"Decolonise, Don't Diversify": Discounting Diversity in the South African Academe as a Tool for *Ideological Pacification*

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Abstract

The problem of the South African university, and society in the same breath, is not so much that of governance or politics but ideology. The deepening realisation of the farcicality and impossibility of strategies, attendant ideologies and "master signifiers" of transformation (such as diversity, multiculturalism and rainbow nation) of the South African society and (whatever remains of) its institutions has never been more acute than now, when the insistence at meaningful change and the unanimous rejection, mostly by blacks, of the university (at least in its current form) have gained traction. This paper draws on Žižek's Lacanian theory of ideology to provide a counter-narrative and reading of official transformation consensus and ideologies like diversity, by highlighting their ethical liminalities. The underside of diversity's official claims to equality and justice are unmasked, and the terror and ironies of this liberal ideology are exposed, especially its refusal to recognise that whiteness (as a system) and justice can never coexist or inhabit the same space. Transformation discourse, of our kind, fashioned under diversity's register can never escape being appropriated by liberal ideology and practice, as yet another means to reaffirm its priorities.

Keywords: diversity; decolonisation; higher education; ideological pacification; transformation

Introduction

> The only emergency is the absence of emergency. (Martin Heidegger)

The South African university, like many institutions of higher education elsewhere, remains the custodian of coloniality, the reproduction of ordained violence against everything subaltern

and the preservation of *epistemic closure* (Harding 2011; Wilder 2013). Lewis Gordon conceives of the concept of *epistemic closure* as "when being black is all we need to know about that person's life. There is no further inquiry because knowledge of their being black brings knowledge claims to a close" (Williams 2001, 2). Such institutional cultures and the historical exclusion of the black student and intellectual from the South African epistemic corps and knowledge production stem from the fact that blacks have historically been defined as sub- or non-human and consigned outside of ontology (Sithole 2016).

Therefore, "how could the black, who by definition was not fully human and hence without a point of view, produce a portrait of his or her point of view" or knowledge? (Gordon 2000, 23). "How can that which is not fully human tell a story of human existence?" (Williams 2001, 1). Like Sartre and Fanon observed, a racist system, like ours, denies blacks their humanity, and the existential status of the Other/Self and renders them to "a zone of nonbeing" (Gordon 1995; Santos 2007). How then do you educate a "thing"? Reason and knowledge are, then, the preserve of those who are human, and in our instance the university becomes the exclusive provenance and prerogative of whites. Assertions that "there was no space for the Bantu" in the university/education by the father of apartheid, Hendrik Verwoerd (Kallaway 1984, 98), and recently that "Africa does not have philosophy" by the head of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Cape Town (D. Benatar) (cited by Ramoupi 2014a; 2014b) are illuminating. The South African academy is a colonial-apartheid invention and continually seeks to reproduce this status quo.

The current resurgence of the South African student movement across the country, actualised under the tropes of "#RhodesMustFall," "#FeesMustFall," "#OutsourcingMustFall" and "AfrikaansMustFall," reveals and animates black students' "urgency to struggle against expendability and the growing precarity of their existence," particularly in the university (and by the same token, society) (Simone 2016, 9). Students have mobilised with newly found critical tools and modalities of understanding, and have brought the historical question of black suffering once more to the fore. They denounce and view the untransformed university as a colonial monument and symbol, the preserve of inequality and the ideology of difference, and a vulgar expression of the brutal and violent anti-black society that South Africa continues to be. Nothing in its alienating iconography, epistemic landscape or educational system reflects their aspirations. In addition to the calls for the removal of colonial and apartheid-era statues and monuments, and exclusion of black students through exorbitant tuition fees, the removal

of Afrikaans as a language of instruction in universities has recently also been a central object of student resistance.

The politically and socially expedient genitives—"diversity," "multiculturalism," and "multilingualism"—for the articulation of the new South Africa and nation building have yet again been canvassed and summoned, by the liberal and right-wing political establishment (e.g., AfriForum and Solidarity) in the country, as ethical solutions against exclusion, epistemic injustice and colonising knowledge in the higher education sector. Laband (2015) characterises this protectionist stance against students' calls for the decolonisation of the university in South Africa when he laments that "[c]learly, students agitating for wholescale (if amorphous) transformations are not abiding by these multicultural principles" (Laband 2015, 19). His indifference and umbrage at the student movement deepens, as he equates the students' calls for the removal of colonial-apartheid symbols in universities to terrorist actions of the Islamic State in Assyrian Nimrud, Stalin's Holodomor and Mao's Cultural Revolution. The *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (1996) and *Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education* (1997), give expression to diversity as a rallying transformation principle, by committing to "create an enabling institutional environment and culture that is sensitive to and affirms diversity, promotes reconciliation" (DoE 1997, 1.13). Linguistic and demographic cultural diversity expressed through racial and gender staff equity and student enrolments is a defining strategy and indicator of higher education transformation in South Africa (Govinder, Zondo, and Makgoba 2013; Ramoupi and Ntongwe 2016). For Naidoo, the transformation of South African higher education "ranges from 'affirmation' or 'celebration' of diversity, to diversity as a strategy for embracing, or accommodating or engaging differences" (Naidoo 2015, 3). While Smith and Schonfeld speak of mounting evidence that support the idea that "faculty diversity (especially in race and gender) is linked to curricular change" (Smith and Schonfeld 2000, 17), the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions in 2008, led by Crain Soudien, was contrarian (DoE 2008). They established that racism, white institutional culture and epistemic exclusion of black students and staff remained pervasive in higher education institutions, despite institutional policies promoting diversity and multiculturalism being in place. This gives credence to the incipient conviction within the black student movement that diversity as an indicator for social transformation is a phantom which in its hollowness embodies deception.

Diversity as an arbiter for the coloniality of the South African academe is seen as errant and a public performance by the prevailing academic regime.

But, maybe instead of the temptation to readily dismiss Smith and Schonfeld's assertion as scandalous or even desperate, perhaps we should risk the antithetical conjecture and see that the real truth about diversity is situated in its/these very exaggerations. It is obvious to see where the fault of Smith and Schonfeld's reasoning lies. The very question of what blacks are being included in, seems to escape their gaze, hence the jump to equating mere inclusion with the very power and control of the institution to the extent of changing the whiteness of the institution. One need not go too far to see disparities between what is said and done. In many cases, it is as if just having diversity policies is in itself the evidence of the university being inclusive/transformed. The statistics of the attrition rate and undergraduate completion rates of black students as opposed to that of white students also betray their supposed inclusion. As such, inclusion read as a result of increasing enrolment rates that do not take into account the drop-out rate and completion rates of black students is only a farce. In any case, the leadership and system of most universities continue to uphold whiteness as a rule—by continuing a ruling on norms that impacts (negatively for blacks) the recruitment, retention and promotion of academic staff (Ahmed 2012). The number of black professors in the country is testament to this fact. Moreover, in many South African higher education institutions, diversity has sidestepped race in favour of gender (mostly white women), sexuality, experience, disability, country of birth and socio-economic status (working class). For diversity to amount to anything (other than the public relations of many universities), it must at least disturb the power relations and whiteness of the institution, otherwise it collapses into nothing and is irrelevant. Another absurdity of the diversity/inclusion speak, such as the like of Smith and Schonfeld, is its refusal to recognise invasion and settler colonialism in the makeup of South Africa. Diversity and inclusion represent complementary discourses that call on whiteness to only relent and not necessarily pay for its crimes, and as qua master, to confer "some" citizenship to blacks, thereby preserving colonial power relations—the situation that sees blacks, as qua slaves, owing their freedoms (in this case, their existence in the university) to the mercy of the white master's kindness.

As such, we must then ask, what is diversity supposed to mean? Are diversity and decolonisation compatible? Are they mutually inclusive commitments? Or is diversity an ontologically independent category to decolonisation? In many ways, the above arresting

questions put a spotlight on a construct (i.e., diversity) we hardly ever take time to call into question. For instance, Troyna (1987, 307–10) differentiates diversity and decolonisation projects thus:

> On the one hand are those committed to cultural pluralism. In this view, teaching from a multicultural perspective prioritizes the inclusion and promotion of ethnic minority lifestyles and cultures in the curriculum and teaching aids. The rationale for this approach derives from the assumption that it encourages white students' empathy with (and tolerance of) ethnic minority groups and mitigates their prejudices and discrimination against those groups … On the other hand, there has been the more recent emergence and gradual diffusion of antiracist conceptions of educational change. Here the concern is with white institutions rather than with black groups. That is to say, "us" rather than "them." In this model we find less emphasis on the lifestyles and cultures of ethnic minority groups and greater attention to structures which produce, sustain and legitimate values and practices which help to maintain racial inequality.

It would seem that the defining features of the antiracist decolonial approach, lacking and overlooked in the diversity/multicultural project in South Africa, are "system" and "structures." With the benefit of Slavoj Žižek's ideas around *ideological pacification*, this paper will attempt to provide a critical reading that disarticulates and rearticulates the putative idea of linguistic and demographic cultural "diversity" as a defining strategy for transformation in higher education in South Africa, to demonstrate the conceptual messiness ensconced in it, and to deconstruct the violence consubstantial with it. Reflections from decolonial theory are also integrated in the critique/analysis to further explore the dynamics around diversity as practised in the South African university. I map the term conservative-liberal onto it and contend that the convenient recourse to the concept is fraudulent, in that diversity is reducible to a pluralism constituted in subjugation, and to borrow from Theodor Ardono, it is somewhat a corollary of the *totally administered world* of blacks. As Erickson correctly observes, "[t]he shift from exclusion to inclusion of minority cultures accomplishes only the illusion of progress … [I]t is based on a superficial pluralism that becomes another way of maintaining the status quo" (Erickson 1992, 113). Based on diversity's logic (maybe not readily apparent), the issue of white privilege and privileging, including its role in global power relations, and *any discourse* that disturbs white people's comfort and provides critical inspection of institutionalised racism must be proscribed and silenced.

In this paper, the flawed idea that changing the face of the system (i.e., demographic representation in the university) is indelibly linked to or will necessarily result in changing the system itself is challenged. I dissent against the standard thinking that diversity (especially in

race and gender) is linked to curricular change and by extension decolonisation or is by itself decolonisation. This essay is attentive and alive to the competing voices around this subject, but intervenes with most scholars that diversity is not redeemable and has no pretence about who it benefits: whiteness. The succeeding sections will address Žižek's (and to some extent other authors) far-reaching ideas on "ideological pacification" or "ideological control" and how they illuminate the often ignored workings of official ideologies like diversity, namely, the implicit conviction that whiteness is indispensable and blackness is extra. Diversity is herein read as the South African embodiment of the idea of the *Denkverbot* and seen as prevailing at the cost of so many things, not least decolonisation and justice.

Žižek's Concept of Ideological Pacification

In their debunking of ideology, Slovene Lacanians challenge the belief that people's subjugation to a repressive social and political system is inseparably connected to "their interpellation by a pervasive ideological framework or their inability to imagine their own possibilities of freedom" (Day 2004, 11; Žižek 2001). The Slovenes' response to Soviet-style socialism in Europe and its eventual decline into some sort of ritual that all people complied with, but no one truly accepted, is illustrative of this point (see Havel et al. 1985). This argument can similarly be extended to the current South African socio-political milieu. Everyone in South Africa recognises the *inanity* of the official ideology (i.e., rainbow nation, reconciliation, multiculturalism, diversity, equality, and multilingualism), and the emptiness of the attendant ideological rituals, but the rituals are nonetheless performed. In this case, the dominant ideology essentially maintains a *performative efficacy*, without any permeation into the people's consciousness. As such, contestable policies like diversity (as effective ideological pacifiers) engender voluntary servitude on the side of the masses.

Žižek (2002) avers that social and political systems cannot be accepted as legitimate when they are buoyed by effective *fetishes*. A fetish for Day (2004, 12; original emphasis) entails

> a form of ideology that doesn't frame the whole world for us in such a way that we choose to interact with it in such and such a manner. It is rather some *attachment* we have, some object or practice that *enables us to carry on participating in social practices we no longer necessarily believe in*. The fetish doesn't tell us how the world is, but it convinces us that *it* is what is really important, and thus offers a sort of compensation for our involvement in what would otherwise be traumatic rituals.

Ideological fetishes create false consciousness and incredulous positions towards existent social concerns (Day 2004).

For Žižek (2002), the critique of "ideological pacification" or "ideological control" here is therefore the critique of ideological *pacifiers* (e.g., diversity, equity and reconciliation) and their role in preserving unjust social and economic conditions and relations. Day's (2004, 13; original emphases) description best instantiates the functioning of these pacifiers in our society and deserves a long quotation:

> Just as when an infant is crying, because it is distraught over some lack or discomfort—dirty diapers, hunger, wanting attention, etc.—parents will stick a pacifier in the infant's mouth, a fetish that will so engross the child's attention that s/he will forget about those other "real" needs or wants; like the distraught infant, mass culture offers up certain pacifiers as compensation for social actors' exploitation, subjugation, or marginalization in social life. "Yes," we are told, "life is hard, but that portion of your life in which you are oppressed is not what is really important or fulfilling—SUCK ON THIS INSTEAD." The pacifier is, in Lacanian terms, the "*objet petit a*", or the object that becomes secretly the foundation for a way of relating globally to our whole world. In other words, it is a particular object that becomes invested with a universal significance for our entire life, much of which "in reality" has nothing to do with our fetish object.

In our higher education, diversity is exactly this Lacanian pacifier, intended to ward off any insistence at "Real" change or inclusion by preoccupying and exciting (and even worse blackmailing) the historically excluded black student and academic with tokenistic and symbolic change. Here, renaming institutions to include African names, exoticising official communications with translations in African languages, changing brochures, updating websites (to include black faces/bodies), and employing key black administrators are prioritised while changing the whiteness of the institution that dictates who belongs, who succeeds, what academic work is valuable or receives funding or gets published, is ignored.

In South Africa, all of these fetishes and ideological pacifiers like diversity and the fetishism of democracy and reconciliation impose what Žižek terms a fundamental *Denkverbot* ("prohibition to think") regarding social relations of oppression (Day 2004; Valentić 2007). We are told to not complain about the illegitimate white privilege and privileging, and that what is truly important is social cohesion and reconciliation; demanding a transformed system and removing the privileging of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in some South African universities will merely undermine this course. The *Denkverbot* is more so the ideological privileging of the fetish object than a "prohibition of thought," to the extent that it seems

offensive to react against other social malignancies whilst the fetish still impends or consoles. True to Žižekian analyses, neo-liberal ideologies like diversity are often portrayed by their exponents as being discourses about "Things" (in our case the university) most sacrosanct to defile with politics. The purpose of a *Denkverbot* in a liberal-democratic order like ours is to always warn us of how things could have been much worse and entrap us into some conformist resignation: "look at our Zimbabwean neighbours and see for yourself what will happen if we take radical positions about transformation!" So, following Žižek's logic, aspirations for "diversity" as a transformation objective in South Africa only serve the white compatriot. It resembles a truly empty commitment in the same way as "equality," "reconciliation" and "rainbow nation." For Valentić the *Denkverbot* "displays itself in a globally dominant political correctness used and abused to put off conflicts in the public sphere, to get rid of all social inequalities in language and thus to pretend they do not exist in the society" (Valentić 2007, 5).

In this regard, diversity embeds a particular form of politics in its fictitious trappings, one that at once mirrors and perverts the very politics and ideology of South Africa's proposed social order. Diversity also then serves as a form of ideology and more specifically, as an ideal ideological extension of the prevailing racist system and coloniality in South Africa. The motif of all myths is invariably the same in that they all aim to obfuscate and so does diversity. Under its facade, the anti-black whites-privileging racist system allegedly purges its historical ideology of subjugation and exclusion of blackness, and embraces an ideology of inclusion. The ideology returns in a sort of empty liberal ideal, namely diversity, that harbours some mild propositions of the earlier order and preserves the persistence of the past. Indeed, behind this entire demographic but superficial shift, diversity functions politically and ideologically in exactly the same way as, and is the absolute ideological supplement for, systemic racism.

Diversity as a Master Signifier

In 2014, the author of this article was invited to contribute a chapter to an edited book on psychological assessment in South Africa. Together with my co-author, we decided to write a chapter on the critical history of intelligence testing in South Africa. The chapter, as expected, captured the complicity of psychology as a field in providing intellectual and "scientific" support for the racist ideology and relayed the sordid history of the use of intellectual test scores across racial groups by the then apartheid government to buttress racist policies. One might

wonder why this little anecdote is of significance to this essay. I beg your indulgence though, because the editor of the said book, as part of the initial review, provided us with the following feedback on the chapter, which I find aptly captures the spirit of my argument herein. We were advised and I quote, to "[r]e-think the use of black/white. At some places it is important to make this differentiation yet you could perhaps refer to diversity rather than black/white at places where this could be used. Similarly, in section 3, you could reduce the emphasis that is placed on black/white, perhaps even deleting some of this content."

So, I hear you ask, what does this "diversity" mean? Goduka operationalises diversity as "the state of being diverse or different and may be based on ethnicity, race, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion or any point of difference" (Goduka 1996, 68). Etymologically, the term originates from the ancient Latin word *divertere*, which means "turn aside" or "preclude" or "exclude" (Cimini and Moreno 2009). It is the source of the English word "divert," which means to "distract" or "sidetrack." As such, latent within the construct and aspirations for diversity in higher education in South Africa lies the meaning, then, to engage in acts obfuscation, diversions and distractions from decolonisation. The above breakdown, if accepted, is devastating for diversity as a possible political and transformation intervention and reveals that it may after all be a false option. In many ways, diversity as a transformation agenda, as Valentić viewed similar concepts, collapses into *political interpassivity*, that is the act of "doing things not to achieve something, but to prevent something from really changing" (Valentić 2007, 6).

Diversity, as deployed as a decolonial strategy in South African higher education, reduces decolonisation to what Tuck and Yang (2012) term the "metaphorization of decolonisation." For Tuck and Yang, this "metaphorization of decolonization makes possible a set of evasions, or 'settler moves of innocence', that problematically attempt to reconcile settler guilt and complicity, and rescues settler futurity" (Tuck and Yang 2012, 1; Mawhinney 1998). No wonder then that gesturers to achieve a decolonised academe in South Africa have floundered, and remain pointedly fixed between, to borrow from de Oliveira Andreotti et al.'s (2015) cartography of decolonisation in higher education, the "everything is awesome" space (no recognition of the necessity of decolonisation) and the "soft-reform" space (downplaying the need for decolonisation, but there is increased access and conditional inclusion of racialised indigenous subjects into the mainstream based on a liberal understanding of inequality).

Under this register, the knowledges and experiences that the excluded groups occasion to the institution "are rarely valued, except perhaps through tokenistic 'recognitions' of cultural diversity that make the institution appear to be welcoming, but otherwise do not threaten the status-quo of their operations … [and] therefore tend not to significantly disrupt existing distributions or structures of power, as regards to both knowledge and resources" (de Oliveira Andreotti et al. 2015, 32). Ultimately this process simultaneously asserts the conditionality of black students' and faculty's inclusion, and prioritises increased access for blacks at the expense of questioning what is being accessed. The prevailing diversity discourse and related extant motifs, as synonyms for decolonisation in higher education, ironically recentre whiteness, in that they provide refuge and extend innocence to the settler (Tuck and Yang 2012). Like Tuck and Yang (2012, 4–9) correctly observe, this exercise

> ultimately represent[s] settler fantasies of easier paths to reconciliation … The absorption of decolonisation by *settler social justice frameworks* is one way the settler, disturbed by her own settler status, tries to escape or contain the unbearable searchlight of complicity, of having harmed others just by being one's self. The desire to reconcile is just as relentless as the desire to disappear the Native; it is a desire to not have to deal with this problem anymore.

In this regard, settler moves of innocence entail and perpetuate efforts to appease settler anxiety, feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up power or privilege, that is, without instituting any changes at all.

If anything, diversity as a strategy for social justice flows from fidelity to the pre-1994 conciliatory political settlement/compromise and the post-1994 rainbowism, which precludes any serious questioning of how such a political order is complicit in the continued privileging of whiteness and coloniality. It pantomimes a grotesque spurious social inclusion that is politically imposed, a farce. Bantu Biko (2004, 72) offers the following intervention on the futility of diversity and likeminded narratives:

> The problem is white racism and rests squarely upon the laps of the white society. The sooner the liberals realise this, the better for us blacks. Their presence amongst us is irksome and of nuisance value. It removes the focus of attention from essentials and shifts it to ill-defined philosophical concepts that are both irrelevant to the black man and merely a red-herring across the track. White liberals must leave us blacks to take care of our own business while they concern themselves with the real problem—white racism.

Diversity attends to liberal sensitivities and is considered herein to be an apparatus of what Sithole (2016) terms the "white liberal façade." Sithole explains the concept thus: "This is a

façade being conferred by white subjects in their capacity *qua* masters where the black subject is told that there is no difference, whereas there is (Fanon [1952] 2008)" (Sithole 2016, 25). He continues: "Accordingly, for the black subject to feature in the white liberal register it should act white in order not to be absent since politics are fashioned in such a way that white liberal sensibilities are guarded and advanced. This also means claiming inclusion in the register that excludes … To be excluded means not to exist, and what does not exist cannot be afforded the demands that are justified as being rightful to what exists" (Sithole 2016, 26–7). As such, to be in the register of diversity is to evade the responsibility of having to bring an end to what makes the black subject the inconsequential other. Similar to what Sithole thought of related concepts, diversity seeks to "rehabilitate the scandal of whiteness and refashion it as some form of moral crusade while hiding behind the notion of humanity" (Sithole 2016, 27). Diversity work involves generating "the right image; it is about changing perceptions of whiteness, rather than changing the whiteness of the organisation" (Ahmed 2012, 34). It is how we discourse about race to guarantee the white establishment's refuge. In essence, it propagates the violence of silence and forgetting—ignoring historical and continuing subjugations and power relations by rejoicing in the multi-coloured present.

Ultimately, diversity is just a perfidious semblance of itself; it's a travesty. Extreme as this position might appear, if one is not to accede to the reconciliation fetish and unconditionally suspend devotion to our cherished myths (e.g., the rainbow nation) and the zombifying *Denkverbot* governing our society, then one will see that diversity as a system of social transformation is simply a ridiculous caricature whose apparition serves to conceal and protect the continuing privileging of whites and whiteness. Its pacifying consolation is strangely impotent; this sterility is confirmed by the continued wretchedness of blackness, epistemic injustice and the legitimising of the existing power relations in the academy. Its contours are discernible in its insistent exoticisation and indifference towards the subalternised subject. Its all-inclusive motif tendentially excludes and silences the historical and current injustices in the system and protects whiteness' disavowed attachment to illegitimate privilege. The supposed "insider" (blacks) is after all ironically also an "outsider." As such, diversity imposes on blacks an even more severe trauma in that it does not allow for reflectivity and interrogation of white mythology by whites. As a result of the ambivalence of the transformation conditions imposed by diversity, race almost immediately becomes absent and disappears in its discourse.

Spivak (1999) captures this fact aptly when she offers this observation: "the mainstream has never run clean … part of mainstream education involves learning to ignore this absolutely, with a sanctioned ignorance" (constitutive disavowal) (Spivak 1999, 2). Here, I submit that diversity should also be seen as a vocation of "sanctioned ignorance" and serves to reproduce colonialist structures (Mayblin 2013). Mayblin (2013, 94) explains that the

> charge of "sanctioned ignorance" is not merely the suggestion of an omission, an angle on analysis as yet unexplored by chance. It gives agency to the omitter. Indeed, to the collective academy. It is a purposeful silencing through the dismissing of a particular context as being irrelevant. This is not necessarily an issue of individual malice but an institutionalised way of thinking about the world.

Spivak contends that this manifests as a result of the denial of the history of colonialism-apartheid and the unequal balance of power between whites and blacks in the world (de Oliveira Andreotti et al. 2015). The result becomes a discourse in which colonialism-apartheid is either discounted or placed firmly in the past, so that it appears as if it has long ended and does not have any effect on the contemporary state of affairs (de Oliveira Andreotti et al. 2015). For Kuokkanen (2007, 154),

> such ignorance occurs at the individual and institutional levels, and assumes both passive and active forms. In the first, there is a refusal to acknowledge, learn, and know the epistemes of the marginalized scholar, in the second there is an active denial of their scholarship—both of which, are mutually reinforcing. The exclusion of subaltern knowledge from the academy keeps the Western epistemic hegemony, while upholding "privileged innocence" in the accountability for or connivance in this "epistemic violence."

For Spivak (1999) the "liberal multiculturist metropolitan academy" is essential in muting and tokenising the subaltern voice and propagating "sanctioned ignorance" or in Kuokkanen's case "epistemic ignorance."

According to Kuokkanen, Spivak's argument reveals "the academic conditions of intellectual representation—liberal multiculturalism, tolerance, diversity—preclude the recognition and hearing of indigenous epitemes" (Kuokkanen 2008, 65). For Kuokkanen (2008, 70–1), if the subaltern is given any recognition it is

> relegated to a mere gesture of tokenism as in officially, publically acknowledging those considered "minorities" or "marginalized" and then quickly forgetting them and continuing "business as usual" … Could such "gestures of convenience" mark an attempt of neo-colonial discourse to fabricate its allies in a new way, as suggested by Spivak (1993, 57)? Does such a discourse suggest an exchange (which is a tit-for-tat relation, not a gift) that agrees to recognize

"the indigenous other" for a conciliatory cooperation as native informants, "add-ons" or consultant … Or could it be argued that it is better than anything; that it is a good starting point?

But, Spivak (Danius, Jonsson, and Spivak 1993, 58) disapproves of this "starting point" discourse by arguing that

> one must begin somewhere is a different sentiment when expressed by the unorganized oppressed and when expressed by the beneficiary of the consolidated disciplinary structure of a central neo-colonialist power … If the "somewhere" that one begins from is the most privileged site of a neo-colonial educational system, in an institute for the training of teachers, funded by the state, does that gesture of convenience not become the normative point of departure?

Within diversity work, there is an abundance of a number on things, of representation in the form of racial and gender demographics, conformist resignation, nonfreedoms and so on, but decolonisation being not neo-liberal itself is absent.

All of this is possible because, as for Žižek (also so for the above cited authors, albeit with a different grammar), official ideologies or rallying political terms like diversity are "master signifiers"—devoid of any meaning, that is, "signifiers without signifieds" in Lacanian terms. The odd thing, although decisive, about official political arrangements (like diversity in our instance), for Žižek, is that no one knows what they quite mean or refer to, or has seen the tangible objects they refer to. The referent/object signified by any "master signifier" will always evade complete comprehension and yet they are politically effective in that they facilitate identification between subjects. Such political ideologies are successful in eluding the masses (and sustaining political consensus) because they invoke what Žižek (1989) terms *sublime objects of ideology*. Sublime objects refer to what political subjects believe their ruling authority's ideological concepts (e.g., rainbow nation and multiculturalism) refer to. These are normally extra-ordinary "Things" that they are prepared to sacrifice their lives or freedoms for. Political ideologies (e.g., diversity) offer subjects a particular manner of experiencing the world in such a way that an inability to do so can seem as evidence of how ineffable, great and sublime their implied objects are. That is, the subject is given the idea that the political authority and its predominant ideologies are grounded in some bigger or sublime "Truth." Under this register, it seems that it is not required that blacks think that policies around diversity are just, only that they are incumbent. For Žižek's Lacanian theory of ideology, the ruling regime succeeds in achieving this by grounding itself in ideological fantasies that simultaneously sustain blacks' (false) sense of individual freedom and the idea that the political authorities are themselves

driven by some greater good or truth (the "Real") other than political reasons (Žižek 1997). For Žižek, political belief or "belief through the Other" is also central here. The black subject need not grasp the exact meaning of "master signifiers" (e.g., rainbow nation, diversity, reconciliation) which they identify with, precisely because their political belief is interceded by their identification with Others (e.g., Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu) and belief that Others know what they are doing.

The functioning of political beliefs is undergirded by what Žižek terms "ideological fantasy": an intricate system of belief that organises how individuals come to understand what violates their principles and limits. According to Žižek (1997), the entire process of humanising people simultaneously involves the surrender and deprivation of *jouissance* (i.e., primal object of desire), justified under the guise of socio-political order and the law. Within this process, subjects are forced, through the observance of linguistically mediated socio-political norms, to seek this particular "lost Thing" (the "*objet petit a*" in Žižekian terms), delaying gratification and accepting injustice. For Lacan (as for Žižek), these fantasies are subliminal structures that permit individuals to accept the traumatic loss involved in the repression of *jouissance* by the law. All political regimes have a set of written rules that insists that their subjects surrender *jouissance* for the benefit of the nation (e.g., South African Constitution and reconciliation ideals). However, the regime's laws can only be successful by also containing a body of tacit prescripts which, in addition to repressing *jouissance*, inculpate subjects in a guilty pleasure of this deprivation. For Žižek, this is akin to the "pleasure-in-pain" related to the experience of the sublime.

The truth of political ideologies is contained in what they do and not necessarily what they say. Diversity, as a transformation strategy, alleges neutrality; it is an empty gesture. The South African academe is diverse in its effigy, and yet it is always highly exclusive. Diversity invokes a false consciousness on the side of the black student and faculty, inclusion that is paradoxically exclusive. It remains exclusive through the financial exclusion of black students, and preclusion of the black academic and epistemic justice resistances. Obfuscation, posturing and prevarications reign ascendant in the South African university, especially because it has continuously been insulated from the social pressures for change in the country through well-seeming sophistry through the invocation of intellectual and academic freedom. Ironically, the university in South Africa demands its freedom and yet denies freedom and justice to the black student and staff. Diversity is predicated on a certain *unfreedom*—a "symbolic forced choice,

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reduced freedom or even an acceptance of what cannot be changed" (Zeiher 2016, 237). It compels the excluded (blacks) to at once be the warder of an exclusionary academic system that engenders their subjection. For Žižek (1989), official ideologies like diversity (in our universities and societies) justify their necessity and validity by invoking quasi-scientific metanarratives. These metanarratives are narratives concerning reconciliation and multiculturalism—and both profess to know a deeper/sublime "Truth" about what blacks want, thereby both justify the sacrificing of real change and justice for black subjects.

The Decolonial Option as the Only Way to Traverse the Fantasy

Žižek's oeuvre offers us a technical locution, "traversing of the fantasy," for the process through which we come to terms with the fact that the sublime objects of our political authorities' ideologies are fetish objects that only seek to deny us our political agency. This "traversing the fantasy" involves simultaneously the subject developing self-awareness and the emergence of radical ideological postures about socio-political order and conditions, and repressed *jouissance*. Žižek (1996) conceives of this "traversing of the fantasy" with regards to an "Act" (capital "A"), far removed from typical human action and language. Ordinary action and discourse usually fail to question the setting of socio-political conditions within which they reside. By an "Act," Žižek (1996) suggests an action that "touches the Real" of what the socio-political order has politically frustrated or abandoned, and that which it may not admit openly to without the possibility of political costs. This "Act" broadens and alters the same political and ideological limits of what is sanctioned within a regime (socio-political order), with the aim of occasioning new boundaries that may herald the subject's realisation of its own justice and freedoms. Decolonisation, as it is by now apparent, is herein seen as a characterisation of this "traversing of the fantasy" or "Act."

What will it then truly entail to decolonise the South African university? Will it demand of us to make a shift from "soft reforms" to either "radical reforms" or an embrace of the "beyond-reform" space (de Oliveira Andreottie et al. 2015)? That is, to agitate for moves to recentre and reaffirm blackness, undermine epistemological dominance, resettle material resources and somewhat repatriate indigenous life and thought. Should it similarly mandate us to reinvent and reactualise the discourse beyond the usual definitions and constellations of ideologically embedded symbols of liberal fundamentalism such as political correctness and diversity? But this might at once also force us to reckon with the fact that the university in South Africa, as

we know it, may be irreparable. This is so because the university is an integral part of modernity (Alfred 2004; Roy 2006; Smith 2009) and as such doing away with modernity might as well mean doing away with the university, at least in its present form. This observation should be easy to defend because the university is viewed by many as a "nonplace" of refuge for escaping modernity and its violence (Moten and Harney 2004). For Moten and Harney, the *undercommons* should "engage in their own, profoundly undisciplined 'outcast mass intellectuality' … committed not to critique and improvement of the university, but rather to 'abolition as the founding of a new society' (2004, 107, 114)" (Moten and Harney, cited in de Oliveira Andreottie et al. 2015).

Whatever position one defers to among the abovementioned desperate attitudes, a consistent assault on coloniality and all its manifestations should embark on a process of decolonial justice and repel the favour for the settler by the preference for blacks (Maldonado-Torres 2007). In this way, decolonisation will afford us a hermeneutic turn and as a liberatory practice it will, unlike diversity, oblige us to assume a certain partisanship and choose sides with the oppressed.

Within decolonisation, the white academic regime should be forced to come to terms with its collusion in the violence of the colonial empire. It begets a restorative justice, a justice that privileges the aspirations of those damaged by the racist colonial-apartheid establishment and not the preservation of the complicit institutions, as is currently the case with the South African academe. Decolonisation in this instance carries with it hermeneutics of provocation, to upset and alternate the very practice of knowledge production and the material substructure underlying it. For Maldonado-Torres, "[t]his demands a decolonial turn: a shift in knowledge production of similar nature and magnitude to the linguistic and pragmatic turns. It introduces questions about the effects of colonisation in modern subjectivities and modern forms of life as well as contributions of racialized and colonised subjectivities to the production of knowledge and critical thinking" (2007, 261–62). He further sees the decolonial turn as "the definitive entry of enslaved and colonised subjectivities into the realm of thought at before unknown institutional levels" (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 262).

Spivak recommends confronting what she terms "Eurocentric arrogance of conscience—a simplistic assumption that as long as one has sufficient information, one can understand the 'other'" (Spivak 1999, 171). To transcend the "Eurocentric arrogance of conscience," the academy must desist from claiming to know the "other" and commit to engaging in the

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persevering work of learning from other's epitemes (Kuokkanen 2008; Spivak 1996). Spivak associates "doing one's homework" with unlearning one's privilege, "unlearning one's learning" and "learning to learn from below" (Danius, Jonsson, and Spivak 1993, 25).

Decolonising the university, then, is also about going beyond the mere destruction of colonial-apartheid tokens and iconography, or the canonisation of a few African scholars and texts. But, decolonisation, as Ngugi wa Thiong'o (2004) argues, "is about rejecting the centrality of the West in Africa's understanding of itself and its place in the world. It is about 're-centering' ourselves, intellectually and culturally, by redefining what the centre is: Africa" (Mbembe 2015, 17). For Fanon (1963, 36 cited in Prinsloo 2016), decolonisation is "similarly a process of remaking—a violent phenomenon that has as its goal the creation of a new humanity." And for Prinsloo (2016, 165) this demands of the South African university to face up to "the epistemic violence inherent in …. knowledges which 'authorises thinking about Others in ways that enables political and economic violence to be enacted on the bodies of subject men and especially women' (Pillay 2015)." Decolonisation, in our instance, will then call for a distance from the "Given" and perhaps also only mean a refusal to participate in the structures of our subjugation.

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