

WANDILE

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AS A DECOLONIAL feminist scholar, I have been experimenting with decolonial feminist pedagogy in the classroom, looking at strategies to decolonise the curriculum from the perspective of a feminist ethics of care.¹ The focus of my work is based on strategies for flipping the classroom towards healing and engaged scholarship. Being a Black womxn scholar carries with it the task of holding space for other Black scholars in a world that is anti-Black and, more importantly, marginalised. In this world, the sheer weight of systems of domination bears more heavily on Black womxn. For this reason, the focus on mental health becomes imperative towards healing as a way to pushback against systems of domination.

“Call me by my name” is a decolonial demand initiated by Wandile Dlamini, a member of #RhodesMustFall (#RMF) student movement at the University of Cape Town (UCT) in South Africa. Wandile identifies as gender non-binary and is also a queer digital warrior doing activism for trans, queer, and gender non-binary people by creating critical awareness (McNeil 1993). At UCT, trans, queer, and gender non-binary people have gotten the university administration to identify gender non-binary toilets – a win for the visibility of trans, queer, and gender non-binary people on campus. Wandile focuses on mental health issues for trans, queer, and gender non-binary people because of the high levels of suicides due to a lack of awareness and psychosocial support. Furthermore, Wandile strategically repudiates gender and the logics of colo-

nality (Lugones 2016; Wekker 2016; Hartman 2019), refusing to fall into the trap of phallogocentrism (Lacan 1977) and Western limitations of pronouns. Gender non-binary people pay a high personal price for strategically disrupting the gender binary and Eurocentrism through displacing language and performance.

Wandile embodies this through art, activism, and scholarship, linking it back to larger bodies of work connected to community. As Saidiya Hartman (2019) encouragingly points out, Black life persists amidst social death. In this light, I too have had Black/womxn scholars hold the space and build community for and with me. The classroom as a space for co-producing knowledge through healing is about centring voice and discovering new ways of being/becoming (Mupotsa 2017) that is crucial for disrupting systems of domination. From this vantage point, I have met Wandile, a scholar choosing to be called by a given name and, thereby disrupting Eurocentric language and epistemology.

It is five years since the #RMF protests at UCT. #RMF forced the university administration to remove the colonial statue of Cecil John Rhodes from the foothills of the campus. However, removing the statue did not translate into substantive shifts towards the decolonial programme. Indeed, decolonisation, with a strong ideological leaning of redressing the logics of coloniality, has shortcomings. Many prominent decolonial scholars, for example, Walter Mignolo (2009), Ramón Grosfuguel (2013), Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007), Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015), are cis-gendered men with a blind spot around gender. For this reason, inserting feminism into the decolonial programme is crucial, and even more importantly, to queer the decolonial programme because the gap in the decolonial programme is that big man politics, with its attendant problems, produces erasures. This has led to push-backs, in particular, from the Trans Collective (a group of trans, queer, and gender non-binary scholars within #RMF)² (Omarjee 2018). Many #RMF members have been at loggerheads with other members of the movement due to toxic masculinities. A rape occurred during the occupation of Azania House in 2015. The occupation was supposed to be a safe space for Black bodies on campus. Yet within Black spaces womxn

are not safe; leading to the question, why does patriarchy continue to play out in the decolonial programme?

Outside the most obvious challenges within the decolonial programme is the issue that decolonisation if not vigilantly guarded for the utopia it promises to be, will become a buzzword lacking a stringent agenda. The utopia that the decolonial programme promises is a world of possibilities through new ways of being/becoming (Mupotsa 2017). But in order for this world of possibilities to occur we have to move away from systems of domination that have ordered our world into a set of hierarchical binaries (Foucault 1977) such as white supremacist heteropatriarchal capitalism. Maria Lugones (2016) speaks of the “coloniality of gender” and Gloria Wekker (2016) follows on with the “cultural archive.” Both these decolonial feminist scholars show how gender and patriarchy are part of the colonial project, ordering the world through white male domination. Therefore, if the decolonial programme is to be fully realised, white supremacist heteropatriarchal capitalism has to be disrupted and decentralised in order for new ways of being/becoming to flourish with possibilities for new imaginaries to emerge.

On an intrapsychic level, gender constructions have been theorised through the Oedipal complex. Sigmund Freud claimed that in order for the boy to become masculinised he has to repudiate femininity (Benjamin 1988). The repudiation of femininity is seminal for the hierarchical gender binary, setting up male domination and female subjugation or the patriarchal order. This ordering of gender lays the foundation for other systems of domination because sexual difference becomes a metaphor for all differences (Braidotti 1998). Moreover, difference observed through hierarchical binaries encourages a lack of respect for difference by promoting the foundations for white supremacy and Black enslavement, patriarchy, class difference, hetero/homonormativity, etcetera. These are the inklings of the logics of coloniality that become part of *The Order of Things* (Foucault 1977) and the normalisation of systems of domination embedded in language and institutions. As the Foucauldian dictum states: power lies in monuments and documents. Moreover, Wekker (2016) points out that Freud’s theory is race evacuated and as such does

not speak to the ways in which racialised gendered identities promote the eroticisation of Black womxn through the logics of coloniality.

Wandile is repudiating language and the symbolic imaginary of gender by not submitting to pronouns, thus opening up the possibility for new languages outside of phallogocentrism (Lacan 1977), towards new ways of being/becoming that makes gender redundant. Afiah Vijlbrief and colleagues (2019) argue that in Amsterdam gender non-binary people are opening gender non-conformist identities to more fluid ways of being/becoming. For Wandile, this strategic placement of non-conformist identities is part of the decolonial programme that finds a space for people that resist the hierarchical binaries implicit in systems of domination. Wandile and others show how the global south is no longer a geographical location (Prasad and Prasad 2002) and, through queer digital warriors, are connecting and queering the decolonial programme globally. My hope is that in the 2020s we will be developing new words that allow for new ways of being/becoming.

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NOTES

1. In 2017, 2018 and 2019 I facilitated discussions in various courses at UCT and the University of the Western Cape (UWC) including, sessions at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU). These discussions dealt mainly with gender and race, and were based at the Centre for Film and Media Studies (UCT), Centre for African Studies (UCT), Linguistics (VU) and Gender Studies (UCT and UWC).
2. Within #RMF many members pushed back against patriarchy and class politics with clashes around who was able to speak. The Trans Collective disruption of an exhibition opening on #RMF in 2016 was one of the more visible pushbacks against narrowed versions of what #RMF is. This led to more significant conversations around toxic masculinities, patriarchy, gender, and sexuality, and the ways in which class representation influenced access to resources. The African Gender Institute (AGI) at UCT held an exhibition in May 2019, addressing some of the erasures from the previous exhibition, specifically that of trans, queer and gender non-binary bodies that constitute #RMF.