EDITORIAL PERSPECTIVE

Symbolic violence: Enactments, articulations and resistances in research and beyond

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INTRODUCTION

In his pioneering work on the subject, French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (2001, p.1-2) defines symbolic violence as "a type of submission… a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part through purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition, recognition or even feeling....". This Special Issue of *African Safety Promotion: A Journal of Injury and Violence Prevention* seeks to reflect on the multiple ways that symbolic violence is implicated in research; how research reproduces symbolic violence; and how hierarchies within research institutions determine the 'legitimacy' of specific knowledges and knowledge producers. We believe that a focus on symbolic violence is necessary to advance nuanced, complex and meaningful understandings of how different kinds of violence operate and are sustained in contemporary society.

CONTEXTUALISING SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE

Direct violence, which always involves an actor, an object and an action (Galtung, 1969), is any physical or psychological violence that disrupts social functioning (Galtung, 1990). Under neoliberal capitalism, direct violence is an increasingly unacceptable and ineffective mechanism of social control (Hall, 2002). This is certainly not to say that the neoliberal state never resorts to horrific enactments of direct violence (von Holdt, 2018). Indeed, one need only to look to the 2012 Marikana Massacre for a recent example of this. Rather, what is meant here is that *violence as control* is both effective and sustainable in the long term when it is enacted through legitimised channels. Such violence, known as 'symbolic violence' (see Bourdieu, 1990; 2001), thus becomes ubiquitous by integrating itself within the social order.

Symbolic violence is not expressed on the body. Instead, it violates how we think (Chambers, 2005). By following socio-cultural codes of conduct, such as participating in institutional rituals or 'behaving' in accordance with

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racialised, classed or gendered expectations, people technically consent to their domination. In this respect, multiple institutional structures - such as ideological state apparatuses and cultural organisations - are integral in coercing subjects to consent to inequitable operational social practices (see Althusser, 2014; Colaguori, 2010). Arguing that "the harder it is to exercise direct domination, and the more it is disapproved of, the more likely it is that gentle, disguised forms of domination will be seen as the only possible way of exercising domination and exploitation" (Bourdieu, 1990, p.128), Bourdieu's work situates symbolic violence within social systems whose functionality relies increasingly on coercive political control (Colaguori, 2010).

Symbolic violence, we would add, is important in considering how research and activism approaches coloniality, that is, systems of power, which today sustain colonial relations of exploitation and domination (see Maldonado-Torres, 2017). Undoubtedly, symbols are integral to how coloniality disfigures colonised subjects, robbing them of selfhood and relegating them to zones of nonbeing (see Fanon, 1967), while transforming the worlds of things, people and meanings in the image of the colonising subject (Bulhan, 2015). Dialectically entangled, symbolic violence and coloniality draw on various racist, patriarchal, classist and ableist discourses as a way of structuring and naturalising particular ways of being, power differentials and systems of knowing.

Unlike direct violence, which is usually more readily perceived as 'violence', symbolic violence is normalised in ways that obscure its recognition as violence. It is in response to the ways by which violence has been symbolically coded that various social movements, such as #RhodesMustFall, #FeesMustFall, Occupy, #HowIResist, direct violence and various other resistance acts across time and space, have contested and attempted to (re)make the symbolic order. Instances of such activism include the removal of symbolically violent statues (such as those at the University of Ghana and the University of Cape Town, as well as numerous Confederate Monuments in the United States); contesting naming legacies (such as Rhodes University as well as the 'Native Yard' naming convention for roads in Gugulethu); challenging the dearth of gender-neutral bathrooms (legally reified by discriminatory 'bathroom bills'); as well as resisting the arbitrary and ideologically-infused bourgeois politics of respectability to which poor and working class people are held. These movements, and their attempts to make visible and dismantle symbolically violent modalities, are repeatedly met with strong - sometimes directly violent - opposition from state authorities, the political Right, liberal establishment figures, and even some on the Left whose chief concern is an economistic 'pragmatic politics' that renders symbolic violence a superfluous 'secondary front' (see Keucheyan, 2013).

VIOLENCE AS A GLOBAL RESEARCH IMPERATIVE

Each year, millions of lives are affected by direct, physical violence, resulting in mortality as well as long-term negative health consequences (World Health Organization, 2014). For example, in South Africa physical violence is "the second leading cause of death and lost disability-adjusted life years" (Seedat, Van Niekerk, Jewkes, Suffla, Ratele, 2009, p. 1011). The effects of violence are therefore both qualitative and quantitative in character.

Direct interpersonal violence has received much-needed attention within academic research, as well as in other sectors of society, including but not limited to non-governmental and state sectors. However, as Colaguori (2010) argues, although there is widespread global recognition that direct violence has become especially pronounced as an individual and collective phenomenon, this recognition has not necessarily resulted in the development of comprehensive conceptualisations of violence. In particular, there is a need to explore further the ways in which direct violence is inextricably intertwined with and supported by more covert forms of symbolic violence (Morgan & Björkert, 2006). Following this, Pieterse, Stratford and Nel in their contribution to this Special Issue, *Relationship Between Symbolic Violence and Overt Violence in Hate Incidences in South Africa,* argue that "symbolic violence breeds the circumstances in which direct violence becomes socially acceptable behaviour, thus creating a society in which hate victimisation of certain vulnerable groups becomes normalised". They go on to assert that "overt violence", what we refer to here as direct violence (see Galtung, 1969, 1990), "reinforces symbolic violence by

communicating to the victims, as well as to their larger communities, that they are unwanted, third-class citizens and because they do not conform to established societal norms, are undeserving of any respect, human dignity and/or regard for their safety". Indeed, it is often through the conditions set by symbolic violence that direct violence is enacted.

It is also necessary to highlight the ways in which research on direct violence is embedded within dynamics of symbolic inequality. Here, critical feminist scholars, such as Tamale (2011) and Shefer (2018), have argued that research on sexual violence in Africa, shaped by Northern and Western research agendas, has rendered Africans in problematic ways. For example, in South Africa research has produced constructions of black women as inevitable victims, and black men as inherent violators (Shefer, 2018). In light of this, the Special Issue attempts to call attention to how symbolic violence is sometimes overlooked in research on violence, as well as the ways in which research itself can be symbolically violent. As Swartz, Hunt, Watermeyer, Carew, Braathen and Rohleder state in their article, *Symbolic Violence and the Invisibility of Disability*, persons with disabilities have been positioned "through medical discourse and the symbolic power which underlies it as 'naturally' inferior". It should certainly be admitted that in the call for this Special Issue, while we refer to race[2], gender and class, we did not explicitly mention disability as a social category through which symbolic violence is so often enacted. Thus, even our considerations of symbolic violence are not exempt from symbolically violent tendencies. The silencing and invisiblity of disability continued.

THE (SYMBOLIC) VIOLENCE OF RESEARCH AND WRITING

One form of symbolic violence within academic research is the positioning of some knowledges as neutral, scientific and objective by rendering others invisible, subjective and/or cultural. In this way, the former's legitimacy, authority and dominance becomes premised on the latter's illegitimacy. The production of Otherness is partly a function of how researchers and academics write (Abu-Lughod, 1991). No research product, as Richardson (2000) reminds us, can be disconnected from "the producer, the mode or production of the method of knowing" (p. 962). Given the history of colonial research which constructed African knowledges and subjects as 'barbaric' and 'bizarre' in order to legitimise colonial violence, the symbolic violence of academic research is of particular salience in African contexts.

In attempting to disrupt the symbolic violence inherent to academic 'scientific' authority, we have included some alternative forms of writing in the Special Issue. The two conference reviews provided by Matutu and Makama seek to excavate the kinds of symbolic violence that are apparent in academic spaces. It is within these spaces that knowledges of a particular - often colonising - kind seek to delegitimise particular ways of knowing and being (see Maldonado-Torres, 2017). Makama's contribution is particularly interesting, as she considers symbolic violence within progressively-oriented decolonising spaces; speaking as she does about the kinds of symbolic violence that can be experienced through acts of silencing that render her deviant for "not being angry enough".

Thomas's poem, *Selotape for Bullet Holes*, represents another kind of symbolic violence. The poem presents an unsanitised, personal and emotional reflection on dominant representations of certain communities in Cape Town (specifically, Bishop Lavis, Elsies River, Manenberg, Ravensmead and Uitsig) as broken and violent spaces. In the poem, Thomas says"[t]hey think we're uncultured, no real 'tongue' mocking our mother-tongue as if it wasn't born in the kitchen of slaves. Uneducated the stats say. Fatherless the stats say. Selotape their mouths

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2   We use the term 'race' (and racial categories, such as 'black' and 'white') to highlight processes of racialisation, rather than to reify categories
     of race, which we recognise as both socially constructed and discriminatory.

I say". In our reading, the poem does not reject violence as a descriptor. Instead, it highlights how violence becomes fixed to community identities in order to deny their full humanity. In other words, in constructing certain communities as inherently violent, they become foreclosed as such in the collective imagination.

Mignolo (1993) notes that when speaking about issues related to hegemonic oppressive structures such as colonialism, the locus of enunciation is paramount in how resistance against these oppressive structures is constructed. In the quest to make oppressive social structures more visible (crucial in the task of articulating and resisting symbolic violence), we reflect below on our own subjective, institutional and ontological positionalities in the context of our respective research areas. Each of us are PhD candidates, whose work speaks to, resists and (re)inscribes symbolic violence in different ways. The dynamics of such work is therefore complex and sometimes contradictory.

Sipho: Being one of the few black counselling psychologists in South Africa, my particular positioning is fundamental to how I have constructed my PhD. Focusing on the training of clinical and counselling psychologists, my PhD seeks to critically interrogate the pedagogical and selection practices of training sites. I position the study in such a way that race and gender are particularly privileged due in part to how I have read issues of transformation in higher education, and psychology in particular. The framing of my work means that there are many people, who are marginalised and excluded through the course of my study. The conceptualisation of my work has had to take into consideration how the intersecting identities of class, race, gender, and sexuality are significant in the shaping of disciplinary boundaries. In much the same way that the call for this Special Issue neglected to mention people living with disabilities, my PhD may continue forms of symbolic violence experienced by other marginalised groups, such as queer and gender non-conforming people. My own positioning as a self-identifying Black, cisgendered, man fits neatly with the focus on binary conceptions of race and gender. However, what this binary conception of race and gender obscures are the nuances often inherent in the lives of the people who are excluded from physical and epistemic participation in higher education. Related to this is the caution advanced by Brown in his article *The Geographies of Heteronormativity: The Source of Symbolic Homophobic Violence at a South African University,* that unless we expand how we conceive of transformation in higher education, we run the risk of continuously acting in (symbolically) violent ways towards people who do not fit neatly within dominant - often binary - identity categories. Symbolic violence's hidden and obscure nature means that we must engage explicitly with who is researching what, from where, and to what end. This is to say that in resisting oppressive structures in academic institutions, the onus is on the researcher to clearly position their locus of enunciation (see Mignolo, 1993).

Rebecca: In 2015, following being raped, I went to a Thuthuzela Care Centre (one-stop government facility for rape victims/survivors) to receive treatment. At this facility, located in an area which was classified as black under apartheid, the nurse misrecognised me as a health professional rather than as a victim/survivor of rape. "In a context in which the bodies of poor black womxn are repeatedly constructed as the sites of sexual violence the nurse is unable to recognise my white, middle-class body as the site of such violence" (Helman, 2017, p. 1). This experience has been the starting point for my PhD project which explores how understandings and responses to rape are enmeshed with the discursive and material politics of sexual violence in South Africa. This PhD study draws on both my own experience and those of other victims/survivors to explore the ways in which post-rape subjectivities are constituted by intersecting categories of social identity. The use of my personal experience of rape is intended as "an act of reverse discourse that struggles with the preconception borne in the air of dominant politics" (Park-Fuller, 2000, p. 26), in relation to both form and content. For example, by drawing on my own experience, I attempt to problematise dominant representations (in both public and research discourse) which render young poor black women as the inevitable victims of sexual violence. By inserting myself into the text (both through my experience and my analytic voice) I seek to destabilise 'objective' authority, whilst acknowledging the ways in which my knowledge claims are politically and socially constituted (Butz & Besio, 2009). However, I am simultaneously aware of my symbolic power (both as a researcher and as a particular raced, gendered, abled and classed subject) in being able to write about my rape, as well as 'analyse' the rapes of

others. Throughout my PhD process I attempt to reflect on the multiple dynamics of symbolic violence which shape sexual violence and research on sexual violence.

Nick: My PhD work, as well as other academic work with which I have been involved, is primarily concerned with using visual methods to (re)present and signify various social phenomena within (and also beyond) community contexts. At present, I am working with different groups to produce participatory films - documentary and scripted - that use multimodal language to explore experiences of structural and direct violence, as well as highlight community-driven modes of resistance and 'the ordinary' (see Ndebele, 1986). It is intended that the films are used for the purposes of epistemic correction (i.e. countering the ahistorical, neoliberal discourses predominantly drawn on by political actors and media personnel when constructing low-income areas) as well as material justice (i.e. lobbying for community resources and services at public film screenings, as well as informing activist and community organising efforts). Impulses towards and enactments of symbolic violence have been noted at numerous stages of the project. Indeed, participants' cinematic narratives are not inherently progressive, with many, in my eyes, drawing on overtly patriarchal and masculinised tropes, as well as a bourgeois politics of respectability, in their characterisations of resistance efforts in the community. Herein lies another symbolically violent potentiality of the project, that is, imposing my own hermeneutic - which, due to my racialised, classed, institutionalised and gendered positionality, is likely to carry a greater degree of "narrative potency" (see Senehi, 2002) than community-driven narratives - onto participants' cinematic portrayals. Although the project is conceived as participatory, it is still me, an outsider to the community, who directs it and plays a significant role in shaping its participatory character. Furthermore, by isolating particular moments in the film products - effectively divorcing them from their broader cinematic contexts - audiences may use the films for their own political purposes. Finally, while the project does not engage 'community' as a homogeneous entity, there is a risk that the films become read in this way, which raises further issues around foreclosing what a community is and what it cannot be. Despite the films, in my reading, addressing in important ways a number of neglected iterations of symbolic violence (and how these interact with other kinds of cultural, structural, epistemic and direct violence), they are also, necessarily, myopic representations that signify - as both processes and products - forms of symbolic violence.

All of our work is embedded within particular institutions. Academic institutions, such as universities, retain especially 'potent' kinds of symbolic power, that is, 'soft power' that works to maintain unequal social hierarchies (see von Holdt, 2018). While students are placed at the lower levels of the academic hierarchy within these institutions, not all students are positioned equally on this level. As Matutu argues in relation to black students: "as a method of survival, we are taught to fear. To be fearful of authority and those who lord over us. Faced with these personages, we would recoil and attempt to take up as little space as we can". We wish to acknowledge that as student editors of this Special Issue, we are, in different ways and to various degrees, empowered and disempowered. While there are certainly institutional benefits and related material advantages that we are able to accrue, we are only able to utilise these through the limited channels made available by the university. The social justice potential of our work is often constrained in this way. Following this, Gordon (2017) urges us to be vigilant about how institutionalised forms of social justice are often just injustices, which is to say that they serve to maintain the status quo to the continual detriment of those who are oppressed.

Finally, the opportunity to publish this Special Issue has rendered us, as editors, gatekeepers of particular knowledges, and silencers of others. In other words, what appears in the pages of this Special Issue was assessed by us as relevant. Although paying attention to our own symbolically violent practices does not mitigate the effect of such practice, we hope that by raising these issues we can begin the difficult, uncomfortable yet fundamental task of challenging the multiple and interlocking iterations of violence within and beyond violence research. The dilemma of simultaneously being located at a lower level within the hierarchy of academic institutions, and being guest editors of an academic publication, was evident in our discussions around the submission by Matutu. In this provocative and insightful paper, Matutu makes reference to feeling necklaced, an act of tremendous violence that was used against people who were deemed 'impipi' during the apartheid era. We, the editors,

discussed whether we should ask the author to remove this or change it as we were concerned that the use of such an example could serve to trivialise the trauma and pain experienced by communities during the latter days of apartheid (in a similar way to when rape is used as a metaphor). However, in removing or changing this reference we would also be censoring Matutu. These kinds of symbolic violences often imposed on authors in the name of scientific rigour can operate as a way to silence voices considered dissident. The inclusion of Matutu's account of the conference as he has written is, firstly, an attempt on our part to open up space for engagement with the issue of academically-sanctioned silencing. Secondly, this account, with its use of the imagery of being necklaced, indicates how difficult it is to articulate symbolic forms of violence - rendered invisible as they are subtle - without making reference to other, direct kinds of violence. We hope that Matutu's use of necklacing to refer to his pain and discomfort at the conference serves to make visible and palpable the harm caused by symbolic forms of violence.

We should pay serious attention to symbolic violence if we are to understand more comprehensively how suffering is institutionalised, historicised and legislated through systems and symbols that are characteristic of so-called liberal, democratic and/or egalitarian societies. However, with language itself being a symbolic system, studying symbolic violence is an inherently difficult, perhaps even tautological, undertaking, and should thus be approached carefully.

CONCLUSION

The Special Issue aims to bring to the fore how symbolic violence is embedded in both a collective will towards unjust power structures, as well as these power structures themselves. By including a range of different articulations, the Special Issue seeks to disrupt the legitimised forms of knowledge dissemination, not only in research related to violence, but also in the structure of academia and formalised systems of knowledge production. We had hoped that other forms of expression in this limited print format, such as visual art, would be part of this issue, but no submissions were made in this regard. The fact that this Special Issue was curated by students, and includes perspectives from students, also allows for voices otherwise relegated to the periphery of the academy to take centre stage in issues that affect us in different ways.

In addition to this, the Special Issue highlighted how we, as people committed to social justice, cannot be complacent in the struggle for equity and cede our control of the definitions of justice to oppressive structures. Further, the Special Issue highlights how, even in progressive spaces, the tendency to revert to problematic binary identity politics needs careful and critical interrogation if we are to truly begin to undo historic and contemporary injustices.

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