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The colonial matrix of power: Image ontology and the question of blackness

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The question of blackness has always featured the intersectionality of race, gender, sexuality and class. Blackness as an ontological speciality has been engaged from both the social and epistemic locations of the *damnés* (in Fanonian terms). It has thus sought to respond to the performance of power within the world order that is structured within the colonial matrix of power, which has ontologically, epistemologically, spatially and existentially rendered blackness accessible to whiteness, while whiteness remains inaccessible to blackness. The article locates the question of blackness from the perspective of the Global South in the context of South Africa. Though there are elements of progress in terms of the conditions of certain Black people, it would be short-sighted to argue that such conditions in themselves indicate that the struggles of blackness are over. The essay seeks to address a critique by Anderson (1995) against Black theology in the context of the United States of America (US). The argument is that the question of blackness cannot and should not be provincialised. To understand how the colonial matrix of power is performed, it should start with the local and be linked with the global to engage critically the colonial matrix of power that is performed within a system of coloniality. Decoloniality is employed in this article as an analytical tool.

Contribution: The article contributes to the discourse on blackness within Black theology scholarship. It aims to contribute to the continual debates on the excavating and levelling of the epistemological voices that have been suppressed through colonial epistemological universalisation of knowledge from the perspective of the *damnés*.

Keywords: decoloniality; social and epistemic location; *damnés*; blackness; whiteness; coloniality; colonial matrix of power; zone of non-being.

Introduction

The article engages with the work of Anderson (1995). It is the intention of the article to argue that the challenges of blackness need to be analysed not only at the provincial level (United States [US]), rather it is imperative to engage with these challenges from both provincial and global level. I argue that it is imperative to locate these challenges within the imperial systems. Furthermore, it is argued that a recognition of the intersectionality of struggles is a move from provincial to a global struggle. This view is also maintained by Davis (2016:144): 'In fact you might say that there has been a symbiotic relationship between the struggles abroad and struggles at home, relationships of inspiration and mutuality'. The article locates its analysis from the perspective of Black people in South Africa.

In this essay of Anderson (1995:91), section of Black theology and the notion of blackness within the colonial matrix of power are engaged. The purpose of the essay is not to examine in any detail scientific racist thought or works of physical anthropologists on blackness, rather it is to highlight how power is performed within the colonial matrix. In other words, the construction of blackness, its social and epistemic locations have to be analysed from the perspective of the systems that have declared blackness and categorised it as the 'Other'. Decolonial scholars, such as, Mignolo, Grosfoguel, Maldonado-Torres have labelled these systems the colonial matrix of power or coloniality of power. Blackness in the article is confined to those wherein the imperial systems of the world have oppressed, dislocated, enslaved, dispossessed, exploited labelled as non-European, uncivilised and heathen. Furthermore, it is argued that failure to locate and analyse the Black experience within the coloniality of power and/or colonial matrix of power that has constructed Western/colonial/modern/capitalist/patriarchal/Christian world order is to misunderstand the pervasiveness of whiteness and its relation to Western theology and its epistemological paradigm.

Note: This paper is dedicated to my late son Moagi Mothoagae, 2016–2019.

Though physical colonialism and imperialism may not be visible administrators of these racial hierarchies, through coloniality of power blackness has represented the paradigm of racial Otherness, as a marker. Therefore, there is a fundamental link between decolonial thought and blackness. Quijano (2007), in his article, located decoloniality as a project aimed at epistemic decolonisation of the colonised. According to him, decoloniality as a theoretical framework has to de-colonise the mind at the same time it ought to unveil the totalitarian complicity of the rhetoric of modernity and the logic of coloniality (Quijano 2007:168–178). Scholars working within a decolonial and African thought in analysing blackness as a marker ought to locate their analysis within the social and epistemic location of Black bodies. In other words, the challenges facing Black people should not only be provincialised, but they should also move beyond the conditions of those in the US. This is because across the world, Black people have a similar experiences, whether in Australia, New Zealand, Africa or many other landscapes.

Anderson (1995:91) raised crucial and relevant matters concerning the Black theology project in the context of the US. It is important to highlight that these issues are located within the social and epistemic location of the African-American in the US. As such, they are provincialised. His chapter on Black theology aims to facilitate a deeper academic conversation on the role of Black theology in the US, its interpretative paradigms, the tools it applies and their relevance. Anderson (1995) lamented the fact that Black theology appears to focus on suffering and rebellion:

> Black theology would take its point of departure from black life and experience, which constitute the exceptional social location for a theology of black power. If white theology was viewed as an ideology of oppression, then black theology would become the ideology of liberation. Black theology's method is correlational. The task of the black theologian is to show the critical correlations existing between black life/experience and traditional theological categories (God, humanity, Christ, eschatology and so forth), between black religion and black radicalism …, and the correlations between the black people church and black theology. The sources of black theology are black people. (p. 92)

Anderson (1995:91) thus highlighted the hermeneutical paradigm of the Black theology project being the social and epistemic location of Black bodies within a white system. Key to Black theology, argued Anderson, is the Black experience, transformation of the Black body into a 'self-worth' within a system that has devalued them. This is a view that he disagreed with. He found it an essentialist and existentialist approach to the question of blackness. Biko (1978) stated the following:

> [C]olonialism is not satisfied merely by holding people in their grip and emptying the native's brain of all forms and content; by a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people and distorts, disfigures and destroys it. (p. 69)

In the engagement of Black theology with Western Christian theology, its interlocutors emanate from Western theology as an epistemological instrument of the colonial matrix of power. Put differently, it is essential to critically engage with it because such a theology has not only functioned as producing subjectivities and agents of coloniality, but it has performed disciplinary power in Foucauldian terms (Bernauer 2017:189). Western theology has also functioned as a form of gaze over Black bodies. This can be summarised in Biko (1978) assertion:

> At the heart of this kind of thinking is the realization by Black [*people*] that the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed. Once the latter has been so effectively manipulated and controlled by the oppressor so as to make the oppressed believe that his is a liability to the white man, then there will be nothing the oppressed can do that will really scare the powerful masters. (p. 68)

The social and epistemic locations of blackness

Anderson (1995) in his critique of Black theology states the following:

> The difficulty arises here: (a) blackness is a signification of ontology and corresponds to black experience, (b) Black experience is defined as the experience of suffering and rebellion against whiteness. Yet (c) both black suffering and rebellion are ontologically created and provoked by whiteness as a necessary condition of blackness, (d) Whiteness appears to be the ground of black experience, and hence of black theology and its new black being. Therefore, while black theology justifies itself as radically oppositional to whiteness, it nevertheless requires whiteness, white racism and white theology for the self-disclosure of its new black being and its legitimacy. (p. 91)

Since the colonial and imperial encounter, whiteness has used the presence of blackness as a marker, as a symbol of limits and a metaphor of an 'outsider'. Furthermore, it locates the impact and effectiveness of why anti-Black stereotypes achieved such remarkable power within the European culture and consciousness. It includes the key role this has played in constructing racial hierarchies. Scholars within the Africana thought have argued that by the 19th century, blackness represented the paradigm of racial Otherness, the marker of which was physically, mentally and culturally different from the 'civilised' European. MacMaster (2001) stated:

> The African negro has, on account of his structure being better known than that of any other of the lower races, always been taken as the antithesis of the white man of Europe. (p. 58)

It can be said that the construction of being, based on 19th century ideology, continues to locate blackness with absence and whiteness with presence. Wilderson III (2008) illustrated this view in his argument:

> For not only are Whites 'prosthetic Gods', the embodiment of 'full presence', that is, 'when a White is absent something is Absent', there is a 'lacuna in being', as one would assume given the status of Blackness but Whiteness is also 'the standpoint from which others are seen', which is to say that Whiteness is both full Presence and absolute perspectivity. (p. 98)

Grosfoguel's (2011) argument is essential in understanding how the concepts of social and epistemic location were applied in this study. Thus, the reference to the two concepts is applied in the same way that Grosfoguel applied them. He stated that:

> [*I*]t is important here to distinguish the 'epistemic location' from the 'social location'. The fact that one is socially located in the oppressed side of power relations does not automatically mean that he/she is epistemically thinking from a subaltern epistemic location. (p. 5)

Gordon (1997:4) argued that the Africana existential philosophy or what can be referred to as questions on ontological blackness are 'philosophical questions premised upon concerns of freedom, anguish, responsibility, embodied agency, sociality, and liberation'. He distinguishes between Black existential philosophy and existentialism by arguing that existentialism is 'a fundamentally European historical phenomenon', whereas Black existential philosophy is 'the existential demand for recognizing the situation or lived-context of Africana people's being-in-the-world'.

Missionary enterprise in South Africa: Colonial matrix of power and cultural revolution

In this section, I analyse the missionary enterprise within the 19th century context. Maldonado-Torres (2014:691) cited that the arrival of Christianity in South Africa formed part of the colonial machinery within the colonial matrix of power. Mothoagae (2014a:149) argued that the arrival of the missionaries at the Cape of Good Hope was essentially to render a service to a particular clientele. This was to enable the expatriates to cope with and adapt to the new geographical environment by providing necessary pastoral care, rituals, values, norms and symbolism familiar to them as stated by Mothoagae (2014b:153). As De Gruchy (1995:31) rightly stated, the presence of the missionaries as an extension of the presence of the Church was a cultural link between the old and the new. It is within this context that the performance of the colonial matrix of power must be understood, above all, locating it within the temporal and the imperial. In other words, the Christianisation of the indigenous South Africans intersected with colonisation and 'civilisation'. The Christianisation of Black people in South Africa not only functioned as a form of colonisation and 'civilisation', but it was also to produce a particular type of subjectivity. These subjects would not only be surveyed, but they would also function as agents and as agencies within the colonial matrix of power. Mbembe (2001) remarked:

> At the opposite pole, Christian monotheism based itself on the idea of universal dominion in time as well as in space. It evinced an appetite for conquest, of which conversions were only one aspect. (p. 226)

It is within this context that the technological machinery that was used on Black bodies to produce subjectivities for the empire must be engaged with. Such a production functioned at two levels: the imperial and spatial. As Mignolo (2007:162) reminded us, 'the formation of the modern/colonial world went hand in hand, in the sixteenth century, with theology; the eyes of God as the ultimate warranty of knowing'. He further reflected on Quijano (2000:215) definition of the colonial matrix of power, and argued that this matrix is positioned, organised and intertwined within the spatial/temporal and imperial/colonial transformations. The intersectionality of these spaces is demarcated as the colonial matrix of power. Mignolo (2007) argued that:

> The spatial/temporal and imperial/colonial differences are organized and interwoven through what Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano has articulated as the colonial matrix of power, which was instituted at the inception of the 'modern' world (according to the narratives told by European men of letters, intellectuals and historians) or the modern/colonial world (if we define it through the critical consciousness of dissidents Creoles and mestizos, as well as from oppressed, exploited and marginalized history of Indians and Blacks in the Americas). The rhetoric of modernity with its various distinctions, I have been arguing here, goes hand in hand with the logic of coloniality, which allows me to make the strong claim that coloniality is constitutive of modernity; that there is no modernity without coloniality. (p. 476)

The above definition of the colonial matrix of power shows how power operates in the spatiality of the modern world order within coloniality (Quijano 2000:533). In the context of blackness, performance of power as a discursive practice functioned at the level of ontology and spirituality. Black bodies were viewed not only as bodies that needed salvation, but also as objects of study, dislocation and disenfranchisement. From the perspective of the colonialist, colonialism, Christianisation and civilisation functioned as a disciplinary power in Foucauldian terms (Bernauer 2017:190). The conversion of indigenous people to Christianity was an act of disciplinary power performed by missionaries to advance colonialism and cultural revolution.

Whiteness, as the norm, finds its meaning within the context that Mignolo (2007a:163) articulated. Whiteness then as a normative includes the privilege and the right to impose culture, religion, oppress, penetrate, enslave, study, objectify, give and take life and infuse a soul, in other words, to make non-being into being. Black life is viewed as valueless. Wilderson III (2008) stated the following on the notion of value:

> Human value is an effect of recognition that is inextricably bound with vision. Human value is an effect of perspectivity. What does it mean, then, if perspectivity, as the strategy for value extraction and expression, is most visionary when it is White and most bland when it is Black? It means that 'to be valued [is to] receive value from outside of blackness.' (p. 98)

According to Quijano (2000), the colonial matrix of power operated within the domain of:

> [*E*]conomy (land appropriation, exploitation of labor, control of natural resources); control of authority (institution, army); control of gender and sexuality (family, education) and control of

> subjectivity and knowledge (epistemology, education and formation of subjectivity). (p. 256)

Therefore, to analyse how the colonial matrix of power functions, the point of departure should be with the missionary enterprise which functioned as a vehicle for colonial power. The missionary enterprise as a valuable element within the colonial matrix of power functioned as a mechanism within what was called the 'civilisational process' and this process entailed what colonialists deemed education, agricultural enterprises and health, to name but a few.

What the missionary enterprise wanted to establish was a 'normal society' or subjectivities for the empire based on the principles of the coloniser and the norms of whiteness. The African landscape and its people were seen as a virgin devoid of society and history waiting to be watered and tilled by the evangelical effort, whereas the Black habitus was viewed as a commodity, non-/semi-human, the missing link between humanity and animality (Mothoagae 2016:67).

The three elements, namely Christianisation (conversion), colonialisation and civilisation, as technologies of surveillance and power should be understood and analysed within the context of the colonial matrix of power as their function was to dismantle any forms of existing social organisation, culture, spirituality and knowledge systems to achieve cultural revolution or change (Bernauer 2017:191). This was based on the notion that anything that was not surveyed by a European eye was neither discovered nor existing. It is for that reason that Corrigan and Sayer (1985) argued that the emergence of the modern state and, by extension, the modern empire, was fundamentally an ideological project based on the notion of 'cultural revolution' in which authentic approaches of control were merged through 'rituals and routines of rule'. Therefore, the understanding of how the 'Other' is constructed ought to begin with an analysis of making subjectivities as part of the discursive practices within this matrix of power.

The missionaries did not only want to preach the gospel to the so-called heathens, they also wanted to bring about cultural change. Missionaries such as John Mackenzie used public rituals as a means to do so. Christianising the public rituals was an attempt to erode the politico-religious conditions. This he did with the hope that such rituals would die a natural death. The approach by Mackenzie in respect of Christianising or Westernising public rituals, as well as giving new meaning to the indigenous concepts and symbols, functioned as technology of surveillance and performance of colonial matrix of power, as Foucault (1996) reminded us:

> The fundamental codes of a culture those governing its language, its schemas of perception, its exchanges, its techniques, its values, the hierarchy of its practices – establish for every man, from the very first, the empirical orders with which he will be dealing and within which he will be at home. (p. xxii)

From Foucault's observation, it can be argued that for the missionaries, Christianity was synonymous with Western civilisation, norms and standards. Part of its machinery was the production of newspapers in the language of the Batswana. Mgadla and Volz (2006) state the following:

> The newspaper was edited by missionaries of the London Missionary Society (LMS) and printed on their press at Kuruman monthly between 1883 and 1896 … Most of these newspapers included contributions from African writers, but the general goal of the missionary editors was Christian instruction and promotion of European norms and values. (p. 25)

Volz (2007:349) observes that the letters to *Mahoko a Becwana 1883-1896* presents us with social institutions as modalities of power. It is in these letters that two elements forming the essential part of the colonial matrix of power become evident, namely what Mignolo referred to as the theo-politics of knowledge and the geo-politics of knowledge within the broader spectrum of the matrix. These letters not only illustrate how the authors of the letters through their writing give legitimacy to the regulatory body, namely the missionaries within the institution of the missionary society, but they also point to how governmentality as a mode of power regulated how they ought to think and write. The missionaries regulated how they wrote, and also used these techniques of knowledge production to infiltrate their cultural norms (Mgadla & Volz 2006:25). Thus, the performance of colonial power was to produce subjectivities (docile bodies) to function within the world order regulated both spatially and epistemologically by Western norms and standards. It is within this context that the question of blackness as both spatial (geo-politics of knowledge) and epistemological (theo-politics of knowledge) would be located, what Fanon referred to as the zone of non-being. Maldonado-Torres (2007:253) summarised this zone of non-being as follows: 'For Fanon, [B]lack is not a being or simply nothingness, Black is something else'.

Conversion[1] as a technology power and subjectification

Wa Thiong'o (1981) postulated that:

> [*T*]he biggest weapon wielded and actually daily unleashed by imperialism against that collective defiance [of the colonized] is the cultural bomb. The effect of a bomb is to annihilate people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. (p. 16)

The conversion of bodies into Christianity was key because converting them into Western culture and religion was in effect subjectification. At the same time, it was othering their identity. West (2016) stated:

> My story tells of how the Bible was brought to Southern Africa as part of a project of imperialism and trade, of conversion and civilisation, of colonisation and conquest; the story of how the

1.By this definition, every conversion ought therefore entail, at least in theory, a fundamental change in modes of thought and conduct on the part of the convert. From this point of view, it is implicit that the act of conversion should be accompanied by the abandonment of familiar landmarks, cultural and symbolic. This act means, therefore, stripping down to the skin (Mbembe 2001:228).

> missionaries and other colonial agents transacted with the Bible among African people; the story of how the Bible was translated from European languages to African languages; the story of how the Africans appropriated the Bible, wrestling it from the hands of those who brought it, the story of how the Bible, became a contested book, both a problem and a solution for the African communities; the story of how the Bible has been embodied by ordinary African women and men, with its narratives being located alongside African narratives; the story of the Bible's role in the public realm of South African life; in sum, the story of the South(ern) African Bible. (p. 2)

Olsen (2008) observed the following:

> Missionaries were the first group of Europeans who tried to achieve an understanding of native African culture, although their focus remained on the transformation and conversion of natives into civilised beings and Christians, rather than on a validation and preservation of African culture. (p. 23)

While Oslen's observation may be accurate, she failed to point out the epistemic power that the missionaries exerted over the formation and structuring of the indigenous languages. For instance:

> In Shrewsbury's[2] view, Christianity was synonymous with British culture, and therefore conversion necessitated an acceptance of both Christianity and the culture of its propagators. From this perspective, the beliefs of Africans were simply an agglomeration of superstitions, a view which the dearth of information on South African peoples did nothing to dispel. As Fast observes in the letters of Shrewsbury that he viewed Christianity as being synonymous with British culture. By converting to Christianity meant appropriating and assimilating to both Christianity and culture of the propagator (Fast 1994). In Foucauldian terms this was performance of power based on the notion of regimes of truth, norms and standards of the west.

From the above citation, Shrewsbury's view indicates how the discourse of 'truths' operated within the bigger scheme of things, namely the institutional frame of production. Evidently, to its propagators, such 'truths' meant the essential codes of culture governing its language, frame of reference, techniques, values, the hierarchical structure of practices and the empirical orders. Thus, conversion to Christianity essentially meant assimilation into British culture. Fast (1994), citing Shrewsbury's letters and journals, further stated that:

> Although Shrewsbury's descriptions of Xhosa culture were very detailed, he made little attempt to understand the underlying beliefs which generated these traditions. As a result, he did not realise that his message was usually incomprehensible to his listeners, not only through language differences, which were monumental – but because of the difference in worldview. (n.p.)

Shrewsbury (1994)'s observation pointed to the disparities between biblical discourse through which the discourse of conversion took place. The knowledge of the language was not to understand the culture and traditions of Africans. Rather, language was used as a tool of conversion, subjectification, creating a reservoir of bodies to serve the imperial agenda using biblical discourse. Another element was making available Christian literature in indigenous languages for the purpose of domesticating and making docile bodies. The conversion of Africans to Christianity was to rupture the African identity. Conversion functioned as the essential ingredient in bringing about cultural revolution, while knowledge of the indigenous languages was to rewrite, appropriate and colonise the African body as stated by Smit (1970:196). Conversion of Black bodies was the fulfilment of the 'Christian duty' of conquering, colonising (invading) and converting. Mbembe (2001) reminded us that:

> Whether dealing with Africa or with other non-European worlds, this tradition long denied the existence of any 'self' but its own. Each time it came to peoples different in race, language and culture, the idea that we have, concretely and typically, the same flesh, or that, in Husserl's words, 'My flesh already has the meaning of being a flesh typical in general for us all', became problematic. The theoretical and practical recognition of the body and flesh of 'the stranger' as flesh and body just like mine, the idea of a common human nature, a humanity shared with others, long posed, and still poses, a problem for Western consciousness. But it is in relation to Africa that the notion of 'absolute otherness has been taken farthest.' (p. 2)

Mbembe (2001) elaborated further on the essence and meaning of 'conversion':

> Therefore, from a theological point of view, conversion is a way of exercising violence against the state of mortality; the convert is supposed to move from death to life – or, in any event, to the promise of life. This tends to suggest that conversion always involves an act of destruction and violence against an earlier state of affairs, an accustomed state for which one seeks to substitute something different. This act of violence and destruction is always carried out in the name of a specific materiality, one that claims to oppose a system of truth to an order of error and falsehood. (p. 230)

Fundamentally, according to Mbembe (2001:231), 'conversion always presupposes an entry into the time of the other'. Conversion as a technology of power within the colonial matrix of power is a mechanism of epistemicide. On the graveyard of African indigenous knowledge, colonialism planted European memory. Institutions such as the church and schools played a fundamental role in establishing European memory, including exacting of colonial languages. Thus, from the perspective of cultural revolution, the introduction of the education system premised on the colonialist agenda was part of the broader colonial process of desocialising African people out of their cultural and historical contexts into zombies of colonialism. Wa Thiong'o (1981) emphasised that:

> [*F*]or colonialism, this involved two aspects of the same process: the destruction or the deliberate undervaluing of people's culture, their art, dances, religions, history, geography, education, orature and literature, and the conscious elevation of the language of the coloniser. The domination of people's language by the languages of the colonising nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonised. (p. 16)

2.William J. Shrewsbury was a missionary to the Eastern Xhosa people.

It can, therefore, be argued that conversion functioned within a broader machinery that was meant to establish effective mental control. Mbembe's (2001) definition of the epistemic implication of 'conversion' is as follows:

> The act of conversion is also involved in the destruction of worlds. To convert the other is to incite him or her to give up what she or he believed. Theoretically, the passage from one belief system to another ought to entail the submission of the convert to the institution and the authority-in-charge of proclaiming the new belief. In actuality, every conversion has always been, if only covertly, an operation of selection, has always required, on the part of the convert, an active exercise of judgment. Further it is also assumed that the person who is converted agrees to accept, in everyday life, the practical consequences of this submission and of this transfer of allegiance. […] By divesting himself or herself of previous beliefs, the neophyte is supposed to have shifted his or her center of gravity. A test or ordeal of de-familiarization and disorientation, conversion distances the convert from family, relatives, language, customs, even from geographical environment and social contacts – that is, from various forms of inscription in a genealogy and an imaginary. This distancing is supposed to allow the neophyte to situate himself or herself within an absolutely different horizon – a horizon that paganism, in its horror, can no longer attain or recuperate. (p. 228)

Mbembe (2001:226)'s definition is crucial in locating the impact of religion in the broader scheme of how, as a technology of power, it functioned within the colonial matrix of power.

The coloniality[3] of power: Black Lives Matter reclaiming the Black identity

Black Lives Matter as a discourse on the struggles of people recognises the coloniality of power as an ongoing invisible and visible presence of colonialism and imperialism. Biko (1978:30) stated that the 'ground for a revolution is always fertile in the presence of absolute destitution'. The flight from the self could be argued as beginning with what Mbembe (2001:225) referred to as image ontology. This is an aspect that Anderson does not address. Furthermore, Black Lives Matter as a movement and discourse raises the consciousness of Black people as its approach would be irrelevant in a colourless and non-exploitative egalitarian society. Thus, it becomes relevant like Black theology as a movement and discourse because it believes that an anomalous situation is a deliberate creation of the colonial matrix of power. The song by Brook Benton (1969) becomes relevant in locating how image ontology is performed on Black bodies:

> I have searched an open sky to find the reason why oh Lord, why Lord
>
> The colour of my skin it said to be of oil sin oh Lord why Lord
>
> No I cannot understand
>
> Never understand oh Lord why Lord why Lord
>
> I got to live and live and give much more than I can give oh
>
> Lord why Lord why Lord
>
> Lord in this world you made so secret I only
>
> Find problem and hatred oh why Lord why Lord
>
> I just can see to find any place my every move unsafe oh Lord why
>
> Lord why Lord tell me why Lord why oh Lord why
>
> Lord why long and be the strack must go on for
>
> Equal rights why can there be some harmony instead of.

The above lyrics echo Mbembe (2001:226)'s understanding of image ontology and emanate from the concept of perceptions and prejudices that one has about the other, based on facial appearances and skin colour. Image ontology is central in the process of epistemicide and spiritual epistemicide premised on cultural revolution, as it is the very prejudice that necessitates the need to convert, Christianise, civilise and colonise based on the perception of the outsider. One would argue that this is because historically, whiteness has projected its 'sins' onto a Black body, that is, lazy, criminal, rapist, addict, corrupt, whilst obscuring the system of racism that they uphold and exempting themselves from its forces, thus appearing progressive. It is through image ontology that the act of political erasure and spiritual epistemicide as a discursive practice becomes actualised within the broader scheme of the colonial matrix of power. Maldonado-Torres (2007) described coloniality as follows:

> Coloniality as a power structure, an epochal condition, and epistemological design, lies at the centre of the present world order that Ramón Grosfoguel correctly described as a racially hierarchised, imperialistic, colonialist, Euro-American-centric, Christian-centric, hetero-normative, patriarchal, violent and modern world order that emerged since the so-called 'discovery' of the 'New World' by Christopher Columbus. At the centre of coloniality is race as an organising principle that hierarchized human beings according to notions and binaries of primitive vs. civilised, and developed vs. underdeveloped. (p. 254)

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015:22)'s definition draws attention to the intersectionality of racial hierarchy, epistemological design and modern world order. Thus, the question of Black Lives Matter becomes critical and should be engaged within these intersectionalities. Racism then cannot be viewed as an event but as a system. This system must be analysed from the perspective of coloniality because the epistemological tools used to analyse the system are in themselves Western and constructed within a hierarchical racial order.

The liberation of people from oppression, colonisation, slavery, segregation and apartheid does not necessarily mean the end of the surveillance of Black bodies, rather, it means the system remains. For example, in the case of other African countries, the coloniser left, while the system remained. In South Africa, the coloniser remained, and the face changed. In the context of the US, the coloniser is not only present, but has modelled the system in such a way that the imperial world order surveys Black bodies as well as their entire humanity. This is referred to as coloniality of power. Coloniality of power or of being, according to

3.As coined by Quijano.

Maldonado-Torres (2007:11), is colonial relations of power that have left profound markers on the areas of authority, sexuality, knowledge and the economy, and also on the general understanding of being. This is a view that Anderson does not address, particularly in his critique of Black theology. Following Maldonado-Torres (2014:14)' argument, a definition of racism from a decolonial perspective becomes paramount. Grosfoguel (2011) defined racism as:

> [*A*] global hierarchy of superiority and inferiority along the line of the human politically, culturally and economically produced and reproduced for centuries by the institutions of the 'capitalist/patriarchal/western-centric/Christian-centric/modern/colonialworld-system'. (p. 5)

This definition illustrates that blackness as an ontological space needs to be understood from the social and epistemic location of the oppressed and marginalised as their marginalisation intersects with the geo-politics and the theo-politics of knowledge. Thus, to be is to be not racially marked at the level of colour, rather blackness is the embodiment of humans that are considered sub-human or non-human. They are not only categorised as such, but their humanity is in fact questioned such as negated in Fanonian terms (Fanon 1967:109). Their access to rights and recognition of their subjectivities, spiritualities, identities and epistemologies are denied. Blackness then becomes a narrative that takes place within the zone of non-being. It is in this zone that the further struggles experienced by Black people are performed through agencies, for example, alcohol abuse, poverty, gender abuse and social hierarchisation through constructed syndromes such as the 'O' factor in the case of the US and the *tender-preneurship* in the context of South Africa. Furthermore, the symbolism of blackness within the zone of non-being is an embodiment of those who are racialised not only in terms of their skin colour, but as inferior and 'thingified' in the words of Cesairé (1955:6) (thingification). Reflecting on racism in the US, Davis (2016:197) argued that the system of racism must be observed as having evolved throughout the history of the US. She (2016:197) stated that it 'has always involved criminalisation so that it is not difficult to understand how stereotypical assumptions about Black people being criminals persist to this day'. Racial profiling in the US has been part of the machinery of the coloniality of power that the system has performed on Black bodies. Quijano (2000) reminded us:

> In an imperial/capitalist/colonial world, race constitutes the transversal dividing line that cuts across multiple power relations such as class, sexual and gender relations at a global scale. This is what has become known as the 'coloniality of power'. (p. 234)

Quijano (2000:233)'s argument pointed to the Black existential condition within the colonial matrix of power (coloniality of power). In other words, blackness embodies the lived experiences of the oppressed. Its analytical departure emanates from the social condition (geo-politics of knowledge) within the zone of non-being. The social conditions within the zone of non-being are without their own struggles and challenges; these systemic conditions are perpetuated and constructed by the world order (coloniality of power and being)/colonial matrix of power that has continued to objectify Black bodies.

Maldonado-Torres (2007:242) argued that the modern forms of exploitation and domination (power) cannot be engaged or viewed outside the impact of colonisation, slavery, segregation, apartheid and capitalism. Wilderson III (2008) opined that the world cannot accommodate a black(ened) relation at the level of bodies [subjectivity]:

> Thus, Black 'presence is a form of absence' for to see a Black is to see the black, an ontological frieze that waits for a gaze, rather than a living ontology moving with agency in the field of vision. The Black's moment of recognition by the Other is always already Blackness, upon which supplements are lavished – *American, Caribbean, Xhosa, Zulu, Motswana, moSotho.* (p. 98, my emphasis)

The notion of Black Lives Matter as an existential call goes beyond the provincialisation of the Black struggle. It reflects the universal struggle of Black bodies within a racialised system, that Black bodies as they engage, they engage as Black, nothing but Black. The reclaiming of Blackness is at the level of agency, the recognition of the *imago Dei*, at the human level. At the philosophical level, the call of Black Lives Matter seeks to draw Black bodies into a consciousness which is ontologically Black. Black Lives Matter then becomes also a vehicle of Black Consciousness. The definition by Biko (1978) thus becomes crucial:

> [*B*]lack consciousness is in essence the realisation by the black men of the need to rally together with their brothers around the cause of their operation, the blackness of their skin and to operate as a group in order to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude. It seeks to demonstrate the lie that black is an aberration from the 'normal' which is white. It is a manifestation of a new realisation that by seeking to run away from themselves and to emulate the white man, … Black Consciousness, therefore, takes cognizance of the deliberateness of God's plan in creating black people black. (p. 49)

It is for that reason that Biko's understanding of Black Consciousness is as an essential instrument to counter white domination. Thus, Black Lives Matter at the existential level universalises the struggle of Black bodies to counter the Black inferiority complex as well as the white superiority complex. From the perspective of Black Consciousness expressed in Black Lives Matter, it is the need to critique power, at the same time bringing forth the centrality and locality of blackness. In doing so, it stretches beyond the colour line in its application of intersectionality as its analytical tool, while engaging with the social and epistemic location of the *damnés*.

In summation, while Anderson (1995:94) has critically engaged with the question of ontological Blackness, particularly, arguing for an attempt to go beyond it, his critique of Black theology fails to take into account the spatiality where Black people find themselves, which is the zone of non-being in Fanonian terms. In other words, Black people have continued to be subjected to the same system

operating within the coloniality of power. In his reflection on the abolition of slavery, W.E. Du Bois (1903) argued that the end of slavery was not going to solve the myriad of problems created by the institution of slavery. He further stated that you can remove the chains, but if you do not develop the institutions that would permit for the incorporation of hitherto enslaved people into a democratic society, slavery would not be abolished (Du Bois 1903). While in the context of South Africa, though apartheid may be abolished, the apparatus of the system remains in place. It is in the conditions of poverty, dislocation, unemployment and dispossession that the Black Lives Matter movement becomes relevant. It is in this context that the provincial struggle links with the global struggle, advancing a transnational solidarity. Black Lives Matter as a movement performs what I have referred to as intersectionality of struggle as well as acknowledging the existential ontological challenges that Black people experience. In Biko's (1978) words:

> The bible must continually be shown to have something to say to the black man to keep him going in his long journey towards realisation of the self. This is the message implicit in 'black theology'. Black theology seeks to do away with spiritual poverty of the black people. It seeks to demonstrate the absurdity of the assumption by whites that 'ancestor worship' was necessarily a superstition and that Christianity is a scientific religion. (p. 31)

Thus, Biko's observation is important in relation to Black theology as a theology that seeks to critique Western theology, which has performed spiritual epistemicide on Black bodies. This links the Black Theology Project in the US with the Black theology of South Africa, which illustrated the move from provincialised to global, an intersectionality of struggles advanced through transnational solidarity.

Black Lives Matter further challenges the provincialisation of the Black people experience – it says we cannot go on as usual. We cannot pivot the centre. We cannot be moderate. We have to be willing to stand up and say no with our combined spirits, our collective intellects and our many bodies. Furthermore, Ferguson, Charleston and Minneapolis have shown that the struggle for equality and freedom is far from over. They have also taught us that local issues have global ramifications. Black bodies are not yet liberated. Anderson's critique fails to address the question of blackness within the colonial matrix of power. It reminds us that 'Freedom is a constant struggle, Freedom is a constant struggle, Freedom is a constant struggle, O Lord, we've struggled so long. We must be free, we must be free' (Jones 2016:1).

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