Critically Diverse Perspectives on Covid-19

Interviews with a Varied Range of South Africans

Editors

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About the editors

Sayan Dey grew up in Kolkata, West Bengal and is currently working as an Assistant Professor, Department of Language and Literature, Faculty of Humanities, Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, Alliance University, India. He is also a Faculty Fellow at The Harriet Tubman Institute, York University, Canada and Critical Cultural Studies Faculty, at NYI Global Cultural, Cognitive and Linguistic Studies, New York. Some of his published books are: Myths, Histories and Decolonial Interventions: A Planetary Resistance (Routledge, 2022), and Green Academia: Towards Eco-friendly Education Systems (Routledge, 2022). His areas of research interests are postcolonial studies, decolonial studies, critical race studies, food humanities and critical diversity literacy. He can be reached at: www.sayandey.com.

Shankhadeep Chattopadhyay earned his Bachelor of Arts in English from Ramakrishna Mission Residential College, Narendrapur, his Master of Arts in English from Banaras Hindu University and is currently pursuing his PhD at Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi. He has participated in several national and international academic conferences in both India and abroad. Shankhadeep is an active member of the Urban Music Studies Scholar's Network, Germany and has presented his research article "Spatializing the Musicking of an Expressive Urban Imagination: A Trans-Cultural Evaluation of the Early Modern Rock Music of Bengal" at the second international conference entitled Groove the City 2020 – Constructing and Deconstructing Urban Spaces through Music organised by the Leuphana University of Lüneburg, Germany. His interests include music and literature, urban geography, spatial and cultural studies, digital-humanities, decolonial studies, postmodernism and creative writing. He is currently researching spatiality in countercultural song in performance, which deals with the poetics of rock music and the socio-historical shift in the construction of urban sounds and of urban imaginaries as well as the spatial contours and the trans-cultural significance of American popular music.

About the interviewees

Dené Du Rand is a clinical psychologist and full-time lecturer in the Department of Psychology at the University of South Africa (Unisa), where she is also part of the clinical team responsible for the Master's in Clinical Psychology programme. In the clinical programme, she teaches Community, Critical and Gender Psychologies, African Epistemologies and Ecosystemic Theory. Dené is the vice-chair of the Community and Social Psychology Division of the Psychological Society of South Africa. Her research interests include indigenous collective trauma, historical trauma, indigenous knowledge and healing systems, decolonial theories, and community health and well-being.

Kenneth Kaplan has extensive experience in film and television production in Africa, Asia and North America, and has been a lead producer or executive producer on several narrative feature films that have screened at the world's leading international film festivals. During his three-decade long career in the media industry, Ken has been an investigative news producer, has produced and directed documentaries, and has been a show creator and showrunner of TV series focusing on youth and health issues in sub-Saharan Africa, with the Bill & Melinda Gates and the Kaiser Family Foundations supporting these documentaries which have been broadcast in 31 African countries. As part of the democratic movement in South Africa, he actively organised media workers in unrepresented communities under apartheid and shared his knowledge and skills with young filmmakers in Alexander Township in Johannesburg. When all media in South Africa was heavily restricted under the apartheid regime's State of Emergency, Ken worked as a field producer for international broadcasters, covering events in South Africa prior to and following the release of Nelson Mandela from political detention. Ken's undergraduate studies included a specialisation in African archaeology, he has an MFA from New York University, Tisch School of the Arts, and he has a PhD from Wits University, where he undertook his doctoral research on the filmed representation of medical doctors in African conflict zones. He currently teaches film production to undergraduate and graduate students in the Film and TV department at Wits University, where he served as department head, and writes frequently about the intersection of media, society and politics.

Sihlanganiso Khumalo specialises in the field of Development Studies. He is currently a PhD student in the College of Human Sciences at Unisa. His PhD thesis, focused on rural development, explores rural development thinking and practices that are misaligned with the modernisation canon. He aims to open up debates that can culminate in situated, pluriversal and nonaligned other ways of thinking and practising rural

development that can lead to mutual and interrelated wellbeing of the people, the planet and their prosperity. He completed his Master of Science degree in Development Studies at Unisa (with distinction). He was awarded the Unisa Vice Chancellor's Prize for the best postgraduate student in the faculty. Sihlanganiso believes in disruptive epistemologies which can add value to day-to-day struggles for survival by ordinary people.

Siseko Kumalo received his formative training from Rhodes University where he read in Political and International Studies, Anthropology and Philosophy, and was awarded the Mandela Rhodes Scholarship in his Honour's year (2017). He holds a Master of Arts (with distinction) in Political Philosophy from the University of Pretoria and is reading for a PhD in the Department of Political Sciences at the same university. His PhD investigates how to model an inclusive national identity in South Africa using the work of William Wellington Gqoba and Samuel Edward Krune (SEK) Mqhayi. He is the recipient of the Harvard South African Fellowship which commences in September 2022, and he has been recognised as a *Mail & Guardian* Top 200 Young South African, 2020 (in the category of education).

Rozena Maart was born in District Six, the former slave quarter of the Cape, South Africa. Her family, along with thousands of other residents, were forcibly removed in 1973 due to the apartheid government's Group Areas Act. Her work examines the intersections between and among Political Philosophy, Black Consciousness, Derridean deconstruction and psychoanalysis, all of which address questions of race, gender, coloniality and identity. Her novels have made the African Studies Association's shortlist for the Aidoo-Snyder Book Prize in honour of Ama Ata Aidoo in 2010, the HOMEBRU list in South Africa in 2006 and the bestseller list in Canada in 2005. Rozena has published several books, journal articles and book chapters, and recently edited *Decoloniality and Decolonial Education: South Africa and the World* (2021). Rozena won the 2021 Nicolás Cristóbal Guillén Batista Lifetime Achievement Award for her contribution to Literature and Philosophy, awarded by the internationally renowned Caribbean Philosophical Association. She was the director of the Centre for Critical Research on Race and Identity at the University of KwaZulu-Natal for five years, before returning to her substantive post in the school of Social Science, where she teaches and supervises students in Gender Studies, Law, Fine Arts, English, Philosophy and International Politics.

Tshepo Madlingozi is an Associate Professor and director of the Centre for Applied Legal Studies at Wits University. He holds Masters' degrees in both Law and Sociology, and he received his PhD degree from Birkbeck, University of London. He is a Research Associate at the Chair for Critical Studies in Higher Education at the Nelson Mandela University. He is co-editor of the *South African Journal of Human Rights* and part of the management team of Pretoria University Law Press. He is a co-editor of *Socio-economic Rights in South Africa: Symbols or Substance?* (2014) and a co-editor of *Introduction to Law and Legal Skills in South Africa,* 2nd Edition (2021). He is an

advisory board member of the *Journal of Human Rights Practice*, and he sits on the boards of the following organisations: Amandla.mobi; Centre for Human Rights, University of the Free State; the Council for the Advancement of the South African Constitution; the Rural Democracy Trust; and the Mining Affected Communities United in Action/Women Affected by Mining United in Action. He is also a member of the steering committee of the African Coalition for Corporate Accountability, and a member of the advisory board of Health Justice Initiative. For thirteen years (2005-2018) he worked with and for Khulumani Support Group, a large social movement of victims and survivors of apartheid as National Advocacy Coordinator and later also became the Chairperson.

Bongani Mkhonza has been working as a curator for the Unisa Art Gallery and Art Collection for more than twelve years. Previously, Bongani worked as an Educational Officer for the Durban Art Gallery. His curatorial experience includes managing acquisitions, curating exhibitions and caring for the Unisa Art Collection. Bongani attends to a variety of professional duties such as operational planning, budgeting, management, coordinating, and administrative duties for the Gallery. He has curated art exhibitions nationally in South Africa and has travelled some of the exhibitions internationally to Austria, Serbia and other European countries. He curates the *Annual Recent Unisa Acquisitions Exhibitions* and some of his recent major curatorial projects include: *If Democracy Could Talk* (2019); *50 Years of Unisa Art Collection* (2011); and *The Meeting Point* (2012). He completed his PhD in Art History and Philosophy at Unisa in 2020. His research interests include university art collections and art acquisition policies, decoloniality, and critical theories. His latest publication is *Relocating the Centre: Decolonising University Art Collections in South Africa* (2021).. In his capacity as a curator, he reports on a broad spectrum of advisory and acquisition committees. Bongani has produced catalogues for the Unisa Art Collection and for other international exhibitions. In his professional career spanning over 23 years, Bongani has come to admire the contribution that university art collections continue to make in the curation and preservation of diverse cultures in South Africa.

Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni is Professor and Chair of Epistemologies of the Global South with Emphasis on Africa at the University of Bayreuth in Germany. He previously worked as Research Professor and Director of Scholarship in the Department of Leadership and Transformation in the Principal and Vice-Chancellor's Office at Unisa. He was the 2019 Visiting Professor at the Johannesburg Institute for Advanced Study at the University of Johannesburg. He is a leading decolonial theorist with over a hundred publications in the fields of African history, African politics, African development and decolonial theory. His latest major publications are: *Epistemic Freedom in Africa: Deprovincialization and Decolonization* (2018); *Rethinking and Unthinking Development: Perspectives on Inequality and Poverty in South Africa and Zimbabwe* (2019) coedited with Busani Mpofu; and *Decolonization, Development and Knowledge in Africa: Turning Over a New Leaf* (2020).

Luthando Ngema is a lecturer at the School of Arts, Media and Cultural Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Her multidisciplinary interests include understanding urban cultures, the representation of gender and race issues in the media, political communication, and communication for development. Luthando teaches and supervises at post-graduate level. She is currently in the process of completing her PhD and the topic of her research is *Representing Urban Social Space: Media Constructions of Ethekwini Central Business District Development.*

Paul Prinsloo is a Research Professor in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in the College of Economic and Management Sciences at Unisa. His academic background includes fields as diverse as Theology, Art History, Business Management, Online Learning, and Religious Studies. Paul is an established researcher and has published numerous articles in the fields of teaching and learning, student success in distance education contexts, learning analytics, and curriculum development. His current research focuses on the collection, analysis and use of student data in learning analytics, graduate supervision and digital identity. Paul was born curious and in trouble. Nothing has changed since then. He blogs at opendistanceteachingandlearning.wordpress.com and his Twitter alias is @14prinsp.

Norma RA Romm is a Professor Extraordinarius in the Department of Adult, Community and Continuing Education at Unisa. She is author of *The Methodologies of Positivism and Marxism* (1991); *Accountability in Social Research* (2001); *New Racism* (2010); *Responsible Research Practice* (2018); *People's Education in Theoretical Perspective* (with McKay 1992); *Diversity Management* (with Flood 1996); and *Assessment of the Impact of HIV and AIDS in the Informal Economy of Zambia* (with McKay 2006). She has co-edited six books: *Social Theory* (with Sarakinsky 1994); *Critical Systems Thinking* (with Flood 1996); *Balancing Individualism and Collectivism* (with McIntyre-Mills and Corcoran-Nantes 2017); *Mixed Methods and Cross-Disciplinary Research* (with McIntyre-Mills 2019); *Democracy and Governance for Resourcing the Commons* (with McIntyre-Mills and Corcoran-Nantes 2019); and *Covid-19: Perspectives Across Africa* (with Fymat and Kapalanga). She has published over 100 research articles on social theorising, transformative research towards social and ecological regeneration, indigenous paradigms of knowing, and the facilitation of adult learning. She has worked on a range of projects aimed at increasing equity for organisations such as the International Labour Organisation , the Association for the Development of Education in Africa , and the International Organisation for Migration.

Endorsements received for this book

Critically Diverse Perspectives on Covid-19 is not only an excellent volume, but is also relevant and timely. There are very few volumes in the field of anticolonial discourse that have powerfully synthesised interdisciplinary lenses to articulate a nuanced discussion that shows that the outbreak of Covid-19 around the world has exposed the rawness of inequalities within and among communities, especially in the global South. In the context of this pandemic, Sayan Dey and Shankhadeep Chattopadhyay asked provocative questions that engage readers with critical insights about social inequities that disproportionately affect under-served communities, not only in South Africa, but around the globe. This stimulating volume is an indispensable contribution to understanding the complex ways in which neocolonialism, neoliberal policies, and marketised democracies around the world have perpetrated hegemonies, such as the control of national borders and the control of the flow of vaccines during the pandemic. The editors are to be commended for an inspiring and ongoing conversation that will increase critical debates and social resistance as we continue to live with Covid-19 and its after-effects.

Bekisizwe S. Ndimande, PhD, Associate Professor of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Texas at San Antonio

This book focuses on the Covid-19 pandemic with particular reference to South Africa. The history of the enduring impact of the morally unjustified violence and injustice of Western colonisation is taken as the indispensable background to the study of the reactions and attitudes by multiple actors, especially the government and the private sector, towards Covid-19. The conversational style of the book, reminiscent of the dialogues of Socrates, brings to the fore the question of epistemic and social justice. The style is an open-ended route to critical engagement for anyone across various social structures.

Prof Mogobe Ramose, Philosopher, Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University Department of Clinical Psychology, Ga-Rankuwa, South Africa

This original and provocative volume offers a unique platform for paradigm shifting conversations to happen. A must-read for current and future generations. Anchored in African knowledge and epistemologies it has great importance beyond the continent.

Defying the sense of entitlement of dominating superpowers, this volume is an example of collective, collaborative, sustainable, future-oriented problem solving. It is a record of learning and inspiration for social justice students and scholars across the world.

Dr Philomena Essed, Professor, Critical Race, Gender and Leadership Studies
USA, Antioch University, Graduate School of Leadership and Change
The Netherlands, Affiliated Researcher, Utrecht University, Gender Graduate Program

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The conversational approach used in this book fruitfully shifts mainstream genres of academia and accommodates indigenous and more specifically, African approaches to knowing as a relational endeavour. The interview design and non-jargonised style of engaging with participants' voices has the potential to engender a wider readership across academic disciplines and social practices. By using multi-layered paradigms and viewpoints, the volume engrosses the reader in the multiplicity of historical and contemporary challenges associated with Covid-19, while inviting the reader to look forward to alternatives. Key among the challenges discussed are the legacies of colonisation, neocolonialism, capitalists' manifestations, patriarchy and the pandemic.

Dr Francis Akena Adyanga, Dean, Faculty of Education, Kabale University, Uganda

Acknowledgments

Prologue

Beyond the pandemic

The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic brought about increasing global isolation with its implications cutting across all sectors of society, not least the education sector. UNESCO refers to the pandemic as the most severe "global education disruption in history" with education grinding to a halt and impacting more than 190 countries, 1.6 billion learners, 300 million higher education students, and 100 million teachers and school personnel (2021).

The past two years have shown that the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has extended beyond mere health-related risks and has had immense social ramifications (Lopes and McKay 2021), affecting the world economy with rising unemployment (ILO 2020), and exacerbating social inequalities with numerous negative consequences that will leave a mark on humanity for many years (Ottersen and Engebretsen 2020).

It was not surprising therefore that academics in South Africa, as in the rest of the world, have raised their voices to contemplate, monitor, reflect upon, and vigorously debate the impact of events unfolding, but also endeavoured to make sense of, and to proactively seek solutions to mitigate the effects of the pandemic.

At the most primary level this required ways of transcending the communication gaps arising from the imposed lockdowns. The aspect of 'conversation' gained ground as an outlet for communities to reach across physical divides to reflect on and monitor their specific situation, while attempting to make sense of events towards a future-oriented perspective. Also, in South Africa, scholarly debate broadened in having to deal with a global and locally felt crisis affecting physical, mental and social health. There was an urgent need to reconnect, to reflect on and ensure that all affected citizens, especially those most socially vulnerable, would not remain stuck within this dire situation.

Although opportunities for scholars to interact contracted through the process of closing borders, donning masks, and reducing human contact, it simultaneously expanded digitally. Within weeks, the digital agility of research communication took centre-stage and evolved to enable widened and ongoing communication. Online communication became the tool with which to sustain education, exchange news and raise and deepen levels of discussion – albeit an imperfect medium with limited human contact abilities. The complex chorus of voices which arose managed to bridge the spatial divides between continents and viewpoints.

Within South Africa, scholarly networks enabled discussions reflecting on the dynamics of the global pandemic. The need for solutions-driven, lateral thinking emerged across divergent sectors. Yet the medium of online conversation remains somewhat ephemeral, quickly dissipating into silence after the immediacy of the online discussion event – even though archived recordings and transcriptions were available afterwards.

In response, following a series of webinars, scholar and activist Sayan Dey and Shankhadeep Chattopadhyay encapsulated the energy and urgency of these online talks in a lively manuscript harnessing voices captured during online conversations where prominent concepts were expressed. The live aspect of the dialogue format was reshaped into written form while still reflecting the flow of spoken thought and direct expression.

The result is a volume which aptly captures in its dynamism of content and structure the renewed scholarly and activist urgency necessitated by the worldwide pandemic – by showcasing a multifaceted array of scholars who are collaboratively envisioning a post-pandemic society with a shared vision focused on development of the scholarly debate. In effect, this is a scholarly record of societal history in the making.

The contributions contemplate the impacts on the world plunged into crisis by the virus which revealed deep social, economic, political, cultural, environmental, and educational inequalities.

As the acting Vice Principal for Teaching and Learning at Unisa, the past two years were spent immersed in history in the making, transitioning 400 000 students and some 4 000 academics into the brave new world of online learning. This was necessary to save the academic year and entailed, literally overnight, converting a system that was essentially blended with a large component of campus-based learning into a fully-fledged remote online modality.

With the changing lockdown levels and the rapidity with which the academic calendar was adjusted, social media enabled the university to tune into the voices of students, to check how they received the changes, to 'hear' their challenges, needs and desires. Amidst the fear and uncertainty, social media enabled me to keep my finger on the pulse

of the digital mood, and guided me, as a university manager, in making crucial decisions on keeping teaching and learning on track while manoeuvring the pandemic.

Foremost was the need to address challenges of digital divide – which manifested as a lack of digital devices, adequate connectivity and digital literacy – and then transitioning the institution and around 400 000 students to a new world of platformisation.

Social media and platformisation revealed the Ubuntuisation of students, suggesting that students made more than just a technical mode change. What was prominent and possibly unprecedented was the number of students offering to help those students who were less fortunate, offering to donate data, textbooks or laptops to students who did not have the means.

On one of the platforms, students referred to the new virtual community as "a family". There was a new virtual engagement (now crossing race, class, ability and gender lines) with students helping one another and jointly lobbying the university management for moral understanding of the many challenges they experienced.

Despite the labour pains of the transition (described by Paul Prinsloo in the closing chapter of this book), the formation of new digital communities and digital spaces engendered goodwill, Ubuntu and resilience, enabling students to navigate around or through crises and thereby supporting the momentum of learning. In this way students overcame the lack of a physical presence, collectively showing resilience in the face of hardship, a hopeful indication of pedagogy beyond the pandemic towards a future-oriented perspective.

In his book *Race, Politics, and Pandemic Pedagogy: Education in a Time of Crises*, Henry Giroux (2021) contemplates education beyond the pandemic. He argues that in the midst of the storm, the pandemic provided a catalyst for reflecting on the world we want in future and on the role education might play in engendering a new society. He offers a theoretical and pedagogical lens for understanding education as critical to the post-pandemic renewal which can lead to a more compassionate, just and equitable society which will develop the agential potential of all.

In the South African context, the pandemic is timely for dealing with the cognitive colonisation of the curriculum and for redressing the inequalities laid bare by the pandemic (Le Grange 2020). This involves tracing inequalities and poverty to their roots. It also entails decommissioning all offensive colonial or apartheid iconographies, banishing epistemicides, linguicides, culturicides, racism, sexism, patriarchy, tribalism, xenophobia and classism (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018, 238).

These are the post-pandemic issues that are explored through the rich quilt of conversations that form the chapters of this book. The conversations show the intersectional impacts of the pandemic while offering a theoretical and practical post-pandemic vision.

Veronica McKay, Professor Extraordinarius
Former Vice Principal for Teaching and Learning
Former Executive Dean of Education, University of South Africa
Honorary Fellow, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning

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Introduction

Sayan Dey and Shankhadeep Chattopadhyay

Diverse impacts of pandemics and Covid-19

The outbreak of Covid-19 in South Africa (and in the rest of the world) not only generated a medical crisis, but also reconfigured other existing crises, which includes social, cultural, racial, gendered, legal and political problems. Besides lack of sustainable medical facilities, the country also encountered challenges like joblessness, student dropouts from schools and universities, closure of several start-ups and established businesses, a massive increase in gender-based violence and psychological disorders, and an acute financial crisis. All these issues are interlinked. Unfortunately, a specific group of socio-economically, politically and racially privileged people turned the pandemic into an opportunity to fulfil their self-profiting desires. They generated narratives expressing "Corona-logy", which can be defined as a "neo-colonial and neo-racial civilisational project that uses the logic of a disease named Covid-19 to unpack newly configured social groups that are microscopically confined within the narrow chambers of racialisation, victimisation, and dehumanisation" (Dey 2021, 154). The project of Corona-logy enabled many in the privileged classes in South Africa to maintain their habitual existential desires through hoarding goods, leaving the country and temporarily settling in a foreign country (preferably somewhere in Europe or the United States of America) and getting treated in expensive health centres, without any concern for the crises and sufferings of socio-economically underprivileged people. In order to outline these issues in a theoretical and methodological manner, the interviews in this book have addressed each issue in a critically diverse manner. That is, the research method of critical diversity literacy was used to shape the conversations recorded in this book. According to Melissa Steyn, "'Critical diversity literacy' can be regarded as an informed analytical orientation that enables a person to 'read' prevailing social relations as one would a text, recognising the ways in which possibilities are being opened up or closed down for those differently positioned within the unfolding dynamics of specific social contexts" (2015, 381). The conversations in this volume engage with the diverse dynamics and contexts of social relationships in South Africa during the pandemic through understanding the role of power in constructing differences; in realising the unequal symbolic and material value of different social locations; offering an understanding of how the different systems of oppression intersect, interlock, co-construct and constitute each other; and identifying the historical legacy of different oppressive systems on the contemporary era.

Historically, infecting communities with diseases became part of the process of generating socio-economic hierarchies across the globe. For instance, European colonisers employed disease as a tool of colonising the world through distributing blankets infected with smallpox to native indigenous communities in the Americas during the 15th century; carrying slaves and indentured labourers infected with smallpox and measles from Europe to the Americas in the

16th century; and spreading diseases like typhoid, influenza, and diarrhoea in Africa, Asia and New Zealand between the 17th and 20th centuries (Ranlet 2000; Pringle 2015; Kiger 2018; Milman 2019; Gunderman 2019; Gershon 2020). It has been argued that these diseases were unleashed across the globe by Europeans as part of their colonial strategies of indigenous depopulation and biological warfare. The use of strategic depopulation and biological warfare were also found beyond European colonisers and within diverse local communities around the world. The usage of such strategies was widely motivated by diverse socio-cultural factors. The use of these strategies in the current era is reflected through unequal access to health facilities, distortion of reports by the media, racial segregation, political hierarchies, psychological marginalisation, sociological inequalities, inaccessibility to law and order, and lack of access to education. These aspects are discussed in depth by the interviewees in the context of Covid-19 and through the themes of art, nationalism, legal studies, urban studies, media studies, critical race studies, decoloniality, sociology, psychology, and open distance learning, and possible solutions have emerged in the process.

In whatever way we locate the cause of the spread of the Covid-19 virus, the pandemic not only generated medical and health crises but also reconfigured the already existing inequalities across the globe. Kwame Anthony Appiah problematises these crises as "a tale of two pandemics" (2021). He argues:

> For the past year and a half, people everywhere have been in the grip of a pandemic – but not necessarily the same one. In the affluent world, a viral respiratory disease, Covid-19, suddenly became a leading cause of death. In much of the developing world, by contrast, the main engine of destruction wasn't this new disease, but its second-order effects: measures they took, and we took, in response to the coronavirus (2021).

With the outbreak of this pandemic, the world saw financially flourishing communities overbuying groceries and medical supplies while economically deprived communities were left with little or no access; certain religious and communal groups were selectively demonised and penalised for supposedly spreading the virus; people from socio-economically poor rural and urban spaces were denied access to basic health, hygiene, and medical facilities; some Euro-North American medical practitioners treated selective bodies as laboratories for vaccine experiments (for more detail, read Rosman 2020; Wong 2020); many women and children were subjected to various degrees of physical, psychological, and sexual violence; the media in many countries misled people through spreading racist and xenophobic health and medical rumours; and in certain countries government health institutions failed to ensure equal vaccination policies, allowing private health institutions to take advantage of this situation by selling vaccines at high prices.

Based on the negative consequences of Covid-19 that highlighted the stark nature of various inequalities, this edited volume focuses on the myriad of crises that South Africa struggled with during the pandemic. Interviewees were invited from diverse academic and research backgrounds. The questions posed generated a conversation between interviewers and interviewees. They shared their understanding of these crises from different socio-historical vantage points and offered possible ways of countering them. These reflections reveal how the pandemic globally unfolded in an intersectional manner. During the pandemic, South Africa's health and governing policies were subjected to severe criticism. These policies once again exposed the colonially fashioned governing structures and the unequal socio-economic practices in South Africa.

Before we continue, brief comments on the genre selected for this book, namely that of the conversational interview, are apposite. While several volumes on the pandemic have been published, such books mostly analyse Covid-19 from somewhat distanced theoretical vantage points, without adequately reflecting on the practical implications of the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result, discussions on practical ways of addressing the impact of the pandemic remain largely absent. In response this volume, constituted through conversations with scholars from diverse and cross-disciplinary academic and research perspectives, endeavours to transcend the usual boundaries of academia.

Our conversations reveal not only the theoretical perspectives of interviewees, but also their preferences, opinions, and knowledge. Conversations have always been an integral part of qualitative research methodology, where researchers generate data by engaging in verbal communication with research participants. In this book, the conversational pattern of conducting research moves beyond a methodological application to emerge as a form of critical writing. The publishers, editors and interviewees agreed on the interview format as most suitable for this book. In order to understand the diverse impact of Covid-19 across different contexts and communities in South Africa, it is important to interweave personal experiences with collective experiences. Our approach seeks to transcend theoretical parameters. In addition, the conversational manner of critical writing, unlike research papers and book chapters, offers more freedom with the use of citations and referencing. This allows participants to freely voice viewpoints with the authenticity of direct voice - though they may still opt to substantiate their own views with those of other authors. In reading these conversations it is evident that the participants speak both theoretically and practically. The resultant non-jargonised conversational style invites a diverse readership, irrespective of professional affiliations.

While shaping the conversations, the interviewers and the interviewees had to overcome very specific obstacles. To ensure the scholarliness and critical nature of the reflections, all conversations consistently needed to balance personal vantage points with collective positionalities. On the one hand, interviewees would reflect on their personal experiences - while on the other, they also offered insight on collective experiences. The challenge was to ensure that diverse reflections are offered in a balanced manner. In addition, the intent was to generate a diverse range of perspectives on the impact of Covid-19. Ultimately, many scholars were reluctant to contribute because they felt that some topics were too sensitive to engage with. Although as editors and interviewers we understand that several perspectives on Covid-19 were not aired, we remained focused on building a diverse range of perspectives within these conversations.

Ultimately, the conversations included weave together like a quilt (Collins 2000, 170) – where each piece contributes to a rich collage of ideas. Collins explains that in African American quilts, the arrangement of the quilt as a whole "does not come from uniformity" (2000, 170). Hence, in line with this metaphor, the interviewers did not try to ask the same questions to each interviewee to build up the conversational quilt, but rather tailor-made each set of questions for each interviewee with the intention of enabling his or her specific contribution to enhance the overall set of conversations which constitutes the quilt of this book.

About the interviews and their ordering

Interviews are thematically grouped into five sections. The first section entitled "Visual Resistance and Covid-19" consists of interviews with Bongani Mkhonza and Kenneth Kaplan. These discussions reflect on how artworks could be used as crucial tools to generate resistance

against different forms of violence and crises in contemporary South Africa that have been exacerbated by the outbreak of Covid-19.

Bongani Mkhonza with his visionary method of 'artivism' (art and activism) engages in the conversation by focusing on artworks that directly trade in the concerns of life and death. While addressing environmental concerns that contribute to several issues like smog and the lack of fresh oxygen, he refers to the collective social importance of art. Multiple layers of tension are prevalent in his conversation. His ideas are radical, unique, and effective because they not only come from the perspective of an academic but also represent the perspective of an activist. Such viewpoints are expressed by several other interviewees who have refused to remain restricted within the secure belt of academia and have actively taken part in ground-level activism beyond publicly expressed scholarly opinions. Bongani emphasises the central public attention towards the commodification of art and consciously displays his ideas as a continuous struggle between the liberating and restrictive forces of art' Following this tussle which creates a porous and liminal attachment to the economisation of art, Bongani shows his environmental concerns in the post-Covid South African context; he explains how the capitalist framework abuses and exploits the natural environment like a resource, how medicinal disposables like bottles, sanitisers and masks have clogged the sea-surface since the outbreak of this pandemic and how the environmental balance could possibly be restored.

Bongani's portion of the quilt of conversations is enhanced by Kenneth Kaplan as he envisages art as a medium of resistance against the illusory solutions provided for the ongoing socio-economic and medical issues while he reflects on how these issues are produced within a capitalistic framework. Like Bongani, Kenneth creates a new narrative out of his conversation which centres on alternative possibilities to create a new future where human beings will not deal with emergencies only, the way we all dealt with this pandemic. Kenneth thinks that the health crisis is the most immediate problem, and the act of rethinking the future is vital. Unlike the immediate or temporary solutions that are generally distributed through several forms of capitalism, he imagines a parallel effort of long-term solutions where the profit-making motive is discouraged. Kenneth argues that only socio-economically and politically advanced nations are able to identify the multi-layered hierarchies that exist within the human-nature relationship. Global capitalism has a motif of placing people into a realm of pseudo-mobility or of 'being stuck' and that has become transparent during the outbreak of Covid-19. We have seen people across the world, irrespective of their class, race, gender, creed, and community, collectively experiencing `being stuck' whether this is environmental, physical, emotional, or psychological. To get out of the condition of `being stuck', as Kenneth suggests, we need to reframe our future. This would enable us to more effectively deal with future pandemics by avoiding temporary solutions such as immediate vaccinations or lockdowns, as the easy subjects of mediatisation with a hidden capitalist motif. By addressing the importance of visual artivism, like Bongani, Kenneth is on a mission to break out of the imaginary prison created by a hostile mediatised environment.

In the second section entitled "Covid-19, Decolonisation and Democratic Participation" interviews were held with Luthando Ngema, Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Rozena Maart and Norma Romm. Overall, these interviewees reflect on the need for revisiting and reviewing the paradigms of decolonisation and democratisation of South Africa within the context of Covid-19.

Luthando Ngema's piece successfully expresses the primary importance of this book, or the conversational approach in its truest sense. Luthando discusses making a paradigm change in the use of mass communication and conversation especially within the context of Covid-19 and

other related issues. She provides an alternate way to overcome the issue of 'being stuck' that Kaplan raised. Luthando's argument widely links to the concept of achieving a functional state of being, that is, not being stuck in a specific spatiotemporal pause while bringing context into the conversation. She describes the ways in which situations, ideas, and contexts seamlessly roam across time and space. Since the generic functionality of conversation is a fluid and porous space in which each social individual with their distinct thoughts and opinions moves in and through, Luthando argues that it is the people only who are taking part in the conversation by drawing on each other's statements with a collective pattern of coming down to specific issues. In a way, her arguments create a kind of de-centralised archipelagic space where individual ideas assimilate with due respect to divergences and differences and yet remain distinctly decentralised and consistently communicative amongst themselves. This aptly reflects the very spirit of this book project where our sole intention is to reach beyond the spaces of printed pages and to connect people in a much wider sense so that each individual can influence themselves and not enforce any opinions and ideas on each other.

Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni's piece reinforces, with another thread, Bongani's and Kenneth's concern about seeing this pandemic as a vital and teachable moment while he also describes how Covid-19 made us rethink our priorities. Sabelo addresses the politics of 'vaccinationalism' and explains how power structures are being regulated by the politics of vaccination, re-vaccination, and de-vaccination and how this leads to economies of profit. He laments that (Westernised) human beings seemingly possess a firm superiority complex above the natural environment and other species which has culminated in a disastrous upheaval to restore the natural order of being. Sabelo attacks the media indirectly for their failure to point out the prevalent everyday causes of dying rather than deaths related to specific and contemporary health issues like Covid-19. He says that such statistics are prominently raised above vital issues such as poverty, malnutrition, and hygiene while the media does not bother about these everyday social issues. Sabelo's concerns revolve around the politics of extraction and distraction of news in a contemporary media environment. He states that media platforms are generally characterised by rhetorical manipulation, resembling the image of a capitalist or political organisation. For this reason, Sabelo consciously focuses on the racial, economic, social, and political crises of poor people in society rather than pondering over rich and middle-class issues like lockdown or vaccination.

Rozena Maart, adopting a similar stance to that of Sabelo, frames strong racial and economic theories in the context of Covid-19. Rozena focuses on and reinforces Sabelo's idea of economies of profit and takes an even more critical and theoretical stance. She unravels the critical race theories developed by scholars over time and reflects on how these were reinstituted during the outbreak of Covid-19. Rozena directly links Covid-19 with racism and discusses how Indian/black/coloured people have suffered the most in this pandemic. By raising such issues as the economic crisis and racial capitalism in the same breath, she points out how health, food, medicine, and employment opportunities remain major concerns at the rudimentary levels of society. Like other scholars and activists in this conversation, she is keen to penetrate the discursive environment and to reach out to the marginalised and disenfranchised sections of the social order. Rozena's intention of ground-level scholarly activism and reaching out to the public is evident in her articles, fiction, and other creative writing which are widely accessible on several academic and social platforms. The question of accessibility remains central within Rozena's interview as she continuously considers the practical ground of sharing and caring about the diversified problematics of socio-cultural, racial, economic, and health concerns of the current context.

Norma Romm develops her argument while addressing issues of inequalities over racialised groups. In parallel to Bongani's arguments on the marginalised position of black persons in the social fabric, Norma explains how the pandemic has spotlighted racialised labour. In addition, she discusses gender discrimination and gender-based violence within the context of Covid-19. Once again, her transdisciplinary viewpoint ensures her perspectives are directly linked to grassroots-level issues – in line with other visionary scholars and activists. Norma's arguments distinctly refer to the emerging necessity of altering and inverting the pyramid of power structures. Hence, her concerns centre around a substantial sociological and decolonial shift in the mediation of power dynamics, which she thinks should be reinvented and restructured. She illustrates and revitalises the philosophy of Ubuntu in her argument and distinctly shows how Eurocentric beliefs and ideas stand in sharp contrast to the African concept of Ubuntu, which ultimately teaches the philosophy of coexistence and harmony instead of promoting individualism and competition. Following the epistemological premise, she discusses the immediate issues that plague black African communities in several townships in South Africa where the basic right of equal opportunity has not materialised. Norma also focuses on indigenous scholarships from Africa which offer unique insights on current socio-cultural, political, and economic issues based on indigenous African ideas as grounded in Ubuntu and which link to forms of counter-resistance as a way to deal with the ongoing pandemic.

The third section is entitled "Covid-19 and Politics" and it consists of interviews with Siseko H. Kumalo and Sihlanganiso Kumalo. These interviews reflect on how the social, cultural, economic and geographical narratives about Covid-19 have been politically fractured and hierarchised in South Africa.

Siseko H. Kumalo proposes an alternative vision to transform the education system. He is concerned about a method of educating and training, which does not guide towards an ultimate epistemological search for an ultimate answer or rather a Western model of the answer. Instead, people need to be made aware of false notions around Afrocentric perspectives. He says that the Afrocentric ideology does not mimic the Western model but rather contains multiple layers where aspects of thinking, knowing, and being are the credible concerns. Siseko's argument on the Afrocentric attitude significantly adds to Norma's ideas of counter-resistance which could produce an alternative way of being and becoming. Siseko relentlessly delves into aspects of transformation in higher education and learning and his arguments broadly question the very epistemological and ontological construct of Westernised universities. While drawing influences from the Latin-American decolonial scholar/activist Ramón Grosfoguel, Siseko problematises some of the significant nuances that get reflected in the everyday social spectrum. Whether that problem is related to the physical, infrastructural, social, or pedagogical, it leads towards a singular problem of mechanised labour production in the contemporary education system. Therefore, he focuses on the aspects of practical transformation in the rudimentary learning phase which could significantly add to the sociology of knowledge production.

Sihlanganiso Khumalo once again focuses on the institutional aspects behind the aggravation of the pandemic in South Africa, especially in rural areas. Adding on to Siseko's idea of curricular transformation, Sihlanganiso discusses the need to develop a pluriversal approach to diversify our curricula in Development Studies. Simultaneously, he problematises the media space like Sabelo and Kenneth and argues that media helps to obliterate and hide social issues which do not feed the capitalistic framework. Therefore, Sihlanganiso calls for new and radical discourses to deal with this global pandemic as well as other socio-political, economic, racial, and gendered issues.

The fourth section is entitled "Legal and Psychological Impact of Covid-19" and it consists of interviews with Tshepo Madlingozi and Dené Du Rand. In this section, the interviewees engage with diverse forms of legal, ethical and psychological challenges that have been generated by Covid-19 in South Africa.

Tshepo Madlingozi's piece enables us to thread some connections towards Luthando's and Bongani's ideas of spatial transformation. Tshepo distinctly focuses on multiple disciplinary spaces and curricula, arguing that existing legal issues and so-called disciplinary structures work to make history inaccessible or sometimes altered in its projection. Hence, he calls for a distinctly new form and method of legal studies. His intention is not just to decolonise legal studies but to empathise with the common humanitarian values which we share. While putting forward his arguments on the complex structure of legal studies, Tshepo consciously engages with the technicalities and ideologies of such legal spaces where several practical experiences do not match with specific legal parameters. His ideas are radical and enlightening and socially applicable. For instance, when he talks about queer aspects, private-public aspects, and so on, he empathises with the need to care for such issues from official and legal perspectives. Tshepo, being one of the most prominent activists and scholars, presents unique and creative solutions for gender-based violence that reportedly increased during the pandemic. He shares how he and his activist groups created an alternative tangential space for individuals who have been violated or threatened, by introducing code-words to communicate with the victim at the time of violence. Tshepo's revolutionary stances not only reflect scholarly activism but also strongly question the very paradigm of the national constitution while dealing with a pandemic such as Covid-19 in an expansive continent like Africa.

Dené Du Rand concentrates on the psychological aspects of Covid-19 in South Africa. Coming from a background in psychology, Dené points out some of the psycho-social aspects of sexual violence. As a transition from Tshepo's argument, Dené acutely focuses on the moral, social and legal responsibilities of the government to heal the traumatised individual who has been violated, especially in terms of racism. The devaluation of human beings has occurred for far too long, and in some cases has made victims of racial violence feel like 'non-beings'. Like Rozena and Norma, Dené also shows concern about the social positionality of black and especially coloured persons, who mostly remain as the traumatic subject in pre-and post-apartheid South African society. She discusses the liminal crisis of coloured persons, especially in the ongoing context of the pandemic, and how they have been stereotyped as negative social characters like alcoholics, womanisers, rapists, and drug addicts in the mainstream media. Dené successfully shows that social and psychological stress arises due to the peripheral existence of the individual inside the social order and asks that the government take care of this situation - where collective trauma needs to be taken seriously. She emphasises the aspect of resilience, which she thinks should be nurtured inside the human spirit so that a new future can be planned and developed.

The final section is entitled "Teaching and Learning During Covid-19" and it consists of an interview with Paul Prinsloo. In this interview, Paul engages with the various teaching and learning challenges that Covid-19 generated in South Africa, especially with respect to Open Distance Learning.

Paul discusses the newly normalised open learning system or distance learning system during Covid-19 and how this 'new normal' way of education severely suffers from a lack of infrastructural, financial, and technological grounding. Paul thinks that technological literacy is much needed for all staff, teachers, administrators, and students of an institution as all of them are facing the same issues from multiple viewpoints. Students need to be organised and

trained properly to ensure that digital accessibility is suited and efficient to the required tasks. While raising questions related to capitalism, racism, and gender issues, Paul connects his argument using a singular global thread by problematising multiple layers of subjugations that are being enforced on marginalised people across a wide front.

Each interviewee opted for the production of something new or for innovative discourses from where the real problems, the everyday problems, and grassroots-level issues can be organised, configured, and addressed. Whether it is Rozena with her fictive impulse, Bongani with his visual artivism, Kenneth with his idea of forms, or Luthando with her idea of mass communication as conversation, each interviewee attempted to reconfigure the ways of looking at a global issue like a pandemic, to provide and propose long-term solutions towards a better future for humanity.

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I.

Visual resistance and Covid-19

Chapter 1

Artworks as tools of encountering Covid-19:
An interview with Bongani Mkhonza

Conducted by Sayan Dey and Shankhadeep Chattopadhyay

Sayan and Shankhadeep: *Artworks in the form of cartoons, caricatures, digital arts, sketches, graffiti and paintings have played a crucial role in regulating the social, cultural, political, racial, communal, religious and economic impact of Covid-19 across the globe. For instance, in March 020, the pandemic undertook a xenophobic rn in India when a Muslim gathering at a mosque in New Delhi triggered the spread of the infection across the city. Several news media outlets in India presented this incident as "Covid-Jihad" by depicting the gathering as a conspiracy of Muslims against the non-Muslim population of India. So, since the inception of Covid-19 in South Africa, what influence did artworks have in reconfiguring the social, cultural, racial and gendered psyche of people in South Africa?*

Bongani Mkhonza: Before I delve deeper into your question, I find it interesting that you referred to New Delhi. Besides the obvious political play evinced in news media reports about a Muslim gathering at a mosque in New Delhi, a more serious global threat has been made visible by works of art while working under the Covid-19 pandemic. What I am referring to is the issue of environmental and climate change. As we are aware, New Delhi like many other Westernised industrialised cities of the post-colony is by design highly subjected to ecological degradation and environmental pollution. Thus, I consider engaging with artworks that deal directly with matters of life and death as of utmost importance. In response to the environmental threats, Aušrys Uptas, a young illustrator from Paris, France curated a series of photographs showing the 'before and after' lockdown effects on several cities around the world, including New Delhi, and the differences were stark, highlighting the impact of pollution on many cities.

In contemporary art critics' circles, there is a saying that, 'art is not what you see, but what you make others see'. Images provide a vivid visual storyboard of the Global Energy Review 2020 on carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions, which proclaimed that global CO_2 emissions were expected to decline by 8% in 2020, falling to their lowest level since 2010. Art during Covid-19 made us see a huge evolution in the environment, forcing us to consider making serious structural changes from the colonial capitalistic designs of development towards environmentally centred approaches of being. These kinds of designs continue to enable colonial violence against species and their environment. In understanding this logic, one starts to grasp that artwork is not just for entertainment, but human beings cannot live without it.

Registering its full potential, art can foster multiple ways of knowing. Art can make us confront our day-to-day contribution towards ecological degradation and death. Moreover, artworks can be a vehicle that could enable us to embark on a long journey towards processes of restoration of people, species and our environment.

Coming back to the South African context, I believe that South Africa has been the worst-hit country by Covid-19 in Africa. Personally, I got infected with Covid-19 just a few days before this interview was scheduled. So, most of the ideas discussed are close to my personal experience with Covid-19. However, despite the devastating impact of the pandemic, the vibrancy of South African art and culture continues to demonstrate its tenacity and perseverance. For example, in February 2021, the annual International Public Arts Festival was hosted in Cape Town. According to the Voanews reporter, "this year's festival displayed more than 100 murals and focused on three points: creativity, sustainability and safety" (Vinicius Assis 2021). Another inspiration can be drawn from the hosting of the National Arts Festival Live in Makhanda. Although the festival was mostly online with a few curated and fringe programme elements, it did take place from 8 to 18 July 2021, despite the pandemic. Many other art and cultural activities, art exhibitions and interventions were successfully hosted online. Moreover, the process of hosting the festival live and online opened up new opportunities. For example, the festival became accessible globally.

Having highlighted the art industry's robust response to the strenuous demands of Covid-19, I want to extend our thinking beyond the widely accepted outlook of the arts under the pandemic. Many critics and their indicators have shown how disastrous the Covid-19 situation has been to the arts. With galleries not operating during lockdowns, most artists lost their sources of income. Galleries could not sell artworks on behalf of artists. Tourism channels which attract art buyers were closed. Art galleries make up to 70% of their revenue from sales through art fairs. However, art fairs were either cut down or cancelled during the pandemic. At the government administrative level, the arts were promised R300 million that had been allocated from South Africa's Presidential Employment Stimulus Package. The situation became dire when artists complained that they did not receive money from the government. The rest is history. Artists went on to stage sit-ins at the offices of the National Arts Council to protest the Department of Arts and Culture's mismanagement of funds. Matters became worse when the media reported that that R300 million had "disappeared" from the National Arts Council's funds. The response from the Council was that the government "over-committed" R260 million to artists that it did not have. But it does not take an investigator to reveal that such contradictions indicate mismanagement of pandemic aid and corruption.

Sayan and Shankhadeep: Your reflections on the influence of artworks in reconfiguring the social, cultural, racial and gendered psyche of the people in South Africa provokes us to socio-historically explore the connections between artworks and the existential approaches of people in South Africa. Can you share with us the various ways in which artworks have been socio-historically shaping the social, cultural, gendered and racial outlook of residents in South Africa?

Bongani Mkhonza: Art has played a major role in shaping the outlook of residents in South Africa. Just to backtrack a bit, it is crucial to submit that these are my humble arguments that lay no claims to universal truths. It is safe to start by saying that art allows us to read the world. Having said that, it is critical to add that in reading the world, one brings with one's personal location, identity, culture, gender and race. What then happens when one is taught to read the world through the eyes of the other? I will attempt to address this question by debunking the baseless power of being defined by the historical narratives of the other. When you look at art

history books, they generally follow a chronological structure or format. This format normally starts with rock art that was created by the San and Batwa people around Drakensberg, spanning over 400 years. It then moves to the so-called colonial art. Colonial art tends to take an anthropological format. It covers mainly art produced by white South African male artists portraying landscapes and wild animals that they encountered while travelling through colonies. It was a documentation of non-European flora, fauna, people and landscapes by artists of European descent. The chapters which follow are normally mapped from the formation of the 1910 Union of South Africa to the apartheid era. Most artworks of this era depicted empty landscapes and farmlands. It is argued that such depictions were predominantly done by Dutch-born painters such as JH Pierneef and which nourished what was to be later conceived as Afrikaner nationalist ideology. Later, around the 1930s, the transformation of subject matter emerged. Most Afrikaner artists were influenced by African traditional and cultural objects, forms, and San-Batwa artefacts. It is important to note the total absence of contributions from other indigenous groups and races from these historical records. Many cultures were thriving long before the arrival of the English/Dutch settlers into South Africa. Although they practised art and produced artefacts, there was a concerted effort to erase their existence and contributions from art history books. This is however in line with colonial logic which claims that former colonies had no history, no education and no civilisation. This colonial logic serves as an important measure of human development. It is premised on propping up European imperialism, as a colonial gift to the colonised subject. At the heart of these predominantly Eurocentric aesthetics and cultural discourse was an assumption that, for its visibility to exist, a black colonial subject had to position himself or herself as "the unspoken and invisible 'other' of itself" (Hall 1996, 442). Within this reasoning, the native's sense of being and his history, art and subjectivity only comes into visibility after the arrival of the European other. Consequently, the logic seeks to justify the transmission of imperial cultures, art, religion, languages, norms and ways of existence to the 'new worlds' as development and progress. It is only later that art history books admit the existence of what they term 'emerging' black artists. To me, the selection and categorisation of this group of artists also raises several compelling philosophical questions. If one critically examines the works of two prominent emerging black artists - Gerard Sekoto and George Pemba - you ponder intriguing cultural developments.

Firstly, even though emerging black artists moved away from painting landscapes and opted to depict their living environments and lived experiences in black townships, their palette and sensibilities were still located in European traditions of painting. In the envious eyes of those emerging black artists, their struggle to be accepted, to be visible, to be recognised, and to be collected by museums, they had to transform their artistic expressions, ideologies, and aesthetics to mimic and assume those of the dominant colonising culture. Hence their prominence later - and it goes without saying that they became highly recognised and included in the dominant historical narrative, which was mainly European. In my interpretation, this phenomenon signifies where emerging black artists were ontologically located and emerging. As much as on the one hand, Dutch-born painters can be summoned to contest for including African forms into their artworks in an attempt to forge and cultivate their new Afrikaner nationalist identity – on the other hand, the coequal can be said about emerging black artists who painted their environment while using the tools and techniques of their white European counterparts. Importantly, one cannot turn a blind eye to Afrikaner nationalist identity, which became centred on the geographic space that they occupied – as Afrikaners. This is while the categorising of emerging black artists was mainly based on who they are – their definition by race, as black people. This is consistent with the intentional omission and dislocation of black people from their indigenous lands, while using art to shape and legitimise the identity of the European other. Under these operational categories, I am obliged to expatiate on how blackness can be employed to shape a narrative. That process starts with what prominent scholars say about blackness. The cultural philosopher Stuart Hall (1996, 442) asserted that the term "black"

was "coined as a way of referencing the common experience of racism and marginalisation … to provide the organising category of a new politics of resistance". Hall's concept of blackness is what critical phenomenologists, including Enrique Dussel (2002), Cecil Foster (2007) and Pius Ojara (2006), refer to as "the community of victims of globalisation, sexism, racism, anti-Semitism, heterosexism, colonialism, and prejudice/discrimination/ oppression on the basis of age, nationality, economic class, location, disability, and so on" (Paradiso-Michau 2008,91). These art practices, histories and social developments have created a situation in South Africa where identities are highly contested. Race relations are a sensitive issue to talk about. Moreover, although we are a mixed community, most social groups remain separated according to race, class or other cultural repertoires.

The last chapter of art history books in South Africa normally examines post-apartheid developments and international influences. Before 1994, the art produced in South Africa was mainly dominated by Western art movements and standards. The socio-political conditions imposed by apartheid forced black art and artists to either become resistant and struggle for equality and social justice or to be coerced and co-opted into the realm of the prevailing dominant Eurocentric culture. Unfortunately, 27 years after apartheid ended, the dominant art trends and art curricula are still largely influenced by Western standards. I can say that there is a glimpse of hope in recent contemporary art production, but little transformation has been achieved.

Sayan and Shankhadeep: You have been associated with the arts and artworks for quite some time. According to your experiences, what are some of the possible ways in which artworks can be used as a physical and psychological tool of healing during Covid-19?

Bongani Mkhonza: My strong conviction is that people need to move away from the conception of art as a physical product of exchange towards embracing art as an all-encompassing denominator present in all we experience and do. By saying this, I am not particularly taking a position that is anti-buying and selling of art. All I am saying is that the economics of art should be regarded as one of the strata and not the central driving force of the sector. You raised the question of what are some of the possible ways in which artworks can be used as a tool of physical and psychological healing during Covid-19? And my direct response is that the buying and selling of art, which gives artists and galleries opportunities for economic security, is not as valuable to society as the socio-political benefits. I argue that nothing during Covid-19 has given South Africans and the world more hope, healing and optimism than the arts. A good example of this is the song Jerusalema by Master KG and Nomcebo Zikode which became the inspiring sound of the pandemic to the whole world. The uplifting message and dance challenges brought along by Jerusalema invited the whole world to stand up and face the challenges of the pandemic. The song spread like wildfire at a time when communities around the world were knocked down by sickness, disease, economic challenges and death. The overall impact of this song had little to do with the economics of art. With limited economic exchange, the song brought to the world positive vibes of love, dance, unity and hope when the world needed it the most. And to me, this should be the fundamental obligation of the arts to society. The impact was felt despite the lack of physicality of being in concerts, studios, and art galleries. This observation calls for us to revisit the strong emphasis we place on art as a commodity, of art as a physical object of exchange. It forces us to move towards giving more attention to the social value of the arts. Moreover, the dominant pattern of measuring the value of the art moves beyond the selling point, towards investments. For example, a painting hanging on your wall can help you heal during Covid-19 lockdowns when your movements are limited. This kind of social investment is invaluable, compared to monetary returns. It is the graffiti, cartoons, and digital arts shared through mobile devices that continue to inspire the world to look forward to

and beyond the terrifying grief of Covid-19. It is poetry and jazz that brings us comfort and helps us heal. As expressed before, I place more importance on experience, as opposed to acquisitions. It is necessary to experience art as a consistent presence and a consistent response mechanism to our social, cultural, gender and racial challenges.

We must recognise that encoded in the arts are messages. During lockdowns, social distancing and limited physical interactions, art can be exhibited in hospitals and care centres to spread messages of comfort and care. Art can be printed on postcards and be posted to our loved one across the world. Music and podcasts can be shared through social media and enjoyed by colleagues, friends and families. Art is one of the few entities that can transcend all these physical boundaries. When we find ourselves living in a world of loss of hope, I truly believe that there are signals that only artists can send, using their artistry and creativity as their frequency, only if we allow ourselves to escape entrapments from certain beliefs that are mostly related to placing more emphasis on the physicality of things and commodification of the arts.

Lastly, like James Baldwin, I don't like nor trust words like healing, "yet one is compelled to recognise that all these imprecise words are attempts made by us all to get to something which is real, and which lives behind the words" (Baldwin 1963). The idealistic notion of employing art to heal seems to suggest that one day, post-Covid-19, things will go back to normal and we might all get healed. However, Baldwin warned us that "art is here to prove, and to help one bear, the fact that all safety is an illusion" (Baldwin 1963). As inspired by Baldwin, I contend that art plays a central role in how people make meaning of their world. Therefore, for art to meaningfully contribute towards healing, it needs to deal with the tension between the real and the ideal. The real problems that people face go beyond Covid-19. The majority of South Africans are facing the horrible reality of poverty, unemployment, hunger and inhumane conditions in their settlements. However, the images, advertisements, poetry and messages of the world that are being projected to them seem to reflect the ideal and the desirable. The accentuation of the ideal psychologically creates an unethical parallel world that is uninhabitable by most people in South Africa. Baldwin perceived the ultimate function of art as a counterbalance for our pain. Taking a leaf from this, I also think that art should thrive to intercede and reflect the realities as they are and help people to share their pain. Perhaps that will bring about spiritual healing to the world.

Sayan and Shankhadeep: *Can you reflect on the different transformations that need to be brought into the present curricular patterns of teaching and learning arts in South Africa, so that it can be an effective practical tool for countering pandemics in the future?*

Bongani Mkhonza: A lot still needs to be done in that regard. The pandemic caught us unprepared in South Africa, which resulted in this country going into one of the hardest and longest lockdowns. The art world and art education sectors almost went into a crisis. Museums were temporarily closed. Art fairs were hard-hit because they were either cancelled or postponed. For example, locally the FNB Johannesburg Art Fair was cancelled in 2020. Internationally, the Art Basil Hong Kong was postponed. This was devastating because art galleries make almost 70% of their turnover through art fairs. Art auctions were also hard-hit, while some conducted their auctions online. However, buyers' confidence was not the same. It has been projected that over 60% of small art galleries could close as a result of the financial impact of Covid-19. Big galleries are said to be surviving by selling artworks produced by already established artists to keep revenue flowing in. The whole supply chain was disrupted as a result of travel bans. Museums bring visitors and tourists to the country, who in turn buy artworks from art galleries. These examples illustrate a disastrous outcome for the arts, should another pandemic strike again. Thus, a level of preparedness is crucial as an effective practical

tool for countering pandemics in the future. In the education sector, news reports indicated that Covid-19 resulted in schools closing across the world, with a global figure of over 1.2 billion children out of the classroom in 2020. One of the common strategies employed by art galleries and art schools was transforming their programmes to online offerings. The art gallery and collection that I currently curate is housed within a university (Unisa). It caters for both the arts and educational functions. The benefit is that my university is one of the largest open distance learning (ODL) universities in the world. At the university art gallery, we took advantage of the already existing technology and infrastructure and moved most of our functions online. Our exhibition programmes were done virtually. Moreover, for the first time in the history of our art collection, acquisition processes were also conducted online. Going forward, I see e-learning as the future. Within e-learning, teaching and learning is conducted remotely using communication technology and home devices, and it is undertaken on digital platforms. Therefore, issues of access to the internet and connectivity are of utmost importance. There are advantages and disadvantages to e-learning. But overall, it seems like in most circumstances, the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. The curriculum should take into consideration the different economic challenges of learners, the age differences of learners and the level of parental support and guidance required. Some researchers suggest that a shift of focus must be effected from a skills-based curriculum to an emotional intelligence-based curriculum. This kind of curriculum will prepare learners to cope in the future world of artificial intelligence and limited human contact. These changes will require adaptability and higher resilience. The latest developments show that schools and universities will have to revisit the driving principles of their curricula. Around the world, researchers propose the four columns for the future curriculum need to be digitisation, collaboration and localisation, social commitment and psychological well-being.

However, my contribution to transformations to the present curricular patterns of teaching and learning arts in South Africa is informed by my analysis, and in identifying what seemed to be missing from the above-mentioned e-learning developments. It is also informed by the locality from where my thinking emerges. This contribution is what I call bringing the 'African culture' to online teaching and learning. At the centre of the principle of African culture should be the concept of Ubuntu. The concept of Ubuntu recognises the mutuality and duality of the existence of all parties involved in the process of e-learning. Moreover, it needs to open a space for more ways of thinking and being. The principle of Ubuntu could be used as a response to the widely accepted one-sided traditional approach. Most traditional methods of teaching and learning follow a linear approach where the school and its knowledge is the authority while the learner is the receiver of that knowledge. In the Ubuntu approach, the teacher, the technology, knowledge, and the learner are equally important. The humanity of all participants is the cornerstone of knowledge that is not universal but localised and contextualised to specific environments. Critical emphasis needs to be placed on individual experiences rather than a 'one model fits all' type of idealism.

To conclude, we need to accept that Covid-19 has altered our ways of being in many ways. Previously, our conditions of existence were mainly informed by the post-war, post-modern, post-colonial discourse. I argue that Covid-19 is one of the major forces in the trajectory of our existence. Post-Covid-19, new worlds will be born. Those worlds will not be born to the universe but to its people and their environments. It will be upon those different worlds to take that opportunity to carve their new forms of existence and relationships with other worlds to re-learn ethical ways of treating each other and the environment and to develop and nurture healthy and peaceful relationships with others. It is a shame that the world had to go through Covid-19 before righteousness in the world can be restored. But now that we are here, let us seize the moment for a reset.

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Chapter 2

Visual resistance against Covid-19:

An interview with Kenneth Kaplan

Conducted by Sayan Dey and Shankhadeep Chattopadhyay

Sayan and Shankhadeep: *Let us start with a general question. How did the media in South Africa respond to the pandemic and how was it similar and different to media discourses which emerged in the coverage of global crises and emergencies in the past?*

Kenneth Kaplan: To answer your question I should first explain a few broad concepts that shape my understanding of the mediated response to emergencies in the coverage of global crises, both now and in the past. The very idea of 'emergency' is fundamental to how we understand this moment and its representation in the media. In South Africa, as elsewhere, media is integral to our cultural, social and political response at this moment. When we look back at some of the major human conflicts or natural disasters over the last 30 or 40 years and the emergencies caused by these events, we see how media depicts suffering around the world. Mass media has become a huge part of how we understand and encounter emergencies along with the humanitarian suffering it causes. Think back to Live Aid in the mid-1980s, a huge media event reaching global audiences through the relatively new broadcast satellite technology of the time. It was the first global media event of its kind to raise public awareness and funding for the humanitarian disaster caused by conflict and the Ethiopian famine. Over the years, we have become increasingly familiar with these mediated images of suffering such as the shocking coverage of the 2004 tsunami which conveyed to the world the extent of the destruction and the massive loss of life caused by that natural disaster. There have been many disturbing images over the years that swayed the public in support of urgent intervention to help those in need. The 2015 pictures of Alan Kurdi, a three-year-old Syrian refugee, lying face down in the water on a Turkish beach is one of the more powerful recent symbols of the human cost of war and the plight of Syrian refugees. The regularity with which these images confront and shock us has become an everyday occurrence with the Covid-19 pandemic.

The great impact of media in shaping our understanding of 'emergency' has played out over many years and continues today. Political theorists and sociologists have been looking at the idea of emergency and how it characterises the world we live in. Craig Calhoun speaks of the "emergency imaginary" to describe a defining experience of our age (2010). Indeed, we seem to lurch from one form of crisis to the next whether these events are caused by environmental

disaster, war, or, as with Covid-19, virulent and deadly forms of biological threat caused by species-hopping pathogens. Thinking about this mode of emergency opens up interesting questions about mediated spaces and what messages they convey at times like this.

In response to your question, let's look back at media representations of past crises to help develop a critical understanding of current media discourses percolating around the Covid-19 emergency in South Africa and other places. Through the lens of emergency, we can discern various distortions that are conveyed in media coverage of these events. Media responses to large-scale public health emergencies such as the 2014 Ebola outbreak and the HIV/AIDS pandemic, are helpful in providing context in answering your question.

A wide range of media was produced on the HIV/AIDS pandemic in South Africa and across the region. International donor funding flooded into southern Africa during the 1990s and early 2000s to address the high levels of infection and mortality rates caused by the disease. Many documentary films, narrative fiction, public health announcements, and educational TV programmes focused on raising awareness and affecting behavioural change to address high-risk factors associated with HIV transmission rates and the social stigma of AIDS. Oswelled Ureke, a Zimbabwean academic, criticised these audio-visual productions as offering overly uniform portrayals of the region for the benefit of the Western developmental gaze which tended to see Africans as the "problem" (2016). Certainly, in some cases, these productions oversimplified complex problems and failed to grasp deeper issues when addressing the need for behaviour change rooted in cultural beliefs and social practices - even when these practices exposed women and girls to high-risk behaviour associated with the transmission of HIV/AIDS. Some media, developed with local NGOs, approached production from a local perspective by including filmmakers from the region in the development and production of the content. One such project I was involved with was GroundBreakers, a TV series produced with LoveLife in South Africa that used entertainment formats in innovative ways to promote awareness around health and lifestyle choices among the youth.

International media coverage of the 2014 Ebola outbreak covered the threat of contagion and the suffering it caused in different ways. I divide these into two broad categories: those highlighting the humanitarian cost of the crisis, focusing on disparities in public health infrastructure between richer and poorer nations, which highlighted the human cost of the emergency; and the other approach, which framed the epidemic as a health-security risk. The health-security angle gained traction following the United Nations Security Council's (UNSC) late-2014 resolution declaring the Ebola virus a threat to peace and security. It is very rare for the UNSC to characterise a public health crisis as a security risk and it has done so only three times-all in relation to Ebola and HIV/AIDS.

You ask how media discourses evolve from past crises and impact how we see the current emergency in South Africa. I think an aspect of what we see is rooted in a post-9/11 fear of bioterrorism which plays out with the closure of national borders to contain the threat of contagion. By this, I mean that we saw a shift in media focus from matters around inequitable access to public health resources and the suffering this causes, to rapid interventions preventing the free movement of people across national borders. We saw these fears surface with the Ebola outbreak when travel restrictions were imposed between various African countries to contain and limit the risks. But South African media coverage of Ebola never approached the levels of paranoia we've seen in some reports coming out of the global North about the fear of the disease spreading into their countries. Social and political tensions in the West have been inflamed by fear of illegal immigration and the threat of bioterrorism which distorts how the media reports on health priorities around the world.

With the Covid-19 pandemic we saw a decisive shift in South Africa as government and media quickly turned to security issues and the threat of cross-border transmission. We saw this with the abrupt closure of international land, air and sea borders with the initial level 5 lockdown restrictions. Media coverage of Covid-19 in the region, compared to past global events like Ebola, reflects the new levels of uncertainty and paranoia that accompanied this emergency at a global scale we have not seen in our lifetime. The closure of our borders is all the more disruptive given our reliance on globalised supply chains and the interconnectedness of regional populations.

In the past, media from richer donor-nations depicted poorer countries as the main recipients of help and this influenced their coverage of disasters and humanitarian emergencies. Now we see an eroding of some of these distinctions as large-scale human suffering, once perceived by people living in the West as occurring in far-off places, came much closer to home for richer nations. In the earlier stages of the pandemic, startling reports of soaring infection numbers and deaths in Western Europe and the United States shattered preconceived ideas about the readiness of health infrastructure in wealthier countries to cope with the Covid-19 health emergency.

One of the enduring legacies of this emergency has to be the redrawing of simplistic media binaries that tended to separate reports between wealthier, better-equipped nations of the global North, from those in the South with less developed facilities. Disturbing images of mass burials and makeshift mortuaries in cities like New York, during the early stages of the pandemic in 2020, shocked the world. CNN's Chief Medical Correspondent, Dr Sanjay Gupta, spoke to this recalibration when he compared the pandemic unfolding in the United States to some of the worst disasters he had ever covered. His observation, based on personal experiences, was all the more surprising considering that he had covered the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami in the Indian Ocean, the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, and the 2011 famine in Somalia.

Sayan and Shankhadeep: *Based on the various discourses as constructed by the media about the pandemic, can you reflect on the various ways in which media discourses influenced the residents of South Africa and their understanding of the Covid-19 pandemic?*

Kenneth Kaplan: In this ever-changing landscape, the media plays an increasingly powerful role in the various discourses that shape our understanding of Covid-19 and how we gauge our progress in this journey of many twists and turns.

In answering your question, let me first give a quick overview of the local TV and radio landscape in South Africa to help us understand what media sources are available and how the majority of residents receive this content. Reading across various reports we arrive at a number of 14.5 million TV households in South Africa. Of this total, 8.2 million receive DSTV, a digital subscription service, which carries a bouquet of international and local channels. Another 2.4 million households use OpenView, a free satellite service, while 500 to 600 thousand others rely on the government's digital-terrestrial service, distributed by Sentech, a state-owned entity. The balance of 3.4 to 4.2 million TV households still receive signal through outdated free-to-air analogue terrestrial transmission.

While private media companies like DSTV and OpenView control a large share of the content delivery, the public broadcaster, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) still provides the most-watched content in the country based on viewership numbers. About 13 of the top 20 most popular shows in the country are produced by the SABC (SABC Annual Report

2020). When it comes to adult radio listeners, a massive 92% of the population, or 37.5 million people nationally, tune in each week to their favourite shows. SABC radio broadcasts in all 11 official languages and this contributes significantly to its 70% control of this type of media in the country (SABC Annual Report 2020).

We can talk about print and online media later, but in answering your question, it is important to understand the SABC's control of market share to appreciate its influence and reach and why government is so dependent on the national broadcaster in managing public perception of the pandemic.

Once President Ramaphosa invoked the State of Disaster laws dealing with the Covid-19 outbreak, the flow of information to the public was affected in many ways. On 15 March 2020, the President announced the establishment of the National Coronavirus Command Council (NCCC) to "coordinate all aspects of our extraordinary emergency response" (Ramaphosa 2020). Following this, the government intensified its public communication across SABC media channels. The public broadcaster was a willing participant and opened its airwaves to government messaging even though such access may raise troubling questions about where the independence of the public broadcaster ends and government control begins. That this debate has received so little attention is worrying when questions of media independence carry disturbing memories of a different era when the SABC functioned as little more than a mouthpiece for the state and its propaganda.

In the earliest days of the pandemic, we saw SABC TV platforms become the main conduit of government information in the form of media briefings orchestrated through the NCCC. Of course, you can make a compelling argument that it is the government's responsibility to take control and ensure effective communication for the well-being and protection of its people during times like this. In such situations, debates about media independence might be considered mere distractions from the pressing issues at hand when the importance of saving lives trumps all other concerns. However, the rapid contraction of the media space that we witnessed in the first few weeks and months of the pandemic in South Africa needs to be viewed against our long and troubling history of state control of media and censorship under apartheid rule.

Given this history, dismissing these concerns as trivial and distracting from the real threat at hand is misguided, even possibly dangerous. You ask about ways in which different media discourses influence public understanding of the pandemic. I think control over the flow of information has important implications in understanding government messaging at this time. When these controls effectively limit the flow of information, reducing the narrative to a single dominant discourse, public trust in the source is also undermined. One consequence is that this trust deficit is quickly filled by alternative media, such as social media and other online aggregators of information.

Growing public distrust in mainstream media sources did not start with the Covid-19 pandemic, but was accelerated by it. We have seen this in many places in the world where traditional print and electronic media are increasingly supplanted by unregulated social media and other digital forms. Even while concerns about accuracy of social media news sources increase, we see the growing influence and power they wield over public opinion and our understanding of current events. The rapidly shifting landscape of the Covid-19 virus only added fuel to the fire of misinformation and fake news.

A Reuters report tracking digital news trends around the world signals worrying levels of misinformation in Africa compared to other regions covered (2010). The Reuters report indicates that the level of misinformation (74%) circulating on social media in the African region is well above the global average of 58% in the Americas, Europe and the Asia-Pacific region.

It is important to clarify that in South Africa, fake news and inaccurate reporting is not limited to social media. We saw this with Jacques Pauw's fake reports of police harassment which was published, without verification, by The Daily Maverick, an online and print publication that was previously acknowledged for its accuracy and high editorial standards of investigative journalism (Bird 2021). Another case was Piet Mahasha Rampedi's spurious report in Pretoria News about a woman giving birth to ten babies without adequate factual confirmation, and the story was also carried by *Independent Online* before it was considered misleading and eventually retracted (Bhengu 2021) When mainstream publications are found wanting, retractions and apologies soon follow, but social media's unregulated space is subject to little or no editorial review and this encourages the rapid spread of misleading and even disproved information.

Fake news was already a major problem in South Africa before the pandemic, as we saw with the disinformation campaign orchestrated by UK firm Bell Pottinger when they were hired by the Gupta family to discredit investigations into the family's involvement in corruption and state capture (Boom 2018). During the pandemic this threat increased and government became increasingly concerned about its potential to derail containment measures and vaccination uptake. Repeatedly, government warned that anyone creating or sharing fake news about Covid-19 could be prosecuted. Statements from the Department of Education were even clearer when explaining that around 10 000 educators in the Gauteng province had declined vaccination. The reasons given were that "myth and the power of fake news" had influenced people to refuse vaccines (ENCA 2021). Officials worried that educators had fallen prey to the trap of accepting falsehoods about vaccines as reality. Even though the courts, government and its medical advisors have slammed fake news for contributing to Covid-19 denialism and people flouting lockdown regulations, while increasing fear and suspicion around vaccines, very little, if any, legal action has been taken against anyone found to be creating or spreading fake news.

We are not unique in the way disinformation mirrors the political climate in our country. What is specific to South Africa is what we saw during the third wave of the pandemic when public violence erupted in July 2021, causing widespread looting and damage to infrastructure in KwaZulu-Natal and parts of Gauteng, while it also disrupted containment of the rampant Delta variant of the Covid-19 virus. President Ramaphosa spoke to this ominous convergence of forces when he warned against the sharing of video clips that falsely represented these events. In the same speech on 11 July 2021 that was delivered on SABC TV, he warned that the extreme nature of the violence risked distracting us from the threat of the virus. Like the Department of Education's concern about its employees accepting fake news as real, the President's words echoed the danger that disinformation posed to national stability, a key requirement for the orderly management of the pandemic. Repeated warnings from government about the risks of fake news suggest an inability to control these unregulated media spaces even when the effective functioning of state is at risk. More than anything, this highlights the strategic importance of how government manages its media messaging and the risk posed by losing control over the information the public receives and consequently believes.

I want to come back to public trust because it is important in terms of how media discourse influences our understanding of the pandemic. As the trust deficits widened in relation to media

accountability and government action, both hope to shore up certain failings to close the gap and win back the public's belief in the messaging they put out. Government addressed public concerns about its lack of preparedness in handling the violence or its containment measures by acknowledging mistakes and promising to improve in the future. Media organisations have grown public trust in some areas by exposing government shortcomings and abuses such as those around irregular procurement of personal protective equipment required by medical personnel dealing with the virus, over-inflated sanitisation contracts, and notably, the Minister of Health's involvement in the irregular appointment of a private company to handle his Department's media campaign which materially benefited his family. Even as these reports garnered public trust, others hoped to discredit the media to protect their own interests. This struggle for control over which media narrative holds sway played out repeatedly around the pandemic as different interests exerted influence over public opinion.

When considering how media discourses constructed around the pandemic influenced public understanding of the situation, issues of trust resurface again and again. I have tried to avoid an overly simplistic view that pins this down to just one or two specific factors because there are many variables that influence public perception beyond just questions of trust in government and the media.

Sayan and Shankhadeep: *How has the media in South Africa represented the govenment's response to this public health emergency with its enforcement of lockdown regulations which have been among the most severe in the world, at least in the first weeks of the pandemic and which saw the mobilisation of military and police?*

Kenneth Kaplan: In the opening days and weeks of the pandemic here, we saw the media helping government to get out its message to the public about how it was dealing with the pandemic. Media support was across the board. It included the SABC, our public broadcaster, and privately-owned media interests who were also on board as willing partners keeping the public informed about lockdown regulations and risk mitigation measures. As you say, ours was among the harshest lockdowns in the world and at the time many thought it was the right thing to do in response to a virus that we knew very little about. However, the extent of the lockdown and its rapid enforcement probably required better planning before implementing such severe restrictions such as the closure of national borders, the halting of public transport, restricting business operations and introducing strict curfews on free movement. Only later did the media adopt a more critical angle as government heavy-handedness and the arbitrary nature of some of the regulations began to stir dissent.

The large mobilisation of police and troops in the first weeks of the pandemic is emblematic of the severity of our lockdown which you refer to in your question. What was very interesting about the media coverage of President Ramaphosa addressing troops on the eve of the deployment to enforce the initial 21-day lockdown was how the event appeared carefully choreographed for the cameras.

Images of troops amassing before the leader carries powerful meaning synonymous with legitimising state power and reinforcing the exclusive right of government to command and wield military force. They are also intended to bolster public confidence in ways that are less familiar to us over the last 27 years of our democratic state. The President's appearance in camouflage fatigues not only reinforces his authority as Commander-in-Chief but also reminds us of his duty to secure the state against imminent threat. This mediated moment required that we put aside our discomfort with military force being used internally against our own people

when our common understanding is that its use is intended to meet external threats to our national sovereignty. Yet, these images serve narratives that justify military deployment as a necessary precaution to help the police enforce lockdown regulations to ostensibly control the free movement of South African residents. Only exceptional circumstances such as those symptomatic of this emergency precipitated by biological threat, could explain these images and the cause to which they rally public opinion.

This footage was carried widely on SABC and across most media platforms. The President's transformation before the cameras, from the familiarly urbane leader into the military commander at the head of his troops, was quite a stunning change and really drives home the power of imagery and the importance of controlling the messages conveyed at critical moments of uncertainty. Whether mobilising the military in support of the police was the right thing to do will be debated for years to come, but I am more interested in how government response to the public health emergency brings together seemingly irreconcilable actors in the form of security forces and medical services.

When we see images of the military on our streets or military doctors working in public clinics, we begin to see how this coverage blurs the lines between security forces and humanitarian actors. I describe these images as operating within an 'aesthetic of emergency' that carries certain narratives about the pandemic. Whether we watch the military and police control the movement of civilian populations or the deployment of military medics in the Eastern Cape helping to control the surge in infections there, a closer reading of these images helps us understand how media cast the pandemic in a certain light which conveys meaning within, and about, the mode of emergency.

In the Eastern Cape, where local health services were unable to deal with the infection surge, media coverage tended to frame the problem as a humanitarian crisis requiring a rush to action. Our understanding of emergency thinking was developed by Craig Calhoun (2010) and Luc Boltanski (1999), describing a shift in focus from a wider view of the situation to a narrower one, fixed on the immediate crisis before us. This results in our delinking of past and future considerations from our evaluation of the present. This temporal shift not only distorts our perception of reality but also shapes the ways in which the media cover these events. Instead of providing context, such as historical problems associated with the lack of investment and upkeep of health infrastructure in the Eastern Cape region, media coverage tended to focus on the crisis at hand and the justification for urgent military deployment to meet pressing humanitarian needs.

This aesthetic of emergency is not only read in the temporal mode of crisis, but also in the humanitarian gaze which the media reports assume. From this vantage point and with its images of human suffering, public opinion is swayed in support of any response that addresses the immediate problem, even when this involves the deployment of military personnel in a humanitarian function. Whether knowingly or unknowingly, such media reports help construct a sense of inevitability and justify the securitisation of health interventions, something we have increasingly seen with the government's response to the pandemic. Whether this plays out in the provision of military medics or in the use of troops to enforce regulations intended to contain the spread of contagion, the outcomes are the same - a muddling of the public understanding of the line that once demarcated medical and humanitarian responses from military and security operations.

I have talked about the National Crisis Command Council (NCCC) and its role in coordinating government responses to the pandemic. I want to revisit this in answering your question about how media represented the government's response. We need to understand the power this body exerts over the flow of information to media and the public.

We know that the NCCC is made up of cabinet ministers and security cluster representatives like the head of the South African National Defence Force and the National Police Commissioner. It also incorporates the National Joint Operations and Intelligence Structures. In facilitating state responses, the NCCC wields centralised control over communication and this shapes government's messaging and how it is conveyed to the media.

I have already mentioned that centralised control over information conjures uncomfortable comparisons with South Africa's past and the restrictions placed on the media during apartheid. Over multiple States of Emergency in the mid-1980s, I saw first-hand how media and press restrictions censored coverage whenever it was considered a threat to the apartheid government. To be clear, no such blatant restrictions exist in South Africa today, yet the centralised function the NCCC exerts, risks insidious manipulation of what information the public receives and what is withheld. We saw this during the initial months of the lockdown as restrictions on movement and the flow of news meant an almost exclusive reliance on government information about the pandemic.

The NCCC's media briefings and the release of National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) daily infection and mortality rates, do not equate with the police 'unrest reports' during the States of Emergency in the 1980s, but the outcome is similar in restricting the free flow of information. This carries risks of a singular dominant narrative emanating from government press briefings which in turn increases the reliance on unverified and false information from potentially unreliable news sources.

Many factors likely influenced the government's decision to move away from Dr Dlamini-Zuma's media briefings, as head of the NCCC, to more varied lines of communication through ministerial-level briefings. I think the outcome was partly successful by creating a greater diversity of opinions and information flow. As NCCC briefings gradually retreated from view, so did uncomfortable associations shared with the government's control over our media space. When President Ramaphosa's "family meetings" took over as the new mode of address, a clear shift in visual language and messaging was apparent - instead of the techno-security state, a more familial and avuncular tone was now in operation. With this we saw a recasting of the President's image and a return to his more familiar role as civilian leader, replacing the militaristic posturing that accompanied earlier images of the government's securitised response to the pandemic. When reconfigured for the camera, these shifts in mise-en-scène communicate powerful signifiers through the visual language of the image.

Through this transition we saw how media influenced public perception about the government's response to the pandemic. By shifting our attention away from the security forces and reports of heavy-handedness in enforcing lockdown restrictions, the more familial mode of address adopted by the President altered the discourse from an adversarial relationship requiring enforced control of people, to a more cooperative message aimed at enlisting public help in controlling the spread of contagion.

Sayan and Shankhadeep: In order to overcome the state of health emergency and the control of repressive state apparatuses like the military and the police in South Africa, do you think

visual resistance in the form of films, documentaries and awareness videos can function as tools of counter-resistance during this pandemic and beyond? If yes, how?

Kenneth Kaplan: I am aware of a few documentaries, public information videos and even narrative films that have been produced in South Africa during the pandemic. Some interrogate the effects of the lockdown on our physical state and others delve into the mental well-being of the people and the country. I am not sure I would call these "tools of counter-resistance" to the extent that they can actually affect change, or anything like that, but they do spark important discussions by identifying links and comparisons that we may not have thought of before. This seems useful when trying to make sense of our new biomedical reality and the ways in which it has changed how we live now and, most likely, in the future.

I have been involved with one documentary film that is still a work-in-progress. It tries to take a long view by constructing parallel narratives that raise interesting overlaps between the HIV pandemic and the Covid-19 experience. By surfacing past and future considerations when comparing medical and political responses to both pandemics, the film hopes to widen our temporal view beyond the narrow focus that dominates during emergency, something I spoke about earlier. Maybe, as you say, in questioning mainstream narratives circulating around the pandemic, these films can offer something of what you refer to as counter-resistance.

I won't talk for the film or the filmmakers, but what interests me is the significance we see in the role of the doctor figure at times like this. This is especially so when tracing the development of the HIV vaccine over the last two decades and how the trials of that process culminated in the current pandemic. It is natural that medical figures assume an importance in this scientific work, yet the increased media attention on medical and scientific figures suggests their growing power and influence over government policy and how the public understands the virus. As the stature of the doctor figure has grown, so too have tensions between governments and its medical advisors.

Consider Dr Anthony Fauci, one of the subjects of the film, and how his voice was amplified by the media as a sober response to Trump's sometimes irrational outbursts about Covid-19. President Trump even retweeted calls to #FireFauci as the doctor's equally vocal fans rallied to defend him on @FauciFanClub. TikTok, a popular video app, has elevated him to something approaching star status with over 1.8 million views of content carrying his name and his popularity feeds a huge demand for a range of fan products (McGraw 2020). If he was 'just' a doctor it is unlikely that so much public and media scrutiny would be levelled at him. Much of this attention results from his influence in advising the American government's response to Covid-19 as head of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. Yet, the emblematic role he assumed during the pandemic was inextricably linked to his stature as a medical doctor. This is not unique to Fauci or a product of the frenzied media in the United States. Consider the ways in which doctors in similar roles in South Africa have been represented during the pandemic - such as Dr Glenda Gray, Dr Aslam Dasoo or Professors Shabir Madhi and Abdool Karim - a special significance accompanied these figures and how they were constructed in the public and political imagination.

The modern medical doctor has strong links with biomedical traditions arising in Western society and stretches back to Greek mythology. The Hippocratic Oath and the Asclepiad staff, with its sacred healing snake, are two ancient symbols most familiar in our thinking about modern Western medicine. At a more nuanced level, philosopher and historian Michel Foucault's ideas are useful in explaining how the doctor figure assumes power when it comes

to matters of the body and the treatment of disease. He links the elevation of the doctor to the rise of modern medical knowledge. Foucault uses the term "medical gaze" to describe a change in how this knowledge is received and dispersed (1973). This he puts down to a recalibration in the perceptual lens that allowed the doctor to perceive at the cellular level an absolute empirical truth, a form of knowledge previously unattainable and still technically beyond reach at the time this shift occurs.

Linking this shift to the rise of the modern European state following the French Revolution (1789 - 1798), Foucault also describes the emergence of the modern hospital, or "clinic" as he calls it. These institutions changed the way society dealt with the sick and diseased. Where previously illness was linked to lapses in spirituality and religious observance, disease was now symptomatic of corporeal function. This effectively replaced the family and priestly classes as primary caregivers; now the responsibility for caring for the sick shifted to the hospital which was under the control of the secular state. Along with the perceptual elevation of medical knowledge, the figure of the doctor emerges as we know it today: indispensable to the functioning of the state and empowered by legal authority over matters of life and death, the doctor is situated at the intersection of power relations involving the biopolitical and therapeutic.

Our fascination with the doctor figure carries into contemporary culture in many forms. One of the most recognisable is the character in the evergreen medical-themed TV drama. Think of Grey's Anatomy, Chicago Hope, ER, House and the huge audiences these shows attract which sustain their ongoing production over many years. Durban Gen, a local telenovela, set in the eponymous hospital, premiered during the pandemic in 2020 and gained a following of over 2.7 million weekly national viewers (BRC 2021).

The dramatic doctor characters in these series might bear little resemblance to their real-life counterparts, yet in the midst of a mediated pandemic, doctors are integral to public perceptions of reality and the dangers posed. Now more than ever, the significance and trust we associate with the doctor figure is constantly displayed and tested. No media report or account of the pandemic appears complete without the opinion of a qualified medical doctor offering their considered views to substantiate the accuracy of the content. Professional medical opinion is elevated even further in an environment where the accuracy and source of media information is often questioned. In addition, at times of biological threat, as with AIDS and Covid-19, we see an increasing reliance on the medical profession in advising government health policy.

A dizzying array of specialists - epidemiologists, immunologists, virologists, physicians and many others - are enlisted as trusted interlocutors to inspire public faith in government policy and lend credibility to therapeutic responses during times of biological uncertainty. Sometimes this relationship is tested when research-based medical evidence diverges from political considerations that might have more to do with the exercise of power and control over populations, rather than general wellbeing. In the documentary film I mentioned, we see this play out in the United States and South Africa. I have already alluded to the conflict between Dr Fauci and President Trump, but want to speak more to your question about local media and contestations arising around mainstream government narratives that seek to dominate the moment.

In the early days of the pandemic, some of the doctors appearing alongside then-health minister, Dr Zweli Mkhize, were praised for their experience and contribution in advising government. However, when social inequalities were exacerbated by the heavy-handed and rapid lockdown,

Dr Glenda Gray criticised the arbitrary nature of some regulations, claiming these caused unintended consequences such as a rise in malnutrition in poorer communities where adequate advance planning was lacking (Karim 2020). The Minister dismissed her criticism as unscientific and argued that her accusations were based on inaccurate information. When colleagues in the scientific community supported her views, defending her right to free speech and academic freedom, they were removed as ministerial advisors (SAMJ 2020).

The documentary tackles the pandemic in interesting ways. Instead of viewing events within the narrow focus of the Covid-19 emergency, the film explores deeper historical linkages by connecting criticism of government's handling of Covid-19 with the HIV/AIDS pandemic in the early 2000s. Then, AIDS-denialism accompanied the South African government's refusal to allow anti-retroviral treatments for HIV-infected patients. This distrust of Western drug therapies was informed by Minister of Health Dr Manto Tshabalala-Msimang's promotion of African traditional remedies as a preferred treatment. Public clashes between Professor Abdool Karim, Dr Gray's predecessor as head of the Medical Research Council , and the Minister, are well known, due to Dr Tshabalala-Msimang's angry dismissals of anyone questioning government's views on HIV/AIDS at the time (Evans 2020). Much has changed since then as we see with the government's massive vaccination rollout and its reliance on the medical sector in guiding its response to Covid-19. However, the harsh reaction to Dr Gray's questioning of lockdown regulations by some in the Department of Health, shares a similar intolerance for criticism that accompanied government's dealing with the scientific and medical community during the HIV/AIDS crisis.

The film also compares these events in South Africa with those in the United States between Dr Fauci and President Trump. In this respect, the doctor figure, understood within Foucault's reasoning to be an extension of state power, appears also deeply conflicted: they must stand as a pillar of support for government's public health response while also speaking out against any blatant extension of political power, when this is perceived to be detrimental to the general wellbeing and health of the population.

In trying to wrap up my answer to your question about how films and other media might function as "tools of counter-resistance" - I think they can pose interesting strategies for overcoming the limitations that emergency imposes on us through a paradigm that distorts how we view the world. This state of being advocates for living in a constant mode of emergency which robs us of critical perspective and analysis, assuming a reactive state of survival as we lurch from one crisis to the next. When media explores historical linkages between present and past, it helps us review how we understand the current crisis and respond to future events like this. Considering the global scale at which the Covid-19 pandemic played out, I am concerned that we could get lost in the 'mediatised now' and become untethered from our past and future.

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II.

Covid-19, decolonisation and democratic participation

Chapter 3

The pandemic of rumours and misdirections in the media during Covid-19: An interview with Luthando Ngema

Conducted by Sayan Dey and Shankhadeep Chattopadhyay

Sayan Dey and Shankhadeep: Covid-19 has triggered a steep rise in rumours and misdirected information about the pandemic across the world. How did media houses in South Africa systematically create rumours and misdirect the residents of South Africa during the time of Covid-19?

Luthando Ngema: An exciting point of departure here, Sayan and Shankhadeep, I am reminded of the words of Musa Abubakar Kana; Ronald LaPorte and Assan Jaye, who stated that

> Global transmission of SARS-CoV-2 was initially facilitated by fast transport movements, while high-speed internet enabling 24 hours live streaming of news and ubiquitous social media transmitted fear and misinformation, including fake news and hoaxes, which promote erroneous practices that increase the spread of the virus.

These words are from their research paper "Africa's contribution to the science of the Covid-19/SARS-CoV-2 pandemic" (2021). This statement alerts us to how the Covid-19 virus spread and at what speed it escalated to reach the globe, specifically the African continent. It further speaks to how the news of the virus was enabled by high-speed internet and access to 24 hour news broadcasts and how social media further played a role as a channel for misinformation and fake news. This statement resonates within the South African media landscape. Though the media in South Africa might have the technology to provide high-speed internet streaming, not many South Africans have access to the technology that delivers news from this platform. So other channels, such as gossip and rumours (Stadler 2003), carry news and global events to the rest of the community who do not have digital access.

The media landscape in South Africa is expansive and includes mainstream print and online news media, broadcast media, including radio and television. New media includes citizen-

based media through independent YouTube channels or personalities who active-ly use Facebook and Twitter.

A friend and colleague, Siyasanga Tyali, presented a talk at the Goethe Institute (Tyali 2021) and offered an interesting argument on how global internet technologies still carry traits of colonial structures and influence. He noted that "Africa has played a limited role on the internet as a carrier of knowledge regarding the internet. So it is reasonable to argue that the knowledge carried by the internet on Africa and Africans needs to be continuously interrogated" (Tyali 2021). What is conceptualised as a 'media house' is further complicated by new media through social media networks. These social media platforms influence social media users, who might not use [1]or trust[2] mainstream media in South Africa. The distrust is usually linked to the "omnipresence" of coloniality that persists "within systems and platforms that are meant to be most progressive" (Tyali 2021). Mainstream would be considered as those platforms that abide by the general media regulations, policies and principles. While new media and citizen media and other alternative presses might have elements of traditional media reporting, they lack the media regulations that hold the mainstream media accountable. Even though there is some media freedom, and less censorship for mediums within new media; the lack of access (to this network or spaces), and the omnipresence of coloniality, through globally dominant Eurocentric/ Western standards, prevail on what is prominent in communication spaces.

Covid-19 communication existed within all these mediums, and was subjected to a number of fake news sources that might have misdirected information about the pandemic. I think that mainstream media was careful to not fuel misinformation and operated from information and 'fact' sharing bases, using the usual agenda-setting methods that news frames operate from. They validated information by providing prominent confirmation from virolog-ists, epidemiologists, medical doctors and government officials who work within the health sector. The government had official websites that provided information updated on a daily basis on how many infections and deaths had occurred. Media houses would gather their references from the official Department of Health information portal. Generally, the South African public was initially sceptical of the virus even reaching our shores. The general language used, especially on social media, was that the virus was "Isifo Sama China" (translated as a "Chinese virus"). The initial encounter of misinformation was that the virus would not affect black/non-white people through the belief that black people have strong genes that would generally protect them. Examples were made of highly populated non-white countries such as India and other parts of the African continent, especially those near the equator.

Madagascar was heavily reported on within global news about their rejection of Covid-related reports and the promotion of the use of indigenous medicines, referring to the 'tonic', based on the plant Artemisia annua which has anti-malarial properties - as it is known in South Africa uMhlonyana (Newzroom Afrika 2020). The framing of the Madagascan indigenous solution as a 'tonic' establishes the agenda or stance of the media. The degrading of the approach indicates the prominence assigned to Western medicine under the World Health Organization (WHO).

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[1] A range of issues could exclude users from consuming mainstream media including lack of access to broadcasting resources, such as televisions, computers or smart phones. Digital access is further complicated by lack of access to data or internet connectivity. Data costs in South Africa are among the most expensive in the world. However, in South Africa, the most highly consumed broadcasting resource is the radio, and the majority of people have access to radio. The SABC alone as a public broadcaster has about 20 stations that cater to the 11 official languages in South Africa.

[2] South African media history is complex due to racialisation, from colonialism and apartheid. For over 300 years, the South African media landscape (especially the press media) lacked diversity, and was often used as a propaganda tool to sustain the apartheid regime.

Although mainstream media set the tone on how to perceive the so-called 'tonic', social media platforms became a prominent space for spreading information regarding the use of uMhlonyana. It was reported to have other benefits, and the product was taken as a tea to curb flu-like symptoms. Mainstream media maintained their agenda for verified medical information, which is research or reports by medical researchers. However, access to social media personalities who promoted the use of uMhlonyana increased the misinformation on ways to use the indigenous plant as a solution to Covid-19. South Africans were roped in; some saw business opportunities and sold a version of Umhlonyana. Madagascar later reported a growing number of infected Covid-19 patients, and overpopulated countries such as India started to experience a surge. South Africa's non-white patients started to increase in hospitals, and the death rate in this country increased significantly during the 2020 winter season.

I feel the mainstream media are irresponsible when they report news based on social media posts without verifying details regarding indigenous approaches. As a racialised society, the misinformation about the disease not affecting black bodies was a welcome rumour - this resulted in many locals believing that our blood would not be affected by virtue of just being black. The mainstream media perhaps played a role with this misinformation by mainly reporting on white individuals who were affected. Initially, a white family who returned from a vacation in Italy was reported as the first to encounter Covid-19. In a way, this perpetuated the idea that whites who had the privilege to travel would be the ones bringing the virus. That news story became prominent and shaped the view that the virus mostly affected white bodies. I remember thinking it was very far from reaching our country and thought of it as being similar to Ebola, and never imagined it arriving and taking over the world as it did.

Sayan and Shankhadeep: *Being a researcher in the field of Media Studies, what do you think are the various factors that have contributed towards the creation of rumours and misdirected information in the media during the Covid-19 pandemic in South Africa?*

Luthando Ngema: Factors contributing to misinformation and rumours regarding Covid-19 are related to trust issues that our society harbours against the global pharmaceutical industry, against new technologies, and against the South African government and news agencies. The word 'trust' here is used loosely. Still, the majority of our society are systemically excluded from the structures of technology and the pharmaceutical industry by dominant societies or industry players. This is similar to how media is produced and accessed globally, as discussed earlier.

When it comes to public health issues, there are interesting historical moments that confirm dominance over who has a say or is regarded as a 'trusted' source. During the rise of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, rumours and gossip became an important channel for people to talk about HIV/AIDS (Stadler 2003). The same channel resonates for Covid-19 conversations. Therefore, this notion of rumour and gossip is vital in understanding communities' statements that involve their cultural and political beliefs and link to how they articulate Covid-19 related stories. Covid-19 narratives emerge where rumours and gossip take shape through conspiracy theories linked to the existence of the virus. Regarding the pharmaceutical industry, the trust issue relates to how certain viruses were rumoured to have been manufactured. These date back to the HIV/AIDS virus, and a number of rumours or stigmas were associated with that epidemic . The location of Covid-19 as a 'Chinese' virus was rumoured to be linked to 5G technology (the fifth-generation *wireless mobile network*). This particular narrative was linked to China's growing 5G technology and the increasing access to 5G technologies perpetuated or led by Chinese mobile technology through companies such as Huawei. However, the reports on 5G within the media discussed the benefits of 5G and what technology's infrastructure would look

like. Various articles reported on how some communities believed that 5G towers would devalue their property if installed on private land. The link to Covid-19 was mostly circulating on social media, and not on formal reports.

South Africa's media landscape is sophisticated in how it reports and frames public health issues. This is especially since South Africa has a high number of HIV/AIDS infections. For several years, the support of international funding and the establishment of research centres such as HEARD or CAPRISA, or the Centre for Communication Media and Society have established research centres within the University of KwaZulu-Natal, for example. The University of KwaZulu-Natal has thereby created scholar scientists, who research viruses and social behaviour models which enhance public health communication as well. The level of sophistication is further enhanced by agenda-setting methods to frame news reporting through the lens of experts and government officials. Professor Salim Abdool Karim from Caprissa was appointed as over-arching Chairperson of the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Covid-19 that was established by the previous Minister of Health, Dr Zweli Mkhize - Karim's prominence as the Director of Caprissa and his status as an internationally renowned epidemiologist sustained the narrative of trusted information regarding the Covid-19 virus.

Ultimately when Covid-19 arrived locally, I believe the media landscape used the same tools previously employed to communicate about HIV/AIDS, which clouded South African society in the earlier years of the HIV/AIDS virus. There was over-communication via radio platforms about the importance of washing hands, and wearing masks. The Department of Health had animated adverts which were visually appealing, and which were shared on mass broadcasting platforms on television and on social media. Education about Covid-19 used entertainment platforms, using edutainment methods to communicate with society. For instance, UNICEF and the Department of Health initiated a campaign entitled #TheTruck, where multimedia media broadcasted stories related to Covid-19 infections while also traveling to various rural and urban parts of South Africa. This campaign aimed to share 'trusted' information, to make a connection with the community based on stories from people that communities could identify with (UNICEF 2021). This strategy allowed a society with limited digital resources to access information while providing tangible access to experts who disseminated Covid-19 related information directly from the Department of Health. This campaign reached those communities that would not have high-speed internet, through using visuals, attached to #TheTruck to disseminate the information.

However, rumours and misinformation were still prevalent across numerous social media networks, through circulation of videos, and images about Covid-19's link to 5G technology. These links were further made with the growing environmental changes, with some claiming that climate change issues are related to 5G technology. The idea of adding 'chip' technology through a vaccinated society also grew, and perpetuated the anti-vaccine movement. Anti-vaxxers, as they are known on social media, further claimed that the vaccine chip is metallic - videos of people showcasing metallic objects like coins over a vaccinated arm, started circulating and continued the misinformation about the virus. There was also a video that went viral on social media (including WhatsApp, Twitter and Facebook) concerning a WHO technical lead, Dr Maria Van Kerkhove, who in the media mentioned that South Africa had been "growing" the virus (Global News 2020). Although the briefing was about research conducted around the virus, the word 'growing' was misinterpreted as science further contributing to developing or manufacturing the virus. I was also guilty of posting my own concerns about this snippet on my Facebook page. Having more than a thousand friends on Facebook, some perceive me as their reliable point of contact with valid information, so I participated in the narrative of distrust for the sciences and the pharmaceutical industry. The

terminology itself confused and perpetuated further distrust of Western medicine. I do not remember counter-articles from mainstream media discussing this issue to ensure that people do not stray further away from regulated information about the virus. Again, within social media, counter-arguments or explanations from those who understood the meaning of the terminology of 'growing' a virus appeared and contributed to educating the public. Like any instantaneous social media viral buzz, the video of the scientist was soon forgotten. Again, news and conspiracy theories on the link with 5G technology grew on social media networks. People shared images of open roads in some regions that were adding fibre to enhance fibre connectivity. Some shared that after getting vaccinated, their arms had metal or magnet-like properties. The stories which circulated after getting vaccinated are also linked to blood clotting or developing clots. The news of people getting Covid-19 and dying after being vaccinated widely links to the factor of blood clotting. This added to the numbers of people not trusting the vaccination process. The conversation re-shaped around the idea of citizens making personal choices to choose to be vaccinated, or not. More rumours circulated about how those who are not vaccinated would be excluded from society, which added to the distrust of government, pharmaceuticals and the media.

Sayan and Shankhadeep: *In order to dismantle the normalised practice of producing rumours and misdirected information by media houses, how can the functional processes of media houses in South Africa be reformed?*

Luthando Ngema: This question is tricky, but I will say this: the social media context perpetuates misinformation. I want to note that the mainstream media has been accused of not focusing on 'important' issues, especially the need for verified sources. I feel the media should take responsibility and not become a source of fear-mongering – rather, it should be used to distribute verified information. The media in South Africa has a history of propaganda, where separate identity and separatist development were promulgated through indigenous languages through 'Bantu' radio (SABC). This particular agenda was important for the South African media to maintain the status quo of apartheid. Today's agenda aims to be different by establishing a more united community through the notion of a rainbow nation. The separatist ideals are hidden, and reporting showcases news that aims to reunite a divided society. News events are carefully framed to occupy the narrative of united, democratic and law-abiding global citizens. South Africa is now welcomed by the global community, occupying a space that showcases the country's global aspirations. To occupy a space within the global media with positive news, to have institutions that showcase world research on public health, and to have the infrastructure to host global events, portrays South Africa as a prominent force in world news and global concerns, including news and narratives on Covid-19. Therefore, during the reporting of Covid-19 news, global audiences were exposed to developments and medical research that was led or linked to South Africa, for instance, the news of South Africa 'farming' the Covid-19 virus.

The media can enhance their watchdog capabilities by engaging fake news with facts to re-educate the misinformed. Perhaps they do re-educate at times, but their silence or erasure of certain issues fuels the racialised space that the mainstream media already occupies, and this can be perceived as not fully representing some views or parts of society- which has been a strategy to exclude and erase voices within the media landscape.

The media's role should involve discussion that challenges rumour and gossip, not necessarily to engage the information but to provide verified facts and researched information that can confirm or counter the rumours circulating. To some extent, the media in South Africa does follow up on rumours, although this is not immediately after the rumours start circulating.

***Sayan and Shankhadeep:** Apart from reforming the functional process of media houses, how can residents in South Africa be sensitised against the entrapments of rumours and misdirected information, especially during a pandemic like Covid-19?*

Luthando Ngema: South Africa is a complex society, and sometimes the complexities are exposed within institutional structures such as the media. From our history, the government and media have played a role in infringing media freedom and controlled or limited information that would eventually circulate in society through censorship regulations. In a complicated society where the media played a role in shaping racist perceptions and attitudes, perpetuating stereotypes, society creates its own form of communication via citizen news sharing, and the trust between 'official' news platforms and news consumers is not very strong. However, mass communication in South Africa is the most accessible through radio , followed by television. By comparison, social media users in South Africa are the minority and usually more affluent, urban and privileged. Social media is a tiny representation of South African society. 'Sanitising' South African citizens against entrapments of rumours and misdirected information, especially during a pandemic, will work with increased information sharing. The media and the Department of Health initially had a proactive approach, where daily updates were reported, but this momentum decreased. Public broadcasters (mainly) also contributed by having regular conversations about the virus and people's experiences. But these conversations were limited or controlled by 'fact' sharing. I listen to Metro FM (an SABC radio station) on my way to school drop-offs or on my way to work, via the car stereo, and I have heard some radio presenters offering their accounts of Covid-19, and their choice to vaccinate or not. Most of them encourage audiences to get the vaccine to increase public interaction. So that platform, I can argue, is used to perpetuate the following of World Health Organisation regulations. Having mass communication continuously in conversation about Covid-19 and getting vaccinated could assist significantly in transmitting positive messages about how to survive this pandemic and to ensure we reach a stage where the virus becomes manageable.

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Chapter 4

Covid-19 and decolonising:

An interview with Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni

Conducted by Sayan Dey and Shankhadeep Chattopadhyay

Sayan and Shankhadeep: We have seen the evolution of how the biomedical crisis of Covid-19 reconfigured the already existing virus of colonialism/capitalism in South Africa. What is your opinion on the aggravation of the mutation of the virus called colonialism/capitalism during Covid-19 despite several initiatives towards decolonising everyday existence in South Africa, both at the institutional and the grassroots level?

Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni: Yes, in fact, I think that the starting point invites us to think deeply about what Covid-19 is. Is it really a biomedical problem as you put it or more than that? And how does it converge with other historical problems? Covid-19 does not function simply as a disease. The outbreak of Covid-19 reconfigures the already existing challenges of health and medicine. We need to think about Covid-19 perhaps using two approaches. One is the existential understanding of Covid-19 and the second is epistemic. These approaches are not exclusive from each other, they are inextricably intertwined to such an extent that we need to move the paths away from humanities and social sciences to scientism and existential questions. This means we must not look at Covid-19 only as a life and death problem but also at the same time we should look at it as a civilisational crisis, so to speak. If we broaden our understanding in this way, we will understand that avoiding the historical, socio-political and economic aspects of Covid-19 would be a very narrow approach to the issue. We need to keep in mind the particular ways in which this virus has manifested itself and affected us. Covid-19 reveals our positionality in the broader spectrum of the human social pyramid where some people have a higher ontological density than others but they exist inside the same social pyramid. Nelson Maldonado Torres (2007) understands the notion of coloniality of being as the discursive terrain within which we need to locate this problem of Covid-19. Our experiences differ, depending on our positions within the invented social human pyramid. The social pyramid reveals the virus's links with racial capitalism along with the patriarchy and sexism because women have high death rates in the social pyramid. Covid-19 exists within multiple zones of inequalities and various levels of differential vulnerabilities due to systemic problems and this leads to differential perspectives and experiences of the pandemic.

You will find that those who are already within the lower echelons of society, even those who have been pushed out of the human family altogether are more vulnerable. Even the state does

not take care of them. These are the people who sleep outside, who have no houses, no address and who have no way to be locked down, they are most vulnerable. They exist outside of the whole social pyramid that can be differential in terms of higher, lower, lowest, and tend to be affected most by this pandemic. I always think that it is important to expand our canvas when we talk about this pandemic and move away from the biomedical definition of Covid-19. We need to create a multidimensional approach because it is not only a medical problem. This devastating pandemic has revealed our economies to be the economies of profit rather than economies of share and care. The sudden way this pandemic has hit the whole world forces us to rethink our priorities. The all-around economic devastation has taught us that we can invest in the accumulation of weapons of mass destruction for instance as a security measure, but the irony is that we cannot shoot or bomb this virus, and therefore the sense of security created by weaponry goes in vain. I hope that this is a learning curve that makes us think deeper about modernity and our priorities.

Sayan and Shankhadeep: Thank you so much, for bringing in these interesting dimensions about the vulnerabilities and the necessary concerns to rethink on so many pre-existing epistemological premises concerning the Covid-19 scenario and diverse forms of crisis in the context of colonisation and decoloniality. To follow up on our previous question, what are some of the factors that are distracting the global project of decoloniality from being a decentralised praxis towards being a metaphor for various visible and invisible forms of colonisation that continue to take place in South Africa? We have noticed that several scholarships have started addressing it in different ways. For instance, Tuck and Yang have posited that "Decolonisation is not a metaphor" (2012) and several scholars from the South have also talked about how decolonisation is getting tokenised through coffee mugs, t-shirts, tattoos and other capitalistic representations. But still, in Covid-19, as you have pointed out, the mutation of these ideologies have also taken on a lot of twists and turns. What are your thoughts, in relation to this context in South Africa?

Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni: Firstly, when we use the phrase 'decolonising Covid-19' we must be careful because there is an increasing lack of consciousness at play towards understanding the problem of Covid-19 in a diverse and in-depth manner. You are saying the problem is 'Covid-19' and you need to decolonise the problem. But the issue at hand is, what is Covid-19? Is it a civilisational problem? Only once we understand this, will we know what it is to be decolonised. It is problematic to just use the phrase 'decolonising Covid-19'. We need to perhaps rephrase the problem and try to invest sufficient time and energy in defining what the nature of the problem is. Covid-19 manifests itself as a pandemic, as a viral infection, but is it that alone? This is the question at hand. And the question might, if we put it that way, take us to the idea that perhaps the starting point in dealing with this issue is to go back to our problem in which we try to subject all aspects of human life to a particular power structure, which is materialist, patriarchal, sexist and capitalist in its formation. If we start there, we can have an entry point into investigating our heinous treatment against nature. If we think that way then we will begin to understand how modernity has reduced nature to a natural resource and how capitalism has propagated that nature is valuable for exploitation ad infinitum. If that is true, then we can learn how our continuous attacks on land, on trees, and so many natural things have provoked the other-selves that exist with us amidst nature.

We need to talk about the virus as an 'other-self'. I would like to present the idea of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o who talks about decolonisation as rethinking about ourselves in the universe in relation to 'other-selves' (1986). The question is how do we live with the other-selves? That is, with all the viruses, trees, water, air, etc. Should we start living with a human superiority where we belittle the other powerful selves? This will lead to a great problem because we would cut

trees and kill animals with impunity. We are living inside a mythical hierarchical paradigm, assuming our place to be above these other-selves. But, inside the ecosystem we need to maintain the balance with the other-selves. It is important to bring in the context of this pandemic and only then can we approach a case study like South Africa to say: the way South Africa tends to be affected may be more than in any other country because there were already deeper inequalities caused by apartheid and by colonial capitalism. You might begin to connect the dots and ask what apartheid was. Apartheid was the most visible and institutionalised hierarchisation of being. Those who were said to be natives were denied their citizenship and nationality. Coming into being as nationals, since 1994, is an ongoing process; that has not come to an end yet. Most South Africans carry identity books as the symbol of being South African. But many South Africans do not get to benefit from the South African economy which was constructed according to principles of socialism as well as capitalism. Black people are the main providers of labour and this is why the struggles in South Africa continue to exist. It sounds like a very powerful form of employment but what is the reason behind reducing ourselves to a mechanical form of identity? Why are we not thinking about everything that has been taken from us, and how we are each reduced to a black object which has become the cornerstone of our ontological basis? I think there is a bigger problem which we need to consider. I don't want us to be so narrowed down by one theme – 'Covid-19.' The pandemic is an entry point to see deeper problems. It also takes us back to the initial framing about disciplines. Can this be an approach to a disciplinary perspective? I don't think so. I think the issue must be approached from an existential vantage point. The existential vantage point cannot be dissociated from the epistemic question but I think we need to think carefully about where does the 'disciplinary' fit in between existential and epistemic. It is important to ask, how the existing disciplines blind us in such a manner as to not see the broader aspect of these challenges which are right in front of us. This is a conjecture which is very important in the South African context. We also need to think about the deaths that have been recorded.

I work in a university and I know professors. But what about ordinary people whom I do not know, whom even the media does not record? Maybe they are dying in higher numbers. If I die due to the pandemic it would be a piece of obvious news but there are some people whose death won't even be news because they are not categorised as 'humans' (in the true sense of the word). They are the people in the informal sectors, they are the men and women in the black townships who are dying every day and have become used to death. These people have been living in a hellish zone where dying is normal. People don't make any media statements about it because dying due to a pandemic is an additional death to those who are living within a zone of non-being. We need to understand the concern in that way. If we don't understand it in that way, we won't be able to see what is happening.

Sayan and Shankhadeep: Thank you for providing us with such important points. It is a very thought-provoking intervention to look into, critique and problematise the very complex space of decolonisation and Covid-19. Also, we have brought the issue into our conversation deliberately. You must be aware, that we are not using the phrase for the first time (which might sound harsh) but people have become reckless with the phrase 'decolonising Covid-19' and already we have seen several articles, symposiums and lectures organised to address this phrase (without exaggerating). Whenever we encounter the phrase we don't see new scholarship emerging that convinces us about the usefulness of the phrase. It's a very complex space, as you have mentioned. Also, to locate decolonisation and colonisation within the complexities of Covid-19 naturally opens up so many tangential gateways to explore while some of them have already been explored as you've mentioned - while some aspects that have been ignored actually need to be unearthed and explored. This launches us into our next question, which is - what are the different ways in which the habitual praxis of decoloniality can be de-

metaphorised and reconfigured to counter the aggravating forces of colonialism/capitalism during Covid-19?

Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni: I think the first concern is who is being metaphorised - that question needs to be addressed along with the reason behind such metaphorising. Also, we need to consider the people who are doing that. If we ask these questions we must refer to the depth of the wealth system and globalisation. An anti-systemic thought which is fuelled by anti-systemic forces has something to do with the wealth system. The system can resist and effectively use power to deal with the anti-systemic forces. But, more often than not, dealing with resistance is not their default position. Their default position is to appropriate and accommodate into the mainstream. And that's where the metaphorising, for me, comes in. This system is no longer fearful of the term 'decolonisation' therefore once the process of decolonisation has begun, anti-systemic cutting edges are destroyed. The process of decolonisation becomes another concept within many other modern concepts so that people can talk about it, even those who are not committed to the project of decolonisation. It becomes an epistemic debate that loses its existential aspects. Decoloniality has begun an interesting debate, and is seen as a new concept within academia. It enables us to publish quickly because the concept is 'new' and we have colonised a decolonial concept - so we have disciplined it in such a way that it has become part of the established order. We talk about bringing in the works of Fanon, Umberto Eco, and W E B Du Bois into the academy. If we bring them into the academy, we must be careful about performing a decolonial activity by including these names. I call them the 'hermits of the bunch'. These great scholars and theorists have awakened something which is produced within a context of human history and struggles and is retained in tears and blood. These people were not made for disciplines; they were made for something else. Once we begin to bring something like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's theory of languages, Frantz Fanon's ideas of psychology, philosophy and sociology, we are bringing works that were not meant for academia, that were produced outside the academy, outside the disciplinary boundaries. They deal with existential questions. So it's important to trace the origin of this metaphorisation. Does it originate from the interpellation of power dynamics? Power always re-enacts itself to the extent that it is repetitive in its re-enactment. If the dynamics of power are driven by capitalism, sexism and gender bias, it re-enacts those ideologies to the extent of maximum appropriation. The act of re-enactments transforms the 'language of the outside' and makes it a language of the 'inside.' We worry about why people no longer fear epistemologies of the global South, why do they no longer fear decolonisation? Maybe it is already part of the mainstream and is no longer directing us anywhere. The idea has just become part of the nomenclature of the conventional thought process. And that is where the issue is. I think if we can start from that basis, which is, that the decolonial project is a pure and complex struggle, only then would we appropriate ourselves into the system; the language we speak will be appropriated into the existing system. This appropriation might provide the system with a newness. Today, everyone across Europe and globally has been engaged in a decolonial struggle (chuckles) - but is it that same struggle that was initiated at the beginning? This question invites the position of an autocrat who can evaluate the value of these worldwide decolonial struggles and can lead us to the right path. This will help us understand whether we are still going somewhere in the direction of the real project of 'decoloniality.' So, that would be my concern. During the pandemic, we all jointly placed our hope in the vaccine and trying to find the solution through a biomedical process. While it is true that vaccines will prevent people from dying, we must not overlook the existential and epistemic concerns related to the pandemic. Vaccination alone will not be able to provide us with employment - and poverty will kill us by itself. It is not the virus that is only capable of killing human beings. In this way, there are multiple ways of thinking which we need to be aware of. I don't know when I will be able to synthesise the issues I am raising, I am raising them as they are hitting my conscience after observing the worldwide crisis.

The matter which I have not raised yet is one of the political aspects of the pandemic. I have observed that whenever we are struck down by any pandemic, the solutions to it become 'national' solutions. There's an irony there. The aspect of a pandemic has a planetary expansion; it is global in its reach. But why does the solution to the pandemic become a national solution, that is, lockdowns and other measures, where the essence of nationalism works? The state always retains a force here in association with its military power. The Covid-19 pandemic displayed that each country individually had to take responsibility — India needed to do it on its own, South Africa on its own, Germany on its own, Britain on its own — and all these pan-European, pan-African and pan-Asian groups are temporarily collapsed due to the spread of the virus. Vaccination organised by individual states has already been ridiculed by scholars across the globe as they called the process 'vaccinationalism'. Each state wanted to vaccinate its people before looking at others on a global level. This act raises a major question that I addressed in my publication on beyond the coloniality of internationalism (2021). We have to think about it collectively and internationally. We need to put effort into making the national the international because, if some other major global problem arises, it would be approached from an international perspective, rather than a nationalist stance. We also have to question whether pandemics like Covid-19 changed the course of the movement of people and their migrations, as it seems to have gone ahead of our institutional systems and structures. We are always trying to solve this in an old-fashioned manner. We are using yesterday's ideas to deal with problems of today; we are using yesterday's institutions to deal with the problem of the present. That to me is limiting in nature. This is where I raise the issue of the 'epistemic' that paves our knowledge systems, which lag behind reality. This is why it took us by surprise that we could be killed by a virus in the twenty-first century whereas we assumed that we conquered viruses a long time ago. It again affirms that somewhere we are lagging behind and the virus is being clever and going ahead of us. We have such 'others' that can defeat us across the world. We need to think deeply, we have to lower our egos. Only then can we think as a collective, and as survivors. I have always pushed the concept of a survival consciousness and I think that a survival consciousness must be a 'we' consciousness rather than 'I' consciousness. If we start from a 'we' consciousness then we would be able to create what Immanuel Wallerstein calls, the "universal universalism" (2006).

Sayan and Shankhadeep: While we were listening to your reflections we were reminded of the philosopher Sally Munt; she writes on "victimocracy" and she says that certain sections of society pretend to be victims to take advantage of the crisis and climb the ladder (2016). We have seen this historically across the world and also with the Covid-19 pandemic we see that this practice of victimocracy has aggravated. Would you like to comment on that?

Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni: One of the consequences of coronavirus is that it has made people act on whimsical choice. Some are trying to label Covid-19 as a 'Chinese virus'. Humanity has become victims of something. Human beings have habituated with such a mode of life where premature death becomes a reality for everyone. Those in the global South have been living under such conditions for years. Premature death is not coming with the virus; it is something that comes with victimocracy. The concept of victimocracy, to me, is interesting if you pitch it at a planetary level and link it with the outbreak of the coronavirus. It is only then we can find all of us as mere victims. Victimocracy or whatever mode of victimhood, is not always the same due to the structures of inequality, racial capitalism, patriarchy and sexism. Aspects of victimhood have paved the path towards the social pyramid created by modernity. If we look at the social pyramid we see that we are subjected to power differentially to a great extent. Maria Lugones (2008) has suggested that when we talk about 'gender', we are talking about human beings. But for those who already have been pushed outside the human family, a sensitive issue like 'gender' does not make sense to them. For those who have always been

treated like animals, a humanly sensitive issue like 'gender' does not bother them. Some people misunderstand the whole concept of gender. We need to be careful with these concepts because they mean something depending on the level of subjection related to the social pyramid, but we are subjected differently. I always try to bring in Ramón Grosfoguel's sixteen dimensions of power, where he explains how sexuality, gender, knowledge, spirituality, nature, are subjected to power (2008). He started with eight but by the time I last read him he was in the fifteenth, trying to show that we are all subjected to a particular power structure, but in different ways. All aspects of human life are subjected to such power structures. If this subjection is true, even in terms of who accessed the vaccine first and who will access the vaccine last, that depends on how we are subjected to this power structure. The West faces problems too. Not even a single country has become ready to remove the problem from the root. Vaccines from India and China were going to come to South Africa but South Africans want vaccines that are produced in Europe without proof that anything is wrong with the vaccines produced in India and China. The very thought that the most effective vaccine comes from Europe tells us something.

Sayan and Shankhadeep: This is an interesting point, that the present government in South Africa is taking the state away from the East towards the West. Especially during conversations, we see that people in South Africa are sceptical about any form of vaccines that are emerging from China. For a long time, in fact In India as well, the very nomenclature 'China' has become a metaphor to prove something which is corrupted, something which is fake, not original. This is an interesting dimension to think about the many racial triggers and racialised activities that have taken place in India. After all, as you know in the north-eastern part of India the facial features of people resemble the mongolite features of the Chinese, and as a result those people from the north-eastern part of India are consistently harassed and subjected to racial violence because they look Chinese.

Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni: You need to include Russia in the East because Russia is also part of Asia. People across the world have begun to use 'race' in its crudest forms. Still, a lot of people believe that going to the centre is the only way to get an authentic and effective vaccine. We have to understand and analyse the location of the Chinese inside the human pyramid along with the locations of the Russians, Africans and Indians inside this pyramid. Only then can we see that these are groups whose humanity is being questioned. And by questioning their humanity we have also questioned their knowledge. By questioning their knowledge, we are also questioning their ability to make anything of value. We repeatedly use terms such as 'coloniality of being', but we don't dig deeper to experience what is the practical meaning of that and how it is related to the Covid-19 crisis. If we do not trust what the Easterners say, we deny them from being human in the first place. So, how can we trust their science and knowledge? A desperate country, like my home country Zimbabwe, is using Indian and Chinese vaccines and people are not dying there. This means that all vaccines have a percentage of effectiveness; no vaccine is one hundred percent effective. What we want is to control the virulence of the virus - so that death rates can be lessened. If a vaccine is about sixty percent effective, it means that it has the potential to save lives, whether it comes from Asia or any other Eastern country. That sixty percent must be our bottom line. The hesitancy goes back to coloniality and the way we are taught and it makes us question our disciplines and the knowledge systems. Why were scientists at Oxford capable of producing the vaccine called 'Zeneca' and why could Africans not produce such vaccines? The only time when we were almost hopeful is when Africans produced the testing kits and associated items. I think an African vaccine would be questioned more, especially if it is produced by a woman. So, the issue is bigger here than meets the eye.

Sayan and Shankhadeep: Very true! Our aim is to intervene in these dimensions of coloniality that we have been discussing concerning Covid-19. There have been many possibilities to inquire into the context of Africa widely and South Africa in particular, concerning the phenomenon of Afrocentrism. Our last question to you is this: Do you think the phenomenon of Afrocentrism should be adopted as an effective tool to counter different forms of crises that have been triggered by the practices of colonialism/capitalism in South Africa during Covid-19?

Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni: I subscribe to the school of thought which says that decolonisation and decoloniality is a family of thought. Remember Nelson Maldonado's definition (2007). What does 'family of thought' mean? It means that it is not a singular school of thought, there are many schools of thought and nomenclature related to decoloniality. Therefore 'Afrocentricity' is part of decoloniality. But what does it bring to the surface? Afrocentricity was imagined to display one aspect of the problem. The agency and history of the African people were questioned. That is why in Afrocentricity we find the Egyptian civilisation featuring more prominently than others. Coming to the context of Covid-19, if these are the people with history, with the agency and with the culture, then it suggests their ways of surviving from viruses and hints at their pieces of knowledge. A lot of people who have survived this virus will tell you that they have survived because of the non-medical solutions like steaming or using African herbs, but the entire world won't recognise this. We would rather rely upon doctors who have never experienced Covid-19 when there are real survivors who can tell us how they survived.

Finally, what would be the benefit of carving out a decolonial anthropological study that interviews all who are affected by Covid-19 and questions the reason behind their survival? Why does that form of survival not exist in any archive or knowledge database which can enable us to think further? Now, we are all reduced to the effectiveness of the vaccine, which is not getting produced in proper quantities in the first instance but still, people are staying alive and what keeps them alive? There are various ways of surviving as the people of Madagascar claim, by using therapies that are based on African herbs and so forth. This suggests our positionality in an epistemically colonised and politically regulated world. If we are living in such a world then our solutions need to be regulated, our knowledge needs to be validated. A solution that comes from a particular civilisation like the Indian civilisation supposedly needs to be validated by the European civilisation, which does not understand how it works.

Take for instance the border issue in Tanzania. The claim was that Tanzanians would die because they did not close the state border, but instead strengthened people by praying and appealing to spiritual knowledge. Spirituality is a container of knowledge just like language is a container of knowledge. It does not mean that prayer and spirituality will heal Covid-19 and medications are useless. These are broader concepts, it doesn't mean that medications are no longer trustworthy - rather, it means that those people were appealing to another kind of knowledge system, another form of coping mechanism, just like closing the borders is a form of coping. If we close the borders for a virus that does not display any respect for the border, does it not seem ridiculous? Organisations like the WHO have remained occupied with ridiculing those who have surrendered themselves to a different form of knowledge system while the organisation spared those who have not altered their path of seeking knowledge. I wonder, how do you close the borders for a virus? Isn't that silly? I like this question you asked about Afrocentricity. That African people are Africans. They have been here on earth, maybe earlier than any other civilisations if we follow the notion of Africa being the cradle of humankind. If we accept that notion then it means that Africans have survived many viruses until now. Covid-19 is just an additional virus, but how did they survive previously? How do

we maximise that knowledge which they have of surviving viruses across time and space? Africans have experienced more virus attacks than Europeans. Therefore, Africa must teach Europe about the process of dealing with a virus. Elísio Macamo, a sociologist from Mozambique, pioneered the concept of a risk-society (2017), which works for Europe as well. In Africa, we find that a risk-society may take shape on an everyday basis. In that case, there's something that we need to explore deeper about this issue of Afrocentricity. We are not suggesting that people must cut themselves off from the world. People around the world must accommodate themselves with modern medicine, but that does not mean that it would substitute what has made them live up till today. It must be an addition to the already existing methods of survival.

How does it launch itself today as an innovation? This is a complex situation and it is not the same situation of a petty-bourgeois who knows that there is already 'food in the fridge'. The concern is, there's no 'fridge' in the first instance. How then does a person survive without a fridge, in parallel to those who have a fridge to store foods? If we think from that perspective, then what form of theorisation, knowledge, and worldview will we arrive at? I think there are deeper decolonial interventions that come from this type of engagement. Hence, I like the idea of 'Afrocentricity'.

However, the issue of 'Afrocentricity' becomes a broader decolonial engagement when approached from an epistemic school of thought. Here my first question is, what should be the units of analysis? If it is feminism, then we know the unit of analysis is 'gender'. Similarly, if it's Afrocentricity, which unit of analysis would be most suitable? It is not like being Molefi Asante, who becomes the unit of analysis himself. We need to consider what the units of analysis are which drive these schools such as culture, history, and many others.

I supervised a PhD student on the application of Afrocentricity. He was always praising Asante. I said Asante is a human being and I want you to think about the units of analyses of these schools of thought and how do they contribute. Like in decoloniality we all know that being, knowledge, power, spirituality, gender, nature, these are the units of analyses. Therefore, based on these particular units we can enquire, in what way does knowledge, power, spirituality, gender and nature help us understand the notion of 'Eurocentricity', which is based on aspects such as salvation, progress, emancipation and development. These are the units of analyses, the normative base of their thinking. What is the normative base of thinking in Afrocentricity then? If we look at those normative bases of Afrocentricity then we need to think about how different these are from a decolonial perspective. That is why it's a family of thought; it is a family member and not something else in addition to or out of decoloniality. If we look at Julian Go's book *Postcolonial Thought and Social Theory* (2016), he talks about the three waves of postcolonial thought. The first wave consists of people like Du Bois, Aime Cesaire, CLR James, Fanon, and Cabral - and he says that these people were fighting against physical colonialism but most of them had never been to universities. These people were actually from the 'battlefield'. So, the knowledge they produced is the knowledge received from the battlefield. Then we have a second wave of post-colonial thought, which to me is postcolonial/decolonial. Then he describes the shift that took place in 1973 that made the shift from the first to the second phase. Julien Go describes two major events that took place in 1973. He talks about the assassination of Amílcar Cabral and then he describes the outbreak of the Arab-Israeli war in 1973. Now the question is, why are these events so important? It is not an epistemic query and a political question, but how is it important within the shift in epistemology? Then Julien Go depicts how Edward Said began to write Orientalism by watching the images of the Arab-Israeli war. After Said's magnum opus Orientalism follows Homi Bhabha, Spivak and others whom you can call the school of subaltern studies. It's an interesting way of thinking about the

problem materially. It is important how you link the epistemic and the material. I have spoken a lot; if I keep speaking about the issue then I won't be able to stop.

Sayan and Shankhadeep: Absolutely no problem. If you have more points to raise on this matter, please feel free to expand.

Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni: I hope my points have started making sense - particularly about the issue of Afrocentricity. Afrocentricity by its basic definition demands that Africans need to take themselves seriously and consider themselves as knowledgeable and innovative people. Fanon talks about decolonisation as the process of producing craftsmen and craftswomen who possess the ability to make things on their own against the law of mimic. Covid-19 has taught us the lesson of avoiding any external sources of help from other people and concentrating on our knowledge system which was not taught by modern doctors or others. I am certain that in India, people have various ways of dealing with this pandemic but the concern is that nobody accurately notes and archives the effectiveness of the individual processes of dealing with the virus. The efforts of these individuals get repeatedly disqualified and if somebody dies following that knowledge system it is the very system that has to be responsible for the deaths. Yet on the contrary, no knowledge system is one hundred per cent capable to produce a medicine which has complete effectiveness. Then why is the ancient knowledge system, which has taught us about surviving the virus, hatefully being denied recognition by modernity? I have suggested in one of my papers about the '10 Ds' of the decolonial that the '10 Ds' can be helpful in locating the nexus of the crisis in the contemporary world which is ravaged by this devastating pandemic (2020). It is only through the 10 Ds, de-imperialism, de-hierarchise, de-canonise, de-patriarchise, etc, through which the possibility of building another world can be organised brick by brick.

Sayan and Shankhadeep: These are interesting perspectives because it reminds us that at one stage during ongoing vaccine research across the world to ensure that vaccines were produced by the end of 2020, some countries were recognised for their rapid success. All countries eventually became politically charged up to compete in the medical market. Yet all of a sudden, a highly controversial matter emerged from France. On one of the TV news channels, French scientists said they were planning to do their first experimental tests on Africans. Surprisingly, scientists were confronted with this nonchalant approach to present this testing concept which instantly opens up the discourse of racism and the need for Afrocentrism in connection to the pandemic. Wouldn't you agree?

Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni: Yes, of course. This pandemic has revealed all the aspects which decolonial scholars have been talking about for quite a long time. Covid-19 has revealed and made these aspects more visible as it helps shroud the 'metaphysical empire' or the 'empire of the mind', which cannot be seen and which can only be manifested. It does not manifest itself as race or gender - rather as something else. Hence, I am convinced that some of these aspects which appear as institutional and as structural are fundamentally epistemic problems. If we dig deeper into the epistemic concerns then we will see what causes what. The major problem, if we limit our analysis to what appears on the surface, is that we won't be able to know what the dynamic behind the concern is. When somebody speaks casually about testing vaccines on Africans, this may seem to be a scientific approach. But how does one choose the geography of the test? How does one choose which people to test on? I can bet that the particular person, who came up with the idea of testing on Africans, will tell you that he is not a racist – rather, that his idea could save the world.

***Sayan and Shankhadeep:** Thank you for this thought-provoking conversation.*

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Chapter 5

Racial segregations and doing critical race theory during Covid-19: An interview with Rozena Maart

Conducted by Sayan Dey and Shankhadeep Chattopadhyay

Sayan and Shankhadeep: *Socio-historically we have seen that the practice of racial segregation has always impacted habitual existence in South Africa in different ways, and in daily life. To what extent do you think, as an experienced scholar in critical race theory, that it has undergone reconfigurations and aggravations since the inception of Covid-19?*

Rozena Maart: I think it really depends on which stage you are talking about. If we had had this interview a month ago, my responses would have been very different. Coming to the context of South Africa, we don't really use the word social segregation, or racial segregation. That is an American phrase which is used quite frequently. What happens in the case of South Africa is that, if we look at the afterlife of apartheid, we will see that it is the Indian townships, the coloured townships and the black townships where people clearly suffered the most throughout the pandemic. What happens in any form of 'suffering' is that it leaves its social implications. If we think about the premise of critical race theory in the context of South Africa in particular, we will understand that a critique of 'materiality' is necessary. In other words, the material conditions under which people live now, because of apartheid, that materiality coupled with racial classification and the issues of settlement, forced removal, and resettlement of people based on racial classification, gives rise to a very particular expression of how racism unfolded during Covid-19. For example, the majority of the black community, mainly Zulu, still lives in the township of Durban from where it takes an hour of travel into the city centre for work, then there is another three to four hours of taxi ride homewards. It is the same for the Indian community, they face a similar trajectory in order to reach the city from their respective townships. The difference, of course, is the kind of economic structure that we are talking about. For example, it is well known in Germany, that even amongst the working-class Indian communities there are restaurants or temples where people can go for eating and praying. On the contrary, there's a smaller population of people who would always go hungry. In the case of the black population in South Africa, you will find a lot of temples and mosques inside the periphery of Indian communities and even in the Indian townships. So, the possibility of work for the Zulu black population in Durban during Covid-19 has reflected in very small percentage, so obviously, there were higher numbers of people who lost their jobs. We're looking again at a very direct relationship between the period during apartheid and the period of what we call the afterlife of apartheid. The ways in which racism was enacted during apartheid was particularly based on aspects of divide and conquer. For example, whilst we have a very

particular set of factors in the Cape through Dutch colonisation, in KwaZulu-Natal we have a very particular set of factors that is a result of British colonialism. The Indian population were brought as cargo, as enslaved, into the Cape, during the middle of the 1600s. The Indian population in Durban were brought in during the 1800s. That is almost two hundred years later for all the different tasks and different jobs. I think when you have people who still are in love with the racially segregated areas then you have a 'crisis', where those racial tensions are exacerbated as well as manifested. It is not like the rich are always fighting against one another. It happens within poorer communities too, because everybody is always afraid of what is going to be taken away from them.

Sayan and Shankhadeep: Absolutely, Rozena. What about the different sub-layers, those very complex sub-layers are really difficult to position to understand the aspect of racial segregation. That is what you mentioned at the beginning of your reflections. Furthermore, that in spite of all these challenges, one cannot deny the fact that there have been consistent efforts towards curriculum transformations bringing in several research projects that centres on the various challenges. That is what you've pointed out now. Government policies and community engagement programmes have been structured in South Africa, but, in spite of these efforts, why do you think the country is experiencing a consistent rise in racial violence during Covid-19? It had been happening prior to that, as you mentioned, during apartheid and in the afterlife of apartheid, and still it continues. What do you think about that?

Rozena Maart: I think the gap between the rich and the poor is still very wide in South Africa unlike in other countries, and I am obviously going to give you a very particular understanding of what goes on in those countries. As far as I am concerned, there are several factors behind this. One of the main factors is engaging in the national liberation struggle. We all know what happened in 1955 when the Freedom Charter was drafted. This was what made Robert Sobukwe leave, since Sobukwe didn't see why a Freedom Charter would be able to steer the national liberation struggle and provide a vision of a South Africa after apartheid, yet would include the colonisers. When you come across a document which says South Africa belongs to all those who live in it, then it's just an empty expression. The question is, why are we having a national liberation struggle then? If you are saying that South Africa belongs to everybody - we know this is not true. First of all, I'm going to raise that point and say that we cannot include our colonisers in our fight against the colonisers. Are you with me? We cannot be promising freedom to our oppressors and our colonisers while we are fighting them. We cannot be promised a non-sexist and non-patriarchal society where rapes and sexual assaults are frequent occurrences. The fact is, we are being promised those things. This is the first problem and of course that problem does not go away. When the Pan-Africanist Congress was banned by the end of December 1968 we saw the formation of SASO, South African Students' Organisation, which ultimately became the Black Consciousness Movement of Azania. I think that the same kind of logic that was used for the Freedom Charter was injected into the Constitution. For example, how do white women learn that they have an ethical and moral responsibility for their participation, upholding and reproduction of racism when they are not held accountable? That is because now the Constitution does not split women and refers to them as a whole. In fact, from March 1994 to April 1994, one month later, you go from upholding racism and apartheid to the democratic vote, right? So, we are always going to have those kinds of racial tensions - unfortunately I don't think we will experience what people are hoping to experience here. That is, how do we experience freedom when we are curtailed and kept under the coloniser's gaze? The Constitution was structured under this gaze. We are not holding our colonisers accountable. We also have a rising black middle class who see themselves as identifying with the white coloniser, now being the oppressor of other black people. For example, in universities those positions of the coloniser will not effectively hold up in question even though there are traces.

For me, truth and reconciliation are religious experiences that ask for forgiveness, and do not ask for any ethical and moral responsibility for your agency. It is always looking at the act and never looking at the centre. I think, partly because of that, we have lots of black folks in universities in South Africa, who are reproducing the same paradigm of the coloniser, because they have been educated to believe that there's nothing wrong. Well, there's obviously something wrong with the idea that you cannot be a racist if you're black. It is like we can do oppressive things to other black people, but because we are not white, we are therefore not an apartheid perpetrator. I think that's the reason we are seeing this continuity. Usually, if somebody tells you that you have now declared freedom - and yet you go, and you look around yourself for one year, five years, ten years, twenty years, twenty-four years later, and you realise that you are still 'poor'. We still don't leave our townships; we still don't get a job, because there's still a white man who's the head of our school and all such matters. Those complex issues do not disappear overnight. I think that all societies are driven by ideological beliefs and ideological beliefs play themselves out in the day-to-day construction of our lives. I think of some of the advancements we have made in the country, which is indicative of advancements that have been made in other parts of the world. Our students talk about being identified in his or her own way, which is happening worldwide. The understanding of identities is not singular and a plurality is at work for some people who do not believe in gender binaries. This is what is happening worldwide because there is a clear understanding of what sexual liberation is, and what it means to be liberated from gender binaries. However, when you are declaring liberation and saying that after liberation comes freedom but there are no visible indicators to show the real identity of freedom - then we get stuck with and reproduce the same paradigm that we are trying to fight against.

Sayan and Shankhadeep: We see the same kind of racial violence, in different formats and forms, and sometimes in a highly structured and also in a very convincing manner, that gets perpetuated in such a way that one does not actually realise it - and one just bypasses and ignores it. We have seen this happening during Covid-19 in different parts of South Africa. We have seen different communities suffering with respect to differences in terms of health facilities, with respect to one's position in a geographically segregated space with black communities existing in segregated peripheral locations where they hardly have access to proper health facilities. The differences have also been seen in terms of vaccine distribution. In these forms, we see how already existing racial violence gets mutated into different forms as well.

Rozena Maart: Okay, I think my understanding of what you are calling mutation is basically the act of being reproduced, right?

Sayan and Shankhadeep: Yes, absolutely.

Rozena Maart: This is why I had talked about the virus as the crisis and I drew a line of similarity between them. Remember, when I started talking to you about the book and about the virus and the crisis, I was talking about how racism is reproduced, how viruses are reproduced. When WEB Dubois first started a journal on the university platform when he was at Wilberforce, it was called the Crisis, because he saw racism as a crisis.

Sayan and Shankhadeep: Indeed! These reflections invite us to be more specific and categorical with the aspect of critical race theory. For the past few decades, you have been engaged with this field of critical race theory as a scholar, researcher, activist, faculty member, as well as in various other ways. How effectively has critical race theory been in addressing

the habitual experiences of racial violence in South Africa so far, both within and outside of academia? You have already pointed out the different ways in which racism exists and formulates even through black people and on black people. How does this happen? What do you think as a critical race theorist, and how does one address this within and outside the educational system in South Africa?

Rozena Maart: I like to talk about the theory in such a way that people can practically identify with it. With all of the theories and books aside, I start with the premise of, when is something critical? That is, when do we say that something or someone is in a critical condition? When we say that my sister, my uncle or my grandfather is in a critical condition in the hospital, what are we basically saying? That all aspects of the regulation and functioning of that person's body has failed, right? When somebody is in a critical state, in hospital, we know that this person is fighting to survive with his/her body, whichever organs are working or not working, but they have stopped functioning in the regular way. Therefore, to talk about critical race theory is to recognise that the previously accepted theories of race had failed earlier. They had failed because we were looking at those theories in a different way. We have a theory of racism, which is basically an action. Certainly, in the context of South Africa, it is always a white person who is racist towards a black person. This is something which we have always had within our lives before critical race theory came in. We spoke at one level of racism - then we went on to another level which was only focused on the 'acts' and 'events' of racism. And then we went on drawing from critical theory. For example, the Marxist critiques have explored those 'acts' of racism within a larger framework. This larger framework has an ideology and the name of that ideology is called 'white supremacy'. However, that ideology can only function if you have the systemic, the structural, and the institutionalised components interwoven, intertwined and working together. This is what critical theory has provided us with. However, it is necessary to recognise whether the critique of 'race' is operating within a racist environment or a non-racist environment. The American theorists, mainly lawyers in the 1970s, began to understand that racism is not just an act whereby somebody perpetrates an act of aggression or violence against a black person or an indigenous person or a person who is not considered white. Those acts are also endemic, it is also to be found everywhere in other aspects of life at that point in time. Those theorists started to look at statistical information of black people. There is a discrepancy between how racism acts on one with its structural and institutional functionality. They began to look at what was then called racial profiling, in other words, they started to address the materiality aspect. Critical race theorists came into the context of material conditions, under which we live, and declare that the condition is created by colonialism. However, these conditions continue to inform the material conditions under which we live. The critical race theorists began to identify us as subjects who live under the law which is not in our favour. That is because we are profiled from the time we are born into this world, like, to be this kind of 'Indian', in a white society or this kind of poor 'Dalit' in a predominantly Hindu elitist society. The combination of understanding the social, structural, systemic and institutionalised along with a legal entity and the profiling of people, are based on the experience of racism that gave rise to what we now call critical race theory. It draws a direct relationship between the experience of racism and the laws that are written to uphold white supremacy. I make the point quite often in my talks when I say that I do not think it's an accident that Steve Biko and Frantz Fanon studied as medical doctors because they saw first-hand where, how and when people came to hospital with a critical condition. It is our well-being, that is, how well we are, the conditions under which we live and which informs our well-being that matters. Do we have access to water? Do we have access to electricity? Do we have our own rooms? Where do our children sleep? All these questions inform our welfare. If we put them together, we would be able to say that critical race theory cannot come without analysing the conditions under which we live and under which we are racialised. These conditions continue in the afterlife of

apartheid, and these are the conditions that we live through today by reflecting on and fighting through those conditions that informed the afterlife of apartheid.

Sayan and Shankhadeep: Your point about how this intervenes into the conditions under which we are living today at the time of Covid-19 provokes us to ask: Do you think that the anti-racist practices that are regulated through the phenomenon of critical race theory can be effective in countering the aggravating racial violence during Covid-19 in South Africa?

Rozena Maart: Anti-racism does not really serve black people and people of colour. I think that anti-racism has to be about the white folks who are not utilising the power as people who have been socialised to be beneficiaries and recipients. So, I think that you cannot talk about critical race theory if you do not understand and situate your objective. The objective, to me, has to be about the dismantling of a system of white supremacy. Without that, there is no purpose. We always need a goal and purpose in mind. For me, if that's not the purpose, then what are we doing? Right? The problem is located in South Africa where we have different racialised identities, and those identities are the product of coloniality. Colonisers did not only come to the Cape to colonise the indigenous people, they made sure that people from Bengal and Indonesia and Malaysia were brought into the Cape. In those instances, they were not only relying on indigenous people but also relied on slaves, who had no power and no ability to engage with the indigenous population either through language or any other means. As a result, complexities were created. It's not as if people in Java or Bengal randomly decided to move to South Africa – rather, they were brought in for a very particular purpose and under very particular conditions. If you do not address those issues, those racial tensions will not go away.

Sayan and Shankhadeep: So, do you think that this particular aspect of this failure, or this deliberate attempt in several locations is actually a major reason for this aggravation of racial violence - obviously, under different circumstances, in different contexts and under different conditions during Covid-19?

Rozena Maart: I think that poverty or not having money and not having food is a very key issue. It's like the Bob Marley song, "Them Belly Full but We Hungry"(1974) . It means that their belly is full but yours is empty, you are hungry. We have to face the sort of violence where only the black people are the victims of poverty. It's the black population who don't have money and who can't buy food and that's their reality. Jackie Shandu, political activist from Durban, had said in many discussions that even after twenty-five years that many black people have remained as poor as they were twenty-five years ago. Then how can we tell somebody that our children are free, when none of those children have ever experienced the essence of freedom? That particular attempt wasn't to narrow the gap or divide, but rather the attempt was actually made to reproduce exactly the same paradigm of poverty. Now we do have black people with money or more money, but that's getting reflected in a very small percentage. I think that we still have the continuation of that 'master-slave', 'coloniser-colonised' relationship which has now also been taken up by those black people who have become a part of the country's leadership. We actually need to think about why those particular positions are being reproduced.

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Chapter 6

Indigenous interventions, sociological understandings of inequalities and Covid-19: An interview with Norma Romm

Conducted by Sayan Dey and Shankhadeep Chattopadhyay

Sayan and Shankhadeep: *Let us begin with a fundamental question. What has been the sociological impact of Covid-19 in South Africa? Obviously, it is a vast question, so perhaps you can specifically focus on the sociological impact of Covid-19 with respect to race, gender and economic conditions.*

Norma Romm: Yes, indeed this is a fundamental question! The ways in which Covid-19 exacerbated already existing inequalities across racialised, gendered, and class relationships (within and between countries across the globe) has been expressed in a myriad of forums by, for instance, academics, journalists, NGOs , international organisations, and activists.

I will start with the links between 'race' (or what I prefer to call 'racialised groupings' so as not to imply that race is a biological category, but a social construction with social consequences) and 'class' (as an indication of position occupied in the capitalist economic system). A United Nations (UN) Report titled *Racial Discrimination in the Context of the Covid-19 Crisis* addresses the question of access to health care and notes that "the Covid-19 pandemic has aggravated long-standing [and racialised] structural inequalities in terms of access to healthcare facilities, goods and services" (2020,2). Furthermore,

> (p)eople of African descent, people of Asian descent and Roma are doing worst in the midst of the pandemic. …. they represent a significant percentage of frontline workers – the nursing personnel; health aides; care workers; grocery and delivery staff; bus and transport drivers, who are more exposed to the risk of contamination, and have been making up the large numbers of contaminations and deaths in the current pandemic. (UN Report 2020, 2)

This Report indicates how types of work are racialised in all of our societies across the globe. In addition, note how racially- and class- based unequal access to quality education is also exacerbated by the pandemic, due to the fact that the racialised poor are disadvantaged in terms of online learning facilities. The Report found that in some countries such as Rwanda, South Africa and Jordan, there have been negotiations with telecommunications companies not to charge data for educational purposes – but this still presupposes access to electricity and also digital proficiency. Meanwhile the pandemic places the spotlight on the fact that "(a)pproximately 1.8 billion people worldwide are homeless or live in grossly inadequate

housing, often in overcrowded conditions, lacking access to water and sanitation – making them particularly vulnerable to contracting the virus"(UN Report 2020, 5).

It was found that "people of African descent tend to live in more densely populated urban spaces in many countries, and a disproportionate number are among those who lack access to adequate housing, including access to adequate water and sanitation facilities" (UN Report 2020, 5).

In a report with an accompanying photo Futshane informs us that the "Soweto Township, South Africa … whose demographic profile is predominantly Black people and people of colour employed in low paying jobs that increase their risk of exposure to Covid-19, have become Covid-19 hotspots" (Futshane 2021). Clearly, the Covid-19 pandemic has drawn attention to the racialised character of the working class, where low-paying jobs are predominantly filled by black people (as a legacy of colonialism and apartheid).

The UN Report details how across the globe issues of food security have become spotlighted during the pandemic, noting that the lockdown and other measures "have resulted in a sharp increase in food prices", causing the poor to "struggle even more to put food on the table" (2020, 6). In addition, the report notes that this is worsened by their "sudden loss of income" (as many of these people occupied positions as workers in the tourism and other service sectors deemed as "non-essential", as well as in informal markets). Moreover, "school closures have led to the cancellation of school meals, which are often the only source of nutrition for children in poor households among which racial minorities are disproportionally represented" (UN Report 2020, 6). Again, we are familiar with these dynamics as applied to South Africa. Although efforts have been made by the South African government and by volunteer organisations to find ways to distribute food, while helpful to some extent, these have not managed to solve the crisis of food security for the majority of the racialised poor. I attended the annual Alternative Futures and Popular Protest conference in June 2021. One of the people in the audience (from the University of Johannesburg) noted that the state should step up its efforts. At first, I thought he might have meant finding new mechanisms to distribute food, but he clarified that he meant that the state in South Africa should have required supermarkets to lower their food prices. Some other members of the audience confirmed how supermarkets across the globe and in South Africa have made huge profits during the pandemic. I then checked on the internet and noticed that Walmart as a global supermarket chain gained billions of additional profits, along with other huge-scale corporations, that have benefited from the conditions of the pandemic (not to mention the pharmaceutical companies!).

A range of activist organisations in the USA have been involved in a campaign called "make billionaires pay" and have been active in advocating for a bill (supported also by Bernie Sanders in the USA), where tech and other business titans who have seen their wealth shoot up during the pandemic would take huge charges. Amazon and Walmart, for example, have both seen their stocks grow as Americans increasingly relied on their services during stay-at-home orders during the pandemic(CNBC 2020).

What I would add is that besides requiring the super-rich to pay for their vast profits gained during the pandemic, even in so-called non- or post-pandemic times, their profit margins should be more carefully scrutinised, and limits put on them by a more active state. As I suggested above, the pandemic brought again into the spotlight the ways in which the inequalities across the globe are perpetuated while the (super-)rich grow richer at the expense of the poor (which are predominantly racialised inequalities due to the racialisation of manual work). As Stevano *et al*. observe, "the pre-existing inequalities of class, race and gender within [as well as,

between] countries have been laid bare dramatically" during the Covid-19 pandemic (2021, 4). They found that

> Lockdown policies had direct adverse effects on all economies across the globe…
> [However,] lower socio-economic groups have been more likely to bear the brunt of
> the negative economic fallouts, apart from often being disproportionately represented
> in the fatality rate. (Stevano *et al*. 2021, 5)

Stevano *et al.* commented on how the plight of these vast numbers of people have been made more obvious even by "the pithy advice to 'stay home, socially distance, wash hands, and see a doctor in case of fever'" – since they cannot follow any of this advice. These people "have no home in which to shelter, no food stockpiles, live in crowded and unsanitary conditions, and have no access to clean water or affordable medical care" (2021, 5).

In essence, "far from being the 'great leveller', Covid-19 is a pandemic of poverty, exposing the perilous state of social safety nets for those on lower incomes or in poverty around the world" (Stevano *et al*. 2021, 5). Just as in the UN and Oxfam Reports, it emerges that a key factor in socio-economic impact is employment: "The impact of the pandemic varies in terms of earnings and job types – while workers in informal, precarious and front-line work feel the brunt most severely" (Stevano *et al.* 2021, 5).

The same authors add a racialised class lens to their analysis of global capitalism, as well as a gendered lens. The outcome is that we see a complex range of inequalities filtered in, leaving women with a lower mortality risk than men yet overly impacted by their jobs being more exposed to the disease – having more care needs, increased unemployment and more vulnerable to domestic violence (2021, 5). Other researchers echo these findings, including the ILO (2020) and Wenham, Smith, and Morgan (2020).

As far as gendered relationships are concerned, it is also worth pointing to the UN Report's (2020) account of the phenomenon of "modern slavery" – that is, trafficking in persons (which often targets vulnerable women who are exploited in the sex trade or used in highly exploitative labour by traffickers). The UN Report says that "in some countries, arrests have been carried out by law enforcement based on reported cases of advertisements posted on social media, offering some domestic workers – primarily women of African descent – for sale" (2020, 8). While trafficking has of course been an issue in South Africa prior to the pandemic, the pandemic increased the vulnerability of people who turn to, or are deceived by, traffickers into what the report calls "risky or exploitative employment" (2020, 8). Again, considering gendered relationships across the globe and in South Africa, which often render women more vulnerable, the increase in domestic violence widely reported in our media during the pandemic sheds light on the endemic problem of violence against women.

The pandemic can be said to have acted as a magnifier of racialised, gendered, and class inequalities. Stevano *et al*. (2021) point to a further issue not accounted for in your question, pertaining to the exploitation of "nature" attendant on the operation of capitalism (where nature is seen as a resource to be exploited for the benefit of profit), and the consequent climate crisis. They note that the pandemic magnifies this too – by bringing into "sharp relief the patterns of consumption and production that render nature vulnerable to exploitation" (2021, 2).

Sayan and Shankhadeep: *We would like your reflections on the phenomenon of Sociology as an academic and research discipline. As we analyse the various sociological challenges that*

South Africa faces due to Covid-19, is it necessary to interrogate the Eurocentric curricular and pedagogical frameworks that are implemented to teach Sociology in educational institutions of South Africa?

Norma Romm: I believe that part of the reason for vulnerable people in South Africa becoming systemically marginalised in terms of raced[3], classed, and gendered relationships has to do with the content of the curricula of our educational systems and educational practices (ways of teaching and ways of assessing), which in the main are not geared to transgress 'the system' of endemic injustices. Instead of concentrating on our teaching of Sociology as your question suggests, I will reframe the question to consider from a sociological (and interdisciplinary) perspective (which can be called the Sociology of Education) how our educational systems need to be interrogated.

The curricula, to which you rightly allude, for the most part arguably reflect and reproduce a competitive and individual performance-oriented perspective that is not in keeping with Ubuntu-inspired Indigenous cultural heritages in South Africa, but is more reflective of Western approaches to (competitive) knowing and living. In the pedagogical approaches informing our curricula and our assessment of people's (individual) learning, people are primed to compete for jobs and status, and are not encouraged to orient themselves in terms of a 'we' (or collective) orientation. Thus education seems to be the problem and not the solution (Gopalakrishnan 2021).

In other words, our curricula do not provide sufficiently for perspectives grounded in the philosophy of Ubuntu, which advocates collaborative styles of knowing and living together – based on sharing and compassion, rather than on individual success. The spirit of Ubuntu, albeit difficult to define, refers to the notion that, as Chilisa summarises (and translates into English): "I am because we are" (2020, 24), or as Chowdhury *et al*. (2021, 361) explain, "an individual's existence is merged in 'we'". That is, insofar as we are directed by the spirit of Ubuntu, we recognise that we owe our very being to our (meaningful) relationships with others. However, the encouragement of knowing and being *in relation* is not given prime attention in our educational systems, although it is sometimes introduced obliquely in what McKay calls a "parallel curriculum", which she, with a team of critical educators, hoped to strengthen via the national school workbook project (McKay, 2017). In the main, it seems to me that the focus on individual achievement pervades our schooling system and likewise pervades our system of higher education (as in the global order), as many universities have become sites where people are taught with a view to their slotting into the capitalist order, ideally aiming to 'get a good job' or make money as an indicator of success. Of course, this is not to deny that some universities in some countries and in South Africa are consciously engaged in curriculum transformation, with a view to introducing more Indigenous ways of knowing and value-systems. The University of South Africa is a case in point with which I am familiar, where initiatives are underway.

The epistemological premise originating in the West that individuals can come to 'know' as part of an individual learning/thinking process has been queried by certain Western scholars alongside Indigenous scholars – who all refer to the importance of conceiving knowing as rooted in developing our relationality (see, for example, Gergen, 2009; Scherto and Gergen, 2020; hooks, 2003; Goduka, 2012). Scherto and Gill (2020) explain that from a relational

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[3] See Romm (2010) for my preferred use of the terminology of 'raced', 'classed' and 'gendered' (all with a *d* at the end) to avoid reifying these categories and to highlight how they become constructed in social relationships.

perspective, which acts as a counterpoint to the dominant learning traditions in the USA and UK, for example,

It is within the process of relating that the world comes to be what it is for us. We draw from this process our understandings of the world, meanings, and values that inform our actions and shape our moral and ethical horizons. (2020, 403)

Ladson-Billings, an African-American woman, writing with reference to education in the USA offers a similar critique of the Euro-Western tradition springing from Rene Descartes' famous "I think therefore I am", which focuses on 'I' instead of on 'we' as thinking together (Ladson-Billings, 2003). With the focus on 'I' and 'my' thinking, education in the dominant Western narrative becomes framed as a possible route to individual success. This is based somewhat on the myth of a meritocracy which implies that if people do learn via an individual 'achievement' orientation, the route to success will open to them. Many African Indigenous scholars join the array of critical theorists from various critical traditions across the globe, in arguing that this is a myth perpetuated by dominant narratives (Akena, 2012; Bassey, 2019). In the context of South Africa Mthembu (2019) indicates, by way of example based on his study of township youth in the KwaMashu township in KwaZulu-Natal (with a sample size of 24 participants aged 18-29), that their hope for employment "is one aspect that is used to propagate and reinforce unequal social relations". He points to the context of the legacies of colonialism, which still disadvantages the black African community in their search for "equal opportunities" (2019, 452). He elaborates on the challenges that the youth expressed that they experience "with limited economic opportunities", despite the "story" that the collapse of apartheid rule would "redress past injustices" (2019, 453). He traces this to the ANC's adoption of a neoliberal policy in 1996, which he contends in effect "transferred power from the public authority [supposedly democratic] to capitalist forces" (2019, 455).

To organise a turn-around of this system of systemic disadvantage, Indigenous scholars plead for a revitalising of the spirit of Ubuntu, which, as Bassey argues, "made the collective [rather than the individual] the basis of communal organising" (2019, 5). This is not to suggest a return to a romanticised past, but it is to suggest a revitalisation of a concern with collective (more collaborative) ways of knowing and living. The question is how to transform our curricula so that their content is geared to help people to rethink ethical ways of living in the current era. Davids and Waghid (2016) suggest that those designing educational policies and curricula, including those heading higher education institutions in South Africa, need to take part in conversations directed along these lines. Such policymakers and those running institutions need to be "open to critique, and open to unexplored ways of thinking and pursuing knowledge. This kind of leadership would be more able to recognise a university's responsibility in relation to society" (Davids and Waghid 2016, 3).

Crucially, these responsibilities are not limited to trying to produce batches of "technically competent graduates who can get jobs but who do not think critically about their world and themselves". True to Indigenous relational knowing, Davids and Waghid argue that

It is the moment to *pave the way for cultivating communities of thinking.* Students need to be encouraged to *think more about their work in relation to how societal injustices can be remedied.* (2016, 4, my emphasis)

While Davids and Waghid expressed these ideas in 2016, we can say that now more than ever, with Covid-19 offering a magnifying glass that illuminates the endemic societal injustices, the

moment has indeed come for this. Just because Covid-19 has laid bare the vast inequalities perpetuated by the global capitalist system (not built on logic of care and compassion for people or for the planet), we now have a window of opportunity to transform our ways of being, based on a kind of solidarity that has been reinforced in some communities through the pandemic.

Sayan and Shankhadeep: How can the revival and performance of the various indigenous systems of sociological knowledges in South Africa be used as a tool of counter-resistance to tackle the pandemic of Covid-19?

Norma Romm: I am going to address this question by redefining/expanding the boundaries of 'sociological' knowledges and also by broadening the crisis of the pandemic to the wider crisis of endemic poverty (spotlighted through the pandemic). In my understanding, Indigenous systems of sociological knowledge (or ways of knowing) are not separated out from other fields of inquiry, because the idea is to try to develop a more holistic understanding, which is transdisciplinary (see Chilisa, 2017). The critical reader of my book called *Responsible Research Practice* (2018), namely Francis Adyanga Akena, made me acutely aware of how African Indigenous systems of knowledge as developed (and as evolving) in Indigenous communities and as developed in Indigenous scholarship in relation with such communities, consider the interdependencies of all "systems" (for example economic, social, political, spiritual, ecological, etc.) in the web of life.

According to Akena, within most African indigenous communities, people consider that they can arrive at a value-based, well-conceived economic system if they focus on the welfare of all the collective living and non-living beings in the physical and metaphysical world. Thus the land is meant to provide for all living beings, while reciprocally, we should also look after the land. They view the economy as embracing earth's biodiversity, while political and social aspects of existence are seen as linked to spirituality. The belief is that both worlds will collapse if there is no divine intervention. Within this worldview,

> (d)ivine blessings are the pinnacle of success for social and economic maneuvers and humans' relation with the (natural) environment is anchored in the spiritual. That has implications for ecological justice, in that the spiritual emphasises the welfare of humans and the natural environment. Usage of natural resources such as land and forests are predicated on continuity of ecosystems. (Akena 2018, in Romm 2018, 31)

Akena's suggestion (2012, 2018) is that this holistically oriented way of knowing (within Indigenous communities and accordingly in Indigenous scholarship) became sidelined in the halls of Western-styled academia and that this sidelining persists today. Chilisa (2017) likewise calls for a transdisciplinary approach where it is appreciated that "Africa's Indigenous Local Knowledge (ILK) systems can offer sustainable solutions to the eradication of poverty and other challenges facing Africa" (2017, 814). She contends that as yet "ILK represents an under-utilised resource that can be the foundation for developing problem-solving strategies for local communities" (2017, 815). While neither Akena nor Chilisa were writing at the time at which Covid-19 struck, their point is that we must be careful of relying on disciplinary expert knowledge (controlled by professional researchers unfamiliar with Indigenous cultural heritages) to develop 'recommendations' for tackling problems without involving the problem-solving strategies which have been traditionally invoked by Indigenous communities. This therefore would hold for the effort to apply communally oriented problem-solving strategies in the face of Covid-19. However, these problem-solving strategies should not be geared to returning to a semblance of the 'normality' of pre-Covid-19, because the racialised poverty pre-dating Covid-19 is clearly not in tune with collective wellbeing. This is why Chilisa argues that

African communities have the collective means to address these issues of poverty, but this requires a radical questioning of the dominant narratives across the globe as well as in much of South Africa, which still support the operation of the neoliberal capitalist economy and are not "Made in Africa" (Chilisa and Mertens, 2021).

Bearing in mind an approach rooted in the concept of *relationality* as explained above and in my previous answers to your questions, Indigenous systems of sociological and transdisciplinary knowledge in South Africa and across the continent, contest the visions of society and of human beings in society which support the mainstream economic view of how industrialisation emerged in the 18th Century. The 'Industrial revolution' refers in mainstream literature to the technological and economic innovations which developed in England between 1760 and 1830, supported by a technologically oriented science and which then spread to other parts of Europe and the USA. However, as we know, Karl Marx in his *Das Kapital* (1867) severely criticised this view of the spread of industrialisation and the science with which it was associated, and focused instead on how human labour (work in factories) and nature (mother earth) became commodified and turned into "money value", in the name of "progress" (Murove 2005; Paulson 2017; Polanyi 1944; Romm 2017). Furthermore, the way in which capitalism was inextricably connected to a racism which supported colonisation has been spotlighted by critical and Indigenous scholars alike across the globe. As Paulson expresses it, "the commodification of labor and nature was a development brutally imposed in 18th and 19th century England" and spread across Europe, and into colonised territories. Paulson criticises the economic theory which assumes that people can be viewed as *homo economicus* selfishly geared to "crave control over resources and strive to take more than our share" (2017, 440).

Murove (2005) indicates that the mainstream economic theory – premised on *homo economicus* – goes against the grain of relational thinking (as in African traditions). He traces the origin of the idea of people as *homo economicus* to the emergence of industrialisation and post-industrialisation (accompanied by colonisation) where he notes that it is a pity that "early modern economists attempted to divest economics from morality" and in this process the "idea of sympathy as social logic" was "hardened into a theory of self-interest" (Murove 2005, 154). Murove emphasises – in contrast to these conventional economic views of people as 'essentially' selfish – that the notion that the economy runs on self-interested motivation does not give credence to the co-operative skills that enabled human beings to survive and thrive in many societies prior to colonisation.

Turning again to the theorising (or knowledge systems) which can inspire a counter-resistance to tackle crises such as Covid-19 (and the crisis of increasing gaps between the super-rich and super-poor spotlighted by the pandemic) we can turn, for example, to the relational wisdom of African sages and scholars. It is this wisdom that offers a resistance to the notion that we must try to return to the kind of 'normality' regarded as normal in the mainstream narrative around our way of being in society and in relation to the rest of nature. We need to offer a resistance which returns rather to the principles of human and natural well-being built on recognising and strengthening our sense of relationality. This of course does not mean that new technological developments (over and above technologies thus far developed in IKS and in other contexts) should be avoided. But a focus on technological solutions to social, medical, and environmental crises as if somehow, we can rely on technology to solve our ways of living, is ill-founded. A socio-economic system that supports business run on the profit motive at the expense of people and the planet is bound to continue to create crises – such as the crises attendant on Covid-19. As the South African philosopher Ramose expresses, it on the cover of the book entitled *Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary*" (2018), our resistance demands a break with the "free market economic delusion that the natural imperative for survival demands possession

and use of money, permitting injury to other human beings and the wholeness of nature in an unceasing accumulation of money. Enough pecunimania!"

Sayan and Shankhadeep: Apart from the revival and performance of the various indigenous systems of sociological knowledges, what are other sociological initiatives that can be collectively undertaken to address the various existential challenges posed by Covid-19?

Norma Romm: I will approach this question by referring to the importance of sociologists, with others, facilitating community-engaged transdisciplinary research. Chilisa (2017, 820) suggests that the study of reality should be known "through Afrikology [derived from the African cosmology of connectedness]" as "an indigenous transdisciplinary approach", directly in contrast with "the standard configuration of academic disciplines as they usually exist in academic institutions" (2017, 820).

Besides breaking with the "standard configuration" of bounded disciplinary knowledge developed within academic discourses, Chilisa points out that the word "transdisciplinary" implies that knowledge-creation should involve "academics" not only theorising together amongst themselves (as in interdisciplinarity) but also in close co-operation with participants in communities in order to jointly arrive at insights which are likely to be relevant in improving the quality of community life (2017, 813). Similarly, Mahlangu and Garutsa tie transdisciplinarity to a quest to develop "solution-oriented research, which seeks to manage complex societal problems which require inquiry, interlinked processes and multiple social perspectives" (2019, 69).

Your reference to "collective undertakings" would therefore refer to a collective undertaking involving multiple disciplines (and rendering permeable the boundaries between disciplines in the process) and involving professional researchers situated in academia working alongside and with communities to seek (via dialogue) ways of addressing the challenges posed by and heightened by Covid-19. As Chilisa argues in her Indigenous research methodologies book as well as in her other works, it is important to give prime attention to those most marginalised in social and ecological life, rather than allowing the "weight" to be given to dominant narratives (2012, 2020). Hence while giving credence to multiple perspectives, we also have to be alert to the ways in which certain perspectives and versions of reality can have the consequence of contributing to further social and ecological injustice (see Romm 2020). I suggest that Chilisa's plea links up with the arguments of Pleyers (2020) who notes in the case of Covid-19 that "the pandemic is a battlefield" between different narratives that explain it, with certain (dominant) narratives reinforcing the idea that we need to "return to normal" (or more or less the same way of doing business that pre-dated the pandemic). Pleyers (2020) adds that although "progressive intellectuals and [social] movements consider the Covid-19 pandemic opened opportunities to build a fairer world, they compete with reactionary, capitalist and state actors to shape the meaning of the crisis and the world that may come out of it" (2020, 295).

Pleyers suggests that we (those committed to a fairer world) need to be alert to opportunities to engage in "demands for structural change" through activating a counter-narrative instead of paying attention solely to "immediate needs", which he argues many activists (in countries across the globe) have been involved in, in order to lend support to those especially hard-hit by the virus. As he notes, "in an emergency like the Coronavirus outbreak, activists and movements focus on immediate needs and concrete solidarity [in building up mutual aid initiatives]" (2020, 300). However, he asks the question, "does this divert energy from demands for a structural change and contentious actions?" and he continues, "do mutual aid groups

contribute to the 'taming' of social movements … and their … integration in the social system as 'service providers' [to help prop up the system]?" (2020, 300). Put differently, does the effort to address immediate needs of people with low or no income suffering from hunger "contribute to a depoliticisation of movements"? (2020, 300).

These questions relate to the question of whether we need to theorise the crises caused by the pandemic as exacerbating *already existing endemic injustices* built into the operation of the capitalist economy. It is too early to say whether in South Africa the way in which Indigenous systems of knowledge (and attendant expressions of solidarity) can lead to what Chilisa calls Indigenous solutions to poverty arising from the pandemic. As Pleyers indicates, "progressive movements [with communities] consider the Covid-19 pandemic as an opportunity for humanity to take its future in its hand, at a time of rising inequalities and when the economic system endangers life and the planet itself" (2020). However, he adds that

There is no easy path leading from the pandemic to a better and less unequal world. The urgent need for a fairer world is not a sufficient argument to make it happen. The Covid-19 outbreak is a battlefield for alternative futures. (2020, 308)

Pleyers' argument is echoed in that of Chowdhury *et al.* (2021), who plead for us to recognise openings to replace "individualism, consumerism, Eurocentric 'self', … by a common principle of solidarity" (2021, 361). Chowdhury *et al.* make the point that Ubuntuism is relevant not only for Africa, and that it has the potential to offer prospects for transformation worldwide. They therefore call for a global solidarity movement based on a "faith in a universal sharing bond" (2021, 361).

In the battlefield of ideas/narratives (as Pleyers calls it), the strengthening of transdisciplinary ways of knowing which analyse (with intention to transform) the racialised, classed, and gendered impact of Covid in South Africa and beyond, we will need to draw on "Made in Africa" deliberations around possibilities for radical transformation (Chilisa and Mertens 2021). For this, a collective undertaking (as you put it in this question) which serves to contest the fundamental economic and political structural institutions in theory and in practice, based on the insights and experiences of those bearing the worst brunt of the pandemic, needs to be put in place. Professional researchers positioned in academic institutions, engaged with communities in transdisciplinary research need to facilitate processes for participants and stakeholders to participate in a genuine dialogue geared to finding transformative (rather than merely 'immediate') solutions. There are ways in which research with transformative intent – informed by an Indigenous research paradigm (as advocated by authors such as Chilisa) – can be undertaken (Romm 2018). Examples can be found within the arenas of raced and classed relationships, inclusive education, gendered relationships, and development processes geared to forward relational wellbeing (Romm 2018, as also identified by Wulff in his review of this book, aptly titled "Research for a Change" (2021)). Research done with the intent for change is one of the ways in which sociologists, whether they are professional or lay researchers/participant researchers, can meaningfully contribute towards addressing the existential challenges highlighted by Covid-19.

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III.

Covid-19
and politics

Chapter 7

The rhetoric of politics during Covid-19:
An interview with Siseko H. Kumalo

Conducted by Sayan Dey and Shankhadeep Chattopadhyay

Sayan and Shankhadeep: *If we look around the world we see that besides the various social, cultural, economic and medical factors, the impact of Covid-19 has also widely aggravated the self-centric and self-profiteering governing policies of the various political institutions. On a similar note, can you elaborate on some of the laxities of the governing institutions in South Africa in tackling the pandemic and how various pharmaceutical companies and other big businesses have benefited from these laxities?*

Siseko H. Kumalo: I would like to begin by mentioning a conversation I had last year with the Deputy Speaker of Parliament (Mr. L Tsenoli) and the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts (Mr M. Hlengwa). In this conversation, I raised the issue of the assurances that the state along with oversight mechanisms—and institutions such as Parliament – were giving to the public about the repealing of the emergency measures introduced at the onset of the pandemic. The response from the Deputy Speaker sought to highlight that an intellectual response to a global pandemic was overrated and that all state institutions were responding from a place of novelty, as we had never experienced such a crisis. In my own assessment, this should have been a red flag for the majority in the country as it was indicative of the fact that the gains of democracy would be undermined. I say that this should have alarmed the public, as the discussion that I am alluding to was a public debate that was hosted by Power FM on the #PowerTalk slot, which was at the time presented by Aldrin Sampear. The lax nature with which the public engaged such concerning issues became a matter of glaring concern when the South African National Defence Force was reported to have been responsible for the murder of two civilians in the country. This also came to light when the George Floyd issue took the international scene by surprise and gave rise to the #BlackLivesMatter Movement in the USA. It is useful to note these interconnections, discussed below, with reference to the systematic attack against democracy, globally.

I refer to these issues on the premise of the interconnectedness of social issues that concern the public all around the world. The principal concern for me is what is termed "Enlightened

Absolutism" as was coined by Hannah Arendt in her Lessing Address of 1966. In the speech, Arendt notes that the role of revolution has been corrupted, if one can read her in these terms, a corruption that happens by way of the public being gated out of participation in matters concerning how they are governed. Moreover, with the rise of the Covid-19 pandemic, the responses witnessed across the globe indicate that, indeed, the public has been gated out of participation from the ways in which they are governed. There has been a disregard for the mechanisms that are meant to be used as oversight in state actions and decision making.

These actions are subsequently what influence and inform how the state interacts with big pharmaceutical companies; they are acting from a position of disregard for the public due to Enlightened Absolutism. It is thus not surprising that the decisions taken by the South African government continue to perpetuate these kinds of modes of disregarding the public. There are further matters that require our collective attention in the responses that our governments are taking—and I say governments as this is not an issue that is only applicable to the South African context—when dealing with this problem. I will focus on two issues. The first concerns the disregard of the views of the people in decisions taken on behalf of the people. The second deals with how our government spends public resources, which are the resources of the people.

On the first matter there is a need to think about the kinds of consultative measures used in getting the public's perception about the decisions taken on their behalf. To demonstrate the point, when the decision was taken to place the country under lockdown, there was no public engagement with the citizenry. This is why I had posed the questions to the public representatives mentioned above. Such a question was predicated on the need to adhere to the principles of democracy, specifically in the context of a budding democracy such as South Africa's. My desire to safeguard democracy is premised on what we have seen across the continent, wherein liberation movements turn to totalitarian rule, while continuously inviting the support of the public using historical memory.

These kinds of exclusions of the public and the lax level of public accountability are what inform the looting that has been witnessed in the case of public funds by those who rule. The removal of the public from decision making is what has resulted in the ruling elite thinking that they can govern without accountability to their electorate. This fact demonstrates, in real time, the concerns that Arendt wrote about, when she was addressing the matter of "Freedom and Revolution".

The Covid-19 pandemic merely raised to the surface a direction in which the state has been leaning toward, which is predicated on the exclusion of the public from the decision-making processes in a democratic era. This goes back to the need for exploring the futures of democracy, not only in the global South, but across the world. This suggestion is made in light of the fact that there has been a sustained attack on democracy, and here democracy ought not to be viewed as the Western imperial agenda that has sought to determine the sovereign affairs of countries located in the global South. Rather, it needs to be viewed in line with the objectives of increasing public participation in public affairs. This would ensure that we safeguard democracy from a historical pendulum swing that sees us going back to despotism and Enlightened Absolutism.

Sayan and Shankhadeep: With respect to the various laxities that you discussed in the previous question, what are some socio-historical factors that have contributed to the naturalisation and systematisation of self-profiteering and self-centric governing policies in South Africa today?

Siseko H. Kumalo: There has always existed an appeal to historical (collective) memory, whereby the ruling party—that is the African National Congress (ANC) —has sought to capture the support of the public by way of reminding us of their role in the struggle for liberation in the country. There are conceptual flaws with this deployment of collective memory, such as the reality that it was not merely the ANC that directed the liberation struggle of South Africa, but also other liberation movements. My intention here is not to suggest an unyielding gratitude directed at those who led the liberation struggle of the country, but rather to indicate the need to orientate ourselves towards solving and addressing contemporary challenges, questions and problems. While the struggle heroes did well in liberating the country, there is a need to go beyond struggle political rhetoric and begin contending with the needs of the people in a democratic state. A liberation movement ought to be distinguished from the ruling party and those who govern, contemporarily. The concern here lies with the ability of those who govern to address the biting phenomenological realities of the people that they serve, that is to say – their electorate. Without such an orientation, public institutions become the breeding ground for looting without accountability.

This case is demonstrable in how the ANC continues to punt the mantra of anti-corruption without acting against those who have been accused of it. Moreover, such a reality is seen in the bloated state of the executive arm of government , with numbers exceeding some of the fastest growing economies of the globe, such as China, Russia, Brazil and the United States of America.

The benefits derived by those who constitute the executive arm of government render them tone-deaf to the realities of the majority. The appeal to collective memory, in this regard, undermines the integrity of democracy by devaluing the needs of the people and prioritising the comforts of those who occupy the halls of power. Exacerbating this challenge is the fact that those who govern do not heed the advice of experts and neglect the reality of the majority – which is epitomised by the staggering figures of unemployment among the youth.

To this end, the ideas theorised by Paulo Freire in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2005) has transcended the mere definition of theory and has become South African reality. This is to say that those who govern have sought to become the contemporary masters, because the fascination with the image of the master has not been dismantled or ejected from the collective imaginaries of South Africans. Furthermore, the legacies of a dysfunctional education system continue to haunt us contemporarily, in the resistance and inability of the ruling elite to realise what Wicomb called a "Radical Pedagogy" that facilitates a level of consciousness within and among the youth. The contemporary intellectual might be persuaded by the argument that those who govern fail to usher in such critical awareness as a mode of securing their privileges, by way of pacifying the majority through an education system that does not serve the interests of the majority. Once more, such deployment of collective (historical) memory is weaponised as a tool that contains the majority in their perilous state of abject poverty, dejection, political apathy and disinterest. Such a challenge is alarming when one considers that since the dawn of democracy in the country, the plight of the black majority has been entrenched to the extent that 67% of black people in the country find themselves in poverty in comparison with only 1% of the white minority.

In attempting to escape this quagmire, we need to consider at least two questions. The first addresses the aims of education. This is to say that the function of education needs to be articulated in crystallised form. For what are we training the South African youth? Who is training them? What mechanisms are being used in said training? These questions have been posed and treated by a number of educational theorists, decolonial thinkers and sociologists in

the country, including myself, Bongani Nyoka, Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Saleem Badat, Chrissie Boughey, Sioux McKenna and Siphamandla Zondi – to name a few. With this first question considered, it also becomes imperative to consider the question of who is advising the government.

If those who advise government are interested in changing the social conditions of the majority for the better, why is it that the policy intervention mechanisms that have been developed by the state continue to be ineffectual? Answering these questions requires that we consider state architecture and the real process of dislodging self-enriching interests in the public sector, such that the state may begin delivering and attending to the needs of the people and the historical ambition that was linked to the process of liberation.

Sayan and Shankhadeep: *As a researcher in political studies, how do you think the flawed governing policies of the political institutions in South Africa can be transformed to counter the pandemic in an effective manner?*

Siseko H. Kumalo: My answer to this question can be derived from the preceding response. There is a need to, first and foremost, articulate the aims of education in the country. Beyond this articulation, we need to ask, are South African intellectuals advising the state to the extent that our national policies are responsive to the realities of the majority? The correlation between these two questions exists in the fact that those who have been trained as potential employees of the state subsequently inform the policy direction of the country. This would happen by way of these graduates advising the state from a place of knowing the realities faced by the majority. If there is a mismatch between these two components, or an inability to see the correlation between those who advise the state and a well-articulated framework of the aims of education in the country, the concerning inequality that exists in our country will remain.

To take the point of education deeper, I believe that such a mismatch continues to exist in our country owing to the orientation of our curriculum and the privileging of foreign concepts, languages and social organisation principles. I will focus on the aspect of language as a way of demonstrating the point. The South African education system continues to privilege the instruction of our children in a language that is oftentimes a second if not fourth language for the majority, that is, English. Such an orientation has deleterious effects, if we hold to the position propounded by Mazisi Kunene (1992) in which he suggests that the acquisition of a language means that its students are doubly a student of the culture of that language too. It is necessary to bear in mind that Kunene (1992) made this observation echoing the argument advanced by Fanon (1958) in *Black Skin, White Masks*. The function of language, then, is highly politically charged as it is a tool that facilitates a process of alienation for the majority from their realities. Simply put, the language prized in our education system entrenches a level of "cultural schizophrenia" that was first diagnosed and analysed by Ali A. Mazrui (1978) in his *Political Values and the Educated Class in Africa*. Mazrui draws our attention to the fact that an African education system must privilege the realities of the continent if said education is to be effective in training a class of intellectuals and a citizenry that will be able to publicly participate in matters of governance, policy and social organisation. In sum, education becomes the bedrock that facilitates a radical shift in how we respond to the challenges of the country.

In suggesting that education is the answer, our audience must hear me clearly, that the education system must not be predicated on a Western epistemic framework, but rather one that takes seriously what I have termed in my own scholarship the "ontological legitimacy of blackness" (2021). Such an approach would begin to value the life systems, cultural capital and linguistic

richness of the majority in the country. Without such an orienting gaze, it is unlikely that we will be able to effectively respond to the disjuncture that defines our country; a disjuncture that I have explained as a sense of tone deafness from those who rule South Africa. This argument has also been advanced by a series of decolonial thinkers, not only in the country but elsewhere, where the decolonial tradition—in both its theoretical and praxis form—has taken root.

Such an acknowledgement of the personhood of blackness (in other words the recognition of our ontological legitimacy) in our country would mean responding to the pandemic in ways that are recognisable to the majority. To demonstrate, at the onset of Covid-19, much of the media campaigns that were developed by government were in English. Crucial information, as to ways of curbing the virus, was exclusionary and targeted at those who are familiar with a colonial language. At the risk of sounding hyperbolic, such blatant disregard for the majority is symptomatic of a genocidal attitude toward the majority. This is to say that those who govern have so imbibed the thinking of those whose organising principles espouse a derision toward blackness, that black politicians themselves have now become the carriers of the historical objective of wiping out blackness in the country. This was not, of course, a mounted attack, but will be explained away by the elites as a mere oversight; an oversight that was quickly corrected owing to public objections at such an exclusionary tactic in dealing with the pandemic. In sum, it is crucial (in the process of responding to such public health outbreaks) to think about the role and function of education, along with who is included and excluded. For, as Covid-19 demonstrated, such considerations are a matter of life and death for those who are marginalised in our thinking about governance and state organisation.

Sayan and Shankhadeep: Besides transforming the governing policies of political institutions, can you outline the diverse ways through which the residents in South Africa can engage in collective resistance against toxic governing policies on the one hand, and play an active role in socio-politically countering the pandemic on the other?

Siseko H. Kumalo: I am of the view that such collective resistance exists in spaces where communities come together to challenge the status quo. This should not be misunderstood as the public protests that have come to define South Africa, but rather spaces of collective education and what we can term community education programmes. This is the only way that change can be realised. This suggestion is also echoed in the scholarship of Zoe Wicomb and other public intellectuals of the late 90s and early 2000s, who were thinking about strategies of collectively banding together, as a new form of charting a new path in the country. Such programmes are already reported on in Wicomb's scholarship, when she writes about visual literacies and how black communities were using these strategies as a way of staking their sense of belonging to the new South Africa. It must be noted, of course, that such public education programmes were introduced in the country owing to the repressive laws of the previous regime that systematically denied black people education.

I believe that public education programmes allow for a widened sense of public participation by the general public. This would come close to realising the theoretical articulations of scholars such as Amartya Sen (1999) who writes about substantive democracy in the development of the "Capabilities Approach". Broadened democratic participation, in this instance, is facilitated by the capacity of the majority being able to articulate their hopes, desires and ambitions to those who govern. This would be through active organisational models that would render the public as active participants in the systems of governance that prevail in the country.

In an ideal world, broadened participation would see the most rural communities commenting and contributing to the drafting and adoption of legislation that concerns their daily and lived realities. While there are programmes such as the Adult Basic Education Programme, which was introduced by the democratic government to redress the issue of opportunities previously being denied to black people, my view is that these programmes have not yet facilitated the kinds of gains that they were intended for, historically. Moreover, there is a lack of systematic analysis of how effective these programmes have been, because they seem to be parachuted into local communities without an understanding of the needs of specific communities. On the other end, communally driven and directed public education programmes would allow for locals to set out what it is that they want such programmes to address and would attend to the immediate concerns of the locals.

Ultimately, I am concerned with public participation as a way of correcting what I termed "Enlighted Absolutism", as discussed in my response to the first question. This would ensure that the project of democracy bears fruit for all in the country, and not merely an elite few. Such a bold claim is predicated on the fact that those who get to participate in issues of governance and substantive democracy in South Africa, are those who are located in the metropolitan spaces (such as Durban, Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Pretoria). Moreover, such programmes, in my assessment, would also allow for the nurturing of locally based ingenuity and innovation. This would take care of the concern around dormant rural economies, by way of facilitating strategies of meeting the needs of rural communities. It should be noted that this is an ideal situation that I am talking about, however, as I also indicated earlier, such programmes have been seen in the past, wherein communities rallied around public education and organised themselves in ways that allowed for the clear articulation of their needs, desires and wants. So while it might be critiqued as an idealistic goal, there is a blueprint from which we can gain knowledge and insights into how we can make such programmes not only sustainable, but also effective – at the local grassroots levels of the country.

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Chapter 8

The impact of Covid-19 in the rural areas of South Africa:

An interview with Sihlanganiso Khumalo

Conducted by Sayan Dey and Shankhadeep Chattopadhyay

Sayan and Shankhadeep: Since the evolution of European colonisation, the rural/urban dichotomy has generated innumerable existential fragmentations amongst the people in South Africa. How has this colonially incepted dichotomy undergone reconfiguration during Covid-19 in South Africa?

Sihlanganiso Khumalo: The genealogy of the rural/Euro-urban dichotomy, decolonially speaking, can be traced back to the start of coloniality/modernity in 1492, a year that symbolises the start of the colonial structure of power in Latin America and thereafter spreading to almost all parts of the world. Rurality is justification and strategy for the existence of urbanity since the rural/urban symbolises abyssal imagination and construction of space and peoples. Rurality was an idea for imagining a violently invisible space for the colonised peoples as a ploy to produce comfort for the coloniser. This violent architecture found expression through biased development euphemistically christened 'separate development' or apartheid.

European colonisation instituted a hierarchical colonial structure in South Africa by 1652. However, the 'city' concept is planetary, rather than exclusively Eurocentric - for instance, the Forbidden City in the Ming Empire, Agra in Mughal and the Great Zimbabwe in Masvingo existed as examples of cities which existed before European societies were civilised. The Euro-modern urbanity/rurality divide came with the colonial structure of power and its darker side, which led to innumerable existential fragmentations amongst the people in South Africa.

The land that became the Union of South Africa in 1910 after the treaty of Vereeniging of 31 May 1902 and an exclusive white Republic of South Africa from 1961 to 1994 experienced the rural/urban dichotomisation through the Land Act of 1913 and the Group Areas Act of 1950, among others. Kok (2006, 8-12) in Mlambo (2018) proposes that the discovery of gold in Johannesburg in 1886 marked the start of urbanisation in South Africa. The ruralisation process of the area called South Africa today took place in two related steps: first, farms, mines and subsequent towns and cities were apportioned to white South Africans (constituting about 87% of land) as non-rural; then, about 13% surplus unproductive land was assigned to indigenous peoples as rural, Bantustans or native lands. The process produced a rural/urban dichotomy that created existential fragmentations, the impact of which still persists and affects the fight against the ills of our time, including the Covid-19 pandemic. Omodan, Tsotetsi and Dube (2019, 12-18) assert that the rural/urban dichotomy needs to be decolonised because it is responsible for

existential problems such as lack of economic and social amenities, lack of economic growth, poor living and working conditions, lack of infrastructure, and poor access to education, health services and social empowerment in rural areas. Their article fails to answer the question: decolonising from which current state to which future state? Decolonially speaking, rurality is constitutive of Euro-urbanity, its logic is exploitation of human and natural resources - hence its darker side is a higher incidence and depth of impoverishment and diseases in rural areas when compared to urban areas.

In addition, Mubangizi and Mubangizi (2021) extensively argue that the rural which was created by colonialism and apartheid in South Africa is made up of vulnerable communities on a number of fronts. The first aspect is spatial inequality. Second is an inadequately developed transport system. Poorly resourced municipalities are the third. The fourth on their list is various poor socioeconomic realities. Rural people have always lived under difficult circumstances.

Mlambo (2018) wrongly laments that the massive urban migration will lead to disruption of rural development in South Africa. This lamentation is motivated by the United Nations projection that 80% of the population of South Africa will be living in urban areas by 2050. The Lewisian lens of the Dual Economy proposes that economic development in developing countries can be achieved with unlimited supplies of labour taken from traditional activity (including all rural activity), with the labour being paid at subsistence wage level (Lewis 1954). A complementary lens is the received theory of migration in Least Developed Countries (LDCs) by Harris and Todaro 1970 (in Fields 1972) which asserts that rural/urban migration entails the movement of workers into urban areas in search of better jobs, as if there were no other reason or no inverted migration. The two theories seem to start from the premise of blindly naturalising the rural/urban divide which was created by a global colonial structure of power, and move on to blame the existential conditions faced by rural people on the victims, the rural people themselves. Finally, the theories seem to believe in what Mignolo (2011b) calls the fairy tales of modernity as a solution to the problems in rural areas. Rural development from this perspective is urbanisation of the rural or a simultaneous creation and invisibilisation of the rural as zones of non-being. The critical decolonial lens helps one realise that rural problems might be the direct result of the darker side of modernity or the logic of coloniality. Perhaps one may also add that the logic of coloniality goes beyond race and is sometimes pivoted on structures like rural development partners such as international non-governmental organisations, government agencies, multilateral organisations, central and local government, which continue to use the methods and tools of the coloniser for selfish primitive capital accumulation at the expense of ordinary people and the environment.

The implications of the rural/urban duality can be better understood through a critique of the Cartesian notion. The dictum "cogito ego sum" (I think therefore I am) is a Descartian philosophy that privileged the mind over the body and instituted hierarchical binaries in the modernity of thought and praxis (Ndlovu 2017). In the light of the Cartesian hierarchical duality of things, the developed are a lesson and guide for the developing in a forward singular march towards a cul de sac; a universal developed state. The urban was framed as a lighthouse for the rural in the modernity idea of rural development. The rural is a quantity that is a project for modernisation in the model of the urban, while the urban is an object lesson of how to develop for the rural; and thinkers and civilised doers are found in the urban. The rural have poor roads, poor transport, limited or no electricity, insufficient and poor health and educational facilities (Mlambo 2018; Omodan *et al*. 2019) while the urban is a beacon which beckons the rural. Mubangizi and Mubangizi (2021) add to the innumerable existential fragmentations amongst the people in South Africa due to the colonial urban/rural dichotomy when they note that rural people lack access to income, employment, assets, health care, education, equal opportunities

to urban counterparts and public services. The duality dangles the rhetoric of urbanity and modernity while hiding its darker side, a coloniality which dominated and exploited the rural to benefit the colonisers; and which perpetuates control and manipulation of the people and the environment in contemporary societies. The logic of coloniality as the energy for the rural/urban hierarchical divide is perhaps the most influential factor in the existential problems experienced by rural people since colonialism. The fundamental question is whether the Covid-19 pandemic had a positive or negative impact on the rural/urban dichotomy, as existential problems for rural people or on the dichotomy itself.

There are three fundamental points to note in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic. It firstly inverted the order of suffering, while secondly it did not remove the colonial rural/urban divide - but instead, it exposed and perpetuated the dichotomy. Thirdly, the Covid-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected rural people and hence it has worsened their condition and deepened spatial inequalities. The reach of the Covid-19 pandemic needs qualification before these points can be explored further.

Covid-19 was a global pandemic. Mubangizi and Mubangizi (2021) note that livelihoods have always been shocked by epidemics and pandemics such as the Spanish Flu (1918-1920), the Asian Flu (1957-1958), AIDS (1981 to the present), the H1N1 Swine Flu pandemic (2009-2010), the Ebola epidemic (2014-2016), the Zika virus pandemic (2015 to date) and the Covid-19 pandemic. These authors proceed to advise that development thinking and praxis must emphasise sustainable livelihoods. An epidemic is a disease which is widespread across a community while a pandemic is one which covers a wide area such as a country, region or the whole world. Covid-19 was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on 11 March 2020 after its coverage had spiralled to most parts of the world since its discovery in China in December 2019 (Statistics South Africa 2020; Siedner *et al.* 2020; Mubangizi and Mubangizi 2021). Taylor and McCarthy (2021) conclude that Covid-19 is a global pandemic because 42 million people had been infected and 1.1 million died of Covid-19 related complications worldwide at the time of the publication of their paper in early 2021. My own *ad hoc* internet search on 7 October 2021 corroborates Taylor and McCarthy (2021), who record Covid-19 statistics as 219 million cases (with 4.55 million deaths) globally and 2.91 million cases (with 87 922 deaths) in South Africa.

Three brief points are raised in view of your question regarding the reconfiguration of the urban/rural dichotomy by Covid-19 or lack thereof.

Literature reviewed suggests that Covid-19 has inverted the order of suffering. The World Bank (2021) notes that the issues of poverty and hunger multiplied and deepened in urban areas as compared to rural areas across the globe. The *United Nations University Working Paper* (2021) observes that Covid-19 decimated savings, incomes and investments of households, and exacerbated unemployment, inaccessibility of healthcare and water services in Khayelitsha, Cape Town. The order that poverty and unemployment was a rural phenomenon was reconfigured by Covid-19 in South Africa. The study aptly concludes that Covid-19 resulted in abrupt and dramatic shocks to the labour market, including the exposure of households and individuals to vulnerability and subsequent despondence in urban areas such as Khayelitsha (The United Nations University 2021).

The second point is that Covid-19 has not removed the colonial rural/urban divide - instead, it has exposed and perpetuated the dichotomy. Covid-19 exposed the weakness in modern agriculture-based rural livelihoods. Mubangizi and Mubangizi (2021) state that lockdowns

harmed cattle-rearing livelihood by restricting cattle dipping, feed supply and auctions. Allen and Christie (2020) report that Covid-19 exposed horrendous inequality in the health system in rural KwaZulu-Natal. They argue that the long distance between clinics in rural areas and shortage of supplies compromised the ability of the rural health system to manage the pandemic. The high economic inequality in a dual economy which is a legacy of exclusion was already affecting the generation of enough jobs in rural areas and it was further exposed and deepened by Covid-19 non-pharmaceutical control measures such as lockdowns and social distancing implemented through business closures, interprovincial travel restrictions and strict curfews. The urban bias (Lipton 1977) was exposed by extra government social protection for troubled urban businesses and employees. Siedner *et al.* (2020) contend that there is very little evidence that the 500 billion Rand meant for troubled industries actually reached rural industries. The above evidence suggests that the bifurcation of rural and urban as zones of non-being and being still persists long after the end of juridical apartheid.

The Covid-19 pandemic did not reconfigure colonially carto-graphed rural/urban divides by levelling suffering. Rather, rural areas were "disproportionately affected by lack of essential goods and services including food, water and health care" (Mubangizi and Mubangizi 2021, 6). It may be argued that Covid-19 reconfigured the rural/urban dichotomy by worsening it as opposed to closing it.

Sayan and Shankhadeep: *How are political institutions and the media in South Africa systematically silencing the existential plight of rural people during Covid-19?*

Sihlanganiso Khumalo: The media tends to report incidents from urban areas which are within reach due to travel restrictions. Furthermore, internet-based news gathering and reporting tends to leave out the rural areas which do not have decent internet coverage. As a result, media houses were inundated with Covid-19 stories from urban areas, thereby silencing the rural ones and hence perpetuating the invisibilisation of the wretched of the earth who hail from the zones of non-being. The idea of coloniality (Mignolo interview with Escobar, 2002) can be clearly located in the Euro-urban/rural hierarchised dichotomy. Furthermore, the state tended to concentrate their gaze on compliance to Covid-19 protocols and its impact in urban areas. This added to the silencing and perpetual exclusion of rural areas. The silencing and disavowal of rural areas pertain even to issues of life and death - where Covid-19 is a logical extension of the colonial structure of power (Quijano 2007) in place since 1492. Mignolo rightly states that coloniality is not over but all over (that is, everywhere) while Grosfoguel (2007) is on point when he interprets coloniality as a belief that the colonial structures of power have evaporated with the onset of juridical independence and that apartheid has been replaced with juridical majority rule.

Sayan and Shakhadeep: *As a researcher in the field of Development Studies, why do you think that the academic discipline of Development Studies in South Africa continues to be widely influenced by colonial patterns of thinking and doing, and how can this be decolonised?*

Sihlanganiso Khumalo: We first need to consider what colonial patterns of thinking and doing look like before delving into your question. Decolonial analysis is premised on epistemic disobedience (not thinking from Athens to Washington but rather from silenced, disallowed, inferiorised and invisibilised situated thinkers such as Cugoano, Wamana Puma, Frantz Fanon, Gandhi, and Sankara among others) because it is motivated by the observation that epistemology is constitutive of ontology (Mignolo 2011b; Mignolo 2018; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2019).The Euro-modern rationality epistemology has been in place since the Renaissance and

the Enlightenment ruled out and ruled over other planetary epistemologies through what Quijano (2007) characterises as the colonisation of culture, the colonisation of the imagination, the repression and appropriation of ideas from those that Fanon described as the wretched of the earth and the mystification of a provincial Euro-modern epistemology so that it could apportion to itself the status of an un-situated, singular, universal and objective epistemology. From the above, Euro-modernity, which silenced what Dussel (1998) framed as planetary modernity, became the wings of promise on which colonial thinking and doing rode. Decoloniality is the energy that opposes the logic of coloniality and does not believe in the fairy tale of the rhetoric of Euro-modernity. It "reimagines modernity as a project of violent epistemic and territorial expansion, exposes its past and points towards different futures" (Andreotti 2020). In the light of this, colonial thinking and doing presents Euro-modernity as the future and the universal, while other modernities present the past and the provincial, or the irrational. The academic discipline of Development Studies in South Africa is still entrapped in decolonial thinking and doing in many ways.

The academic discipline has modernisation as its goal. It does not train the student to imagine alternative pluriversal futures but to think of how South Africa missed out in the period of modernity and how it can catch up today. The discipline emphasises epistemic obedience by thinking from the Renaissance and the Enlightenment to how the so-called developed countries developed. The discipline is a quest for strategies that can transform South Africa into a developed country. Cornwell (2020) proposes to decolonise Development Studies through pedagogic reflections. She uses unconventional methods in her lectures and assessments to decolonise pedagogies in Development Studies. My view, however, is that a comprehensive decolonisation of the discipline must entail changing both the goals and methods of the discipline. The academy has to acknowledge that modernity has not only failed but has been discredited even in the North (Escobar 2015) hence the discussion about sustainable development and degrowth. Pushing for modernity is a misnomer. To add to that, it is not logical to pursue post-modernity as if there has been modernity in as much as there can be no post-coloniality in a world where coloniality still exists. The alternative ways of thinking that go back into the archives to reconstruct the repressed or appropriated epistemologies and planetary modernities should be both the content and method of decolonised Development Studies as an academic discipline.

Sayan and Shankhadeep: How can decolonising the field of Development Studies erase the differential impact of Covid-19 in rural and urban areas in South Africa and generate possibilities of resisting the impact of the pandemic in a more effective way?

Sihlanganiso Khumalo: One interesting case for the decolonisation of the field of Development Studies has to do with the colonisation of culture and invisibilisation of key populations. Weerawardhana (2018) declares her positionality as a transgender individual. She contends that Development Studies privileges white male practitioners and heterosexual families and individuals at the expense of experienced and more knowledgeable researchers of colour and Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transgender (LGBT) families. Kapoor adds that the LGBT inclusion in Development Studies that is captured in coloniality is "manipulative homo righteousness" (2015, 1116) signifying that the inclusion dangles liberties of the LGBT community while its logic is public relations for neoliberalism. Transfeminism, an extended feminist lens that privileges transgender women is recommended as a Development Studies lens that can decolonise the academy (Weerawardhana 2018). Unfortunately, the imagined intervention seems not to have the capacity and commitment to expose, dismantle and usher in another way of thinking and doing but rather engages in a reverse psychology or cosmetic shifts within the fairy tales of modernity and the logic of coloniality.

Decolonising Development Studies can erase the rural/urban dichotomy. First, the rural/urban divide signifies progress towards modernity and the urban is a schoolmaster for the rural. Removing modernity as a central organising idea collapses the divide. Secondly, the rural are seen as non-beings and rural areas are zones of non-being while the urban is constitutive of the rural. Reconstituting repressed or appropriated epistemologies or worlds and knowledges (Escobar 2002) will collapse what Maldonado-Torres (2007) frames as the coloniality of being and reconstitute decolonial subjects who have dignity and who treat others with dignity and who pursue their pluriversal futures by operating in the borders of rural/urban in re-existence. Re-existence is a Mignolo term to denote non-aligned and non-fundamentalist border thinking and living. Border living is characterised by non-reliance on the state but is constituted by day-to-day creative hard work by ordinary people to re-exist (Mignolo 2011b).

To conclude, my hope is that such organisation of life for ordinary people outside the Westphalian state (Destrooper and Mbambi 2017) can obviate the need for social distancing, curfews and quarantine, iterating between rural and urban for services and employment. Self-sufficient convivial re-existence can go a long way towards minimising the impact of modern diseases while at the same time giving communities humane and sustainable proactive ways of dealing with pandemics.

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IV.

Legal and psychological impact of Covid-19

Chapter 9

Covid-19, legal issues and decolonisation:

An interview with Tshepo Madlingozi

Conducted by Sayan Dey and Shankhadeep Chattopadhyay

Sayan and Shankhadeep: *You have been associated with the field of Applied Legal Studies in diverse capacities for several decades. In your opinion, to what extent has the field of Legal Studies in South Africa been able to disentangle itself from colonial functions and develop decolonial ways of analysing and addressing legal issues?*

Tshepo Madlingozi: I think the decolonial approach to law or to constitutionalism is still very much a marginalised perspective in South Africa. We know that South Africa has a Constitution that is considered as one of the best constitutions in the world because it guarantees particular rights. It creates a wide array of socio-economic rights and discourages homophobia and other forms of discrimination. The Constitution guarantees freedom of movement which is very progressive. The seemingly progressive nature of the Constitution leads people to believe that South Africa and its Constitution have been decolonised, but that does not lead to a decolonial understanding.

There are three reasons for which a decolonial understanding of the Constitution must arise. The first relates to the way people understand and interpret the Constitutional ethics and norms of South Africa. This belief is guided by a deliberate attitude towards the Constitution which is 'emancipatory' in nature, and later on we will discuss this aspect a bit more. The second reason is naturally the ways in which people document the post-apartheid and postcolonial laws and order in South Africa. Many people claim that the fall of a political party due to their association with colonialism fulfils the demands of decolonisation. However, this is highly problematic because the process of decolonising laws and order is not so simple. Like any other form of decolonisation, it is a highly complex process and is underfed with multiple, complex and entangled layers of domination, marginalisation, and violence. This is why we need to reconceptualise decolonisation again and again. The third reason is fundamentally part of our

legal education. It is important to investigate the way people are legally educated in South Africa. Our legal education does not properly teach us about history. Most of Africa was colonised for less than a hundred and eight years or so, but South Africa was colonised for more than four hundred years. Our system of education is ahistorical. This lack of consciousness about the history, laws and order of South Africa is highly visible amongst the students here. When I ask my first year and final year students, why did apartheid fall? They often fail to answer, or simply identify a group of political institutions and argue about their failure to live up to the expectations and commitments of the white population in South Africa. Of course, that is a major reason but the discussion does not end there. In order to interpret apartheid in a diverse and holistic manner, it is necessary to map the transmutation of apartheid to new apartheid, and the transformation of colonialism to neo-colonialism. If we don't understand history, then we will not be able to understand these transitions and transmutations. What will happen is that we will look at this progressive Constitution like any other and we would say that there is no need for a decolonial approach to that. Decolonial approaches are still very much marginal because of the reasons given above.

Sayan and Shankhadeep: Indeed, this lack of historical consciousness has been a fundamental issue in our understanding of the aspects of colonialism and neo-colonialism. Narrowing our focus towards lockdowns at the time of Covid-19, we saw during the lockdowns a steep rise in domestic violence in South Africa. How effective has law and order in South Africa been to address the issue?

Tshepo Madlingozi: The lockdowns aggravated the already-existing imbalance in the laws and order in South Africa. In fact, this is the same issue that we find in other countries like India, Britain and elsewhere. Amongst several issues, one of the major issues that came up during the lockdowns is the severe increase in 'intimate partner violence'. To understand this issue categorically it is important to understand that intimate partner violence cannot be equated with the phrase domestic violence. Of course, intimate partner violence is a form of domestic violence, but it needs to be interpreted within a situation where the instigators and the victims are locked down in the same house. This dimension of intimate partner violence in South Africa invites us to analyse the issue of domestic violence within a broader framework of homophobia and patriarchy. South Africa is not only a racist country, but it is also a deeply homophobic and patriarchal country. Policies normalise the acts of patriarchy and homophobia because of two very prominent cultural reasons. The first cultural reason is the naturalisation of the inferior status of women in South Africa. Here women are seen as inferior, while female bodies are also seen as objects of pleasure for men. Therefore, women are seen as secondary when it comes to their citizenship status. The second cultural reason is that there is always a split between the public sphere and the private sphere in South Africa. We can have amazing laws on paper and most of those laws are understood as the best for the welfare of the citizens in the public sphere, but when it comes to application the intention and functionality of the laws become highly questionable. The law keepers in South Africa maintain a clear distinction between the private and public spheres. This is why when many victims visit the police station to report their experiences of domestic violence, complaints are often ignored by police officers. Often, the police officer says, "hey, I don't want to interfere in your family business". The laws can never be effective if we have cultural attitudes that do not support the citizens at the time of genuine crises and instead join hands with those who instigate violence.

The laws failed to function properly during the lockdowns. At the time of lockdown people ran out of alcohol and cigarettes. This aggravated the frustration of men, who are addicted to cigarettes and alcohol, and they poured out their frustration on their partners. Law and order in South Africa were not at all ready to deal with these crises. Therefore, the legal system in South

Africa has widely failed to cope with the tremendous rise of intimate partner violence during Covid-19.

Sayan and Shankhadeep: Why have the existing laws in South Africa not been improved? Adding to that is the lack of preparedness, which the entire world faced because nobody was prepared for Covid-19. Historically, if we look into this particular aspect, we also know that colonisers played a very important role in using alcohol and drugs as weapons to pacify slaves and local indigenous communities. The use of alcohol and drugs was supported so that the people wouldn't rise up against the colonial masters and would remain silent. Do you think it was this specifically, together with several other colonial aspects, that introduced physical abuse and played a role in the current situation of domestic violence in South Africa? What is your opinion?

Tshepo Madlingozi: The aggravation of these particular events of violence took place with the arrival of the European colonisers in South Africa. However, alcohol as a tool of political negotiation and building community faith has been in place in South Africa for several thousands of years. Unfortunately, we do not talk much about these events of violence because we feel ashamed about it. Some of our potent anti-colonial leaders became alcoholics. Alcohol became important to native kings, the very people who were ruling thousands of men and women, prior to the arrival of the European colonisers. Sometimes kings used to pass down the road and, in order to gain the faith of the people, distributed alcoholic drinks. With the arrival of European colonisation the consumption of alcohol amongst the indigenous natives of South Africa increased. During the colonial era, many became alcoholic because they couldn't face the reality that their lands and rights had been taken away by colonisers. Another reason for the rise in frustration (leading to intimate partner violence) was the loss of indigenous spiritual beliefs and practices. People were becoming Christians and they were getting Western education. Some of them loved it and some of them were forced to do so. In both cases, the native indigenous people of South Africa were uprooted. With the passage of time, people realised that under any circumstance, they were failing to defend themselves against colonial guns and bombs. The masses were ashamed, in a way. To further physically and psychologically sterilise the natives, European colonisers gave them alcohol and tobacco. Even in several slave estates, alcohol and tobacco were used as payments by colonial masters to pacify the anger of the slaves. This is known as the 'Dop System' which I will discuss later. The process of using alcohol and tobacco as tools for pacifying the crises and the frustrations of the locals in South Africa continues even today, through setting up of beer gardens and beer courts. For instance, if one goes to the townships, one may not find health clinics, hospitals, and soccer fields, but one will surely find massive beer bars. This is how, instead of improving the basic amenities like health, education, law and order, investments are being made to cater to violence. In the Western Cape there was a system called the 'Dop System' where, along with money, slaves were paid with locally brewed alcohol by the colonisers. The people who went to work for farmers in the Western Cape or the Cape Coral in the Western Cape, used to receive alcohol as part of their salaries. Even today, in the Western Cape you will find the largest rate of foetal alcohol syndrome; where babies are born with disabilities due to alcohol consumption of pregnant women. This is the foetal alcohol syndrome generated by the 'Dop System' and it was specifically widespread during the 1980s. This situation still continues because alcohol addiction is intergenerational. In all the townships of South Africa, a large number of youths indulge in anti-social activities and die every year because of their addictions to drugs and alcohol. So yes, alcohol addiction contributed to the process of dehumanisation as people were trying to cope with different levels of crises. According to the patriarchal system, men in society are taught that they are the providers and women are nothing more than submissive entities. But one will not be able to provide if he or she is unemployed and therefore, they seek refuge

in alcoholism to numb the frustration of being unemployed. Addiction to alcohol has always been a coping mechanism by the colonised people who are still colonised and de-personalised and de-humanised. They have been completely uprooted from their native indigenous social, cultural and religious roots, and it was a deliberate scheme by the colonial government to colonise these people so that they can dictate freely. So yes, your assessment is correct.

Sayan and Shankhadeep: Your assessment of the problems of domestic violence, alcohol abuse and the poor implementation of law and order within the political framework of colonialism and capitalism invites us to think about the lack of concern towards reporting cases of domestic violence. With respect to domestic violence during Covid-19, we are aware of the fact that many cases go unreported while the reasons behind cases going unreported are many, just as there are many factors that contribute to it. What we are particularly interested in is how the practices of racial and gender hierarchies contribute to this situation in South Africa. and what role can Applied Legal Studies play in addressing the issue?

Tshepo Madlingozi: Black women are easy objects of gender-based and sexual violence in South Africa. It is found in several other global South countries that black women are expected to accept domestic abuse as well as to acknowledge the instigators of those abuses. For men who try to act in line with capitalism and colonialism, unleashing violence on black women is a normalised affair. The women are also expected to accept domestic abuse as a normal affair. Black women have internalised their abuses. Gender hierarchy does play a role here because, by default, black women are expected to be caregivers of colonialism and capitalism.

With respect to the initiatives taken by practitioners of Applied Legal Studies, we have published some infographics and pamphlets for organisations of the public interest and for the legal sectors, to convey information in case of someone's abuse. Some have even published infographics which consist of sound signals and symbolic words. The sound signals and symbolic words were created for the safety of victims, so that when they are on a phone call their abusive partners are unaware that they are calling for help. We have also established a hotline with about ten other organisations where people could call in to get help. In fact, separate hotlines have been established during Covid-19 to cope with the increasing complaints of domestic violence. A hotline for reporting domestic violence is really useful because people at least have a place to call for help. Lists of organisations where people can ask for assistance have also been published. We have received plenty of cases to fight against such abuse of women. It is a good thing that we have many call centres in South Africa. Along with the call centres, many safe homes have also been established. However, this is still not enough for victimised women. There are many problems within the process, especially with respect to safe homes. They only allow people to stay for a certain number of days. We have cases where people have developed phobias due to long-term abuse. We do a lot of work in court to defend these women. We are busy with a case where we are trying to come up with norms and standards for how the victims can be given lifetime security and habitual legal support. That's what we are doing in Applied Legal Studies. There are only a few organisations, and most of us communicate via the internet and social media. The infographics can only be accessed by the people who are on social media or who at least can read English. This fight is not only a legal fight, but also a cultural and a colonial fight. The fight against colonial cultures must continue through transformations in law and order, so that colonial structured violent cultural attitudes can be dismantled.

Sayan and Shankhadeep: Do you think there has been a significant reduction in unreported cases? Are people becoming more aware and bolder to come forward and report their problems?

Tshepo Madlingozi: I don't know exactly – given that I have not done a study to see a before and after effect. We do see people calling in, but I don't know about the ratio between people who call in, and those who do not. We have not done that kind of study yet. I don't know because South Africa is still very much a colonial state where so many hidden policies are followed to distort and hide data. Even a lot of our empirical research is based on data from urban areas, which shows that our intervention does make a difference. We have seen people using those services and calling, but I'll be lying to you if I say that I know whether it has led to a reduction in unreported cases.

Sayan and Shankhadeep: Sure, that's perfectly understandable. You have already talked about legal issues and decoloniality in South Africa in the previous questions. Specifically with respect to the various forms of legal crises that emerged during Covid-19 and some of which you have already discussed, how urgent is the need to decolonise the legal system to address such matters?

Tshepo Madlingozi: As I have already shared, first we need to be clear about the fact that patriarchy plays a pivotal role in assigning people a particular gender and imposes its own ideology on them. In South Africa, patriarchy has vehemently contributed towards both colonialism and capitalism. Patriarchy existed in South Africa before colonialism also. But we have to understand patriarchy as a colonial problem which sprouted along with issues like sexism. To dismantle this colonially fashioned patriarchal and sexist system is to decolonise. However, liberal feminism won't help us in this project because that is about how women become the same as men or white middle-class women in a capitalist society. We need a few colonial perspectives that will address the fact that what we call South Africa today is basically a 'thing' without a name that was set up in 1910 as a settler colony and which was never destroyed. I mean, we still live in South Africa but there's a sort of colonialism that is still in continuation with four aspects. Firstly, there is the aspect of culture, religion, and education. Secondly, we have the aspect of land dispossession. Thirdly, there is the aspect of economic subjugation. Fourthly, there is the aspect of institutionalised racism. These four aspects continue to evade all possibilities of decolonial resistance and maintain the fiction of genders. As part of decolonial resistance, we need to recover the constitutional perspectives that are rooted in African feminism. African feminism is decolonial by nature and you don't need to do anything separately to create equilibrium here, because African feminism conveys that gender oppression in Africa is different from gender oppression elsewhere. That is because the gender assignment agenda is aligned to colonialism in Africa. As a result, the acknowledgment of African feminism is an important point to begin the process of decolonising legal studies in South Africa.

Any legal approach that is not decolonial will continue with the project of colonisation and the awkward positioning of women within the system. As a part of decolonising legal approaches, I am advocating for the approval of African feminism because it is an indispensable approach for us. African feminism is geared towards the total dismantling of patriarchy, because the ideologies of African feminism not only challenge colonially structured gender and sexual roles, but is also anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist, and anti-liberalist in nature.

African feminism is anti-imperialistic in nature because the patterns of gender and sexual hierarchy are quite different in Africa as compared to elsewhere in the world. Instead of borrowing from Western/colonial perspectives of feminism, African feminism tries to develop ways of generating indigenous methodologies for addressing the issues of gender and sexual hierarchies in South Africa. African feminism can also create a strong resistance against the invasion of non-governmental organisations, who often come to Africa to liberate the

indigenous natives from their sufferings. Many socio-political organisations from the global North try to present Africa's fight against patriarchy as a fight against African culture, but this approach is completely wrong, and this is what African feminism wishes to address. Africa's culture belongs to Africa and it cannot be 'owned' by anybody else.

African feminism is also anti-capitalist because it understands that in a neo-colonial country like South Africa the nascent forms of capitalism sustain itself on the unpaid labour of African women. Without destroying capitalism, the fight for equality and the fight against sexism are impossible.

Besides being anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist, African feminism is anti-liberalist in nature as well. It is so because African feminism questions the elitist discourses of liberalism in South Africa through calling for reformations in the country's legal system. The phenomenon of African feminism in South Africa does not identify itself as a separate entity, but exists in entanglement with the law and order of the country. It is a powerful decolonial approach to law. It can help us attend to aspects such as unemployment and hunger, which Covid-19 exacerbated. It is necessary to collectively build decolonial legal systems in South Africa by intersecting law and order with the aspects of race, gender, sexuality and patriarchy.

Chapter 10

The Psychological Impact of Covid-19 in South Africa:

An Interview with Dené Du Rand

Conducted by Sayan Dey and Shankhadeep Chattopadhyay

Sayan and Shankhadeep: Although several discourses have been generated on the issues of mental health during lockdowns and solitary confinements, collective discussions and engagements to address the psychological impact of Covid-19 nevertheless appears to be quite underrated as compared to the engagements about the physical impact of the pandemic. Can you discuss the various ways in which (from your experience) Covid-19 has psychologically affected people in South Africa so far?

Dené du Rand: Thank you for the opportunity to engage in a meaningful and critical conversation with you. Firstly, one has to take into consideration the historical and socio-political context of South Africa. Secondly, it is paramount to look at the positionality of psychology as a discipline, specifically issues related to mental health and mental health care, in the larger context of the healthcare system when planning to respond to the impact of any pandemic.

Research has shown that the spread of Covid-19 created a public health emergency and the South African government, as many other international governments, implemented important restrictive and preventative measures such as a nationwide lockdown, wearing of masks, hygiene practices, quarantine measures and social distancing, as a way of containing the pandemic. These measures are important and necessary when aiming to prevent the spread of the virus and treating those who are infected with it, but these measures have the potential to disrupt many aspects of people's lives resulting in psychosocial distress. I agree with Steven Taylor who, in his book The Psychology of Pandemics (2019), argues that the methods that were implemented to prevent and contain the spread of the virus has psychology behind it and therefore this essentially makes it a psychological problem. The success or failure of these methods depends largely on psychological factors. It is, however, concerning to think that little attention has been aimed at identifying psychological factors related to the spread of psychological and pandemic related distress. Considering this background and the important role that psychology as a discipline can play in preventing and managing psychosocial stressors related to Covid-19 it becomes crucial to include a focus on issues related to mental health and mental health care when responding to any pandemic.

Engagement with anything unprecedented has the potential to create uncertainty, anxiety and fear. Similarly, unprecedented pandemics, like Covid-19, are often characterised by psychological distress such as uncertainty, confusion and a sense of urgency to contain the

crisis. Steven Taylor predicts in his book, The Psychology of Pandemics, that the psychological impact of the next pandemic will be more noticeable, more pervasive and longer lasting than the physiological effects of infection.

The psychosocial stressors related to pandemics such as the restriction of physical mobility, a certain degree of loss of control over your life, threats of harm, loss of employment and income, loss of health, and the loss of loved ones are traumatic. Although not everyone will be impacted in the same manner by the pandemic, it is safe to argue that these traumatic experiences have the potential to result in mental illnesses and psychological distress such as anxiety, mass hysteria and panic, acute stress/post-traumatic stress disorder, loneliness, depression and stigmatisation because of a positive Covid-19 diagnosis. Stigma attached to a positive diagnosis of Covid-19 has the potential to contribute to marginalisation, isolation and discrimination, resulting in increased psychosocial distress.

The uncertainty that accompanied Covid-19 created a lot of fear and anxiety for South Africans. I think as time went by this fear and uncertainty were exacerbated by the possibility of getting infected and being shunned or stigmatised, losing loved ones and not knowing what will happen tomorrow. Individuals with pre-morbid anxiety related symptoms and disorders could potentially go to great lengths to protect themselves from Covid-19 and this may include avoiding infection-related stimuli, people, places and hygiene behaviours that are more extreme than mere handwashing.

Considering issues related to loss due to the pandemic such as having lost your income, your health and your loved ones has often resulted in people experiencing depression related symptoms. In cases where a family member died it is not odd to find that the surviving members struggle with grief and guilt because they feel they could have done more or they were perhaps responsible for their family member dying. We have to also reflect on the events leading up to Covid-19 related deaths, burials and how these events caused psychological distress. Rituals related to the grieving and mourning process include community and family members sympathising with the bereaved family and these rituals and cultural practices have psychological benefits to them. Unfortunately, the way we mourn and grieve had to change due to lockdown restrictions. For example, only a certain number of people was allowed to attend funerals, and some funerals moved to online platforms to accommodate friends and family who could not attend due to the restricted numbers of people allowed at the funeral service. It is important to mention that we are used to having large numbers of people at our funerals. When people come to sympathise, one would find the bereaved family talking about the events that led up to the person's passing and this process in itself is a form of psychological debriefing and brings a lot of comfort to the family. In addition, there is also distress related to the events leading up to a Covid-19 related death. For example, due to the restrictions, family members were not allowed to visit the ill person and many times people died without their loved ones around them. I have also seen how in some cases family members were not given the opportunity to see the remains of their deceased relatives and this included the remains not being present at the burial ritual. These are issues that complicate the grieving process and make it difficult for the bereaved family members to find closure. Personally, I have experienced the distress related to losing a family member while still mourning the loss of another family member. On a psychological level, this has the potential to contribute to depression, trauma and complicated bereavement.

Scholars have discussed how sometimes during a pandemic mass panic and widespread antisocial behaviour, such as rioting, looting and the destruction of property will occur. This happened during the pandemic in South Africa and many people lost their lives, businesses

were burned down and people lost their jobs. Over and above the psychosocial impact of the pandemic, people had to deal with the losses they experienced due to the riots and looting. We must also look at the root causes behind such types of behaviours. I would like to argue that these behaviours are rooted deeply within the historical and socio-political context of South Africa that created several layers of inequality. It therefore becomes important to view the riots and looting as a systemic problem and not merely an act of criminality.

I think in addition to the above-mentioned psychosocial distress, another important issue to discuss is the psychosocial impact of quarantine and self-isolation on the mental health of people. Family members and friends of mine who tested positive for Covid-19 and as a result had to quarantine spoke about how difficult it was on them psychologically. Research has indicated that during previous outbreaks, the psychological impact of quarantine and isolation included feeling irritable, a fear of spreading the virus to family members, anger, confusion, frustration, loneliness, denial, anxiety, depression, insomnia and despair. A person in quarantine could also be experiencing anxiety due to fear of being stigmatised, rejected, or being discriminated against and this may result in the person withdrawing from social interaction which could exacerbate the already existing psychological distress that they are experiencing.

The above gives us an idea of how Covid-19 and its consequences impact not only the physical health but also the mental health of an individual and the collective and it is therefore paramount that we reflect on ways to address these psychosocial consequences.

Sayan and Shankhadeep: *In spite of several initiatives such as online counselling consultations or teaching general self-care, why do you think the psychological issues of people in South Africa were aggravated during Covid-19?*

Dené du Rand: You have asked a very important question and one I feel we have to engage with on a critical level. In an attempt to answer this question, I would like for us to explore the positionality of psychology within the larger healthcare system as well as the historical and social and political context of South Africa. It is paramount when making an analysis and interpretation of a problem to do so within its context because the context gives meaning to the problem and often contributes to the manifestation and exacerbation of the problem.

Some people speak of Covid-19 as the equaliser because it does not discriminate when it infects people, and everyone is at risk of being infected and affected regardless of gender, race, socio-economic status and religion. Covid-19 has not only infiltrated our bodies, our lives, and our communities but our psyches as well. It has, among other things, affected our ability to breathe which is crucial for us to live. It has been discussed that psychology in its essential, original and literal meaning is concerned with the breath, energy, consciousness, and the soul or spirit of life that leaves a person at death and continues in some other form.

Covid-19 created a heightened state of psychosocial, health and political crises in South Africa. When one analyses and interprets these situations through an ecosystemic lens it would make sense to not view these crises in isolation but as interrelated intersections that are manifesting in a specific socio-political and historical context. An exploration of the historical and environmental context is crucial in order to understand the causes underlying and factors exacerbating current psychosocial problems. The South African context is characterised by a history of colonialism, slavery and apartheid. We must move our gaze not only to individual factors that render an individual more vulnerable to develop mental illnesses or psychosocial

distress but also systemic practices such as racism, oppression, dispossession and marginalisation. The political history of slavery, colonialism and apartheid, South Africa's changing socio-political environment and the country's attempt to reconstruct itself and the blend of different cultures, values, social pressures and economic statuses are purported to be factors that contribute to the high levels of psychosocial distress in South Africa. The socio-political history of South Africa and the failure to address these historical imbalances and injustices have led to significant economic imbalances between different racial categories in contemporary South Africa and have in some instances resulted in pathological symptoms such as racism, oppression, marginalisation and other psychosocial distress. It is also important to be aware of the history of psychology as a discipline in South Africa. This history is characterised by its complicity with coloniality, racism, apartheid and Euro-American-centricity.

These traumatic legacies carry contemporary negative impacts for development with corresponding psychosocial, environmental and economic dimensions. The effects are both historical and ongoing, both acute and long-term, both individual and systematic. Studies have shown that the distance between historically dominant events and related contemporary psychosocial problems makes it more likely that marginalised and minority indigenous groups are blamed or pathologised for failing to thrive within the constraints of a neoliberal paradigm for development. Pathologisation is known to divert attention away from underlying issues of accountability for trauma and ongoing injustice. These historical injustices had positioned people of colour within the South African context on the periphery of society and more susceptible to psychosocial distress.

The concept of social stress broadens our lens in terms of understanding the impact of trauma by suggesting that conditions in the social environment and not only personal events, are also sources of stress. Furthermore, social stress might have a stronger impact on marginalised and stigmatised social groups. Minority stress is an elaboration of the social stress theory and it can be used to distinguish the stress which individuals from stigmatised social categories are exposed to as a result of their minority position.

Communities who exist on the margins are being suffocated by oppressive mechanisms and historical trauma and therefore they are struggling to breathe. In essence, these communities struggle to breathe not only because of Covid-19 and its ramifications but also as a result of many years of traumatic experiences due to social injustices. In my mind, both Covid-19 and systemic racism are serious public health crises that have violently invaded our bodies, lives and psyches and should not be viewed in isolation. Covid-19 is exacerbating psychosocial distress due to the socio-political and economic disparities along racial lines. Covid-19 is a collective form of trauma on the South African psyche but it is also complicated by historical trauma that people of colour are still experiencing in contemporary times.

As stated above, not everyone has been affected in the same way within the South African context. It has been found that certain socio-economic circumstances will influence the manner in which the pandemic will impact on people. Individuals with better socio-economic circumstances are in a better position to self-isolate, they have better opportunities for seeking medical care, and access to clean water which is important in terms of hygienic practices but they might also be in a position to be working from home, therefore securing their finances. In contrast, people from disadvantaged backgrounds and poorer socio-economic circumstances may not have access to resources that will make it easier for them to survive the pandemic. Research has found that people with poorer socio-economic circumstances often live in overcrowded spaces and this makes isolation and quarantine difficult. They lack access to clean

water and this increases the risk of secondary infection. People from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to have been in poor health before the pandemic struck, too.

The unprecedented and novel coronavirus affected the South African population at large but it also took a toll on the healthcare system and people's lives on different levels. Mental health and the Covid-19 pandemic were influenced by social determinants. Nevertheless, psychology as a discipline and science has always been on the periphery of the bigger healthcare system. As a result, not enough attention is paid to mental health and mental health care. The South African healthcare system is therefore unsteadily balancing on a foundation characterised by territorial colonialism, apartheid, economic instability and modern colonisation. The majority of South Africans are exposed to diverse and underlying vulnerable psychosocial conditions that make them more vulnerable to psychosocial distress, resulting in the majority of South Africans being at high risk of mental health problems.

The South African healthcare system experienced resource constraints and several other challenges and was not prepared to deal with the medical and mental health implications of Covid-19. Research has found that while the coronavirus affected all South Africans, it was the poor and marginalised who were greatly affected by it due to socio-economic circumstances such as inequality, poverty, gender-based violence and a rising unemployment rate.

It is not only individual vulnerabilities that are exacerbating psychosocial problems. Covid-19 shed light on the inequalities that exist in South African society and exacerbated the underlying psychosocial conditions facing South Africans. The virus violently nudged us to pay more attention to the pervasive and destructive psychosocial conditions that perpetuate the psychosocial ills of our society. I hope that we will take a holistic and contextually sensitive view as we start healing as a collective.

Sayan and Shankhadeep: *Let us position the psychological challenges within wider epistemological and ontological frameworks of race, gender, economy and society. As a scholar in the field of psychology, how do you think the already existing colonially structured practices of racial, gender, economic and social hierarchies in South Africa have contributed towards aggravating the psychological suffering of people during Covid-19?*

Dené du Rand: In order to understand how colonially structured practices of racial, gender, economic and social hierarchies have contributed towards aggravating the psychological sufferings of the people during Covid-19, we have to understand how we reached this specific point in time. We must understand the history and context of South Africa and her people. By understanding this historical context, we will be less prone to describe psychosocial problems on the surface level but instead we will view it in its context and therefore, as a symptom of deep woundedness and trauma that is still deeply embedded in our collective psyches. I have touched on this discussion in my previous answer but I would like to further unpack it here.

Patric Tariq Mellet in his book *The Lie of 1652: A Decolonised History of Land* reminds us that South Africa and its borders were created as part of a peace agreement at the end of the Anglo-Boer War. The Anglo-Boer War was a war between the British and two independent Boer republics established by the Dutch-speaking descendants of European settlers and Natal Colonies. He describes South Africa as a historical construct of colonialism and white supremacy that still dominates the history of the South African landscape. The manner in which the borders of South Africa was demarcated, and the name given to this land was done with total disregard for the opinions, rights or feelings of indigenous communities and therefore it

did not receive the blessing of the majority of people who were forced into this framework. Here, I agree with Professor Mogobe Ramose who argues that it becomes an ethical question to impose an identity on a people and their land. Professor Ramose reminds us to be critical regarding the implication of imposing a name on another human being as this indicates that we are undermining the principle of the ontological equality of all human beings.

Considering this background, it is important to note that the political landscape of South Africa is characterised by a history of slavery, colonialism and apartheid. Apartheid, which was characterised by the enforced political, social and economic segregation of people along racial lines, was enforced from 1948 when the National Party became the ruling party, until 1994. The apartheid regime implemented policies of racial and ethnic segregation through the creation of legislation that subordinated non-white groups, while advancing the superiority of whites in general, and specifically the white Afrikaner group. These laws and institutional structures further perpetuated social inequalities.

Several South African scholars have argued that apartheid was one of the most inhumane and most widely condemned forms of institutionalised racism. South Africans have witnessed a collection of tormenting manifestations of racism even post-apartheid and these incidents cannot but serve as unavoidable reminders, as evidence and re-inscriptions of the perversion of the apartheid order. Racism is a visible remnant of apartheid in contemporary South Africa.

The manner in which people learnt to think about themselves and others has greatly been impacted by the colonial and apartheid context, and this specific way of thinking is not necessarily erased through political change. The values of the coloniser or oppressor, which views the colonised as inferior, a non-being and backward, are internalised by the colonised and often results in the colonised losing their self-esteem, hating themselves and what they present in the worldview of the oppressor. These oppressive systems and structures have resulted in the majority of South Africans being deeply wounded and traumatised. South Africa's history of oppression has created a racialised context characterised by particular circumstances such as poverty. The ability to live a flourishing life is affected by socio-economic circumstances, as a person's socio-economic situation will determine among other things, the quality of medical care and education they will receive. The socio-economic positions that the majority of South Africans find themselves in today is most likely because of the country's socio-political history. The structural racist inequalities in South Africa are still evident and as a result the average black person or person of colour is less likely to lead a flourishing life than the average white South African. Failure to take into consideration the impact that these structural causes have on a person's ability to live a flourishing life, will result in blaming the individual, for instance blaming their failure on laziness or choosing crime as a way out of their circumstances.

The emergence of Covid-19 has merely exacerbated these inequalities in South Africa. When I take into consideration the historical and socio-political context of South Africa I would like to argue that it becomes crucial for us to re-think how we conceptualise this problem an therefore the manner in which we respond to the pandemic and its consequences. The pandedmic is not merely a health crisis, it is also deeply embedded in a context characterised by colonially structured practices of racial, gender, economic and social hierarchies which resulted in historical and ongoing traumas which contributes to and exacerbates contemporary psychosocial problems. Our woundedness is not just physical; it is deeply embedded in our psyche and the spirit of the collective.

The oppressive past of South Africa has rendered people of colour invisible. Similarly, we often do not see the importance of healing psychological wounds because it is not always visible. I am hoping that work like this will perturb us to shift our gaze, our conceptual lenses, and elevate our consciousness so that we see beyond the visible. Once we see, we cannot un-see and therefore, our response has to be informed by an intersectional, inter-disciplinary and ethical approach which has to restore the humanity of not only some South Africans, but the collective.

Sayan and Shankhadeep: How can the psychological sufferings of people during Covid-19 in South Africa be effectively countered not only from an exclusively psychological dimension, but also in connection to race, gender, and economy?

Dené du Rand: The Covid-19 pandemic has reminded me to not merely bear witness to events as I am experiencing them but to reflect deeply about my positionality, responsibility and role as a human being and as a healer (Clinical Psychologist) in relation to the pandemic but also the post-Covid world that I would like to live in.

Globally and in South Africa the response to the Covid-19 pandemic focused on it solely from a health emergency perspective and therefore neglected the other systemic and psychosocial issues that were exacerbated by the pandemic. The image of the Sankofa bird comes to mind when I think of how we ought to respond to the pandemic. The Sankofa bird is associated with the proverb that roughly translates as "it is not wrong to go back for that which you have forgotten". For me this means that we have a responsibility to revisit history and to bring back lessons learned from previous pandemics that we have forgotten. It is clear that the pandemic will have an impact on our futures; it is therefore paramount that we curate in the moment the future we are envisaging. The past is not a moment that is over, it is characterised by socio-political and historical forces that are shaping our contemporary moment filled with severe psychosocial distress.

Responding to Covid-19 and these historical injustices that this virus has amplified requires us to be radical and critical. It requires us to be more deliberate and critical in our reflections if we want to create a meaningful existence within a reality that is constraining us. We ought to think differently about resilience as not just the mere ability to survive in adverse circumstances but as the epitome of the human spirit, the ability to not only survive in a context that is designed to suffocate us but a deliberate, radical and conscious act of curating the future we want in the current moment.

An analysis and interpretation of the impact of Covid-19 on the lives of South Africans should be located within a framework which acknowledges the interplay between individual, social and structural forces that contribute to psychosocial distress.

When attempting to understand and address psychosocial problems and distress from an ecosystemic point of view, attention needs to be paid to the interrelatedness of three interdependent ecological levels: micro (such as family and friends); meso (for example the relationship between the different micro systems) and the macro (which includes community, society and culture). Each ecological level has different risk factors that can make an individual or groups of individuals more vulnerable to psychosocial distress, whereas protective factors can safeguard them from psychosocial distress. The focus of psychosocial stress prevention and intervention programmes should therefore shift from individual deficits (such as predisposing psychological traits) to the process of the interactions and relationships between the different systems that exacerbate the symptom.

Steven Taylor (2019) proposes four methods that can be used to manage the spread of infection. These methods involve time and planning but psychological factors also play an important role in the success or failure of these methods. These methods are: (1) risk communication which involves educating the public regarding the coronavirus so they can make informed decisions regarding their safety and well-being; (2) vaccines and antiviral therapies; (3) hygiene therapies; and (4) social distancing. Furthermore, non-adherence to these methods is a serious problem and a deeper understanding of the psychology of pandemics is needed to understand why adherence to infection management programmes is poor and how this might be improved.

Responding to the pandemic requires creative and innovative methods that includes technology such as online therapeutic sessions. This also requires healthcare professionals, especially psychology practitioners, to re-think our intervention strategies and how we plan our interventions. It has been recommended that attention needs to be paid to vulnerable groups such as individuals who are in quarantine, healthcare professionals, children, the elderly, marginalised communities and individuals who are suffering from pre-morbid psychiatric conditions. It is important that government and stakeholders take cognisance of the psychosocial morbidities of the pandemic and assess the associated consequences. A response to the Covid-19 pandemic should take into consideration the stigma attached to the virus so that care can be taken to address the stigma, racism and the psychosocial impact of these consequences. Another need is the setting up of mental health organisations with branches in different parts of the country and healthcare systems that focus on research, mental health care and awareness programmes at both a personal and community level. It is also recommended that virtual platforms and helplines should be established to assist with alleviating psychological distress and to educate people regarding the coronavirus. The Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated how a virus can negatively impact our lives but it has also made us realise that the greatest assets of mankind are health, peace, love, solidarity, ingenuity and knowledge.

The South African government should prioritise the mental health needs of its people and address these needs by providing the necessary psychosocial health support. The prolonged duration of the lockdown exacerbated the already high levels of stress, fear of losing jobs and the distress related to restriction of movement. It is paramount to pay heed to the role that psychologists and other mental healthcare practitioners can play in terms of mental health care and the development of psychosocial interventions on an individual and community level.

I recommend that policy frameworks and government strategies view the mental health impact of the coronavirus not as a mere incidental issue, but instead as an important and integral part of the nationwide response plan, with a clear focus on vulnerable communities.

An analysis of previous pandemics has taught us that the psychosocial ramifications of the Covid-19 pandemic will have a lasting impact on many South Africans for years to come. These ramifications are manifesting against the reality of an already struggling and overwhelmed healthcare system with a paucity of mental health services. It is important that government and health professionals employ a multidisciplinary approach when responding to the pandemic in order for them to reduce the adverse psychosocial effects of the virus and the lockdown measures.

It is important to emphasise the role of public health awareness campaigns and prevention strategies as well as the different effects that pre-existing structural vulnerabilities can have on differential perceptions of Covid-19 infection risk. The findings of these studies reiterate the

lessons learned from past epidemics, such as HIV/TB in South Africa. These lessons include that the fundamental causes of an infectious disease should be systemically prioritised across the continuum of public health responses, from emergency response, treatment and education to prevention.

We should not forget our healthcare workers who have been combating the virus since the first case was detected in South Africa. The mental health of these healthcare workers is just as important and should be part of any response to the pandemic.

The multi-dimensional nature of the psychosocial consequences of Covid-19 requires an ecological, multi-sectoral and holistic approach. Interventions should utilise an integrated strategy that involves all systems on every ecological level and should be aimed at containing and managing current psychosocial effects as well as focus on preventing psychosocial distress in the near future. Furthermore, it is paramount that we start addressing the pre-morbid psychosocial conditions that have impacted on the majority of South Africans due to our socio-political history of oppression, racism and marginalisation that created great division and inequality amongst us as South Africans.

The world and South Africa need collective healing from these traumatic experiences caused by the pandemic and systemic racism. Psychological practitioners should utilise their skills and knowledge to analyse the situation and to recommend appropriate interventions. The world at large and specifically South Africa needs to focus on social cohesion and to focus on creating a world where everyone can breathe freely.

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V.

Teaching and learning during Covid-19

Chapter 11

Open Distance Learning during Covid-19:

An interview with Paul Prinsloo

Conducted by Sayan Dey and Shankhadeep Chattopadhyay

Sayan and Shankhadeep: With the rise of Covid-19 and the closure of schools across the world, virtual methodologies of teaching and learning have converted the mainstream physical modes of learning almost into a system of Open and Distance Learning (ODL), while tutors and learners are stuck within their respective geographical spaces and are interacting with each other online. Coming to the context of South Africa and specifically to the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, how effective has the system of ODL been to regulate the habitual modes of teaching and learning during lockdowns?

Paul Prinsloo: In responding to this question, I would like to clarify some concepts to fully understand Open Distance Learning's response to the pandemic. It is firstly crucial to understand that ODL in the context of South Africa refers to a particular form of educational delivery and form of distance education, and to one institution, namely the University of South Africa (Unisa) in the context of a range of institutions offering post-school educational opportunities. Though the pandemic affected all forms of educational delivery, and the effects across institutions may show some similarities, there were some unique impacts on Open Distance Learning.

Secondly, it is important to note that as institutions responded to the pandemic with a range of approaches clustered under a broad umbrella term "Emergency Remote Teaching" (ERT), there was concern that while ERT shares a number of characteristics with a variety of established educational modes of delivery such as Online Learning or equivalent E-Learning, Distance Education and even Open Distance Learning, we need to understand ERT as a distinct form of educational delivery in response to the pandemic. While the strict boundaries between face-to-face education, online learning or technology-enabled learning, and traditional distance education (whether print-based correspondence or blended) are increasingly more porous than before, the pandemic further destabilised some traditional assumptions and definitions foundational to, for example, face-to-face education and other forms of remote teaching such as Distance Education and Open Distance Learning.

Online learning is a broad phenomenon encompassing a range of instructional designs and purposes – including stand-alone, drop-off-and-go and online correspondence courses – with or without assessment, to well-structured and designed formal offerings with teacher-student, student-student and student-content engagement, all happening online, whether synchronously or asynchronously. ERT was, as its name says, an emergency response that was mostly online, but was anything but planned, well-designed or built on established pedagogical practices. We should therefore not equate online learning with ERT.

Distance education (DE) can be online (and in the US context it is), but in many other contexts can also be offline, or may use blended forms of delivery, including online possibilities (whether internet supported, internet dependent or fully online). Once again DE is a systematic, well-planned and designed form of educational delivery with clear differentiation between different functional departments all contributing to the result. DE therefore refers to industrialised processes of educational delivery with division of labour and economies of scale. Not all DE systems are Open Distance Learning (ODL) systems, but all ODL systems are DE. ODL institutions have different admission requirements, use of technologies, pedagogies, open curricula, open registration periods, and open assessment methods (depending on the geopolitical and legislative context).

To summarise my response so far, the pandemic impacted on all forms of educational delivery, and while there are some similarities in how institutions responded to the pandemic, there are some crucial differences, which can be related to institutional character, such as whether they used face-to-face or residential/campus-based, DE and ODL methods. Despite these differences, there was, across institutions, a greater use of online teaching and learning than before the pandemic. It would be safe to say that most, if not all higher education institutions in South Africa utilised some form of learning management system (LMS) before the pandemic, even if this entailed only making course resources available to students. While all higher education institutions are increasingly digitised and datafied, the pandemic exponentially sped up this process.

With the above as backdrop, I now turn specifically to how the pandemic impacted on Unisa as an ODL institution in the context of South Africa, some key elements in the response, and some reflections on what we have learned and should learn from this. To fully understand how the pandemic impacted on Unisa, it is furthermore important to understand some aspects of ODL.

ODL as a form of DE is still a highly industrialised form of educational delivery. Since the early definitions of DE, emphasis was placed on successful DE depending on the division of labour, the use of technology, mechanisation and automation of production processes and the rationalisation of processes with the purpose of providing education at scale. In DE as an industrialised form of educational delivery there is, however, a real danger of alienation of academics and staff as they may experience their role as boxed-in on a conveyor belt of educational delivery. Interestingly, as DE becomes increasingly digitised, these industrialised processes continue to inform the design and delivery of educational opportunities, albeit often modified to some extent.

Considering the world-wide phenomenon of the massification of higher education and increasing student numbers, elements of the industrialised design and delivery of education are also increasingly found in residential institutions, where the bureaucratisation of education finds a useful ally in industrialisation in teaching large class sizes and lectures for hundreds of students.

With this brief background about industrialisation as an essential characteristic of educational provision at Unisa, I will now turn to how the pandemic impacted on educational provision at Unisa.

Programme and course design, approval, and development at Unisa entails a lengthy process of stakeholder consultation, division of labour, and courses are designed, developed, quality-assured and produced well ahead of time. Therefore, by the time South Africa went into lockdown in April 2020, the pandemic did not impact on the 'delivery' of teaching and learning in respect of making the materials and assessment available to learners. All courses were already online, with students having access to the materials and discussion forums. So delivery, as such, was not disrupted, but what happened was the following:

The digital divide and the pandemic

The notion of the digital divide normally refers to the divide between those who do not have and those who do have access to forms of information technologies such as sustainable and affordable access to the internet, hardware and software. While the notion of the digital divide is often misunderstood, misconstrued and seen as static, it has become germane to discussions about issues and inequalities regarding access in education, with specific reference to student access to the internet, and overlaps with other classifications such as the myth of digital natives. While there are documented concerns regarding the use of the term 'digital divide' in referring to students' access to sustainable and affordable internet connectivity and hardware, the pandemic has shown that the digital divide also impacts on lecturers, with many not having access to sustainable and affordable internet connectivity and appropriate hardware. The pandemic also showed concerns about digital literacies of staff and students alike.

There is furthermore a huge difference between making materials, assessment and discussion forums available to students, and online teaching. As the pandemic unfolded, students had more queries, and a greater need for administrative, emotional and academic support, and lecturers and tutors were overwhelmed with not only the queries, but also the range of queries. The digital divide also played out in an interesting way in relation to the divide between the teaching and administrative functions of educational delivery. While students had relatively easy access to lecturers and tutors who worked from home, the administrative and support systems were not, necessarily, available to staff off-campus whether in referring to access to systems, or administrative and/or support staff not having the hardware or software to access these systems from home.

Formative and summative assessment

With ODL being a pre-designed and industrial process, assignment dates, scope, and content, as well as examination dates, are set a year in advance. The pandemic disrupted not only the dates of formative and summative assessments, but also the format of the examinations. Assignment dates had to be postponed, causing a cascading effect on subsequent assignments, the marking of these assignments and admission to the examination. Industrialised systems are highly inflexible and there was ample evidence of how inflexible the system was.

Traditionally, Unisa's summative assessment was venue-based, with human invigilators at dedicated examination centres across South Africa, the African sub-continent, and international cities. As such, the design of these examinations was therefore informed by the reality that students were present at a venue, completed the examination in writing, under invigilated

circumstances. Not only had Unisa to find a way to ensure the academic integrity of the examinations, but the examination papers had to be redesigned and departments had the choice to change the format of the exam to portfolios, take-home examinations, multiple-choice or a combination of these options. For many members of faculty, this was unchartered territory as they had to rethink what would be doable in two or three hours by students with a range of digital competencies, from elementary to advanced. Allowing fair time for the online examination also required faculty to consider the reality that most students would have completed the online, proctored examination in a language that may be their second or third language. The redesign of the examinations also affected students who were not only required to adapt to a new timetable, but face the reality of doing an online examination, orientating them towards the new format (and in some cases scope), finding sustainable and affordable Wifi solutions, installing proctoring software, increasing their typing skills, and for many students, finding appropriate spaces to write the examinations. The latter provided many students with often unsurmountable challenges as they were sharing spaces with family and members of their community. Sitting for a proctored, online examination in a second or third language in shared spaces with unpredictable hardware, software and Wifi was, for many, very traumatic.

Moving over 400 000 students to fully online, proctored examinations, over a three-to-four-week period, also meant putting online systems in place to mark these examinations, providing guidance to external markers, and adapting quality assurance measures to guide the whole process.

While the current Information and Communications Technology (ICT) infrastructure barely managed the impact of increasing student numbers as well as the increasing digitisation of teaching and learning before the pandemic, when everything had to move online (including assessment, administration, student support, teaching and learning and summative assessments) the ICT infrastructure could not handle the complexities and traffic with 400 000 students and more than 4 000 staff working permanently online.

Sayan and Shankhadeep: *Can you elaborate on the various racial and gendered challenges that the system of ODL encountered while functioning during the pandemic of Covid-19? What impact did these challenges have on tutors and learners?*

Paul Prinsloo: Distance education has a long history of creating opportunities for disenfranchised populations and individuals, people who were excluded from educational opportunities whether due to race, gender, socio-economic circumstances, or prior learning experiences. Distance education provided millions of individuals with an opportunity they would not have had through traditional higher education. In one of the early theorisations of distance education, Wedemeyer (1981) referred to distance education as "learning at the back door", pointing not only to perceptions about distance education, but also to the opportunities distance education provides to thousands who may not have had the opportunity to enter education through the front door. Learning at the back door also calls to mind how the front door, in many societies, was meant for those with social standing, often of a particular class, race or gender while the back door was used for those of a non-acceptable, lower class, different race or gender – the workers and working class, the 'Other' – those who did not qualify, did not meet the admission requirements or could not pay the fees. The process of entering a space through the back door also meant only having access to certain rooms and dedicated spaces. It did not provide you with access to the whole house or the whole building, but only to limited areas – where you would have found people 'like you'. Distance education has therefore, from its emergence as a distinct form of educational delivery been *humanitarian* in its essence, and

as such, has always been revolutionary in terms of flexibility, providing quality and affordable education to those who find themselves on the margins of society or excluded from realising their educational aspirations.

With the above as reminder of the 'original' orientation of distance education, the question is to what extent the pandemic impacted on this 'humanitarian task' at Unisa, as a specific example of distance education. We can, however, not talk about the various racial and gendered challenges higher education in South Africa, and Unisa in particular, faced in response to the pandemic and ignore the continuing, intergenerational legacy of colonialism and apartheid. South Africa is the most unequal country in the world, and as such, ICT is a two-edged sword, with the potential to provide access and be an equalising measure or a mechanism for increasing inequalities.

It is no secret that Unisa, being an ODL institution, has lower admission requirements, in general, than the rest of the higher education sector. For many students, just based on their failure to get admission to other residential higher education institutions, Unisa is the only choice, and for some, the choice of last resort. Many works have documented the low quality of schooling in South Africa. Due to various factors, schooling post-1994 has not been able to address the legacy of colonial and apartheid education pre-1994.

Considering the impact of not only the legacy of colonialism and apartheid, but also the state of school education post-1994 and increasing inequalities, it should come as no surprise that students are under-prepared for higher education. It is crucial to note that we should not pathologise students' under-preparedness or hold them solely responsible, as institutional cultures, inefficiencies and lack of appropriate support may play an even greater role in student attrition and drop-out rates than students' (often) temporary under-preparedness. It is also important to note the reality of intersectional disadvantage in students' encounters with ontologies and epistemologies framed in the global North. In distance education contexts the seeming under-preparedness of students for higher education, distance education and online learning intersects not only with institutional and departmental cultures and (in)efficiencies but is also impacted by macro-societal changes.

Under normal circumstances most students have trouble 'fitting' into each of the respective intersecting layers – higher education, distance/online education and the disciplinary domains – and the pandemic made 'fitting' in more difficult than before. The pandemic therefore revealed historical and intergenerational fault lines in society that institutions forgot or ignored and possibly exacerbated them.

Sayan and Shankhadeep: As a research professor in ODL at the University of South Africa you have researched about ODL from diverse theoretical and experiential perspectives. Based on your experiences can you share with us the various ways through which the colonial/Euro-North American patterns of thinking and doing have affected the functioning of ODL in South Africa and how can the discipline of ODL be decolonised?

Paul Prinsloo: The answer to the question is layered and complex and my response is tentative and incomplete. While DE and ODL have the potential to deprovincialise the North and provide access to indigenous and decolonised epistemologies and ontologies, DE, and Unisa in particular, are part of the broader South African higher education sector that has not yet been decolonised. I do not believe that decolonisation as a 'state' is achievable due to the persistent impact of the global/modern/colonial imaginary. There are three main narratives co-existing in

higher education – neoliberal, liberal and critical – and decolonisation forms part of the latter narrative. These narratives not only co-exist but also compete for space and resources, and higher education in general, and South African higher education and Unisa in particular, are no exception. We therefore cannot talk about decolonising ODL if we do not talk about decolonising higher education as part of orthodoxy and competing narratives.

Sayan and Shankhadeep: *How can decolonised frameworks of ODL make the processes of teaching and learning more diverse and inclusive during Covid-19 in South Africa?*

Paul Prinsloo: Most, if not all the foundational theoretical frameworks and research findings on the evolution of distance education have originated in the global North and continue to do so. The silence or absence of African theorists on distance education from the canon of distance education may be ascribed to the historical and continuing asymmetries in knowledge production between the global North and the global South.

Due to its inherent openness – whether regarding open access, and more flexibility (terms and conditions apply) – ODL may have the potential to serve the decolonisation project and process. If we see the decolonisation of ODL as much broader and more encompassing than just the curriculum (as we should), we have not yet started. There are some inroads into some disciplines to decolonise the curriculum, but then again, even curricula are not islands, but part of broader global and colonial power asymmetries and networks, and contesting discourses.

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Afterword

Sayan Dey and Norma Romm

This Afterword was written when the new Covid variant called Omicron was detected in South Africa and has been spreading across the globe. The variant was detected at an early stage and South Africa alerted the world before the health situation reached a state of emergency. In return, the country was penalised with travel bans by several countries. Immediately after South Africa revealed the detection of the new variant, the UK slapped a travel ban on South Africa with a 'thank you' note. After the UK, several other countries across the world followed suit and banned flights to and from South Africa and other countries within southern Africa. Though the political and health organisations of the UK, the US, and other countries justified the ban through health concerns, certain health statistics relayed a different story. On the day that the UK declared travel bans with South Africa, South Africa had detected 1 000 new cases (including cases of Omicron), which is relatively low compared to the roughly 46 000 new cases in the UK. Moreover, the travel bans were not equally implemented (Regan 2021; Fabricius 2021). While flights to and from southern African countries were globally banned, travel between other countries continued to function. Such selective and hierarchical approaches categorically outline the reconfiguration of the Euro-North American-centric, white-dominated socio-economic ideologies across the globe. Such ideologies never miss a chance to degrade, decredentialise, dehumanise and marginalise black intellectuals, black bodies, black principles, black geographies, and black topographies.

The interviews in this book engage with associated concerns and discuss how the health crisis during Covid-19 unveiled multiple other forms of crises, amongst which many are deliberately generated by the US and Europe, such as an economic 'stimulus' accompanied by further inequalities between the global North and South, vaccine hoarding, selling vaccines at exorbitant rates and several other matters. The interviews function as an eye-opener and repeatedly remind us to think about carving out our future sensibly and thoughtfully. To build a thoughtful and sensible future it is necessary to consider solutions beyond vaccination. We are aware that vaccination is a crucial tool to combat the virus, but we are also cognisant of the fact that vaccination can be regarded as nothing more than a patchwork solution, which does not serve to "change the channel" of long-established social and economic imbalances as eloquently elucidated by, for example, social entrepreneur and filmmaker Mallence Bart-Williams (2015). Vaccination can bring an immediate and temporary solution to a pandemic, but it can never guarantee the prevention of pandemics in the future, nor excavate the roots of the social, economic and ecological crises of which it is a part.

To generate long-term solutions, as the interviewees in this book all argue, it is necessary to seek to locate the underlying epistemological, ontological, and methodological problems that

are both visible and invisible through curricula, pedagogies, documentaries, conversations, body languages, and ideologies. As a long-term solution, the present and the future need to generate a shift from egological consciousness towards ecological consciousness, where the existential patterns of human civilization will deviate from revenue-centric lifestyles towards economies of care and share – as summarised by South African philosopher Mogobe Ramose in his phrase "enough pecunimania!" (2018).

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