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Decolonial thinking and Europe: Decolonisation between particularity and universalism

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Colonisation continues to have a tremendous impact on large parts of the globe and not only on previously colonised countries. Many of the current geopolitical, economic and environmental challenges that the globe faces cannot be thought of without taking decolonial thinking into consideration. In his Preface to Fanon's book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Jean-Paul Sartre argues that this book is not written for Europeans, yet he challenges Europeans to read it. It is between such particularism and universalism that this article will engage with decolonial thinking in the context of the globe's various geopolitical, environmental and political challenges. Europe's colonial claim to universalism cannot be separated from Christendom. In this article, this Christian colonial universalism will be brought into conversation with an attempt at a decolonial theology.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: The article is an interdisciplinary conversation between philosophy and theology.

Keywords: Fanon; decolonialism; social death; Afropessimism; Europe; Human Rights; Ethics; Theology.

Introduction

This article was first presented as a paper[1] in Germany. The title of this article, *Decolonial Thinking and Europe*, raises numerous critical questions and some serious concerns.

Does a white man, living and working in Europe, have the right to write about decolonial thinking? Where and in what place should such conversations take place? Is a Zoom meeting, predominantly attended by participants from European institutions of higher education, the correct space and place? Clearly not, on two accounts: it is an *exclusive space*. It is a space from which far too many are excluded from the conversation, firstly, because of the global divide between north and south and secondly, the digital divide that divides the world into those who have access to the digital world and those who cannot afford that access, because either they cannot afford the technology and/or cannot afford the data costs. These questions can be further expanded regarding Christianity, talking about decolonial thinking in a Christian context, where Western Christianity has played such an integral colonial role in global Christianity.

Yet, I believe that this conversation is *vitally* important, and even more so in exactly such a space of privilege. I stress the term *vitally*, as it has everything to do with life and that which gives life a chance, as the Argentinian political theorist Léon Rozitchner (2012) argues, when he argues that there is power in this life of the majority against the politics of war and neo-liberal democracy.

But one needs to make a few clear demarcations:

- Not going to try to define what decolonial thinking *is*.
- Not presenting or introducing a theory of decolonial thinking.
- Not going to present a decolonial perspective, as I do not have that right or that privilege.

What can be done?

- As a European, one has a *responsibility*, in the sense that decolonial thinking calls a response forth, and therefore one cannot but respond. In this sense, one has a responsibility to allow decolonial thought and decolonial questions to address and deconstruct one.

1.This article is based on a paper presented, via Zoom, as part of a series of International Talks. This is a joint venture between various universities in Germany.

Note: Special Collection: Decolonialism in Theology today.

- This responsibility is not to theorise or determine or appropriate decolonial thinking but to allow it to challenge the Western European subjects, in their Eurocentrism and allow it to deconstruct the European bourgeoisie colonial subjectivity.

Therefore, this article will not be a presentation of decolonial thinking, but rather a thinking and/or a reflection about Europe together with an interpretation of European (bourgeoisie) subjectivity, which are both placed in question by decolonial thinking. To reflect on decolonial thinking as a challenge to think about Europe and European subjectivity together with European identity as it is revealed and exposed by responding to decolonial thought.

The time-place of thinking and writing

Who has the right to talk about such matters, in a world where large parts of the world's population, in fact, the majority, have been structurally silenced and continue to be silenced or are at least not respected as equals? Spivak's (2010:21–80) famous question, *Can the subaltern speak*, is as relevant today as when it was first published. The place and time of the writing of this article is Europe, more specifically Germany, and the time is the time that is dominated by news of the war in Ukraine and the war in Gaza. Trying to write about decolonial thinking in Europe in this particular time-place, while being exposed to the mainstream and official media, one cannot help but perceive how little attention or credence the global south's opinions receive concerning these geopolitical matters, be it on the war in Ukraine or the South African case against Israel.[2] This lack of credence that the South receives raises exactly this question: Can anyone, but the West speak authoritatively and 'rationally' on these global matters? The scant attention and bias against South Africa in mainstream German media, clearly accentuates this question, that if such a global legal case is brought before any International Court, by anybody but a Western European or North American country, it will not really count in the global *rules*-based order, which seems to be the new order that has replaced International Law (see Dugard 2023). The dominant West's (USA, UK and Germany together with France) attitude towards the war was not in the least affected by the preliminary judgement of the International Court of Justice. The court's ruling has not received the urgency nor the attention (by Western Government or Western Media) that the situation requires. This historic moment accentuates, or one could even say embodies, the theme of this article.

Fanon and social death

Frantz Fanon was a psychologist well acquainted with psychoanalysis in the tradition of Freud and Lacan. This

2. The *Application of the convention of the prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel)* instituted in December 2023, see https://icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/192/192-20231228-app-01-00-en.pdf. The order from the International Court of Justice on 26 January 2024, see https://icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/192/192-20240126-ord-01-00-en.pdf.

psychoanalytic space together with Marxism – which in a certain sense are both marginal paradigms of thinking within Europe, specifically after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the supposed victory of capitalism – might offer an ideal space to be receptive to the decolonial questions and challenges.

The question this article seeks to respond to, is the question: Is Europe obliged to respond to the call into responsibility by the colonial other, as the other of Europe is the very other who helped create the identity of Europe and European subjectivity? All this, while keeping in mind that the moment that one talks about identity and subjectivity, one has entered the space of the symbolic, the constructed and therefore an ideological and/or religious space.

Fanon did not write for a European audience, but he wrote his thoughts for those whom the white man had and continues to classify as black, as other. Today there might be other names for this other, for example, the migrant, the illegal, the paperless, the stateless and those classified as terrorist, as once Nelson Mandela was also classified as a terrorist not only by apartheid South Africa but also in the West. Fanon wrote for those whose identity, as the black other, was and remains an imposed identity. This *Fremdbestimmung* determines the livelihood of black people in the global north and south. Frank B. Wilderson III (2017) in his edited book on Afro-pessimism reinterprets the concept of Afro-pessimism from its original use as it was first coined in the context of developmental studies and argues that this determination, this *Fremdbestimmung*, being identified as black, brings with it a social death. To be racially classified as black is to experience social death. The term, social death, Wilderson (1982) develops from Orlando Patterson:

> This is not to privilege anti-Black racism on a hierarchy of oppression, but to assert – against the disparaging lack of analysis – the unlivability of life for Blacks over centuries of social death and physical murder, perpetuated (at varying times) by all non-Black subjects in society. (Wilderson III 2017:12)

Fanon (2008), many years before Wilderson, writes something very similar:

> The White man is all around me; up above the sky is tearing at its navel; the earth crunches under my feet and sings white, white. All this whiteness burns me to a cinder. (p. 94)

In other words, what seems to be described here is the impossibility of being in the white world: a social death.

To understand both Fanon and Wilderson, it is important to acknowledge that it is not skin pigmentation that brings about racism, but racism that creates race. '[*I*]t is not race that produces racism but racism that produces race' (McGowan 2020:181). Or as Fanon writes, 'it is the anti-Semite who makes the Jew' (Fanon 2008:73).

The racial category 'Black' is not biological, genetic, essentialist or a natural phenomenon, but is and always will

be an ideological construct of one or other form of racism. This does not deny that the category 'Black' has had tremendous day-to-day implications for generations of people. Barbara and Karen Fields in their book, *Racecraft* (2012) argue exactly this point that the visibility of race attests to the predominance of racism. The scapegoat that is presented for racism is always the other race. Or as Todd McGowan argues, 'We see race in order not to see racism' (McGowan 2020:187). One speaks of races, one speaks of black people in order not to be confronted with one's racism. Fanon takes this thought one step further, when he argues, 'In our view, an individual who loves Blacks is as "sick" as someone who abhors them' (Fanon 2008:xii). In other words, as long as race is a category (positive or negative), there is racism.

These words and these thoughts of Frank B. Wilderson are extremely unsettling, especially taking into consideration that he wrote these words and edited his book on Afro-pessimism during the presidency of Barack Obama (2009–2017), not only the 44th President of the USA but the first *black* president of a Western nation, which was presented to the world as a sign of progressive politics, as the end of racism. The idea that a *black* president presented as *the* symbol of anti-racism and progressive politics is a clear indication of the underlying racism.

To return to the concept of social death, Wilderson (2017) describes it as follows:

> Social death has three constituent elements: One is gratuitous violence, which means that the body of the slave is open to the violence of all others. Whether he or she receives that violence or not, he or she exists in a state of structural or open vulnerability.
>
> This vulnerability is not contingent upon his or her transgressing some type of law, as in going on strike with the worker. The other point is that the slave is natally alienated, which is to say that the temporality of one's life that is manifest in filial and afilial relations – the capacity to have families and the capacity to have associative relations – may exist very well in your head. You might say, "I have a father, I have a mother," but, in point of fact, the world does not recognize or incorporate your filial relations into its understanding of family. And the reason that the world can do this goes back to point number one: because you exist in a regime of violence which is gratuitous, open, and you are openly vulnerable to everyone else, not a regime of violence that is contingent upon you being a transgressed worker or transgressing woman or someone like that. And the third point is general dishonour, which is to say, you are dishonoured in your very being – and I think that this is the nature of Blackness with everyone else. You're dishonoured prior to your performance of dishonoured actions. So, it takes a long time to build this but in a nutshell that's it. And so that's one of the moves of Afro-pessimism. If you take that move and you take out property relations – someone who's owned by someone else – you take that out of the definition of slavery and you take out forced labor, and if you replace that with social death and those three constituent elements, that you have is a continuum of slavery-subjugation that Black people exist in and 1865 is a blip on the screen. (p. 18)

I believe that these words of Wilderson ring shockingly true in Gaza in this time of war beginning in October 2023 and continuing into 2024, where the lives of children, black children (that is, non-whites) have no value. At least their value does not compare to the life and the bodies of Europeans and their families. The mainstream Western response to the different murdered bodies in Gaza makes a mockery of the term universal in universal rights.

There are no universal rights prior to the politics of belonging, that is citizenship (see Žižek 2007). Agamben's (1998) *Homo Sacer* or bare life, does not have any rights; one first needs to be worthy, identifiable, to be included in the bourgeoisie citizenship of freedom and rights as developed through the Enlightenment and the French Revolution.

Human rights and decolonial thinking

Before Wilderson, Frantz Fanon (2008) wrote, in *Black Skin, White Masks*:

> Running the risk of angering my black brothers, I shall say that a Black is *not* a man. There is a zone of *nonbeing*, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an incline stripped bare of every essential form from which a genuine new departure can emerge. (xi *author's emphasis*)

Between, on the one hand, the pain of this assertion of *nonbeing* and of having *no* value and on the other, the cry of hope for a genuine new departure, one ventures forth in this article, consciously writing these words at a desk in Europe.

This social death of the black body, raises the question: What is it in the white man, or in the white global world of the European, that she, he, they need the social death of the black body, the black person, why do they need the Black other for the 'I' of the European to be? To ask this question even more radically, in the tradition of Rozitschner (2012), why is there a need for genocide of the other for the universal rights of Western civilisation to be? The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) was a response to the genocide in Germany and the atrocities. In other words, genocide and human rights are intimately connected.

This is the question that is maybe raised among others by decolonial thought, in the tradition of Fanon. The European subject, just like the Black subject, is not a natural phenomenon, but an ideological construct, constructed not only from the protestant Reformation, the Enlightenment and the French Revolution but from the exploitation and the genocide of indigenous people, cultures and civilisations by colonialism. This modern universal (European) subject is, if anything, a transmodern subject, created in the intersection between North and South. It is not a subject that was born from the isolation of Europe and purely on European ground and thought, but it is a transmodern construct – it is a colonial construct. The rights of the Europeans, believing themselves to be the incarnation of

the World Spirit, are only possible based on the loss of all rights, the rights of all the other 'inferior' cultures and civilisations who apparently do not incarnate the World Spirit, as Hegel thought in his Hegel's Philosophy of Right (cf. Dussel 1981:807).

It is in this transmodern space, that this question is revealed and becomes visible and through decolonial thinking, the question becomes audible and ever more visible, tangible as it becomes embodied in this space.

Why does the European *they* require the social death of the black *them* to be?

For the European modern subject to be, to be European, to be modern, to be universal with all its human worth, dignity and rights, whatever that might mean, it needs the black them to be without dignity, honour, worth and rights. For the one to be the civilised, free and autonomous *same*, it needs the barbaric and unfree *other*. The colonial other only exists because of colonialism, and therefore, decolonial thinking only exists because of colonial thinking. In this sense, the two cannot be separated from each other and therefore decolonial thought cannot be separated from colonial thought – decolonial thought reveals a truth one could say of colonial bourgeoisie or if you prefer, metropolitan, even cosmopolitan thought and subjectivity.

As Fanon writes in his book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 'It is the colonist who *fabricated* and *continues to fabricate* the colonised subject. The colonist derives his validity, that is, his wealth, from the colonial system' (Fanon 2004:2).

The active-passive agent here is the one who requires an answer to the question, 'Who am I?' once the traditional identities all but disappeared with the Reformation, Enlightenment, Industrialisation and the French Revolution. For Kant, it was tradition and society that violently imposed an identity on individuals (cf. McGowan 2020:11) and therefore, the Enlightenment was experienced as a liberation of identity from these imposed determinations. Identity was now dependent on superior values, such as a 'free' consciousness and the individual's courage to think for themselves. These superior and higher values had to be superior and higher to something, first superior and higher to the past (tradition and traditional authorities) and then the other.

Therefore, it was not the colonial other, who asked these questions concerning identity and the 'free' grounding of this identity, because the colonial other was created in response to this question. It is the identity of Europe that depends on the social death, we can add the cultural death, of the other. Europe, with its stars on the blue sky of the European Union's flag, was created on the foundation of this death.[3] Yet, this modern Western identity is such a

3.It had to believe that the culture and the civilisation that is liberated from tradition and religion is superior. It had to believe that this enlightenment and reformation freedom is superior to the tradition and religion of the indigenous other.

fragile and fickle thing, and always a response to an other. In this sense, identities are always ideological as they are symbolic.

Jacques Derrida (1992) writes in his book, *The Other Heading*:

> In the logic of this 'capitalistic' and cosmopolitical discourse, what is proper to a particular nation or idiom would be to be a *heading* for Europe; and what is proper to Europe would be, analogically, to advance itself as a *heading* for the *universal essence of humanity*. (p. 49; *author's emphasis*)

Decolonial thinking is in this sense as much about the identity of the coloniser (Europe) as it is about the struggle for cultural and economic independence of the colonised.

The colonised other and their struggle for identity and liberation is a structural necessity caused by the European self, the European subject and the European ego, and therefore this has as much to do with Europe as it does with the colonial countries. For the coloniser (Europe), it is a self-critical perspective grounded in a deep understanding of this structural necessity hidden in the subjectivity and identity of Europe of which Europe is so proud, namely the supposedly free, autonomous and self-determining subject – in other words, the emerging bourgeoisie and colonising subject of the metropolitan centres, which has given itself the right to be the *heading* (leaders) of the globe by revealing the universal essence of humanity.

The European subject is born in and from the oppression of, colonisation of, silencing of and condemnation to the social death of the colonial other. There is a certain necessity of death to be, the necessity of violence to be and the necessity of murder to be. This structural insight, that psychoanalysis argues, is what is concretised and revealed in decolonial thinking. A truth, hidden in the unconscious and revealed through the work of psychoanalysis. Europe responds to this concretisation in various ways.

It can play the role of the eternal confessor, publicly confessing their privilege, as I did at the beginning of this article, but does such acknowledgement of privilege change anything, or is it part and parcel of the same bourgeoisie mechanism, where acknowledgement of one's privilege becomes the grounding of an inverted privilege to speak. In other words, a Nietzschean will to power that is hidden or not so hidden in this apparent confessional morality of proclaiming oneself guilty – a kind of inverted victimhood. It is a will to power of not only wanting to speak but to continue to determine what social justice is, what the good is and what is politically correct, in other words, still determining the superior values on which identity is based (Žižek 2004):

> And is this not the 'truth' of such an ethical stance, thereby confirming the old Hegelian suspicion that every self-denigration secretly asserts its contrary? It is like the proverbial excessive Political Correctness of the Western white male who questions his own right to assert his cultural identity, while celebrating the exotic identity of others, thereby asserting his privileged status of the universal-neutral medium of recognizing other's identities … (p. 11)

The inherent superiority of knowing what justice and social justice are and to a certain extent what the goal of human development and what true civilisation is: the civilised are those who can acknowledge their privilege and confess their past atrocities; this confession of past atrocities seems to lend the confessor the right to morally recolonise the globe.

Acknowledgement of privilege becomes the new hallmark of superior values, and of what is good, just and politically correct. These superior norms and values are still established among the liberal intellectuals and academia of the Face of Christ as Deleuze and Guattari (2011:167–191) would argue, in other words by the West. Thus, both the construction and the deconstruction, the presentation and the critique of the presentation of this Western Norm remain a Western privilege.

It remains a kind of missionary universalism that the contemporary politically correct European is once again imposing on the colonial world, while presenting it as a universalism of inclusivity, a celebration of diversity, a cosmopolitanism, in the sense of belonging to the wonderful and colourful rainbow of universal (Western) humanity. This is not a universalism, as François Julien would argue, but a uniformism. In other words, it is a cultural (European) particularity that presents itself as universal (Julien 2014):

> The uniform is the perverted double of that universal which is now being spread by globalization. As it saturates the world, it surreptitiously masquerades as the universal without being able to evoke its legitimacy. (p. xi)

But one knows that belonging is only possible on the condition that there is a non-belonging, just as an inside is structurally and logically only possible if there is an outside, an inclusion is only possible on the condition of the possibility of an exclusion. To be able to determine who belongs, one also needs to determine who does not belong; in other words, the other, the enemy, the excluded needs to be determined. Uniformism is always conditional, of course, the other is welcome in the inclusion, if and only if she, he, or it fulfils certain criteria, agrees to the norms and subscribes to certain 'superior' values, which are all part of the criteria for inclusion. Inclusion in the world system, inclusion into the norms and rules-based world order, and if not, one is classified as rogue and/or terrorist, or a '*Queerdenker*'. This conditional inclusion presents itself as open, inclusive and universal, but it is based on becoming uniform to a particular interpretation of diversity. This mission of uniformising the globe becomes historical in the belief that this mission is progressive. It began with the Enlightenment and the French Revolution and their claim to universal rights, but in fact, it was only the inclusion of the heterosexual white middle-class male, although the inclusion was presented as being universal. Later heterosexual women were included and eventually many years later, homosexuals were included. This brings with it the belief that this inclusion and celebration of diversity is something progressive and that eschatologically one day all will be included in a global humanity with their particular cultural, racial, religious, sexual and sexual orientation differences, and identities respected and recognised. It seems to be about the recognition of differences.

In time, in eschatological time, everyone could theoretically be included. However, 'The project of universal inclusion is hysterical: it does not want the total inclusion that it strives for' (McGowan 2020:186) – a universalism of belonging, conditioned by rules and norms; a rule and norms-based universalism that finds expression in so-called universal rights (as universal norms and values).

As Fanon (2004) writes:

> In the colonial context the colonist only quits undermining the colonized once the latter have proclaimed loud and clear that white values reign supreme. In the period of decolonization the colonized masses thumb their noses at these very values, shower them with insults and vomit them up. (p. 8)

This kind of universalism of belonging is opposed by Fanon. The colonised do not want to one day be granted the privilege of belonging to a uniform European-conditioned universal humanity, for example, once the colonial subject has learned to speak French or English without an accent, has studied and learned the correct manners, has adopted the values and integrated the norms and therefore abides by the rules-based Western world order. It cannot be a question of the colonial subject becoming uniform to the conditions set by those who believe their particularity is universal but needs to be something else.

Fanon argues that even if the black mouth speaks French perfectly, the black intellect has received all the degrees from the prestigious ivy-league universities, she or he or they will still not be welcomed as full members of the so-called uniform universal bourgeoisie metropolitan community, as they will never completely belong. Fanon, argues that the black skin will never belong, will never be equal, irrespective of how she or he performs and fulfils the criteria set out in the universal charter of belonging, which supposedly determines human worth.

An other universalism

Wilderson argued in 2017, it does not matter how well educated the black person is, it does not matter if the president of the USA is black, the black person is doomed to social death because it is never enough to belong, as the conditions are never fulfilled. Fanon thus argues for a different kind of universalism, the *universalism of nonbelonging*. There are different voices within decolonial thinking who would probably not agree with Fanon on this point. They would rather argue for a pluriversal perspective, embracing differing worlds, rather than a singular (Western) world where nonbelonging prevails.

McGowan describes this subject, this universal non-belonging subject, as a being of language and as a consequence of being a language, the subject is divided.[4]

4. The speaking being becomes a speaking being through a constitutive lack: language distances the subject from the world of objects and eliminates any direct access to the object that would fulfil the subject's needs. The subject exists as a subject only insofar as it remains incomplete and divided from itself. The subject desires as a result of its incompletion, and this desire is caused by the lack. Lack defines how we relate to the world, impelling us to seek out what we are missing in the world. The self-identical, non-lacking subject would no longer be a subject and no longer be capable of speaking. Lack is subjectivity (McGowan 2017:15).

'Universality is not the uniform but the absence that puts subjects at odds with themselves' (McGowan 2020:172). What is truly universal about humans is that the human subject is a divided subject, a subject that is at odds with themselves. The universalism that takes this universal lack into consideration is a universalism that unites all humanity. The particularity of the diverse identities is an unavoidable symptom in response to the universal lack. For there to be belonging, there must be nonbelonging. Likewise, one can say that for there to be inclusion, there is exclusion. It is the universalism of a certain lack, a *non*, a universalism of a negativity, of a social death, of a certain violence, an original murder. This is the universalism that appears through the hermeneutic lens of psychoanalysis, in which Fanon was trained. That which universally unites all humanity is not the constructed particular identities, which are always ideology dependent. The universal humanity is not identity dependent, but humanity is united by their *common* lack, the murder, the violence and the death that gives birth to the speaking being: the human subject.

Lacan teaches one that the subject is a divided subject, a lacking subject, and it is this lack that is universal, but without conditions, as it is a universalism that is universal without any positive content for which one can fight, it is a universal that stands with or without human struggle. The colonial subject is the singular expression of this universal, in the particular global uniformism of the European subjectivity. Such universalism is worth taking up, in the sense of posturing oneself or taking this specific stance rather than a position (see Meylahn 2021:201). It is about taking a stance with regard to this lack – not to fulfil the conditions set by a particular construction of human identity, but rather to create an awareness of the struggle of universal non-belonging, the struggle of universal social death. It is a much more fundamental or originary universalism that is there prior or as the non-ground ground of all particular constructs of universalism. It is a universal condition concerning all human systems, constructs, identities, social systems and communities. It is as Wilderson (2017) writes:

> If we are to be honest with ourselves, we must admit that the 'Negro' has been inviting whites, as well as civil society's junior partners, to the dance of social death for hundreds of years, but few have wanted to learn the steps. (p. 13)

Fanon's decolonial thinking helps us rediscover this kind of universalism, the universalism of nonbelonging.
Fanon (2008) writes, '*This essay will attempt to understand the Black-White relationship.*
The white man is locked in his whiteness.
The black man in his blackness.
Our sole concern was to put an end to a vicious cycle.
Fact: Some Whites consider themselves superior to Blacks.
Another fact: Some Blacks want to prove at all costs to the Whites the wealth of the black man's intellect and equal intelligence…
We believe that an individual must endeavour to assume the universalism inherent in the human condition' (pp. xiii–xiv).

Decolonial thinking gives this universalism a singular face, not a particular expression, not a particular African construction of an alternative humanity or alternative claim to universal humanism, as Fanon does not want to lift Negritude, African Socialism or Ubuntu to the status of an alternative construct, alternative essentialism and thus alternative universalism. Decolonial thinking can be interpreted rather as a singular expression of the universalism of nonbelonging and in this sense, it is a universal struggle, which includes Europe.

Fanon (2004) concludes his book with the following words:

> If we want to transform Africa into a new Europe, America into a new Europe, then let us entrust the destinies of our countries to the Europeans. They will do a better job than the best of us. But if we want humanity to take one step forward, if we want to take it to another level than the one where Europe has placed it, then we must innovate, we must be pioneers. For Europe, for ourselves and for humanity, comrades, we must make a new start, develop a new way of thinking, and endeavor to create a new man. (p. 239)

It is a universalism, a new conception of humanity, but not a humanity that will be born on the foundation of any positive attributes, but that will be born out of the scream from a black hole (Fanon 2008):

> What more can we say? After having driven himself to the limits of self-destruction, the black man, meticulously, or impetuously, will jump into the 'black hole' from which will gush forth 'the great black scream with such force that it will shake the foundation of the world'. (p. 175)

To give an example from the Black Lives Matter movement, one could argue, as does Todd McGowan (2020):

> Success for *Black Lives Matter* could only be everyone paying attention and recognizing that we all partake in the nonbelonging that the murdered black people represent. This mark of this success would not be total integration. Instead, it would occur when lives that don't belong would become impossible to shoot without collapsing the entire social order. The fundamental confusion that surrounds universality is that we often mistake the adding up of all particulars, which is what All Lives Matter proposes, for the universal. (pp. 185–186)

The politics of liberal cosmopolitanism often presents itself as universal, but the universalism of cosmopolitanism is understood as a combination of all positive differences in a rainbow-nation sense. McGowan (2020), in reference to Jacques Lacan, argues against such a positive interpretation of universalism, understood as the addition of all possible positive identities:

> But the universal is not all particulars assembled together.[5] It is not a combination. It is what remains absent from a complete collection of particulars. It is what all the particulars lack. The point of political struggle is not to include all within the social structure but to recognize the failure of all inclusion. (p. 186)

5. Jacques Lacan defines feminine sexuality according to the logic of the not-all in his Seminar XX. He contrasts this with a masculine logic of the all, which attains wholeness through positing an exception out-side the all. In this way, Lacan shows that the only possible universality is that of the not-all. The universality of the all is faked, just like masculine potency.

A radically different kind of universalism is presented here (McGowan 2020):

> The solidarity organized around a shared absence does not necessitate the nonbelonging of some because it accepts that no one really belongs. We can discover universal solidarity only through what doesn't belong, not through the act of belonging. (p. 186)

It is not about including the colonial other into the particular universalism, in other words, the bourgeoise subjectivity of the Enlightenment and French Revolution, but rather discovering universal non-belonging through the singular decolonial other, who becomes the concrete universal in this particular struggle. There will always be the poor among you, there will always be someone in the position of the black other, the colonial other. Therefore, the question cannot be how they can be included, but how one relates to (postures oneself to) this structural necessary exclusion. The political posture to take is to abandon the quest for a solution, and rather *identify* with the missing signifier, but not in an attempt to integrate it successfully into the very system that always again brings about exclusion (see McGowan 2013[6]):

> By doing so, we would see that the missing signifier, despite appearances, does not concern those who are not properly represented. It concerns the system of signification itself, the law itself. The absence in the law is the founding moment of the law, not an otherness that the law cannot accommodate. (p. 277)

It is not about seeking to include the other, but focusing on the insider; decolonial thinking in this sense could be interpreted as focusing on colonial Europe, with the emphasis on the upstanding citizen within the dominant social structure, which needs to be disrupted. By responding to the other, the political battle is already lost, as the missing signifier is not an opening to a mysterious otherness; 'it is the unacknowledged way that the symbolic structure manifests itself' (McGowan 2013:277).

Therefore, McGowan (2013) argues that:

> [R]ather than working to include previously excluded subjects within the structure of signification, we must work instead to reveal how those inside are themselves already excluded: there is no inclusion that does not partake of the fundamental exclusion that defines the structure. (p. 277)

This is a very different kind of universalism to the universalism of the Face of Christ, as Deleuze and Guattari argue, and in this context, Christianity cannot be ignored (positively or negatively) when thinking about decolonialism.

Therefore, instead of trying to ignore Christianity, ignore the Face of Christ (see also Meylahn 2018:41), one would need to reinterpret Christianity or at least follow the traces of alternative interpretations of Christianity throughout the ages. For example, one could follow the traces of the prophetic voices within the Bible as well as throughout church history,

although these prophetic voices throughout the history of Christianity remain part and parcel of this Face of Christ as Nancy (2008:10) argues, that both construction and destruction are Christian. It cannot therefore be a matter of simply choosing between the priestly and the prophetic, as in the Kairos Document (1985), but it is rather to seek a radical non-interpretation. Not an active interpretation or reinterpretation, but a passive stance, allowing something to happen to one, as Saul's experience on the road to Damascus. Saul, before he became Paul, experienced being confronted with his persecution of Christ. Such a passive experience is transformative: to realise that one cannot but persecute Christ, to realise that one, in order to be, cannot but be a colonialist persecutor of black bodies. Such a Saul-Paul experience is required, not in the sense of a reinterpretation, as it is not an *active* alternative interpretation, but as a *passive* experience of being the persecutor and the experience of being the cause of social death.

This might open the door to a different universalism, namely a universalism of lack, which can be interpreted as a universalism of the crib and the cross. The crib and the birth of an illegitimate baby on the outskirts of an Empire only recognised by those marginalised by society is certainly a story of lack, entering the world. The crib in a stable in Bethlehem is the birth of the saviour revealed in a lack: the lack of a home, the lack of being an illegitimate child, the lack of living on the margins of the Empire and the lack of being forced to become a refugee in a foreign land. This lack that is revealed in the crib will repeatedly and constantly be filled with positive content, as has happened throughout the centuries, when good intending and devout believers gathered around the crib in awe and adoration filling this lack with various positive fictions: dogmas, theologies and beliefs. It is probably no coincidence, that – as this lack is universal – the positive fictions that are supposed to fill this universal lack present themselves as positive forms of universalism, although this kind of positive universalism is always particular to those who create it and who have the power to universalise it. One could say the same of the cross, which is par excellence a symbol of lack and loss of all meaning, the death of God. In the adoration of the cross, like the crib, it has been filled with positive content, which presents itself as universal, thereby repressing the universal lack that the cross reveals. In this sense, one can argue that Christianity, as a positive religion, will always present itself as universal, as its founding event is the revelation of universal lack.

The question is if this is inevitable. It certainly seems that way, if one for a moment reflects on the Book of Revelation.

As the fatally wounded lamb of the Book of Revelation Chapter 4 opens the seven seals of the Book of Life, it makes sense that the first seal, the first rider on the white horse, can be interpreted as the rider of universal victory. The victorious world spirit rides out to conquer the world in the name of its universal truth, only to realise that once this universal truth,

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6.This means that the struggle against illegal immigration does not concern illegal immigrants outside the legal social structure, even though they are clearly affected by this struggle. It concerns, instead, the status of the upstanding citizen within the social structure (McGowan 2013:277).

as lack, is positively filled with a particular content, which enables one to ride out in conquering victory, it is lost and the red horse of war invariably follows. The red rider brings with him religious wars, ideological wars, wars always between friend and foe. To stem this eternal conflict between friend and foe, the black horse with its rider needs to be released. The black rider of the law and the market. Laws, as Benjamin argues, 'Modern law [is] to divest the individual, at least as a legal subject, of all violence, even that directed to a natural end' (Benjamin 2004:241). Yes, the law can stem the violence, as does the 'free' market which seeks to regulate a space for 'healthy' competition and thereby stem the mimetic violence, but the law together with the market and the commodification brings with it the final rider on his pale horse, the rider of death. These four riders, seem to be necessary, structural consequences of filling the lack with content, be it the positive adoration around the crib in a stable or at the foot of the cross in Jerusalem. Yet, the congregation in Philadelphia (Rv 3. 7ff) was commended not for riding out on any white horse, but for remaining true to the lamb in weakness and in lack. Can the congregation in Philadelphia inspire decolonial theology?

The question is if such a decolonial faith can be translated into a theology, or is theologising always a form of idolatry? Wilderson argues that a black person is the singular universal, who reveals the social death of humanity and invites all of humanity to this dance of social death. In this sense, just as decolonial thinking is tied to the singular universal of the black person, as Wilderson understands the construct of the black body, so theology, if it wants to remain faithful to the crib and the cross, is tied to this social death, and is thus inherently decolonial.

Such a positioning of theology is untenable and it would again be a position and not a stance or a posture. Maybe one can refer back to Luther and his *simul justus et peccator* – that one is always simultaneously sinner and justified. In this sense, one can argue that humanity is simultaneously coloniser and colonised, colonialist and decolonialist, as one cannot but be colonialist, as to be is to be colonial. Luther is believed to conclude from this that one is encouraged to be a joyful sinner. What does Luther imply with his idea of sinning joyfully? He is certainly not referring to immorality or debauchery or even to purposefully disobeying the laws or moral codes, but to acknowledge – in one's desire to do good, to be perfect, to create a perfect just society by seeking to fulfil the law – that one does the exact opposite and enters the realm of the wrath of God *deus absconditus* (the hidden God). The desire to do good, to reach the good taken to its logical consequence is to experience suffering and the cross and therein alone lies freedom and redemption. It is one's sins that bring one to the grace of Christ crucified. It is the terror, the violence that is experienced in the world that drives one towards the grace of democracy (see Rozitchner 2012). This is maybe where one is today and where theology should posture itself, where theology should take a stance within society between colonial and decolonial. Maybe Wilderson

has something of this in mind, with the invitation to the dance to which all are invited. It is not that one dances with death, as a kind of dance with nihilism, but it is the dance of immortality: the dance that dances with death in that it defies death. It is that which is not killed, not murdered, that which defies and denies death, plays with death, also known as eternity, resurrection and everlasting life but in an immanent non-otherworldly sense, as a political force in Jacque Rancière's (2019:39–44, 160) sense of politics.

Social death is a universal human condition, which is a dance, and the colonial subjects have been inviting the globe to learn this dance. The time is now, to hear the scream from the black hole in the birth pains of a new humanity – resurrection.

Acknowledgements

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