (in Mbele 2015).

around African problems and focusing on African solutions is the starting point in an attempt to restructure the current order. Decolonisation must not be confined to specific disciplines. Rather, it relies on various disciplines to re-member in order to remember. In other words, the decolonisation project must occur on several levels, and these levels must be linked in order for memory, not history, to be foregrounded (Van Marle 2014).

With the aim of re-membering as a mode of reconstituting the dignity of Blackness in our context, education has immense social and political value, which is substantially reduced by downplaying the right to anti-political 'wants'. Nussbaum (2006: 10, 6) argues that education is closely connected to the idea of democratic citizenship and the 'cultivation of humanity', which requires students to see themselves 'as human beings bound to all other human beings by ties of recognition and concern'. This necessitates knowledge and understanding of different cultures and 'of differences of gender, race and sexuality' (Nussbaum 2006: 17). It is, however, more than 'factual knowledge' that is required. What is needed is

> the ability to think from a position that assumes the *Other's* position; thinking critically about what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person's story and to understand the emotions, wishes and desires that someone so placed might have. *(Nussbaum 2006: 6–7)*

Harris (2004: 6) describes education as a tool to 'address civil, domestic, cultural and ethnic forms of violence, trying to heal some of the wounds of citizens who have been raised in violent cultures'. Without education, humanity cannot be recaptured or reconstituted.

However, when education has been centred around a Eurocentric perspective – one that erodes the value of being Black – humanity towards the Black person, and even to oneself as a Black person, is difficult to achieve. Instead, a Black student in the institutional atmosphere of the university experiences a (social) death as a *natal alienation* – a loss of connection not only with the past, but also with possible future generations (Turner 1967) – and is forced to assimilate into whiteness. Within this social economy, students must conform to the acts, desires, thoughts and narratives of their white peers and in the process they lose their identity and knowledge. This loss of knowledge will likely filter down into future generations and alienate the generational transference of specific knowledge(s) guarded and preserved by previous generations. Furthermore, Black students are made to feel as though they are foreigners in the space identified as the university (Mbembe 2016), as though they have no natal connection to the space, the land and the content of the curriculum. In a subordinate position within the framework of a dominant university, they are forced to give in to their powerlessness in order to maintain their presence. These experiences of alienation give rise to articulations of (social) death – a consequence of the nature of the colonial capitalist system which is unable to exist without dominating, violating and destroying that which is contrary to itself.

To draw an analogy, consider Ari Shari'ati's reinterpretation of the story of Kaabil and Haabil[8] (in Cornell & Seely 2016). Kaabil (personifying capitalism), consumed with jealousy, murders his brother Haabil (personifying socialism) in order to claim his fiancé. Cornell and Seely (2016: 92)

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8   These are the Arabic/Persian names for the brothers Cain (Kaabil) and Abel (Haabil).

explain that the actions of Kaabil were not due to him being inherently evil, but were rather an outcome of the effect of 'oppression, private property, imperialism, and then capitalism' on the human being. According to Shari'ati, as long as we maintain the capitalist system, with its private property and exploitation, we will live like Kaabil, as his life and actions are expressive of how we engage with one another in an environment of exploitation and possession (Cornell & Seely 2016). In the process, not only do we live like Kaabil, but we sentence our compatriots to a death like Haabil's. However, if we can transform the world in which we live and be true to ourselves and the transformed world beyond the walls of private property and capitalism (Cornell & Seely 2016), then there is hope for us. Thus, to tie the analogy to my argument, whilst coloniality is preserved and maintained within the university – a place of private property which participates in the basic tenets of capitalism (Slaughter & Leslie 1997) – we will be trapped in the suffocating grasp of powerlessness because of the very processes, systems, structures and administrative rules that govern our presence, interaction and participation in the university. This social space is even more difficult for those who enter it crippled by a lack of self-esteem and educational skills. In this regard, the university space fosters a culture that fails to address the needs of students, as well as an unwillingness to accommodate students in programmes that could ensure their success instead of resigning them to failure and (social) death. From this position of (social) death, which underscores the erasure and marginalisation of Blackness within the university, the student is relegated to a zone of non-being. How does an underprivileged, Black and powerless student challenge these entrenched systems? Is it worth it, or does the student tolerate these confines? There is no space for negotiation in this context. It is a (social) death.

The death of a race, and a university without grace

> Dead is the new black, y'all
> Race is a lethal condition
> Being a man of colour
> That's the national sin. *(Lanham 2016)*

Racism, for Fanon, is a global hierarchy of superiority and inferiority. As he notes, '[t]he colonial world is a world divided into compartments', one that distinguishes along the 'line of the human' that has been politically, economically and culturally produced and reproduced by the colonial capitalist world system (Fanon 1967: 29). People above the line of the human are in the 'zone of being' (or in a state of social life), and their humanity is recognised. Those who are below the line of the human are in the 'zone of non-being'. These people are considered subhuman or non-human, their humanity is not recognised and they are in a state of social death (Gordon 2007).

Conflicts within these zones are managed in different ways. In the zone of being, conflicts are regulated and are often peaceful save for extraordinary moments of violence. In the zone of non-being, conflicts are managed through violence, appropriation and dispossession, thus facilitating a norm of violence with exceptional moments of peace. Oppression in this zone occurs along lines of class, gender, sexuality and race (Grosfoguel 2011).

Fanon's (1965) definition of racism allows us to appreciate that there are diverse forms of racism, thereby avoiding a single, exclusive definition based on skin colour. Racism can also be based on ethnicity, language, culture or religion, for example. Grosfoguel (2011: 98) states:

> [if] we collapse the particular form of racism that a region or country of the world adopts as if it were the universal definition of racism then we lose sight of the diversity of racism[s] that are not necessarily marked by the same form in other regions of the world.

We should thus guard against accepting any one form of racism as universal, as this could prevent us from acknowledging different forms of racism. The zone of non-being produces and maintains unbearable conditions of existence that often result in mental, psychological, social and spiritual death. There is physical life, but the subject is not alive, or it may be that physical life and (social) death are constantly negotiated in the reality of the being. The westernised university also contains a zone of being and a zone of non-being. Of significance is that there are hierarchies and overlapping priorities within both zones. For instance, Black males occupy a hierarchical space over Black women in the zone of non-being; white females are located in an inferior position to white males in the zone of being. The difference, however, is that despite a lower social status or position in the zone of being, subjects in this space still have recourse to rights, the rule of law and the realisation of these rights based on their identification as members of the cohort of 'superior' being(s). Conversely, subjects in the zone of non-being are often marginalised and discriminated against by the law and by power structures. While they may have rights, accessing those rights may be difficult (Gordon 2007).

Within the university, the social stratification which establishes the category of the subhuman manifests through the race and class of students. To be Black and poor is a lethal condition, the outcome of which is (social) death as it entails existing below the line of the human. This condition is not exclusive to the university but is reflected in the wider South African society (Mbembe 2016). The university is a microcosm of this social reality. The Black middle class, though they may experience (social) death because of their race, is divided into those who are inclined towards the decolonial project and the idea of a 'real'[9] life and those who are not. The latter can possibly be attributed to forgotten or repressed memories of difficult lived experiences, complacency, 'white-ache'[10] or a total assimilation of the 'colonialist thought in its most corrupt form' (Mbembe 2016: 32). Therefore, when those who are against the project of decolonisation are called upon to recentre themselves, to come to their true selves,[11] they find they cannot and may encounter difficulty in simply understanding the concept of the true self. If they cannot reconcile who they are with their identity, they will have difficulty understanding why they need to rediscover their identity in the first place. The call to decolonisation 'is a struggle over what is to be taught; it is about the terms under which we should be teaching what – not to some generic figure of the student, but to the African "child"' (Mbembe 2016: 35). This figure of the 'African "child"', or, for our purposes, the

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9   A real life would entail having their humanity recognised.

10 A desire to be white.

11 I acknowledge that the concept of a true self is problematic, as identities are constantly shifting as people negotiate their lived reality subject to the social positions they hold.

African student, is central. Therefore, to recentre oneself is to reconnect with one's humanity; it is to reject imposed notions of superiority and inferiority. Yet, if one has completely assimilated into the colonialist mentality, the idea of an 'other' would seem preposterous (Fanon 1952). Thus, due to the differing interests of the classes and races, conflict arises. In the university, this conflict manifests as violence, as students from below the human line try to breach that line in an attempt to escape a (social) death and regain their humanity. This violence is also in response to the violence perpetrated by the university – it is an anti-force striving against (social) death.

Contrary to typical media claims, most violence is not 'senseless' (Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois 2004). Foucault (1996) suggests that human behaviour is programmed and appointed through rationality, and violence is no exception. To award rationality to certain acts of violence while simultaneously condemning other acts of violence as irrational, perceived rationality becomes misconstrued with legitimacy. A dichotomy subsequently forms and creates a distinction between the 'civilised' and 'barbarians' (Springer 2011). This misconstruction in turn gives rise to the social instantiation of power. The exercise of power and the sanction of particular knowledges follow the same design (Foucault 1972). Thus, when students rise up in protest against subjective,[12] symbolic[13] and systemic violence[14] in the university (Žižek 2008), they are instantly framed through discourse that characterises them as barbarians, hooligans and violent. Their violence is deemed to be the irrational actions of troublemakers. However, the violence of the university (and the violence of the Beast) in response to student violence is normalised as the proper response, the *rational* response, to irrational violence. By creating this distinction, the university exercises and establishes its power, a move which acts as the premise for justifying institutional actions that claim to be within the realm of sanctioned and rational knowledge – such as not sanctioning non-Eurocentric knowledge paradigms, which then leads to (social) death as it begins a process of natal alienation.

To counter students' acts of protest, the university relies on the law to meet these 'perpetrators of violence with violence' (Benjamin 1921: 282). However, the law may recognise that competing rights are at stake in this context. Therefore, as the cornerstone of the social arrangement (i.e. constitutional democracy), the law cannot maintain the status quo that the university desires. Thus, in order to preserve perceptions of violence and to bolster its position where the law cannot, the westernised university in our context employs the police force to do its bidding. As Walter Benjamin (1921: 287) aptly states,

> the 'law' of the police really marks the point at which … [institutions], whether from impotence or because of the immanent connections within any legal system, can no longer guarantee through the legal system the empirical ends that it desires at any

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12 Subjective violence is directly experienced in relationships of dominance (e.g. conflicts, bullying, murder, theft). Subjective violence is the kind we experience most explicitly, so we have an implicit assumption that all violence is subjective. This kind of violence presents itself in the university in incidents of racism and 'blackface'.

13 Symbolic violence has to do with ideology and the implicit structures of language. Examples are the privileging of certain languages within the university and the exclusion of other epistemologies in favour of Eurocentric knowledges (see Žižek 2008).

14 Systemic violence is almost explicit when examined as the background of subjective violence: class antagonism, exploitation, the market, colonialism, etc. The university, a colonial institution, will experience systemic violence through coloniality.

price to attain. Therefore the police intervene 'for security reasons' in countless cases where no clear legal situation exists.

In the 2016 #FeesMustFall protests, Benjamin's (1921) assertion was envisaged rather clearly. In order to delegitimise the movement and mark the violence of the protesters as irrational, the police used various aggressive tactics, such as firing stun grenades at sitting protesters (Gqirana 2016) and firing at an unarmed woman 13 times (702 Reporter 2016). These were attempts to goad students into retaliation as a means to justify their apprehension. The destabilisation, division and eventual dis-membering of the movement by destroying the intellectual and directive force behind it are the 'empirical ends' which the university and the state wished to obtain. Given that the South African Constitution affords the right to peaceful protests and assembly, when the #FeesMustFall campaign was launched it was expected that academic institutions would laud the inherently non-violent nature of the movement and allow for a presumption in favour of peaceful assemblies. However, anticipating violence and institutional disruptions, most universities immediately regulated the protests through interdicts. The militarisation of campuses was justified by claiming that protesting students posed 'security concerns' (Duncan 2016) and threats to private property for institutions. This action was mostly directed at Black students as they are considered to be subhuman, below the line of the human, and thus devoid of the humanity required to prevent them from engaging in activities of protest. Thus, Black students experience their presence in the (westernised) university as a 'brutal encumbrance … regulated by strict ordinances' (Benjamin 1921: 287) that limit their access and influence their environment, making them feel unsafe, alienated, isolated and unwelcome. This discomfort eventually leads to isolation and dissociation from the self, from fellow Black students (instead preferring the *cultured* nature of whites) and from the decolonial project. Black students then begin to reject the humanity of fellow Black students and to question their own. They may even feel that in order to regain a sense of belonging, or to obtain one in the first place, they must conform to the status quo. In accepting the status quo, they reject their past, and distance themselves from a possible future. In short, they give in to (social) death. To be Black is to be buried alive and if you do not claw your way to the surface you risk suffocating to death.

Conclusion

The world which constructed race is also the one that sets the rules for negotiating between life and death – simply put, who lives and who dies. Life and death, however, are not confined solely to the physical/bodily realm. Death has been reconceptualised to also include the death of the psychological, sociological and social, the latter being when a person believes that they are as good as dead. (Social) death has its origins in slavery, and can be conceived of as a natal alienation – a loss of connection not only with the past but also with possible future generations.

The process of colonisation created a system of domination structured around race. In the (post)colonial condition, race thus becomes the focal point of negotiations around life and death. Therefore, if colonisation created a system of domination structured around race, it essentially created a system of domination structured around (social) life and death.

This analysis framed racism as an apparent global hierarchy of superiority and inferiority spread along the 'line of the human', which has been politically, economically and culturally produced and reproduced by the colonial capitalist world system. I argued that people above this line are in the 'zone of being' (or in a state of social life), and their humanity is recognised. Those below the line are in the 'zone of non-being'. In the university, this conflict manifests as violence, as students from below the line try to breach the social relegations that enclose them in an attempt to escape (social) death and regain their humanity. This violence is also in response to the symbolic, systemic and subjective violence *by* and *of* the universities – it is the anti-force striving against (social) death.

The analysis argued that this anti-force is decolonisation, which is a necessary and sufficient condition for liberation from the colonial matrix of power, as it destabilises the patterns of power that have been entrenched and institutionalised in the westernised university. Decolonisation of the domain of subjectivity allows for new ways of interpreting, viewing and understanding the social world. Furthermore, decolonisation is not confined to specific disciplines and relies on various disciplines to work together in an effort to spur on a process of re-membering and remembering. In South Africa, the perpetuation of old injustices and the introduction of new ones, coupled with inequalities and exclusions, demand new social, economic and legal orders as a way of attaining a substantive postcolonial condition. Quality decolonised education, centred around African problems and focusing on African solutions, is the starting point in an attempt to restructure the current order and liberate those who are rendered powerless in institutions plagued by the Beast (coloniality). It is a brave step to overcome (social) death.

About the author

Iram Yousuf | Department of Jurisprudence, University of Pretoria, South Africa
ORCID 0000-0002-7578-8125 | yousuf_iram@yahoo.com
Having completed an LLB and LLM, Iram Yousuf is presently an LLD candidate in the Department of Jurisprudence at the University of Pretoria. Her fields of interest include Islamic philosophy, law and literature, critical race theory, critical legal theory, and decolonial theory.

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