

Philosophy Born of Struggle, Philosophy Born of Massacres – Young Learners Project
A Project by Rozena Maart

Philosophy Born of Struggle, Philosophy Born of Massacres [PBOS PBOM] owes its emergence to Philosophy Born of Struggle [PBOS] in the United States. Philosophy Born of Struggle is a community, a conference, and a textbook, which was first organised by Professor Leonard Harris and Professor Evert Green three decades ago. The edited textbook, which contains chapters from renowned scholars, is now in its second edition. The first conference was originally organized by Prof Evert Green and Prof Leonard Harris in 1993. Philosophy Born of Struggle conducts an annual conference to this day, with South African participation for more than 10 years now.

Philosophy Born of Struggle, Philosophy Born of Massacres [PBOS PBOM], started as a research and seminar series with an annual symposium, at the Centre for Critical Research on Race and Identity [CCRRI], with Prof Rozena Maart as its Director, at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The continued work from students and the contribution from communities of scholars in South Africa, such as Siphosiso Singiso, as well as internationally renowned scholars such as Prof Leonard Harris and Prof Lewis Gordon, have allowed for us to ensure its continuity. Prof Rozena Maart was a keynote speaker at the PBOS 2013 meeting, with Prof Lewis Gordon and Prof Cornel West. The same meeting also saw three UKZN students present on a panel. At the annual conference in 2016, Prof Maart who continues to attend the annual gatherings, presented on gender-based violence with two UKZN students. We take this opportunity to offer a few snippets of the work of the scholars that contribute to this area of study:

Philosophy does not begin with high-caste leisurely men seeking eternal truths (for their own sake) nor with anonymous reasonable beings behind a veil of ignorance working autonomously in a cooperative venture for mutual advantage. Philosophy begins with the full range of human experiences (including genocide, slavery, exploitation, misery, degradation, cognitive dissonance, cynicism, etc.). This philosophy, born of struggle, should help people assess their situation and facilitate the mitigation of struggles and misery, the actual experiences of surviving human populations. [Leonard Harris, *Philosophy Born of Struggle*]

Racism, Lewis Gordon argues, requires the rejection of another human being's humanity. Since the other human being is a human being, such a rejection is a contradiction of reality. A racist must, then, deny reality, and since communication is possible between a racist and the people who are the object of racial hatred, then social reality is also what is denied in racist assertions. A racist, then, attempts to avoid social reality. Gordon argues that since people could only "appear" if embodied, then racism is an attack on embodied realities. It is an effort to make embodied realities bodies without points of view or make points of views without bodies.

[Lewis Gordon, from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lewis_Gordon]

Every concept has its own history. The history of the Black man subject in South Africa has several overlapping trajectories, a long and very complex history – usurped, brutalised, regionalised, coastalised, forced inland, ghettoized, tribalised, yet defiant, rebellious, determined, are all within the range of possibilities as points of departure for tracking this trajectory. It is, therefore, important that we analyse the trajectory within which the concept – Black man – has been built, populated. To fight for the rights of the Black man subject means to understand and to deconstruct the history of that subject. As such, the deconstruction of the subject is at the centre of the fight for the rights of that subject. [Rozena Maart, *Philosophy Born of Struggle, Philosophy Born of Massacres*]

Apartheid South Africa created then perpetuated and reproduced the belief that European philosophical thought was the only thought that mattered; that is, philosophical thought from three countries – Germany, France and the UK, which is today still erroneously called European philosophy and treated as universal. Not only was this idea premised on the belief that Black people are not thinkers, but if and when we as Black learners and scholars enter places of learning, it would take place under the mentorship, guidance, and expertise of White South Africans. We had to learn what they learnt, from their analyses, their interpretation of the world, within which they lived on usurped land, and from a place where the material conditions under which they lived were created from stolen wealth and stolen labour. With the weapon of the law, our voices were chastised. We lived in spaces where the material conditions of our racialisation offered death rather than life; these were the conditions of Black existentialism inflicted upon the enslaved and disowned inhabitants of South Africa and legalised as apartheid. Institutions of learning, such as schools and universities, were racialised, under the structural and systemic components of settler coloniality and apartheid. These institutions were places where White South Africans remained the settler-colonial, the beneficiary and simultaneously the agent of a system of White domination despite their verbal protestations to the contrary, the Black population (inclusive of the population and ethnic groups racialised as Coloured and Indian), the oppressed, exploited and colonised, where socialised via the law of the land to be indebted to the coloniser for our entrance into learning via the two primary languages of colonisation: English and Afrikaans. Many at the Cape still speak Kaaps today, the language spoken by the enslaved populations of Malaysia, Bengal and Indonesia (Java in particular), who were cargoed and trafficked, then enslaved, many named after the month of their enslavement at the Cape, who spoke a 16th century version of Dutch that was injected with the languages of Bengal, Indonesia and Malaysia. Bantu Stephen Biko was clear in his analysis of the state of education during apartheid South Africa, as he noted: “I am against the superior-inferior white-black stratification that makes the white a perpetual teacher and the black a perpetual pupil (and a poor one at that).”

Today, twenty-eight years since the first democratic elections in South Africa, philosophy departments across South Africa, among others, are still headed by White men and White women, both equally beneficiaries of apartheid’s racism, both settler colonials in South Africa even though the South African constitution has removed the identity of White women as benefactors of apartheid. Despite their past as beneficiaries and usurpers who continue to benefit from the afterlife of apartheid White women now benefit from the all-inclusive term woman in the South African

constitution. As such, White women are now hired under procedures that suggest that they are part of an oppressed group. And, with this irony comes particular sets of entitlement, some of which include bare-faced constructions of fragility as though the protection of White women should be our prerogative as a country. If and when Black lecturers are hired in philosophy, they are usually former students of their colonisers who ensure that the baton of European philosophy has been passed on.

This series, as part of a five-year plan, will commence during the month of August 2022 within high schools primarily, and will extend itself to undergraduate students and the youth within communities that recognise the need to develop a conceptual framework for talking about being-in-the-world, existentialism, freedom, justice, histories of enslavement, usurpation, identity, consciousness, mind, self-consciousness, decolonisation, etcetera, in the aftermath of apartheid, and as such, learn the untold (and untaught) philosophical legacies and struggle histories of Bantu Stephen Biko, Mangoliso Robert Sobukwe, Anton Lembede, Charlotte Maxeke, Patrice Lumumba, Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, Wangari Matthai, Sylvia Tamale, Lewis Gordon and Leonard Harris, among others.

This high school series and young learners project will commence in the Cape, in August 2022. For further details, contact Prof Rozena Maart by email: rozmaart@gmail.com

Rozena Maart was born in District Six, the former slave quarter of Cape Town, South Africa. Her family along with thousands were forcibly removed in 1973 due to the Groups Areas Act, which was followed by the apartheid government's Forced Removal Act. She went to school at George Golding Primary, Square Hill Primary for one year, Steenberg High School then the University of the Western Cape. Rozena took her Masters' degree at the University of York in the UK, and her doctoral degree at the University of Birmingham, in the UK. Professor Maart has published several books, journal articles and book chapters, and recently edited, *Decoloniality and Decolonial Education: South Africa and the World*. She wrote the race chapter for South Africa's first Sociology textbook in 2015 and has supervised students in Philosophy, Literature, Fine Arts, Sociology, Psychology, Education, Politics, International Relations, Law and Gender Studies. In 1992, she won "The Journey Prize: Best Short Fiction in Canada." In 2016, she received the William R. Jones lifetime achievement award from *Philosophy Born of Struggle* and in January 2021 the Caribbean Philosophical Association awarded her the Nicolás Cristóbal Guillén Batista Lifetime Achievement Award for her contribution to literature and Philosophy.