

PHILOSOPHY ON THE BORDER



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PHILOSOPHY ON THE
BORDER
Decoloniality and the Shudder
of the Origin

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‘In the beginning,’ John Locke said, ‘all the world was America.’¹ This is perhaps a curious claim to make in light of our conception of the world today. But, when placed in the political context of Lock’s *Two Treatise on Government* (1689) and interpreted against the background of the social and political challenges of the present world, Locke’s claim still speaks to our contemporary concerns. The goings-on in academic philosophy within and beyond South Africa demonstrate to some extent why this is a reasonable assertion. Respected Locke scholars, such as Barbara Arneil, have shown that the claim Locke advances relates to his imagining of the founding of the new world.²

Prima facie, Locke’s assertion can be read as the invocation of a powerful imagery that points to the incredible opportunity for refounding human civilisation. In this sense, America represents not merely a geography, but an imagination that tells the story of an opportunity for the founding of a new world where human aspiration, ingenuity and will can reach beyond the pernicious imperfections of the old British order. The story of the founding of America therefore represents the remembrance of the process through which human striving for greatness and heavenly existence on earth is realised.

But there is another perspective on Locke’s invocation of America as the refounding of all the world. From this perspective, Locke does not merely wish to underscore that America is ‘a two-sided Genesis’ we must look to if we wish to discover the beginning of ‘the past’ and ‘promise of the future’, but that it is a conceptual metaphor tied to Locke’s ‘defence of England’s colonial policy in the new world against the sceptics in England and the counter-claims of both the aboriginal nations and other European powers in America’.³ Viewed against the background

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1. John Locke, *Two Treatise on Government*, edited by Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988 [1689]), 319.
 2. Barbara Arneil, *John Locke and America: The Defence of English Colonialism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).
 3. Arneil, *John Locke*, 2.

of the experience of the ‘disposable people’ in America at the time Locke made his assertion – Native Americans – Locke’s reference to America as the story of founding par excellence quickly reveals itself as an epistemic standpoint.

The story of a founding is always a double-edged sword. On the one hand, there is the *prima facie* narrative. On the other hand, however, there is the story that emerges when things are put in their proper social, economic, cultural and political contexts. The case of Locke is invoked here to point to the relevance of this book. I will shortly come to specifics in this regard but before I do so, let me tease out some of the implications of the complicated story of founding considered as an epistemic standpoint.

One of the well-travelled paths to constructing the epistemic standpoint that is required by the process of founding a nation or a discipline is the construction of a narrative. Itself a tool, the narrative springs from a foundation. This implies that for a people to have a sense of collective identity – an imagination of who they are and perhaps what they should aspire to become – the narrative must do more than tell, synchronically or otherwise, of events that lie in the past. The narrative must tell us not just about the past, but also about the present and the future. From this we can infer that the power of narratives derives from something fundamental. Herein lies the appeal and convincing force of the story that inspires us to recognise ourselves as belonging to a tribe of practitioners, of a discipline, or as a part of the people rooted in a specific place in the world. Such vital knowledge cannot be based on superficial grounds.

The question then is this: what is the fundamental ground that gives meaning to the stories we tell about who we are as members of a tribe of practitioners, of a trade or as part of the people of a place? That is the point of contention. For, even if one decides that it is impossible to imagine a satisfactory answer to this question, one cannot deny with any measure of plausibility that any attempt at an answer must recognise that facts matter. Thus, although we may be at liberty to propose that we cannot insist on substantial agreement with regard to answering this question, we can certainly agree that procedural faithfulness applies. That is, either you do not attempt an answer, or you answer within the bounds of epistemic demands, namely, within the bounds of what the facts bear out. This is to say that recognition of the facts is essential for the construction of the fundamental ground that underpins our narrative of the founding – of nations, or of disciplines of inquiry. Although we may choose the tone, language, idioms and metaphors of our narratives about the founding of our disciplines, it is not up to us to choose the facts that our narratives will relay.

I chose this entrance into my brief meditation on the book before you in order to underscore the urgency of the theme it addresses. This book presents a penetrating analysis of the narrative of the founding and the (re)imagining of the discipline of philosophy within, but also beyond, a given context – South Africa. What is the narrative of founding articulated by the practitioners of philosophy in this context? How does the narration of the story of the discipline relate to wider considerations and contestations in other parts of Africa and the world regarding the urgency of ‘now’ for those who consider themselves, or are considered to be, philosophers? By engaging with and curating a very fine set of essays addressing different aspects of these questions, Leonhard Praeg provides us with a compass that enables us to interrogate different standpoints. By taking us *to* the border, and letting us stay *on* the border, this collection of critical essays compels us to rethink assumptions and reject easy answers in the light of considered arguments. Above all, the book forces us to rethink the past in the light of the present so that we can imagine the future practice of philosophy. The appeal of this book lies in the fact that it is neither a collection of essays that choruses ‘Mea culpa’ in apology for those who may disagree, nor is it a discordant chant of mutual admiration for those who might agree.

Most importantly, the book recognises that the claims and counter-claims made in the name of ‘decolonial thinking’, ‘epistemic justice’ and other catchphrases of the moment, will be futile if we cannot seize the moment to imagine a plausible starting point for articulating these issues. *Philosophy on the Border* provides us with a point of departure that is both profound and practicable. It invites us to enter the space of coexistence of dualities; a context where clear-cut distinctions are unaffordable luxuries. The book invites us to consider the cogency of adopting a point of departure that will allow us to deal with the ‘messy business’ of interrogating the nature and practice of philosophy. Whereas the classical story of philosophy has always departed from the proposition that Africa is a point zero of the discipline’s emergence – a context innocent of the sort of reflection that would otherwise engender philosophy – *Philosophy on the Border* reframes the discussion in a manner that circumscribes the grand idiocy of the very assertion of a point zero. In the main, the different essays recognise that the *crisis points* of philosophy as a field of inquiry are an essential normative foundation for the emergence of new perspectives on what the discipline can aspire to become.

To conclude, I should note another fundamental strength of the book – namely, its openness, which is devoid of pretentiousness. The authors of the different chapters do not pretend that they can satisfactorily or exhaustively answer the questions they

raise. But this fact does not subtract from the depth of their reflections. By bringing to the fore how the recounting of the story of philosophy erases, ignores, forgets and chooses not to remember, and how the forgotten subjects of knowledge challenge the canon, the chapters in this book present ideas that can help us imagine the unity of thought and the thinking subject. How agents of knowledge tell their story and what they think must necessarily be ignored for this story to sound plausible, cannot be divorced from the end product of their narration. When questions are raised about the exercise of ‘constitutive violence’ in disciplinary formation, what emerges is an articulation of the urgency of moving beyond fixation on the end products of canon formation. In such a situation, the way to proceed is to open up a space for the reevaluation of the two basic principles of epistemic honesty: 1) recognising that there is no subject of knowledge who is an intransigent *other* and who cannot know or be known; and 2) understanding that every subject of knowledge is an equal partner in the production of knowledge about knowledge. It is therefore epistemically unwarranted to impose, from a position of ignorance backed by disciplinary and social power, a burden of proof on agents of knowledge to demonstrate that they have something valuable to add to an already constituted disciplinary discourse. The recognition that every subject of knowledge is an equal partner in the production of knowledge about knowledge implies that it is futile to succumb to the allure of blame apportionment. In short, we owe it to ourselves as agents of knowledge to recognise the duty to transcend the theatrical performance of protest scholarship. This means abandoning an approach to inquiry whose first and only achievement in the declension of the cases of disciplinary formation is the assertion ‘*J'accuse!*’ Realising this aim will enable us to reconfigure ourselves as subjects who do not deserve merely to be pitied or repudiated, irrespective of the place history has assigned us in the ladder of prestige, upon which hangs the old narrative we seek to transcend.

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An apocryphal story tells of a nobleman who had been at odds with his Sovereign for a number of years because he always expected his noblemen to arrive at court with a bribe thinly disguised as a gift. Every time he was summoned to appear in Court the nobleman arrived bearing nothing but his people's good wishes and every time the Sovereign was frustrated and outraged by the nobleman's audacity. As was to be expected, the conflict soon escalated and the Sovereign fabricated an accusation of treason against the nobleman who was once again summoned to appear at Court. Arriving with his devout retainer by his side, the nobleman listened to the accusation, refuted the evidence, but was predictably found guilty and sentenced to death. In a moment of pure hubris, the Sovereign decided that only by demanding of the retainer that he should decapitate the nobleman himself would he secure the servant's future loyalty. He commanded the retainer to proceed with the decapitation, but the retainer, paralysed by the love for a master who had raised him as his own son, hesitated. The Sovereign smirked and said: 'Just get on with it. There is no decision here. I gave you a simple command. Just execute it.'

To this the retainer replied: 'And if I should refuse?'

'Then I shall have your head too,' the Prince responded.

The retainer turned away from his master and, laying his sword on the ground, said: 'But then that is my decision.'



Philosophy on the Border

Leonhard Praeg

In contemporary discourse on decoloniality a number of master tropes have come to play a central role: epistemicide, epistemological marginalisation or exclusion, epistemological disobedience and epistemic justice. What all the tropes have in common is not only a concern with *episteme* (from the Greek for ‘knowledge’), but also with what it means to know, the knowledge of knowledge (epistemology), which in decolonial discourse manifests primarily as a concern with the politics that regulate and determine what it means to know. Here, the phrase ‘what it means to know’ is no longer simply understood in terms of a neutral self-reflexivity (for example: how can I be sure that what I know is true? What is the source of my knowledge?), but additionally is concerned with understanding the power at work in those processes through which one knowledge system – for example, Western philosophy – asserted and in many ways continues to assert itself over others, either by eliminating them (epistemicide), marginalising or excluding them from the ‘canon’ of legitimate knowledge, or assimilating them in a way that does not allow them to question the way in which philosophical curricula are constructed. In its most simplistic sense colonialism was premised on the notion that one episteme, the Western, was superior to others, not because other systems of knowing and articulating the meaning of the world were somehow wrong, but because they could not aspire to universality; they merely articulated a particularity (what it meant to be African, Indian, Chinese and so on) while Western knowledge was seen to articulate the very meaning of what it means to be human. The central concern of the discourse on decoloniality consists of revealing the politics at work in this aspiration, particularly the history and logic of those processes that allowed the Western episteme to erase or conceal the contextual and temporal dimensions of its own origin so that it could present itself as acontextual, ahistorical and universal. Decoloniality is nothing but the systematic dismantling of all the intellectual Disciplines or Subjects that combined to form the Western grid of intelligibility imposed on the world.

At the heart of this collection of essays lies a specific concern with one of these Subjects – philosophy – its history and some of the tensions generated by the decolonial quest for epistemic justice. A significant part of the quest for epistemic justice consists in offering different notions of what constitutes the *Subject* philosophy and what other, counter-hegemonic understandings of the human *subject* should be taken more seriously. This is a collection of essays that seeks to articulate some of the tensions that become apparent when historically excluded subjectivities question the politics of a Subject.

Initially, I was uncertain whether the collection should be titled ‘Philosophy *at* the Border’ or ‘Philosophy *on* the Border’. In the end I decided that ‘at’ the border did not quite capture the spirit of the conversation curated in this collection because being ‘at’ a border invokes images of being on either this or that side of the border. One stands *at* a border looking either to what lies beyond or, having crossed the border, looks back across the border to where one has come from. Being ‘on’ the border, on the other hand, means standing on the line of differentiation: neither on this side nor the other side. Formulated differently, whereas being ‘at’ the border suggests a difference between what lies on either side, being ‘on’ the border suggests less of a differentiation between this and that and more a de-differentiation of this *and* that, of being *in* difference.

Being *on* the border is a messy business and that is how it should be because to contest the manner in which a subject defines itself (the individual and collective experiences it considers worthy of reflection) messes with the very nature of the Subject: how it is taught, what kind of questions it engages (or not) and how it does (or does not) respond to the reasonable demand that individuals and society should in some (admittedly complex) sense of the word benefit from its practice. To simplify all of this somewhat, this collection of essays is situated in that liminal space of de-differentiation where a Subject finds itself confronted by historically excluded subjects who reveal the politics of the Subject by, in part, demonstrating how a Discipline also functions as a form of epistemological discipline.

Philosophy is a notoriously difficult Subject to define – a difficulty demonstrated by the fact that one of the most fundamental and enduring questions that historically has and in future always will occupy philosophers is: what is philosophy? Perhaps with the luxury of hindsight it was only to be expected that the great debate that erupted in the 1970s and 1980s over the questions, ‘Is there such a thing as African philosophy and what is African philosophy?’ would eventually simply collapse from conceptual fatigue. The attempt to invoke a subject (‘African’) – whose very

self-understanding is constituted as political contestation – in order to (re)define a Subject (philosophy), which in its own self-understanding cannot, by definition, be defined, was in a sense as necessary as it was futile. Necessary, because it tackled the question of the politics of philosophy head on; futile, because it did so by invoking one indefinable concept to qualify another.

For the purpose of framing this collection of essays, what is meant by the Subject ‘philosophy’ is therefore unclear, both constitutively (being a Subject that cannot define itself because it refuses to patrol its borders) and politically (because the very ‘subjectivity’ that informs its practice is undergoing radical interrogation). The best I can do in order to frame a conversation between a number of philosophers at this turbulent moment in the history of philosophy in South Africa is to define its meaning tautologically: the Subject as represented here includes contributions from a number of scholars who, through various different research projects, engaged with me in a dialogue on decoloniality in general and the way in which the student protest/revolt of 2015–16 acted as a catalyst for enhanced interrogation of the politics of philosophy. A contingent definition of the Subject, then; one that makes no grand claims about its potential universality.

As a Subject, philosophy, like most other Disciplines in the social sciences and humanities, finds itself at a point of reinvention with regard to its very meaning, specifically the manner in which it has been researched and taught over many decades in departments of philosophy at South African universities. Historically that meaning was a function of a Western-centric *imaginaire* that explicitly incarnated in teaching and researching the Western philosophical canon while implicitly inculcating in students the meaning of Western subjectivity. Simply put, in many departments the philosophical curriculum had been structured as *Bildungsroman*, a coming-of-age story of the Western subject presented as the Subject of philosophy. Philosophy reproduced Western culture through the medium of the Western canon of philosophy in a manner that was premised on and legitimated by the meta-assumption that the assumptions of the Western philosophical project were universal and therefore universalisable. Colonialism was the concrete expression of that meta-assumption. In addition to philosophy as a Subject that incarnated and inculcated a Western understanding of the subject, we can therefore also distinguish a third sense in which philosophy as a Subject *subjected* the colonised to a form of epistemological discipline. Philosophy is not just a Subject. In its Western-centric form it is also one of the Disciplines that came to constitute the European grid of intelligibility that was devised to make sense of

the complexities of Western modernity, part of which consisted in imposing that grid on Africa (see Mudimbe 1996). Through this grid of disciplinary intelligibility, Africa became a Subject of study and *subjected* to the discipline of what thinking in and through that grid means. Given this complicity of the various Disciplines with the project of colonialism, we can therefore also speak of each one of them as a form of disciplinary technique: colonising subjects subjected the colonised in order perpetually to recreate their own Subject: Disciplines disciplined. This is admittedly a broad sweep, but it outlines in very general terms the conceptual domain of which the meaning of tropes such as epistemicide, epistemic marginalisation and epistemic justice is a function.

As I curated this collection and started to think about an introductory narrative that could contain the conversation, I came to realise that finding oneself *on* the border of a discipline means making visible both the implicit and meta-assumptions that historically enabled a Subject to *subject* individuals; ‘making visible’ involves identifying and articulating the strategies and techniques that were invoked by a Discipline to discipline its subject in order to contain thinking itself within the parameters of a certain political project and this is perhaps a useful way of understanding what decolonising a Subject is all about.

But who is the subject that demands the end of discipline as we know it? Who is this unruly subject who insists on articulating the constitutive violence of the Western epistemological grid that inculcates as it incarnates both Subject and subject, Discipline and discipline? The temptation is, of course, to say ‘Africa’, or the ‘African subject’ – from which follows a whole gamut of related conclusions such as: we should teach more (or only) African philosophy; or African philosophy should be the foundation of the philosophical curriculum; African philosophy should be to Africa what analytic philosophy is to the British, idealism to the Germans, pragmatism to North Americans and so on. But this counter-hegemonic invocation of ‘Africa’ or ‘African subjectivity’ is at best necessary but inadequate, or at worst a comfortable identitarian illusion that fails to recognise the aporetic tensions between its constative claims (‘this or that is what being African means’) and the performative purpose of making the claim (to perform a different, counter-hegemonic *S*/subject into existence). In addition, it exaggerates the relevance of the claim that there have always been different philosophical traditions – African, Western, Indian and Chinese, for example – while glossing over the fact that none of these traditions can claim a pure origin uncontaminated by other traditions. Where there is a relative purity of origin, as in the case of (neo)Confucianism,

it remains the case that modern (neo)Confucianism is as much a retrodiction of tradition as modern African philosophy is a retrodiction of precolonial African world views. In other words, as much as certain forms of contemporary Afro-radicalism seek to convince us that the passage between African subject and African Subject is seamless or unproblematic, its homegrown epistemological claims merely constative and not political performances, locutionary and not perlocutionary, it seems indisputable to me that African philosophy is no exception to this law of hybridity – a fact often overlooked by theorists who write about the recovery from epistemicide in a way that is ironically structured in terms of what Jacques Derrida would call a secular messianism.

Here it may perhaps be useful to suggest that philosophical traditions are always a function of at least two kinds of contestation: the first is a self-reflexive engagement with the tradition of philosophy, which can be traced as the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of a text or the genealogy of a *Problemggeschichte*; the second contestation involves one tradition in dialogue with another – either implicitly, explicitly or, as is the case with the North African influence on Greek philosophy, an influence that was once explicit, but subsequently became erased as a result of Western modernity establishing its epistemological and ontological hegemony. I think the extent to which a philosophical tradition is predominantly concerned with self-reflexive contestation as opposed to interphilosophical dialogue is a function of asymmetrical power relations. Dominant or hegemonic traditions – such as the conception and practice of modern Western philosophy – mostly engage their own unfolding while by and large, although not exclusively, displaying little or no interest in other philosophical traditions. Such relatively narrow self-reflexivity is a function of politics, more specifically power. The one thing an (emerging) hegemonic philosophical tradition will as a rule *not* do is to seek out an understanding of what is universal about its particular experience of the world. This is as true of past, Western epistemological hegemonies as it is of contemporary forms of Afro-radicalism that seek to turn the tables on Western-centrism. True universality – a genuine concern with what is universal in the human condition, discovered dialogically in conversation with other philosophical traditions – is a form of ‘contestation’ (a productive agonistic) usually only pursued by societies that find themselves either *not yet* inducted into hegemonic traditions or *already in the process of being* epistemologically reconstituted. In these cases a tradition enters into dialogue with a dominant tradition because by *not* doing so it runs the risk of being assimilated, absorbed, obliterated or relegated to forgetfulness;

alternatively, it may form emancipatory dialogical alliances with other traditions that face a similar threat – two recent examples of which would be ‘epistemologies of the South’ and the notion of a ‘global South’.

Mapping the terrain in this manner allows me to be a little more precise about the particular contestation I have in mind when I locate this collection ‘on’ the border. In some contested sense there has always been an African philosophy. Just exactly what ‘some sense’ means is part of a greater debate that I will not enter into here. Suffice it to say that my interest consists in teasing out some of the tensions that become visible at the interface between hegemonic Western philosophy and *modern* African philosophy, where ‘modern’ is taken to mean an African philosophy conscious of itself as the philosophy of black people. If there is a meaningful difference between ancient, traditional or precolonial African philosophy and contemporary or modern African philosophy, it is the fact that only the latter as a Subject takes as its point of departure a black subject who has come to think of itself in and through the racialised disciplinary grid of intelligibility imposed on Africa through Western modernity in general and colonialism in particular. Historically, African philosophers in particular and African peoples in general did not think of themselves as black in the same way that we use racial categories today. Race, particularly scientific racism, was an invention of Western modernity and colonialism was a function of that modernity. Traditional African philosophy became *modern* African philosophy at the precise moment when race – the fact of being black and colonised along with the need to emancipate the meaning of blackness from the discipline of colonialism and the disciplinary grid of intelligibility that the African was subjected to – became the major, if not exclusive, concern of African philosophers. It is on *that* border, where the mechanisms of epistemological subjection and discipline are being made visible by an increasingly unruly black subject that this collection of essays is situated.

The emerging relationship between a global South discourse on decoloniality and every particular place-bound struggle that dialectically feeds into and off this emancipatory alliance is complex. To tease out the nature of that reciprocal constitution is not the object of this particular volume. That said, some of the chapters speak to this generality and the way in which the local, South African struggle under various master tropes – Africanisation, transformation, decoloniality – resonates with the work of global South scholars who are working through the ‘decolonial turn’. Although I recognise this emancipatory alliance, I prefer to present the historical condition for the possibility of the unruly black

subject's contestation of Western philosophical hegemony more deconstructively in terms of the genealogy of one of Western philosophy's own most enduring fascinations, namely, the idea of a First Philosophy. Since Aristotle, philosophers in the Western tradition have been intrigued by the idea of a First Philosophy as that sub-discipline that poses questions that are so fundamental to philosophy that it should be considered as constituting the grounding of philosophy as such. Over time different conceptions of what this First Philosophy may be have been advanced: epistemology (all questions related to what we know and how we know that what we know is reliable knowledge); ontology (questions about the nature of existence); the ethical (because my responsibility to the Other is more fundamental to understanding questions relating to my knowledge or my existence). But it took scholars working in the tradition of decoloniality to argue that the most fundamental question we can ask is political: *whose* epistemology? *Whose* ontology? *Whose* conception of the ethical?¹ Of course, this is not to argue that Western philosophy never took political philosophy seriously. Rather, it is to point out, as Hannah Arendt reminds us in 'Concern with Politics in Recent European Philosophical Thought' (1994: 430) that from its inception Western philosophers treated political philosophy as a 'stepchild'. Greek philosophy was founded on the distinction between 'pure philosophy' and 'political philosophy', with the former considered superior to the latter because it was less contaminated by the ordinary, factual, contingent aspects of everyday life. The distinction between 'pure' and 'political' philosophy became one of the cornerstones of the definition of Western philosophy until decolonial scholars quite correctly pointed out that the 'pure' has always been contaminated by the political; there is no such thing as a study of epistemology, ontology and ethics not contaminated by context, time and history – that is, by the political. And yet we find this distinction between 'pure' and 'political' reiterated and reinscribed in the way philosophy departments deal with the challenge of the fundamental contestation that the political is First Philosophy. That reiteration becomes visible every time a department or philosophy curriculum distinguishes between 'pure philosophy' and 'political philosophy'; or when African philosophers are accused of 'politicising philosophy' or of failing to do 'pure philosophy'; it becomes visible every time a philosophy department responds to the demand to decolonise its curriculum by creating courses in 'African Philosophy' without ever referring to the rest of the curriculum as courses

1. For a more detailed discussion, see Praeg (2014: 6–10).

in ‘Western philosophy’; or when students complain that they have had enough politics and that they want more ‘pure philosophy’ – by which, of course, they mean Western philosophy, uncontaminated by the deconstruction of its claims to universalism. Only once we have been alerted to the political as First Philosophy can we recognise these gestures for what they are: the insidious continuation of the colonial *S/subject* at the heart of the postcolonial *S/subject*.

The merit of the discourse on the ‘decolonial turn’ is that it reminds us that the black subject has been epistemologically unruly for some time. That said – and this is probably the most acute sign of the locality (such as it was) of the local, South African struggle for decolonised knowledge production – what motivated me in compiling this collection was, to a large extent, the student protest/revolt of 2015–16. Over a period of almost eighteen months, what appeared as the ‘same movement’ was sustained, through moments of relapse, consensus, dissent and resolution, by various demands ranging from the removal of colonialist symbols on campus, to no fee increase, from resistance to campus (and more general) rape culture to outsourcing, the inadequacy of and lack of safety in residences, the immediate decolonisation of universities – institutionally as well as epistemologically – and the call for free higher education. Considered in this light #MustFall represented all three historical ‘stages’ of student protest in sub-Saharan Africa, which Mahmood Mamdani divides into the colonial, the nationalist and the neo-liberal. This compression of three different stages into one event should not come as a surprise, given South Africa’s status as last-born postcolony, which has resulted in the ‘compression of the nationalist and neoliberal phases’ (Mamdani in Hewlett et al. 2016: 148) and the confluence of issues that, in their otherwise historical order of appearance, would have manifested as the resurgence of pan-Africanism against corrupt, incompetent and authoritarian regimes and external economic and cultural interference; mobilisation on bread and butter issues; students acting as the social conscience of the state and expressing the frustration of being ‘status-incongruent’ (where social position is at odds with the level of education); the call for epistemological decoloniality; the reinvention of postcolonial Africanity, a paradoxically elitist critique of elitism that articulated and confronted what Aníbal Quijano calls the ‘colonial power matrix of control of economy (land appropriation, exploitation of labor, control of natural resources); control of authority (institution, army); control of gender and sexuality (family, education) and control of subjectivity and knowledge (epistemology, education and formation of subjectivity)’ (in Mignolo 2007: 156).

While I recognise the importance of the student protest/revolt as a catalytic event, this book is not about #MustFall as such. Rather, to the extent that it engages with the discourse of #MustFall, it is because I recognise the fact that it has, without doubt, been the most important catalyst for epistemological decolonialism we have experienced since 1994. #MustFall cleared a space where engaging in the contestation of a Subject by its included and excluded subjects is no longer only the business of the politically minded, but rather the inescapable responsibility of every intellectual who works in higher education in South Africa. Some chapters in this collection explicitly deal with #MustFall as a catalytic event and follow through on some of the questions it raised, while other chapters respond more generally to the demand to excavate the site of contestation that is philosophy – an excavation that has taken the form of various debates about *how* and *what kind* of philosophy should be taught in philosophy departments, debates that preceded the student protest/revolt, although they were undoubtedly given considerably more urgency by the events of 2015–16.

In the following section of this introductory chapter I start by addressing two related questions about #MustFall that have a direct bearing on how I came to think of this collection of essays as poised on the border of philosophy. The first question is: what precisely gave the events of 2015–16 the status of a catalyst for a much more far-reaching engagement with the politics of knowledge production? I believe the answer to this question lies in the answer to the second, namely: what precisely did we witness in 2015–16? Was it a student *protest* or a student *revolt*? Although the events of 2015–16 can perhaps usefully be theorised as a (new, new new or even post) social movement, I think it more relevant to excavate the meaning of the ‘event’ as *revolt*. Only by shifting our language away from ‘student protest’ to ‘youth revolt’, can we come to a more adequate understanding of the full significance of the event and the way in which it created an enunciative space where philosophy as Subject became more open to a contestation between its implicitly included and excluded subjectivities. In short, we find ourselves on the border of philosophy, in part, because of a revolt that amplified simmering epistemological discontent into a fundamental epistemological shudder, which requires patient reflection. In what follows I briefly dwell on the undecidable nature of the 2015–16 protest/revolt. In the third and final section of this chapter I turn to a short description of how each of the essays in this collection constitutes a response to that shudder.

The catalyst

Unlike *Fees Must Fall: Student Revolt, Decolonisation and Governance in South Africa* (Booyesen 2016), I do not use the name #FeesMustFall as an umbrella term for the protests of 2015–16 because only at a particular point did the call for free higher education become metonymic of a movement that had been driven by a variety of concerns, the totality of which became known as ‘Fallism’. I also do not refer to ‘Fallism’ because the -ism suggests a degree of stasis and coherence, both of which were absent in the student protests *qua movement*. I therefore settled on #MustFall as the term to refer to the entire range of issues raised by students (symbolic, gender, material, epistemological). The topic has been relatively well covered. In addition to a range of scholarly articles, the manifestos and other writings that came out of #RhodesMustFall were collected in a special issue of the online *Salon* (Johannesburg Workshop on Theory and Criticism) in 2015.² Susan Booyesen’s *Fees Must Fall* (2016) includes a range of contributions from both students and academics and in *Free Fall: Why South African Universities Are in a Race against Time* (2016) Malcom Ray locates the movement in the *longue durée* of black education in South Africa while Jonathan Jansen’s *As by Fire: The End of the South African University* (2017) offers insightful analyses from the perspective of a university manager deeply concerned with the future of higher education in South Africa. Without exception, all these texts refer to what I consider the main discursive theme of the protest/revolt, but without exploring it in sufficient depth. That theme is the historical, political and epistemological status of #MustFall as *deferred founding* of the post-apartheid Republic. One reading on which all the interpretations of #MustFall converge to some degree is the connection between #MustFall and what is increasingly referred to as the ‘failed transition to democracy’ in 1994. This perceived failure of the founding of the new Republic has generated a self-understanding of the protest/revolt as deferred founding; a return to the founding moment in order to ‘get it right’ this time. In other words, the rhetoric of the movement suggested a reading of #MustFall as a return to, or a re-enactment of, or an attempt to actualise, a true transition to democracy, understood as a break from the racialised structural inequalities of the past: ‘We want a decolonised, free higher education now!’ This undeniable but as yet underexplored connection between 1994 and the 2015–16 mobilisations calls for the interpretative frame of

2. http://jwtc.org.za/the_salon/volume_9.htm.

the ‘founding’ and the ‘deferred or re-enacted founding’; a frame that can explain many of the ambiguities in #MustFall discourse as *necessary* ambiguities, that is, as the kind of ambiguities that are not to be resolved this way or that because they are the kind of undecidabilities characteristic of any Founding and its iteration. A movement that legitimises itself as a deferred or reiterated founding will be haunted by the undecidabilities of the Founding.

This is not the place for an extensive analysis along these lines. My ambition is more humble – namely, to sketch that interpretative frame in the broadest of outlines in order to make visible some of the ambiguities in #MustFall discourse that will afford us more conceptual clarity on #MustFall’s status as a ‘catalyst’ for taking the discourse on decoloniality more seriously. The ambiguities I have in mind will be familiar to all those who participated in and/or witnessed the events of 2015–16: Was #MustFall a protest or a revolt? Was the violence legitimate or illegitimate? Is the familial rhetoric of political leaders as ‘fathers’ and ‘mothers’, students as ‘children’ and the ‘pain of the black child’ and so on constitutive of democratic discourse or inimical to it? Does this kind of familial rhetoric give us more or less democracy? In order to set up the interpretative frame that will enable us to address these ambiguities as necessary undecidabilities I will very briefly outline the logic of the founding as theorised by Derrida in a text that seems even more relevant to me now than when it first appeared in French in 1986, ‘Admiration of Nelson Mandela, or the Laws of Reflection’ (published in English in 2014), which I read in conjunction with Arendt’s analysis of modern revolutions and the founding of the republic in *On Revolution* (1963).

For both these theorists the founding of any republic is characterised by a radical undecidability, perhaps best articulated by Arendt: ‘Those who get together to constitute a new government are themselves unconstitutional, that is, they have no authority to do what they set out to achieve’ (1963: 183–4). The founding fathers may state, ‘We the people will in future abide by these rules’ and in so doing create a regime of laws and the authority necessary to enforce those rules, but at the very moment when rules are created in the name of the ‘people’, those who make the rules lack the necessary authority to do so (because authority will only be a future function of the rules themselves). Legal and legitimate authority follow from the rules and do not precede their making. In that sense, as Derrida argues, every founding is a *coup de force*, a violent act that will produce the future politico-juridical entity called the republic (as a formalised expression of the collective will) that is presupposed by, and created as a result or effect of, the *coup*

de force. Simply put, when in the founding moment it is stated, ‘We the people’, the ‘people’ as such does not yet exist, but is created by performing it into existence – a double-think or performative contradiction that legitimises or authorises the *coup de force*. It is a simple performative contradiction, but without some re-enactment of this contradiction no new political order can be founded. This performative contradiction can also be represented as the tension between the constative and the performative function of language: ‘we the people’ appears as a constative statement that pretends to merely reflect an existing state of affairs (the existence of the ‘people’) while it is in fact the performative nature of the statement, the fact of making the statement, that creates the ‘people’. Derrida (1986: 67) writes:

The properly performative act of such an institution must in effect produce (proclaim) that which it claims, declares, assures it is describing according to a constative act. The simulacrum or fiction then consists in bringing to the light of day, in giving birth to, that which one claims to reflect so as to take note of it as though it were a matter of recording what will have been there, the unity of a nation, the founding of a state, whereas one is in the act of producing that event.

Over time the legality and legitimacy of the state so created is installed and the violence of the founding *coup de force* forgotten. In order to become a functional politico-juridical entity, every state has to forget the violence of the *coup de force* that made it possible. Where such forgetting does not happen, the violence of the origin will repeat itself indefinitely – as in the case of Rwanda where the genocide of 1994 was, from at least a state-centric perspective, the reiteration or deferred founding of the violence of the 1959 revolt that, because of subsequent ethnic polarisation, could not be forgotten (Praeg 2008). Derrida describes the successful execution of the founding as follows:

The founding act of the law, an act that is *necessarily a-legal in itself* [. . .] can only become legal afterward, in particular if it is ratified by the law of the international community [. . .] On the territory thus delimited, all human beings, all human beings ‘worthy of the name’ *will then effectively become subjects of law* (1986: 69; emphasis added).

I will not enter into a discussion here of whether this conceptual framework applies to the founding of democratic South Africa, given the much-contested myth of its so-called non-violent transition. Rather, the point I want to make is twofold: firstly, that the founding of any modern republic – where, following Arendt, ‘modern’ refers to the impossibility of legitimising the a-legality of the founding with reference to a transcendental authority, such as God – is characterised by a radical undecidability or what Derrida calls a momentary ‘a-legality’, which creates subjects that *will only in future* become legal subjects of a collective created performatively through the claim that it expresses the will of the people. Secondly, and this is crucial for the discourse on #MustFall, a revolt that self-consciously articulates its *raison d’être* as a return of/to the origin or Founding, a revolt that describes the original passage as a failed transition, thereby setting itself the task of executing a proper passage or a ‘real’ (re)founding of the republic, cannot but repeat the radical undecidability characteristic of the Founding itself. I now want to briefly explore three examples of the iteration of founding undecidabilities in the #MustFall discourse.

First undecidability: Protest or revolt

Do we speak of #MustFall as *protest* or as *revolt*? This distinction goes to the heart of the founding and its iteration. A protest is what the law permits while a revolt rejects the very authority of the law to distinguish between what is and what is not permissible. Which then is more appropriate in reference to #MustFall? What do we need to know in order to decide? This is one of the difficulties the movement generated because, depending on one’s perspective or politics, #MustFall was both protest and/or revolt: it was a ‘protest’ for those protesters who still recognised the authority of the African National Congress (ANC) founded on the Constitution of 1996, and it was a ‘revolt’ for those who not only confronted the elite head on, but for whom the illegitimacy (or at least the legitimacy crisis) of the current ANC government necessitated a return to the founding. That both sentiments coexisted in #MustFall explains why the terms were and continue to be used with some uncertainty – as, for example, when Booysen in the same sentence writes ‘herein lay some of the keys to explaining the governance-related impact of the *revolt* [. . .] the *protest* had a radical thrust and challenged socio-political-economic fundamentals, yet it was not an outright rejection of the legitimacy of the regime’ (2016: 24; emphasis added). Elsewhere, following one dimension of the undecidable difference between the two terms, she writes:

Student activists and analysts characterise the events as a ‘revolution’ only tentatively. Perhaps they could be deemed a delimited social revolution or a revolution of values in having brought about certain foundational considerations, including deep probing of the value and validity of the transitional negotiations of the early 1990s. It is partially a generational revolution in that it indicates the born-free (or coming-of-age-free) young South Africans are no longer taking the liberation myth as seriously as do the elders and liberation stalwarts. It also indicates that the neoliberal ideologies (be ‘good customers and pay for services’ or even ‘play by the rules of multiparty democracy and the constitution’) are despised (Booyesen 2016: 3–4).

The extent to which students appealed to the concept of ‘revolution’ is not what matters; what does matter is the meaning and implication of doing so because in the appeal to revolutionary change lies a readymade justification for exceeding the limits of violence circumscribed by the law, specifically the right to protest. In the self-understanding as ‘revolution’ the appeal is to the logic of the state of exception, to the natural assumption that where the cause is just the limits of the law are just that: limits that need to be extended, even if it requires violence to do so. The undecidability of the logic of the (re)founding (the movement as total onslaught on white, patriarchal, heteronormative, neo-liberal economic and epistemological coloniality) leaves the very question of violence undecidable, for if a movement justifies its violence through the appeal to a deferred founding, then the violence we witnessed in 2015–16 assumes the form of a reiterated *coup de force* that, according to the logic of the founding and its iteration, is neither legal nor illegal, but a-legal and by deduction morally undecidable – that is, irreducible to the kind of moral theories we would bring to bear on the question of violence in an otherwise stable politico-juridical context. Here, the holy trinity of Western ethical discourse – virtue, consequences and duty – that suggests various measured calculations (weighing up means and ends, the lesser of all evils, financial costs and losses of the protests/revolt and the like), in other words, measured rational discourses that fail to recognise the aporetic impasse of violence when it presents as a return to/of the founding, are of little use. Such finger exercises in moral theorising (for that is what they amount to in view of the reiterated founding) were and continue to be premised on a self-servingly limited and limiting understanding of the originary (*archē*) injustice that fuelled #MustFall as an iteration of the founding of the

Republic. They lose all currency the moment it is acknowledged that, considered in its totality and as a multiple-issue or total social movement, #MustFall was premised on and driven by the recognition of what Mogobe B. Ramose (2002, 2007) calls the ‘original injustice’, that is, an injustice so comprehensive that it calls forth the longing for an all-consuming violence that will bring to an end the world as we know it in order to found it again. And yet, uncritical appeals to Frantz Fanon’s famous defence of anti-colonial violence fared no better. After the decolonial moment of accepting an all-inclusive, liberal democratic Constitution, we can no longer simply appeal to his argument to suspend the ethical in order to re-found a new politico-juridical order as a condition for the possibility of a future, truly ethical community. If the students’ appeal to Fanon was at best cursory, many academics fared little better in offering useful interpretations of the violence precisely because they failed to recognise the a-legality of violence that understood itself as an iteration of the founding. Instead, at those particular moments in time (October 2015, September–December 2016), calls for decolonising knowledge production were often met with the most brutal iterations of coloniality – as, for instance, the conceptual final solution executed by Thaddeus Metz (2016), who interpreted the student/worker struggle within the conceptual framework of ‘just war theory’, which a priori exteriorised both students and workers as enemies of the state, securitised the discourse on emancipation and decoloniality while foreclosing the debate on citizenship as it legitimised future state repression. The best thing one can say about such responses is that they fail to engage with the conceptual, theoretical and moral *blind spot* of the founding and its reiteration. Merriam-Webster Online defines ‘blind spot’ as ‘a portion of a field that cannot be seen or inspected with available equipment; alternatively, an area in which one fails to exercise judgment or discrimination’. To formulate this blind spot in terms of the logic of the founding: ‘Derrida’s point, like Nietzsche’s, is that in every system (every practice), whether linguistic, cultural, or political, there is a moment or place that the system cannot account for. Every system is secured by placeholders that are irrevocable, structurally arbitrary and prelegitimate’ (Honig 1991: 106). To say that the founding of the politico-juridical is undecidable, the Republic was founded on a blind spot (its a-legality) and #MustFall was the iteration of the founding is to say that the movement was the iteration of that ‘blind spot’ – an iteration that presented itself as resistance to the continued exclusion of the black subject from the economy, as well as from the Subjects that provide the ideological legitimization of that continued exclusion.

Second undecidability: Outside the law, or marching to the drum of a different law?

Does the above analysis mean that the moments of extreme violence we witnessed in October 2015 and again in September–December 2016, because of their iterated a-legality, were in a sense beyond interpretation? Does it mean that any possible interpretation loses the politico-judicial points of reference that would enable a judgement of the violence as either just/unjust or as morally (in)defensible? Such implications would be as worrying as they would be illuminating; worrying, because they would constitute those who were at the receiving end of the most extreme violence as ‘bare life’ trapped in a zone of indistinction;³ illuminating, because they would also explain why during those two periods it felt as if we were living through, if not a *de jure* then a *de facto* state of emergency.⁴ Recall how for Derrida, quoted above, ‘on the territory thus delimited, all human beings, all human beings “worthy of the name” *will then effectively become subjects of law*’. In the a-legality of the founding moment nobody is yet subject to the law; subjects (as citizens) are a future effect of the politico-judicial order performed into existence in the founding moment. It follows then that an iteration of the founding, such as #MustFall, will reiterate this undecidable status of those students thought of being engaged in a ‘revolt’ as a-legal subjects, reduce them temporarily to mere ‘human beings’ who *only one day will become constituted as political subjects* or citizens. Until then, they are mere human beings, mere biological creatures; bare life.

But precisely on this point we have to widen our interpretive frame because the protest/revolt of 2015–16, as much as it drew deeply from the well of the logic of the founding, cannot be contained by that frame because for its legitimation it also drew on events that, while resonating with its demands, far exceeded the logic of sovereignty and the boundaries of the Republic. To start circling this issue, let us consider the apocryphal story in the prologue at the beginning of this volume.

The fable illustrates the simple fact that we always enter the Law – the authority of the Father in Freud, Kafka and Derrida – by choice, through an act

3. A double exclusion since the indistinction would in the first instance refer to the indistinction constituted on a horizontal plane between the founding and its iteration and in the second instance to the indistinction on a vertical plane, that is, the aporetic suspension of differences constitutive of the founding as such, whether original or iterated.

4. For readers who were not on any of South Africa’s campuses over these two periods, Aryan Kaganof’s documentary *Metalepsis in Black* provides a sense of this undeclared or *de facto* state of exception. <https://vimeo.com/193233861>.

of consent, and should we find the Law inadequate or unjust, we can choose to act differently, from outside the law or even, in the name of justice, against the law. But this is precisely the question we are circumscribing here: who were the students when, in that iteration of the founding, they placed themselves outside the Law and against the Law by adopting the language of ‘revolt’ and ‘revolution’? Do the two categories of a-legality and ‘bare life’ suffice? Here it is tempting, but I believe misguided, to follow Giorgio Agamben as if in the de facto state of exception students, academics, management, security guards and support staff were all reduced to depoliticised physical entities, ‘bare life’. Let us recall what Agamben’s claim would be. To place oneself beyond the law in this way is to reposition oneself in relation to the rule-governed community as the ‘banned’; as that entity (we can no longer refer to the person outside the law as a subject; he or she is ‘bare life’) whose supplementary existence outside of or beyond the city paradoxically legitimises the border and the Law invoked to construct and defend it. In this trajectory of thought the banned are absolutely essential for the continued existence of the community, for it is the banned who live in a proximate relation to the very society whose continued existence is legitimised by its power to effect the ban. It is only by viewing the ‘banned’ through the lens of the necessary supplement that the individual appears to us, in Agamben’s terms, as the sacrifice that cannot be sacrificed. This scenario certainly resonates well with Derrida’s notion of the a-legality that is reiterated in the deferred founding. But the protest/revolt of 2015–16 also had a global dimension and it is precisely that global dimension that compels us to widen our interpretative lens beyond the frame suggested by Arendt, Derrida and Agamben. On this point, Ernesto Laclau’s penetrating critique of Agamben is instructive.

Laclau (2007) argues that Agamben’s postulation of the ‘ban’ as the originary political relation is indefensible because it is premised on two untenable assumptions: one, an assumption of ‘sheer separatedness’, which dispossesses those who are acting outside and against the law of all collective identity or communitarian *belonging*; two, an assumption of ‘radical indefension’, which leaves the outsider entirely vulnerable to the violence of the city/sovereign. For Laclau neither of these assumptions are true. The political outsider – here, students in the mode of revolt – finds him- or herself more often than not as part of a collective of individuals who act in concert and do not act outside the Law, but merely outside the *specific law of a specific city*. Laclau invokes Fanon’s description of the march of the lumpenproletariat in *The Wretched of the Earth* – the ‘pimps, the hooligans, the unemployed, and the petty criminals [and the students we might add] [who]

throw themselves into the struggle like stout working men' (Laclau 2007: 14). These 'outsiders' are not beyond the Law as such. They merely march to the drum of a *different* law, taken as a starting point *opposed* to the law of the city. In other words, the original (originary, or founding) relation of the political is not the binary tension between sovereign and banned, but *between one law and another law*. The originary tension of the political is therefore not one of law versus lawlessness, but of two laws that do not recognise each other. The result, Laclau argues, is the *relation of a mutual ban as archē* of the political that constantly renegotiates and regrounds the social bond. In the case of the student protest-revolt of 2015–16, the different law to which students appealed exceeded the sovereign domain of the Republic, an appeal that questions the reduction of their status to the a-legality of Derrida's discourse on the founding and Agamben's notion of 'bare life' in a zone of indistinction. Supplementary to these useful concepts, we have to recall the legitimation often invoked by the students, a legitimation rooted in the need for local justice derived from global justice; a different law that states: 'Black lives matter' – a statement that, in revolt against sovereign power, is as much a universal rule as it is a law unto itself and the invocation of which in the moment of revolt legitimised certain actions, despite the a-legality suggested by the iterated founding of the Republic in what was effectively a de facto state of emergency.

Third undecidability: Patricide and the (im)possibility of democracy

But our apocryphal story in the prologue to this book also has direct bearing on the third undecidability that became visible in #MustFall discourse. Much of the retainer's anguish derives from the fact that he had been raised as the nobleman's son and that the sovereign's command effectively compelled him to commit an act of patricide. In substituting 'student' for 'retainer' in the fable a mutation of outcomes consists precisely in the fact that for the students, placing themselves outside or against the Law in the way described above amounted to an act of patricide, of symbolically and physically 'decapitating' the very Fathers they were supposed to be most faithful to – the liberation struggle fathers and their new post-apartheid Law.⁵ As Patrick FitzGerald and Oliver Seale (2016: 236) write:

5. Which is not to deny that the history of struggles in South Africa is punctuated by moments of youth-led resistance, but only to comment on this particular instance of a revolt against Fathers who compromised into freedom and the youth who have to shoulder the responsibility for them having done so. For more on this, see Everatt (2016).

Significantly, the apparent balancing factor of relatively stable external party political structures, as represented mainly by the African National Congress (ANC) leadership and Youth League structures, [has] seemingly collapsed. This skein of relationships and networks, which organically connected student politics to the broader considerations and interests of party and government, has all but disintegrated – opening up new possibilities of much more independent and radical perspectives and actions within the campus milieu.

The structures and networks referred to here are constitutive of our familial democracy and the opening up of new possibilities cannot but come about as the result of a traumatic individual and collective rupture in the fibre of familial democratic discourse. This undertone of patricide runs through the discourses of #MustFall as youth revolt. Booysen (2016: 35), for instance, comments: ‘In usual circumstances, the ANC is regarded as the caring parent who may not get everything right, yet “will bring home the food at night”’. This very ANC, she comments, ‘was pushed out of its comfort zone of governance by the students using exactly the same parent-child narrative that constitutes [a] pillar of the ANC’s governance project’. And so, she continues, ‘the protesting youth projected themselves regularly as the neglected “children of the ANC”; narratives often centred on the “condition of the black child”, “black pain”, the “suffering of the children of the workers”, and the students’ concern about workers as their emblematic “mothers and fathers”’ (25). In a singularly profound example of familial democracy and the articulation of the breakdown of the social contract in psycho-dynamic terms, one protester stated: ‘As a black child you do anything just to get their attention [. . .] The minister understands the struggle of the black child [. . .] But who knows what they are talking about inside’ (44). The ‘who knows’ signifies all the ambivalence that accompanies the breakdown of the social pact conceived in familial terms. Unlike the retainer in the aporetic fable, denying the command of the Law and deliberately placing themselves in opposition to the Law constituted the most fundamental act of patricide we have witnessed since the founding of our so-called new order. Students placed themselves outside the Law by politically decapitating those whom history expected them to remain faithful to, the mythological Fathers and Mothers of the struggle and the transition. The grand narrative or master trope of #MustFall, then, is undoubtedly one of a ‘youth revolt’. The issues were what they were, but in its deepest political – and dare I say, psycho-social – sense, it was a narrative of patricide, of the youth revolting against

the system created and safeguarded by the custodians of the struggle, the Fathers of the democratic Law, who nonetheless have done very little to give them hope.

In concluding this section it therefore must remain undecided whether #MustFall is better described as ‘protest’ or ‘revolt’, whether its violence was legitimate or illegitimate, morally justifiable or not, because precisely these ambivalences or undecidabilities are what typifies the Founding and its iteration. In a relationship carefully circumscribed in terms of familial belonging, it was a revolt against those who had become simultaneously loved and hated, trusted and distrusted, respected and disrespected – an ambivalence perfectly captured by the ANC government when it played the role of distant, yet protecting Father (government), and, through a time warp of misguided identification, co-rebellious youth, always acting on the dictum ‘contain and repulse, but don’t forget [. . .] the bonds of political blood that tie the protesters to the politicians and law enforcers’ (Booyesen 2016: 15).

The iteration of the founding, this deferred founding that constituted a total onslaught on the politico-juridical and epistemological order, which is, in many ways, a continuation of old apartheid into democratic South Africa, constituted nothing short of a *shudder* that reverberated through the very foundations of the new Republic. As such, I believe, it acted as a catalyst that once and for all propelled us beyond sentimental nationalist notions of ‘Africanising’ this or that and talk of ‘transformation’ carefully circumscribed by neo-liberal commitments to maintaining the status quo.

As noted earlier, all the chapters in this volume are direct or indirect responses to this shudder. They either directly address some aspect of #MustFall or discuss debates that pre-date the movement, but have gained renewed interest and urgency, in part, because of it. Of course, a fundamental shudder, being what it is, can never be addressed or even outlined in its totality. My ambition in compiling this collection of essays is therefore to simply walk along the fault line that has opened up as a result of that shudder in order to trace some of the contestations between Subject and subject that have emerged as a result of it, a fault line where the disciplinary nature of an epistemological Subject (philosophy as a Discipline) is being questioned and interrogated by a subject who has rightfully become unruly.

Contestations

Before I outline the nature of each chapter’s contribution, it is perhaps apposite to very briefly address the question: why this focus on the Subject of philosophy? At one level the answer is simple: I am a philosopher who has worked in the domain

of African political philosophy for more than twenty years. But beyond that contingency I like to think there is something to be said for focusing on philosophy at a moment when the political is being recognised as the First Philosophy. As far as the history of intellectual Disciplines is concerned, philosophy – regardless of whether we are referring to African, Greek, Indian or Chinese philosophy and so on – is the oldest of them all. Philosophy is the most ancient example of the human attempt to make sense of the world and therefore forms an integral part of every moment when human beings question the nature of human existence. When religion is no longer enough, it is in philosophy that questions of a moral, ontological, epistemological, ethical and political nature are thought through – whether in the cold light of reason or in the warm communal terms of proverbs, oral traditions and spiritual practices. A culture’s philosophy represents the pinnacle of its self-reflexive understanding. It is understandable, then, that in the disciplinary division of knowledge in the West, philosophy was for a long time cherished as the Discipline of Disciplines, the Subject of Subjects.

But Western philosophy did not only consider itself queen of all Western disciplines. Since the late eighteenth century a particularly Western conception of what philosophy is had established itself not only as the pinnacle of Western civilisation, but also as the only ‘proper’ way of doing philosophy as such. This arrogance was, of course, wholly a function of Western modernity because the difference between those who could claim to be ‘human’ (Westerners) and those who could be traded as commodities because they were not human (Africans) neatly dovetailed with the idea that Africans do not have a philosophy nor are they capable of producing one. One prejudice legitimated the other, so that the historical process through which Western philosophy succeeded in establishing its particular conception of what philosophy should look like in retrospect appears as one of the clearest examples of Western modernity bootstrapping itself into hegemony.

In Chapter 2 Anke Graneß traces the history of this process. The defining moment, she argues, was the closing decades of the eighteenth century when, *within Western philosophy itself*, a new definition of philosophy emerged as ‘the rational activity of the lone individual thinker’. From that moment onwards, the discipline that was imposed on other philosophical traditions by Western philosophy *qua* Discipline was that only individuals who relied on reason, the Western experience and rational concepts could claim to be philosophers. Prior to this watershed moment, Denis Diderot’s *Encyclopédie*, for instance, and Jakob Brucker’s (1736)

Kurze Fragen aus der philosophischen Historie von Anfang der Welt bis auf die Geburt Christi (Short Questions of the History of Philosophy from the Beginning of the World until the Birth of Christ) and his *Historia critica philosophiae a mundi incunabulis ad nostram usque aetatem deducta* (Critical History of Philosophy from the Beginning of the World until Our Days) published in 1742–4, all discuss Western philosophy as but one philosophical tradition among many others, including those of the Egyptians and Ethiopians. The implications of Graneß's revelation of the politics of the historiography of Western philosophy is that we may have to revisit the terms of the debate between African ethnophilosophers and those, like Paulin J. Hountondji, who have critiqued it as a 'mere' expression of a collective world view. Is ubuntu, for instance, already a philosophy of a people or does it only become 'philosophy' when it is theorised by an individual scholar? And if we insist on the latter, does that not suggest an appropriation of a disciplinary criteria that is merely a function of Western modernity?

It should come as no surprise then that the master trope or philosophical concern of modern, counter-hegemonic African philosophy has been the dual contestation of interrogating, firstly, the disciplinary matrix that defined who does and who does not count as human subject (a distinction on the basis of which certain philosophies were dismissed as the expression of collectivities and not the thinking of individual human genius) and secondly, making explicit the very political foundations of *Western philosophy as ethnophilosophy*, that is, a Subject that articulates the experience of a people (*ethnos*), a Western subject and not the philosophy of *all* people. Given the combination of philosophy's status as Discipline of disciplines and the specific definition of philosophy that emerged towards the end of the eighteenth century, there is therefore a simple yet at the same time extremely complex set of reasons why of all the disciplines in the humanities, philosophy should often appear to be the most resistant to change, transformation and decolonisation; why as institutionalised Subject it should represent in the words of Louise Antony (2012), the 'perfect storm'.

To explain the use of this phrase, Antony (2012: 250) refers to Lorraine Code's diagnosis of why Western philosophy is so exclusionary (of gender) when the latter writes: 'With its relentless abstraction of knowers from their material circumstances and its exclusive focus on the individual knower, malestream epistemology [. . .] perpetuate[s] the neglect of factors essential to a thorough understanding of human knowledge in all its various forms'. In Antony's analysis the factors that coagulate in the exclusion of women from the discipline include gender schematic thinking,

stereotype threat and conflicts between gender norms and occupational norms. Her argument is that given these general social constraints ‘philosophy presents the perfect site for a class 4 hurricane: either a unique set of biasing factors converge here, or else philosophy intensifies the impact particular factors have on women’s academic lives’ (232). If philosophy is already the site of a class 4 hurricane in the relative calm of the global North, we should – in light of the factors discussed above – expect an upgrade of its classification to a class 5 ‘event’ (Badiou 2007) in the context of the global South.

How do we counter this deeply entrenched and institutionalised hegemony? Antony juxtaposes her ‘perfect storm’ analysis with a more familiar way of diagnosing and solving the problem, what is generally known as the ‘different voices’ approach. Crudely put, the latter approach soberly assesses the situation, recognises philosophy’s exclusionary arrogance, but proposes as solution that ‘more voices’ need to be included in the discipline’s self-conception. Antony rejects this way of conceptualising both problem and solution in a way that, for the sake of contextual relevance, I would rather transpose into the more familiar discourse of Steve Biko’s understanding of black emancipation in relation to white liberalism. What so annoyed Biko about white liberalism was that the liberal solution to the problem of liberalism usually – then, as now – amounts to just another way of co-opting other voices into a system as a conscious or unconscious strategy devised to prevent any of the newly incorporated voices from having any fundamental, redefining impact on the Subject. Accommodating the historically excluded by assimilating their voices and by including what they have to add to the conversation more often than not amounts to an inclusion that excludes the very possibility of change because it disallows a fundamental interrogation of the parameters of the conversation that otherwise would expose the founding epistemicide and the theodicy of whiteness (Gordon 2014: 14–15) that are constantly re-enacted in order to re-found and sustain a particular Western politico-epistemic order of things. What is needed, then, is not an expansion of the philosophy curriculum that will accommodate ‘different voices’, but rather a fundamental rethinking of philosophy in relation to place and context. Such change will be fundamental and, for that precise reason, difficult to bring about. Given the historical status of philosophy, philosophers can be expected to be very reluctant to recognise the political as First Philosophy for the simple reason that it will reveal the universalising ambition of Western philosophy as the political ambition of a particular people (*ethnos*), projected as Philosophy.

While the impact of #MustFall should not be overestimated – after all, it is not as if the discourses of Africanisation and transformation have had no effect at all on the practice of philosophy over the past twenty years – I do think that the impact of a social movement whose *raison d'être* was the re-founding of the epistemological basis of the 'new' Republic should also not be underestimated. Earlier I ascribed to this movement the status of *catalyst* that reiterated a founding *shudder* that propelled us away from a discourse on transformation towards integration in a wider, global discourse on the 'decolonial turn'. Useful as they may be, both the concepts of 'catalyst' and 'shudder' are perhaps too vague and emotive to demarcate the borders of the Subject of philosophy as an active site of contestation.

In Chapter 3 Bruce Janz argues that Alain Badiou's notion of the 'event' allows us to frame the site-specific contestation between Subject and subject(ivity) in a way that will not threaten premature closure. Building on the conceptual foundations of his *Philosophy in an African Place* (2009), Janz argues that there are gaps in our *cognition* or understanding of place, in our ability to see our processes of knowledge production as integrally linked to the production of concepts that are true to a place. Places – in the sense used by theorists who work on pedagogies of place – are the originary sites of concepts that have, or should have, common currency. Yet our university system – what we teach and what we research – lags behind the *recognition* of place. Eurocentrism means thinking in terms of placelessness and universally accepted abstract methods of knowledge production, rather than the particularised ways in which knowledge is actually produced. For Janz, it is in the gap between *cognition* and *recognition* that the 'event' (Badiou) emerges to call forth an engagement with context and place, an engagement that university structures and mainstream cognition consistently undermine by regularising the reproduction of universalist 'knowledge', in which they are supported by various forms of globalising neo-liberalisms, such as global ranking systems. In the conceptual space opened by Granef's deconstruction of Western philosophy's historiography and Janz's articulation of the tension between cognition and recognition, #MustFall appeared as an 'event' that urges us to close the gap between cognition and recognition in order to articulate a philosophy of the people who live in this time and this place.

In Chapter 4 Lis Lange reveals some of the tensions that arise when formal processes of curriculum review (for example, audit panels that assess a curriculum in order to make recommendations regarding pedagogy and decoloniality) are

responded to with a reluctance to confront the tension between cognition and recognition. At the heart of this reluctance, Lange argues with reference to a review of the Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of the Free State, is a tendency to collapse the demand for a Subject to be sensitive to context into a (obviously problematic) utilitarian demand to be ‘useful’. She quotes one of the responses to the curriculum review panel’s recommendations:

The pedagogic approach we perceive the panel to be taking contradicts our approach in which we ask ontological, existential or conceptual questions such as: ‘what is the nature of it?’ before we address the pragmatic consideration: ‘what is the use of it?’ We believe that we ‘protest’ much more efficiently and extensively by laying down conceptual frameworks before challenging students to engage with the controversial [. . .] The report however, almost exclusively emphasises the usefulness of knowledge and questioning skills. The opposing argument is that it is just as important to instil in students *the relative constant, universal and foundational knowledge, while local issues should be treated as an extension and application of the aforementioned knowledge* (Lange’s emphasis).

The reference to ‘relative constant, universal and foundational knowledge’ as that which a priori precedes mere contextual ‘application’ reveals something important about how, in a context of decoloniality, we should rethink the core business of the university. We have become accustomed to thinking of the modern university in terms of its three core functions: teaching, research and, of late, community engagement. But even the most cursory reading of Bill Readings’s *The University in Ruins* (1996) reveals the historicity of the evolution of these core functions. At first, the core function of the modern university was limited to teaching, that is, the transmission of the established archive. To this was added much later the idea that the university also exists to produce new knowledge and, even more recently, the idea that through ‘community engagement’ the university must recognise its embeddedness in a community of praxis that, at first, exceeded any academic understanding of the phrase. As Lange (2014) argues, the only way of effecting radical transformation in South African universities is to have the courage to conduct a critical examination of the historicity of the three types of knowledge that sustain their existence: knowledge of knowledge (core functions); knowledge of the other (pedagogy) and knowledge of the self (institutional culture) at each

university. To the extent that the university is considered a microcosm of the social, #MustFall revealed something entirely more subversive in line with the intention to reveal the ‘epistemicide’ at the root of the postcolonial university, namely, that the institution’s *primary* or core business has always consisted in the reproduction of the values implicit in the *secondary* core functions of teaching, research and community engagement; primary or core values that in the above-quoted response to the curriculum review panel’s report resurface in the commitment to teaching knowledge that is ‘universal and foundational’, that is, *cognition* a priori to any *recognition* of context.

At work here is something we can perhaps call a ‘conflict of nostalgias’. Derek Hook (2014: 171) distinguishes between progressive or potentially transformative nostalgia, and regressive or conserving forms of nostalgia – a distinction that echoes Svetlana Boym’s distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia. Restorative nostalgia always longs for a reconstruction of the loss in order to go home, while reflective or progressive nostalgia is at home in the longing for home itself. The relevance of this distinction for the discourse on decoloniality cannot be overstated, for it generates the simple question: what is the conception of home, longing and nostalgia at work in the longing for a decolonised Africa? Is it a restorative longing, or a reflective and progressive longing? In other words, is the nostalgia at work in decoloniality a desire to ‘go home’ or is it a desire to be at home in homelessness?

I take up this question in Chapter 5, where I critique Ramose’s claim that the adoption of the Constitution (and constitutional sovereignty) amount to little more than constitutionalising the ‘original injustice’ – a claim premised on just war theory, according to which colonialism, considered a sustained war, was never *ius bellum iustum* (a just war), but in fact an unjust war and as long as it can be argued that the war concluded in *uti possidetis* and not with *status quo ante bellum* (the state existing before the war), we cannot begin to address the question of justice. My point is that not only can the conceptual frame of just war not contain the argument, but the politics of nostalgia at work in the argument is restorative, a longing ‘to go home’ that finds its final and impossible revenge in the assertion that, because the Constitution is no more than the codification of an ‘original injustice’, any claim to justice that results from an application of the Constitution is, in fact, no more than a perpetuation of the original injustice. This nostalgic stalemate calls for a different thinking of the founding of the constitutional regime, one I pursue in a complementary line of enquiry that invokes the undecidability of

the concept of the ‘border’ to re-present the totality of both black subjectivity and the constitutional order in the undecidable terms of a founding aporia, according to which both can only be apprehended in ‘mystical terms’. By ‘mystical terms’ I mean, in relation to black subjectivity, that the term ‘double-consciousness’ creates an inside (blackness) at the same time that it differentiates that inside from an outside (whiteness). As a consequence, it functions as what complexity theorists would call a ‘border concept’ because what it creates (black subjectivity) will always remain open to its founding differentiation between ‘that’ (whiteness) and ‘this’ (blackness). This is not to suggest that black subjectivity will somehow always remain incomplete, but rather to argue that constative claims about the meaning of blackness will, as with any other identity, always retain a performative dimension whose greatest longing it is to establish a subject ‘in itself’ and ‘for itself’.

There is a clear sense in which this demand for an absolute founding is precisely the tension or aporia with which Adam Small grappled in his work on Black Consciousness, as explored by Ernst Wolff in Chapter 6. Small’s work on Black Consciousness is important for at least two related reasons. The first is historical. Wolff demonstrates how Small’s resistance to apartheid in his poetry, theatre and his book *Die eerste steen?* (The first stone?) not only anticipated the Black Consciousness Movement – which explains why his name came to be associated with it in significant publications in the 1970s – but also why he was called by the defence in what would become known as the ‘State versus Black Consciousness’ trial of the mid-1970s (officially ‘State versus S. Cooper and Eight Others’). The second reason why Small’s work on Black Consciousness is important is because, unlike many other Black Consciousness theorists, he insisted on ‘autonomy without apology’. In Wolff’s classification of the central tenets that constitute Small’s shade of Black Consciousness, this insistence is the sixth and must be read in conjunction with the preceding five.

The first tenet is that blackness is not non-whiteness where the ‘not’ seeks to abolish whiteness as a reference for blackness in order to ‘unfetter every man who is not White from Whiteness’ (Small 1971: 14). The second tenet is that blackness includes ‘people of all shades of colour who are not considered by the laws and the people of this country to be White: Blacks, brown, yellows, what have you’. The third tenet provides the philosophical foundation for the sixth and states that blackness is ‘a certain awareness, a certain insight’, which, for Small, means that for a subject to become aware of his/her blackness, she or he does not have to look outside themselves, but inside, to the self. This leads directly into the fourth tenet,

according to which ‘real black people’ embrace the positive description ‘Black’ as opposed to ‘non-White’ because they do not run away from who they are but, instead, dare to come face to face with who they are (15). The fifth tenet recognises the global dimension of racial discourse and contextualises Small’s thought in world-historical terms as a problem that humiliates all people, black and white. The sixth tenet stated above leads Small to argue: ‘We are not there for Whites. We are there. We are. That will be the fact for us: that we ARE’ (16), which, as Wolff points out, means that Small ‘cites no justification for this claim to the value of blackness; he does not fill blackness with content. In so doing, Small remains true to his claim that blacks may assume their life autonomously as themselves, without apology.’

In the culmination of Small’s thinking in what Wolff calls the sixth tenet of his Black Consciousness – the statement ‘We are there. That will be the fact for us: that we ARE’ – a clear tension seems to emerge with regard to the point I argue in the preceding chapter with reference to double consciousness. This tension can perhaps best be articulated with reference to Descartes for, as Wolff points out, while Descartes stated, ‘I think, therefore I am’, Small’s formulation of a founding subjectivity is ‘I am, I exist’ or ‘I am, therefore I am’.⁶ Although Wolff does not do so, I think the difference can and perhaps must be translated into political terms. Descartes’ statement is *implicitly* an ethno-political statement in the sense that its politics has to be uncovered and made visible as part of the project of deconstructing Western philosophy’s claim to universalism. Small’s claim, on the other hand, is *explicitly* ethno-political because, despite its foundational claim to the contrary (‘I am because I am’), the claim is intended, quite explicitly, as a counter-hegemonic political performance. It seeks to make a difference by performing it and it is this explicit performative quality of constative claims about black subjectivity that I seek to accommodate in reconstructing the architecture of black subjectivity with reference to its mystical totality.

6. This juxtapositioning favours the better-known over the less-known Descartes who, in fact, elsewhere in the *Meditations* also states, ‘*ego sum, ego existo*’, or ‘I am, I exist’ (‘necessarily true each time that I pronounce it or conceive it’). The implications of the way in which ‘*cogito ergo sum*’ has become a conceptual foil for much identity-driven discourse in African philosophy (particularly by way of contrasting it with the ubuntu-based dictum ‘I am because we are’) will have to be deferred for future study. I thank my colleague Ulrike Kistner for pointing this out to me.

I pursue this conversation within a conversation in the seventh and final chapter, where I pay close attention to how this tension between the constative longing and the performative reality of black subjectivity played out during #MustFall. One of the most troublesome aspects of #MustFall was the extreme and virulent – some would say fundamentalist and xenophobic – manifestation of Black Consciousness among a small section of the students. This extremism manifested itself in, for instance, white academics being told that we cannot teach theory premised on the black experience because we cannot pretend to have knowledge of that experience. It also manifested itself at the Higher Education National Convention in Midrand (18 March 2017), which descended into chaos amid demands that white students should leave and when Kolosa Ntombini from the Pan Africanist Student Movement of Azania at the University of Cape Town requested of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o to demand that white people leave his lecture because ‘how do we have a lecture and form a consolidated voice, as the oppressed, in the presence of those who oppress us?’.⁷ To simply dismiss this extremism as ‘irritating’, ‘fundamentalist’, ‘extreme’ or ‘the opinion of a small minority’ is at best not yet to understand it and, at worst, itself a form of anti-intellectualism. I have already argued how *not* simply dismissing the violence of #MustFall as the mischief of a ‘small minority’ allowed us better to understand the movement in relation to ‘the bad land we call the transition’ (Ray 2016: 8) and its unresolved undecidabilities as deferred founding. The same can be said of radical, extreme or ‘fundamentalist’ Black Consciousness: we must recognise in the violence of its assertion the logic of the founding at work, the *coup de force* that presents itself as constative claim (‘We the people’ or ‘We are because we are’) precisely because it would risk the inexecution of its own founding by acknowledging its performative or perlocutionary nature. In other words, the challenge is to acknowledge this ‘blind spot’ for the performative contradiction that it is. How the founding of a Republic or a *S/subject* is to be executed alongside or despite that contradiction or aporia being articulated is a complex question that cannot be addressed here. At the very least it is only to be expected that in moments when black emancipation seems most impossible and therefore most urgent an extreme version of Black Consciousness should emerge that seeks to forget or violently exclude from its self-consciousness its founding relationality to white consciousness. One of the

7. See <https://www.thedailyvox.co.za/ngugi-wa-thiongo-white-people-uct-jameel-abdulla/>.

clearest signs of this violent longing for closure is the reduction of all signs of the originary relationship to/with white subjectivity (double consciousness) to signs of continued dependency and enslavement – as, for instance, when Ntombini asked, ‘How do we have a lecture and *form a consolidated voice*, as the oppressed, *in the presence of* those who oppress us?’

By way of conclusion, two comments on the demographic nature of this collection. In the first instance, except for the Foreword by Uchenna Okeja, the collection, while engaging with the work of black theorists, does not contain any other contributions from black philosophers. This is regrettable. The initial impetus that resulted in the publication of this collection was the Thinking Africa conference #MustFall: Understanding the Moment, a joint venture between the Thinking Africa project – formerly from Rhodes University but now located in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Pretoria – the office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Academic at the University of the Free State (represented by Lis Lange) and the Department of Political Science at the University of Pretoria, with additional support from the Johannesburg Institute for Advanced Studies. Participation in the conference included a number of students from the University of Pretoria, Rhodes University, the University of the Free State and Stellenbosch University; academics from Rhodes University, the University of the Free State and Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University; representatives of management from the University of Pretoria, the University of Cape Town and the University of the Free State, as well as support staff from the University of the Free State. Anonymous reviewers of the initial collection of proceedings – a hefty collection of sixteen chapters with an impressive diversity of voices, including contributions from students, management and scholars – found the scope of the collection too vast to sustain a coherent response to questions generated by #MustFall and recommended that contributions be divided into multiple volumes. This is the first of those volumes. The second and third volumes will contain a number of contributions that had to be excluded from this volume for the sake of sustaining thematic focus. The lack of demographic representation in *Philosophy on the Border* is the outcome of a long and complicated editorial process that required us on several occasions to rethink the organisation of research produced by the conference and two other associated research projects. Sadly, sometimes contingency trumps necessity.

In the second instance, it is somewhat peculiar for the editor of an anthology to contribute three chapters. This, too, was the outcome of prioritising thematic

unity within and across the three planned volumes. The result is a collection of essays that is, perhaps suitably but nonetheless precariously, balanced on the border between an anthology and a monograph.

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