

RACIAL EPISTEMOLOGY AT A TIME OF A PANDEMIC: A SYNOPSIS OF SOUTH AFRICA'S PERSISTING INEQUALITIES THROUGH THE LENS OF '#FEESMUSTFALL' AND '#FREEDECLONISEDEDUCATION'

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Abstract

The creation of South Africa was accompanied by the creation of an education system that would reflect Eurocentric ideologies, concepts, and livelihoods. When South Africa attained 'democracy', this creation was not abolished. A direct consequence of this was that the racial epistemology of conquest continues. The #feesmustfall and #FreeDeclonisedEducation protests were a response to the persistence of this creation. However, these calls were also not realised. Which means that the racial epistemology of conquest persists. In this article I attempt to show how the realisation of these calls could have dealt with the challenges that the education system and sector faces as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. I do this by problematising the exclusionary nature of the type of education and learning that is prevalent in South Africa. I opine that in order for the racial ontology of conquest to be abolished, there should be free and decolonised education.

* LLB, University of Pretoria. ORCID iD: 000-0001-5967- 3101. To Masixole Mlandu, Busisiwe Seabe, Amla Monageng and the many named and unnamed student activists, history will absolve you. Although completely different, the opening lines of this article were inspired by one of my favourite openings to ever grace literature. I dedicate all my writings to Suzan Tshikota and Karabo Tshikota. To Mr Steven Ball and his family, Mr Muanalo Dzhivhuho and Mr Phumudzo Tshikota, thank you for your continuous support. Aluta!

1 Introduction

Mcebo Dlamini spent about two years in prison after being denied bail, whereafter he was trialled and found guilty of public violence for his participation in the call for free and decolonised education.¹ Similarly, Kanya Cekeshe was also found guilty and sentenced to five years imprisonment for his participation in this call.² Many student activists and protesters know the smell of rubber bullets, but Shaeera Kalla's body was subjected to rubber bullets not only once, but almost ten times.³ Naledi Chirwa, and many other student activists, were also victimised by higher education institutions, some suspended, and others expelled for their participation in this call.⁴ Now it is our time to engage in the plight for free and decolonised education. During the COVID-19 pandemic, most universities introduced online learning.⁵ The pandemic brought with it so much pain; economies found themselves in the grips of depreciation, and humanity was found shaking as about 56 356 people around South Africa had lost their lives to this monstrous pandemic by middle April 2021, whilst poverty and unemployment continued to worsen.⁶ Despite the entire country coming to a standstill, universities across South Africa decided to continue their activities on online platforms.⁷

The implementation of online learning was problematic in many respects, but for the purpose of this article, focus will fall on how online teaching and learning excluded certain groups of students from the services of these South African universities.⁸ This article will

- 1 C Manyathela 'Fees must fall activists Mcebo Dlamini found guilty of public violence' *Eye Witness News* (Johannesburg) 09 March 2020 <https://ewn.co.za/2020/03/09/fees-must-fall-activist-mcebo-dlamini-found-guilty-of-public-violence> (accessed 27 January 2021).
- 2 Z Pikoli 'Growing calls from civil society to "Free Kanya Cekeshe"' *Daily Maverick* 22 November 2019 <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2019-11-22-growing-calls-from-civil-society-to-free-kanya-cekeshe-now/>. accessed 27 January 2021).
- 3 C Manyathela 'Police investigates after Wits student leader hit by 10 rubber bullets' *Eye Witness News* (Johannesburg) 20 October 2016 <https://www.google.com/amp/s/ewn.co.za/2016/10/20/Police-investigate-after-Wits-student-leader-struck-by-10-rubber-bullets/amp> (accessed 28 January 2021).
- 4 Y Sobuwa 'What happened to the "fees must fall" movement leaders' *Sowetan Live* <https://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/south-africa/2018-02-28-what-happened-to-the-fees-must-fall-movement-leaders/> (accessed 28 January 2021).
- 5 South African Government 'Minister Blade Nzimande: Government's intervention measures on Coronavirus COVID-19' 24 March 2020 <https://www.gov.za/speeches/response-covid-19-24-mar-2020-0000> (accessed 22 January 2021).
- 6 Congressional research services 'Global effects of COVID-19' 07 March 2020 <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R46270.pdf>. (accessed 29 January 2021).
- 7 South African Government (n 5).
- 8 See Z Pikoli 'South Africa: Academics Reject Claims That 2020 Has Been a Success for Universities' 14 December 2020 <https://allafrica.com/stories/202012150228.html> (accessed 23 January 2020) where about 300 academics all over South African universities revealed that some of the problems that online learning created were; increasing dropout rates, the adverse effects concerning the critical thinking development of students, and many other issues as highlighted in greater detail in the latter paragraphs.

argue that in 2021 there is neither free nor decolonised education in South Africa, and as a result, the inequalities in the education system persist. This argument will be made by indicating that South Africa was, among other things, built on racial epistemology and that this racial epistemology was not abolished when South Africa attained its so-called 'freedom' in 1994.⁹ This article will also reveal how the COVID-19 pandemic has once again highlighted the importance of the call for free and decolonised education in South Africa. And lastly, this article will indicate that the #feesmustfall and #FreeDecolonisedEducation calls could have addressed these issues if they were realised, and as a result, such calls are further enunciated; *Mayihlome!*¹⁰

2 Racial epistemology

2.1 An introduction to racial epistemology in South Africa

The emergence of what we know as South Africa today started in 1652 and developed until 1910.¹¹ In 1910 the racial order was legalised and formalised, which persisted through the 1913 Land Act¹², the 1948 declaration of apartheid, the 1961 Constitution¹³, and the 1983 Constitution.¹⁴ The year 1652 set in motion the colonial encounter, when Jan van Riebeeck arrived in the Cape of Good Hope and began to reshape the area which would later be known as 'South Africa' in the image of the conqueror.¹⁵ This resulted in what historical literature has coined as 'conquest', which results from political economy, ontology, and epistemology.¹⁶ This is how South Africa was constituted.¹⁷ Racial capitalism entailed the creation of an economy that favours white people over black people, that is, white people being beneficiaries and black people being labourers.¹⁸ Racial

9 H Savo 'Decolonisation of higher education: Dismantling epistemic violence and Eurocentrism in South Africa' (2016) 1 *Transformation in Higher* at 2.

10 The term 'Mayihlome Ihlasele' is an isiZulu phrase which was used during anti-colonial-apartheid protests signifying non-resistance and not backing down. Directly translated the term means 'Let us arm ourselves and attack'.

11 South African History Online 'History of slavery and early colonisation in South Africa' <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/history-slavery-and-early-colonisation-south-africa> (accessed 15 April 2019).

12 Natives Land Act 27 of 1913.

13 The Republic of South Africa Act, 1961.

14 The Republic of South Africa Constitution Act 110 of 1983.

15 JM Modiri 'The jurisprudence of Steve Biko: A study in race, law and power in the aftermath of colonial-apartheid' PhD thesis, University of Pretoria 2017 at 182.

16 B Magubane 'The problem and its matrix: Theoretical and methodological issues' in *The political economy of race and class in South Africa* (1979) https://knowledge4empowerment.files.wordpress.com/2011/08/magubane-1979-1990-ch1_poliecon-raceclass.pdf (accessed 22 May 2020) at 3; T Serequeberhan 'African Philosophy as the Practice of Resistance' (2005) 4 *Journal of Philosophy: A Cross-Disciplinary Inquiry* at 50; Savo (n 9) 2.

17 As above.

18 Magubane (n 16) 3.

ontology entailed the creation of a reality that presented black people as non-humans, thus justifying their enslavement and their reduction to the lowest human class.¹⁹ Racial epistemology entailed the imposition of Western education, cultures, traditions, and norms, accompanied by the demonisation and destruction of indigenous African knowledge.²⁰ According to Modiri, conquest should be understood as the taking over of foreign territory through physical, structural, and symbolic violence.²¹ Accordingly, in South Africa, black people are the conquered and white people are the conquerors.²²

When white people came to Africa, they made several claims: Among these were claims of an empty and unoccupied land, and the claim that African people were not civilised.²³ This seems to be a contradiction in and of itself, because if Africa were indeed empty, who would the missionaries have to civilise? Accordingly, the belief was that Africans ‘needed’ the Europeans to make them human-like through the imposition of religion and education.²⁴ Pivotal to white settler[ism] was the imposition of a form of education that would ensure that Eurocentricity was maintained and preserved for centuries to come.²⁵

In the middle 1900s, the children of the indigenous people were introduced to an education that did not reflect their backgrounds, histories, traditions, or norms.²⁶ They received an education of a lower standard than that provided to white pupils.²⁷ In addition to this, black students were directly and indirectly excluded from institutions of learning through fee hikes and racial segregation.²⁸ The exclusionary nature of these institutions was predetermined, as the system undertook to enslave the natives and strip them of any economic viability.²⁹ Through the establishment of the Bantu Education Act,³⁰ black people were subjected to an education that would relegate them to being slave labourers.³¹ Through the establishment of universities exclusively for black students, which

19 Serequeberhan (n 16) 50.

20 Savo (n 9) 2.

21 JM Modiri ‘Conquest and constitutionalism: first thoughts on an alternative jurisprudence’ (2018) 34 *South African Journal on Human Rights* at 320.

22 As above.

23 NS Cezula & L Modise ‘The “Empty Land” Myth: A Biblical and socio-historical Exploration’ (2020) 46 *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* at 3.

24 Savo (n 9) 2.

25 As above.

26 As above.

27 Savo (n 9) 3.

28 CH Mackenzie ‘Black Students in “White” Universities: The character and provision of liberal higher education in post-apartheid South Africa’ (1994) 24 *A Journal of Comparative and International Education* at 67.

29 As above.

30 Bantu Education Act 47 of 1983.

31 P Bauer ‘Bantu Education Act’ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 22 July 2020 <https://www.britannica.com/event/Bantu-Education-Act>. (accessed 06 June 2021).

were either of poor infrastructure or lacked resources, black people continued to receive an education that was of a lower standard compared to that received by white people in universities reserved exclusively for white students.³²

2.2 The persistence of racial epistemology in South Africa

Madlingozi opines that racial epistemology persists in South Africa because 1994 did not facilitate a breakaway from [colonial]-apartheid South Africa to freedom.³³ Many scholars ascribe this to the 1996 Constitution's³⁴ failure to address the injustices and tragedies of conquest.³⁵ The main contention here is that the 1996 Constitution undertook the task of moving South Africa forward without accounting for the segregated foundations upon which South Africa was built.³⁶ These foundations being, as discussed above, the racial ontology, racial capitalism, and racial epistemology of conquest.³⁷ To my mind, this is the reason why racial epistemology remains entrenched in South Africa's fabric, despite the claims of freedom.

Constitutional abolitionists also argue strongly against the notion of the year 1994 signifying a new South Africa.³⁸ They contend that the 1996 Constitution did not address the long history of segregation, inequality, and injustices in colonial-apartheid South Africa.³⁹ Accordingly, racial epistemology, as one of the foundations upon which colonial-apartheid South Africa was nurtured, has not been dismantled.⁴⁰ As a result, South Africa's education and forms of learning remain very much Eurocentric.⁴¹ Institutions of learning continue to speak from a Eurocentric mouth while enclosed in African names, and the education system does not reflect the needs, lived realities, histories, and norms of the indigenous people of 'South Africa'.⁴²

32 As above.

33 T Madlingozi 'Social justice in a time of neo-apartheid constitutionalism: critiquing the anti-black economy of recognition, incorporation and distribution' (2017) 1 *Stellenbosch Law Review* at 127.

34 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996.

35 N Dladla 'Towards an African critical philosophy of race: Ubuntu as a philpraxis of liberation' (2017) 6 *Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions* at 39.

36 As above.

37 Magubane (n 16) 3; Savo (n 9) 2; Serequeberhan (n 16) 50.

38 Dladla (n 36) 39.

39 As above.

40 Savo (n 9) 3.

41 As above.

42 As above.

3 Free decolonised education

3.1 Education during the COVID-19 pandemic

On 24 March 2020, it was reported that the Minister of Higher Education made an announcement that higher education institutions would have to switch to online learning.⁴³ Furthermore, the Minister of Basic Education took a decision to suspend contact classes to plan for a gradual resumption of face-to-face classes, whilst the management strategies for the COVID-19 pandemic were implemented.⁴⁴ Only nine universities were able to complete the 2020 academic year within the year 2020, and it comes as no surprise that all of them are former 'whites only' institutions, and were therefore at the receiving end of colonial and apartheid benefits.⁴⁵ The poor and former black institutions which house most of the vulnerable students of this country are said to have finished the 2020 academic year in 2021.⁴⁶ The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed once again the persisting inequalities that student activists were fighting against during the #feesmustfall and #FreeDecolonisedEducation protests.

The universities that were previously exclusively reserved for white students managed to finish the 2020 academic year in 2020 because these institutions are well resourced.⁴⁷ The majority of students in these universities are from households with study rooms, unlimited internet connection, environments that are conducive to learning, private tutors, and sufficient nutrition.⁴⁸ However, for many black students, online learning meant going back to townships where a person may share a room with five other people, and studying is an inconvenience to those around you.⁴⁹ It meant going back to an isolated village where network coverage is scarce, and electricity is unreliable or even unavailable for many.⁵⁰ In some cases, it meant

43 South African Government 'Minister Blade Nzimande: Government's intervention measures on Coronavirus COVID-19' 24 March 2020. <https://www.gov.za/speeches/response-covid-19-24-mar-2020-0000#> (accessed 22 January 2021).

44 Congressional research services (n 6).

45 See Cezula & Modise (n 28); Staff Writer '2020 academic year remains on course' *eNCA* (Johannesburg) 09 July 2020 <https://www.enca.com/news/2020-academic-year-remains-course-nzimande> (accessed 01 February 2021). The institutions which are said to have been able to complete the 2020 academic year are amongst others, the University of Pretoria, the University of Witwatersrand, the University of Stellenbosch, the University of Cape Town, the University of Johannesburg, the University of Free State, and Rhodes University.

46 As above.

47 As above.

48 L Bashman 'Online learning punishes the poor' *IOL* 12 April 2020 <https://www.iol.co.za/news/opinion/online-learning-punishes-the-poor-46963674> (accessed 01 February 2021).

49 As above.

50 As above.

that students who relied on feeding schemes and free food from university events were found without any alternative.⁵¹ Obviously, since we live in a classist society, it would be naïve to conclude that I am ignorant of the fact that not all black students suffered from these challenges, it is safe though to say the majority of them did.⁵²

In the sphere of basic education, public schools ceased any form of learning at first while private schools continued with online learning since they were equipped to do so.⁵³ Learners who benefitted from the Department of Basic Education's feeding schemes had to accept the reality of not having anywhere to eat when these schools closed down.⁵⁴ The inequalities created by racial epistemology are clearly visible at this time of a global pandemic. Before the onset of COVID-19, black pupils were already congested in their classrooms, sharing desks and at times fighting for chairs.⁵⁵ When this pandemic started, it exposed how impossible learning would become for black learners in particular. It exposed the exclusionary nature of having private and public schools. Private schools are better resourced, are very expensive, and fee hikes are introduced every year which results in the exclusion of black learners since most of them are unable to afford these schools.⁵⁶ Consequently, the majority of black learners remain discarded in some public schools which are underfunded and have poor infrastructure.⁵⁷ In my opinion, this is a consequence of, not only the colonial-apartheid implications, but also the fact that some of the promises of the progressive realisation of socio-economic rights are yet to be realised.⁵⁸

The announcement by former President Jacob Zuma that free education would be implemented was not the solution that the #feesmustfall and #FreeDecolonisedEducation protests sought.⁵⁹ Education remains unfree because even National Student Financial

51 As above.

52 As above.

53 As above.

54 Maverick Citizen 'There is no school feeding' *Daily Maverick* 12 June 2020 <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-06-12-there-is-no-school-feeding/> (accessed 1 January 2021).

55 B Phakhathi 'School infrastructure is still largely inadequate' *Business Day* 8 April 2019 <https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.businesslive.co.za/amp/bd/national/2019-04-08-school-infrastructure-is-still-largely-inadequate/> (accessed 2 January 2021).

56 Mackenzie (n 28) 67.

57 Phakhathi (n 56).

58 Staff Writer 'The most expensive schools in South Africa in 2021' *Business Tech* 12 January 2021 <https://businesstech.co.za/news/trending/459994/the-most-expensive-schools-in-south-africa-in-2021/> (accessed 19 January 2021).

59 A Areff & D Spies 'Zuma announces free higher education for poor and working-class students' *News24* (Johannesburg) 16 December 2017 <https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.news24.com/amp/news24/southafrica/news/zuma-announces-free-higher-education-for-poor-and-working-class-students-20171216> (accessed 23 January 2021).

Aid Scheme (NSFAS) qualifying students continue to get financially excluded since NSFAS does not cover all costs.⁶⁰ NSFAS was a government loan scheme founded in 1999 under the name Tertiary Education Fund for South Africa (TEFSA), which was later changed to NSFAS in 2000.⁶¹ It was implemented through an Act of Parliament (Act 56 of 1999). Its primary function was to loan disadvantaged students money on condition that they pay it back after graduation.⁶² This was later changed to what former President Jacob Zuma referred to as 'free education'.⁶³ The announcement of 'free education' by the former President only applies to students from households within a certain income bracket.⁶⁴ The 'missing middle' category is often ignored, and their circumstances are not considered.⁶⁵ The 'missing middle' includes students who are deemed too wealthy to benefit from NSFAS but in reality, these students struggle to fund their higher education because of various reasons.⁶⁶ In my view, some of these reasons may be; where both parents earn above the threshold amount but have other children depending on them, where the parents earn above the threshold amount but have debts, and last but not least, where there is a single parent who earns above the threshold amount but has other financial commitments that are out of their control. The fight for free and decolonised education was a fight for the universities in South Africa and during this fight, the needs, lived realities, histories and norms of the indigenous people of this country have been reflected.⁶⁷ Pivotal to that realisation is the notion of de-commodifying education because the indigenous people of this country, who were previously economically disadvantaged, cannot afford it.⁶⁸

The #feesmustfall and #FreeDecolonisedEducation calls would ask whether proper teaching and learning can take place amid a pandemic. Can one learn while anxious? Can learning take place amid questions like 'who is next', 'am I next', and so many other questions which would have highlighted the state of despair that this pandemic has ushered in? Is it possible for teaching and learning to take place while the parents of these students or pupils are facing

60 S Shoba 'Unprecedented number of students at risk of financial exclusion, says Wits SRC' *Daily Maverick* 17 February 2021 <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-02-17-unprecedented-number-of-students-at-risk-of-financial-exclusion-says-wits-src/> (accessed 3 March 2021).

61 Western Cape Government https://www.westerncape.gov.za/general-publication/student-guide-funding-nsfas?toc_page=1. (accessed 6 June 2021).

62 As above.

63 As above.

64 As above.

65 As above.

66 N Garrod & A Wildschut 'How large is the missing middle and what would it cost to fund it' (2021) 3 *Development Southern Africa* at 484.

67 Savo (n 9) 3.

68 As above.

retrenchments⁶⁹ or when their parents stand in long queues just so that they can receive a mere R 350.00 for food which should supposedly last the whole month?⁷⁰ Can one learn without the promised data and laptops or the pay-outs that the NSFAS' free education debacle promised yet seldomly delivered?⁷¹ It is therefore worth noting that this is not what 'free education' meant because free education is not a call for the tuition fees of disadvantaged students to be paid for, but a call for education to cease from being made a commodity.⁷² It is then further safe to say that in 2020, teaching and learning did not take place, but instead, measures were put in place to ensure that government and universities, particularly universities that were previously exclusively reserved for white students, are not seen as failures.⁷³ Some of the measures that some institutions took were, amongst others, giving students data and some laptops, and giving some students university-based accommodation.⁷⁴ However, not every student benefitted from these measures, and most importantly, students in poor universities did not benefit from these measures since their institutions did not have sufficient resources.

3.2 #feesmustfall and #FreeDecolonisedEducation

In the year 2016, students from all around South Africa began to protest for free and decolonised education.⁷⁵ The protests followed an 8% fee hike in tuition fees but ended up comprising of a wider call for education to no longer be commodified, the dismantling of racial epistemology, and the cessation of outsourcing.⁷⁶ In essence, the call for #feesmustfall and #FreeDecolonisedEducation was a call for the

69 N Makhubele 'COVID-19 impacting the workplace: Outlining retrenchments in good faith' *De Rebus* 1 August 2020. <http://www.derebus.org.za/covid-19-impacting-the-workplace-outlining-retrenchments-in-good-faith/> (accessed 22 February 2021).

70 N Majola 'Long queues as people scramble for Covid-19 relief grants' *News24* 15 July 2020 <https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/long-queues-as-people-scramble-for-covid-19-relief-grants-20200715> (accessed 27 January 2021).

71 South African Government (n 5).

72 JA Mbembe 'At the center of the Knot' (2012) 38 *Social Dynamics* at 11

73 Pikoli (n 8).

74 Universities such as the University of Pretoria, the University of Cape Town, and the University of Johannesburg are, amongst others, universities which had resources to facilitate the rollout of these measures. See South African Government (n 5).

75 G Mavunga '#feesmustfall protests in South Africa: A critical realist analysis of selected newspaper articles' (2019) 7 *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa* at 81.

76 As above.

decommodification of learning, and for African history to be rewritten and retaught from an African perspective.⁷⁷

The definition of decolonisation varies depending on who/where it is borrowed from. Decolonisation, with regards to racial epistemology, means the dismantling of racial epistemology, in that, education ceases to be a commodity and the education system and all forms of learning in this country reflect the knowledge, lived experiences, needs, histories, and traditions of the indigenous people of this country.⁷⁸ Ramose defines decolonisation as the deconstruction of the system to allow for the restoration of title and sovereignty over the system to the indigenous people.⁷⁹ Decolonisation would result in the conquerors denouncing their title and sovereignty over the South African territory.⁸⁰ Accordingly, this would be the abolition of the conqueror's South Africa.⁸¹

Decolonisation accounts for reparations, it interrogates the foundations of colonial-apartheid South Africa, and it calls for the reconstitution of South Africa.⁸² Decolonisation is also defined by Fanon as setting up a new humanism.⁸³ In my view, Fanon acknowledges that the only way to move away from colonisation is through a complete destruction of the systems that were created by colonisation, and by replacing these systems with new ones.⁸⁴ Ramose writes that the negotiated settlement that took place in the early 1990s in South Africa was faced with two paradigms that had an imperative role to play, namely; decolonisation and democratisation.⁸⁵ Expanding and exploring upon Ramose, he defines decolonisation, as just noted above, and democratisation as, conforming to the conqueror's claims concerning extinctive prescription.⁸⁶ In other words, democratisation does not undo the colonial-apartheid foundations of South Africa but instead assimilates black people into a South Africa that is founded, maintained, and preserved based on the racial capitalism, ontology, and epistemology of conquest.⁸⁷ This is the reason why this article calls for decolonisation of the education system and all forms of learning in South Africa and Africa as a whole.

77 As above. According to Mbebe, decommodifying education means removing the notion of students having to pay for knowledge, whether through a bursary or sponsor. It means that education is accessible to all without any financial barriers. See also Mbembe (n 75) 11.

78 Savo (n 9) 5.

79 MB Ramose 'An African perspective on justice and race' (2001) at 14.

80 As above.

81 As above.

82 As above.

83 F Fanon *The Wretched of the Earth Black Skin* (1968) 245.

84 Fanon (n 86) 35.

85 Ramose (n 82) 14.

86 Ramose (n 82) 15.

87 As above.

Decolonisation of the education system would mean that the natives are taught about their history, culture, laws, traditions, and livelihoods from an African perspective.⁸⁸ It would mean undoing the racial epistemology of conquest through undertaking the task of decolonising the curriculums, universities, and residence cultures which, in my view, continue to perpetuate racial inequality and patriarchy. Furthermore, it would entail undertaking the task of implementing equity in the management of these institutions through the appointment of black and underrepresented people in managerial positions. Last but not least, decolonisation of the education system would require education institutions to be part of society, open to society and to contribute to society, particularly to poor communities through, for example, their law clinics and other organisations capable of making change.⁸⁹ Such contribution to society would also require a declaration from these institutions that they did not only benefit from, but also played a role in the creation of a South Africa that is founded on the racial capitalism, ontology, and an epistemology of conquest.

This then takes us to the question, can decolonised education exist in a country that is not decolonised? The answer to this question is not in the affirmative. It is my view that in order for the racial epistemology of conquest to be undone, it must be accompanied by the undoing of the racial ontology and racial capitalism of conquest. In other words, security officers, waiters, domestic workers, taxi drivers, and all other people in low-income positions who cannot afford education should join the call.

It is safe to say that the #feesmustfall and #FreeDecolonisedEducation calls are a decolonial call both in education and in general. Decolonisation should not start at higher education institutions; it must start with primary schools and high schools. African learners from primary and high schools are introduced to western literature; they read and hear of the 'Shakespeare[s]' and never know of the 'Nguni wa Thiong'o[s]'.⁹⁰ The decommodification of education should also start there. How is it possible that in a country that many have celebrated to be democratic, we have pupils in private schools costing more than R200 000 per annum whilst others receive it for free?⁹¹ If people are willing to pay so much money for private school education, then it should tell

88 Savo (n 9) 5.

89 As above.

90 Savo (n 9) 5.

91 See L Cribbs 'Is quality education reserved for the wealthy and elite? Do public schools make the grade?' 23 January 2020. <https://medium.com/age-of-awareness/is-quality-education-reserved-for-the-wealthy-and-elite-6c021ea3ff4c> (accessed 06 June 2021). Cribbs writes about the United States of America, but her article is also applicable to the South African situation.

us something about the quality of learning and teaching in some public schools.⁹²

In my view, the inequalities that the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted in the year 2020 show that racial capitalism is still in existence, and the only way that it can be dismantled in ‘post’-apartheid South Africa is through a decolonial call, particularly the one that was led under the #feesmustfall and #FreeDecolonisedEducation protests. This pandemic has shown us once again that although the initial call for free and decolonised education was successful in ensuring the end of outsourcing to some extent, and the implementation of the NSFAS’ free education debacle, nothing much has changed. This pandemic exposed to us the need for the call to be revisited, and for decolonisation to be the primary consideration this time around. It is my view that had the decolonisation of the education system and all forms of learning been achieved, then black and poor institutions of learning such as the University of Limpopo, Vaal University of Technology, Tshwane University of Technology, and others, would not have been left behind after the implementation of online learning. The implementation of online learning would have taken cognisance of the fact that many black students live in homes that are not conducive to learning, and most importantly, that effective teaching and learning cannot take place during a pandemic.

Last year, more than 300 academics from various higher education institutions in South Africa signed a statement where they rejected the claims by universities that 2020 was a successful academic year.⁹³ They argue that these institutions are ignorant of the damage caused by lockdown regulations and that online learning will affect tertiary education terribly.⁹⁴ These academics have also noted how the lack of contact classes affected the critical thinking development of students.⁹⁵ They reveal how the pandemic brought with it so much loss and anxiety among both students and lecturers and how the dropout rate was a bit higher in the second semester.⁹⁶ These academics simply reiterate the argument presented in this article, in that, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the persisting inequalities in higher education institutions and society at large.⁹⁷ Accordingly, it cannot be said that 2020 was a success nor that any effective teaching and learning did take place during that time. Hopefully, this pandemic has also played a role in making academics more aware of the lived

92 As above.

93 Pikoli (n 8).

94 As above.

95 As above.

96 As above.

97 As above.

realities, needs, and backgrounds of the poor black students of this country.

It has already been highlighted that the creation of South Africa was not only confined to the racial epistemology of conquest, but also to racial capitalism and ontology. It is also worth noting that such creation was accompanied by violence.⁹⁸ Accordingly, it is my opinion that a call that seeks to dismantle these foundations will also be met with violence similar to how it was exposed in the previous protests. In my view, government and universities will continue to brutalise and even kill in defence of South Africa's colonial institutions and will either do this through the South African Police Service or through private securities. Moreover, the anxiety, pain, and fear that comes with seeking to undo such a long history of violence and deprivation are also worth noting. However, a fitting response is to be borrowed from Fanon when he says; 'Each generation must out of relative obscurity discover its mission, fulfil it, or betray it'.⁹⁹

4 Conclusion [Ending ...?]

South Africa was created on the basis of the racial epistemology, ontology, and capitalism of conquest.¹⁰⁰ This article focussed on racial epistemology. When South Africa attained democracy, these foundations were not dismantled.¹⁰¹ As a result, the education system and all forms of learning in South Africa are very much still Eurocentric.¹⁰² This is the reason why students in South Africa started the #feesmustfall and #FreeDecolonisedEducation movements in 2016. These calls were however not realised. When the coronavirus started, it exposed the inequalities that student activists were fighting for. Calling this part of the article an ending would be a mistake as this is not an ending but a way forward. For many, the revolutionary hashtags #feesmustfall and #FreeDecolonisedEducation fell with the victimisation and arrest of student activists, but for this article, this idea lives on. It lives on in academic papers, on social media, and many other platforms at our disposals, including the streets.

Mayihlome Ihlasele!¹⁰³

98 Modiri (n 21) 320.

99 Fanon (n 86) 205.

100 Modiri (n 21) 320.

101 As above.

102 Savo (n 9) 2.

103 The term '*Mayihlome Ihlasele*' is an isiZulu phrase which was used during anti-colonial-apartheid protests signifying non-resistance and not backing down. Directly translated the term means 'Let us arm ourselves and attack'.